



PERCEPTIONS ON THE USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND MOTHER TONGUE IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Oladunni O. DEJI- AFUYE

Department of General Studies, School of Education,

College of Education, Ikere Ekiti,

Ekiti State, Nigeria

Email: dunnidejiafuye@gmail.com

Temidayo A. AYENI

College of Education (DSS) Ikere Ekiti,

Ekiti State, Nigeria

Email: tayeni1@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study examined the use of English language and mother tongue in national development in Nigeria. The sample used for the study consisted of one hundred (100) stakeholders from Ekiti State. A simple self-developed questionnaire was used to get information from the respondents regarding their perceptions on the use of English and mother tongue in national development. The research hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance during the study. The findings indicated that there was significant relationship between the use of English and national development and that there was low relationship between the use of mother tongue and national development. The study, therefore recommended that government should make necessary efforts in developing the indigenous languages which serve as mother tongue of Nigerians in order to make them viable for national development. It should be noted that our indigenous languages can as well make positive impact on national development by improving the quality of education, reducing illiteracy, increasing public awareness in public programmes and encourage mass participation in public affairs.

Keywords: English language, mother tongue, national development, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The English language is a part of the legacy left behind in Nigeria by the British at the end of the colonial administration (Bamgbose 1971). Its importance and role as a second language in national issues cannot be overemphasised. It is the language of government and administration. Thus, it serves as the official language in Nigeria. It is used during national occasions and celebrations such as Children's Day, Independence Day and every national forum. English language cuts across ethnic groups, as well as social and regional boundaries. It is therefore, the language of inter-ethnic communication. The position of English in Nigeria as a second language and a language used in all facets of life – politics, social, religious, education commerce – has contributed to its being taken as national language in Nigeria. There is no doubt that there is a great diversity of varieties and functions of English in Nigeria. It is widely used in both the electronic and the print media, in the judiciary, the police, the armed forces, the legislative, etc and as a lingua franca in political mobilization, ethical orientation and population education. This confirms the entrenchment of English as the main official language of Nigeria (Oluwole, 2008). Nevertheless, English exists alongside indigenous languages which serve as the mother tongue of most Nigerians.

According to Seweje (2006) the term *Mother Tongue (MT)* is used to mean sometimes the first language that a child acquires and with which he/she first makes contact with him/herself, others and the environment. Mother tongue is not regarded as a garment a child puts off when he/she wears his/her school uniform, rather, it is part of the stuff with which his/her mind is built. It is therefore, the language through

which the child thinks, dreams, cherishes, loves, learns and expresses all kinds of feelings. In other words, the Mother Tongue is the language in which the child has more intuitive knowledge. Thus, learning a second language means learning a different set of rules which makes the child a bilingual who is faced with two different linguistic systems which he/she uses alternately.

Mother Tongue is the language in which the bilingual has more intuitive knowledge.

Role of English in Nigeria

Nigeria with her numerous indigenous languages has adopted English as the official and second language for communication within and the outside world (Awobuluyi, 1998; Deji-Afuye, 2000; Olofin, 2012). There are different factors responsible for this. The language has sufficient and available orthographies for effective teaching and learning at all levels of education in the country. It has been discovered that some indigenous languages such as Efik, Ibibio, Nupe, etc have little orthography and few qualified and adequate teachers to handle the languages efficiently. Furthermore, Nigeria is characterized by diversity of languages and dialects which are not intelligible to all the indigenes. In order to promote unity and peace; easy access to national information; and make communication among the various speakers of various languages and dialects possible, a common language is needed. English is readily serving these purposes.

Majority of Nigerian novelists, short story writers, poets, and playwrights depend entirely on English to express their literary views. Works on the three major literary genres are also found in indigenous languages, but it is the writings of literary works published in English that are more widely read and known in Nigeria and also in the international community. The Nobel Prize for literature was won by Wole Soyinka who writes in English. Equally, Chinua Achebe's literary works in English are widely known and read not only in Nigeria but also throughout the world.

The Federal Government of Nigeria regards education as an instrument of national development. The role of education in the empowerment of a people is very crucial (Ayeni, 2011). English has been widely used in the promotion of education in Nigeria. Even though, scholars, such as Fafunwa (1987), Emenanjo (1990), and Bamgbose (1991) among others, believe that mother tongue or language of immediate environment should be the medium of instruction in Nigerian schools the fact still remains that none of the indigenous languages has the linguistic capacity to handle the teaching of all subjects. Therefore, English is used in all facets of education and this seems to be the most important role of English. Without any gainsaying, wherever education plays a role, English as the language of education and medium of instruction in Nigerian schools also plays a role. Furthermore, the national policy on education has featured English as a subject on the curriculum for students to undertake. A credit in English language is a pre-requisite for admission into the Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Effective use of the language in running political activities such as campaign rallies, delivering political manifestoes and lectures is highly crucial. English plays an important role in the acquisition of political skills. It is as well an important instrument in the hands of politicians as far as handling political issues and people is concerned. English is a major language through which politicians can educate their followers. For a politician to be able to influence and convince his followers, his ability to think effectively should not be in doubt. Language enhances people's ability to think. Evidently, the participation of Nigerians in politics in both national and international politics can hardly be possible without the English Language.

In the area of national security, a high priority is placed on proficiency in English Language. Operational instructions for all the gadgets used in maintenance of security such as: pistol, rifle, and machine-guns are written mostly in English.

The international status which English has attained is another principal factor which makes it to be adopted as the universal language. It is obvious that English has a vast coverage in all the continents of the world; hence, it is necessary to adopt it as national language in Nigeria.

Workers in Nigeria still need English to perform their jobs effectively. Job performance requires effective communication both in speech and in writing. It should be noted that most written and spoken communications in the work organizations are in no other language than English. A break-down in communication among the rank and the file of an organization can have devastating repercussions. It may cause industrial unrest in the form of strikes and lock-outs which may result in dismissal of staff and litigation. This also may lead to destruction of property and sometimes of lives. If the organization is a private one, it may cost it the goodwill and support of the people and government. It is important to note

that being careful about what we say and how understandable the language we use is, really enhances communication. In the words of Simon (1989:80),

... we think in words, we conceptualize in words, we work in out our problems inwardly with words and using them correctly is comparable to a craftsman treating his tools with care and keeping, his materials in good shape.

He goes further to stress the fact that a person who does not have respect for language would not have much respect for ideas and cannot have ideas at all. Language use mostly depends on the communicative context or situation, be it official or purely social, casual or polite, formal or informal and so on

Statement of the Problem

National development can be achieved or facilitated by various means one of which is the use of language. In the life of any group of people, communication is a basic necessity. Since communication is done through language, it remains an important factor in national development and national awareness. Nigeria is a community with varying degrees of language diversity and social complexity. Language situation in Nigeria is so obvious that within each of the ethnic groups that make up the nation, there are differences in languages and dialects used. This situation has constituted an important issue to most Nigerians in recent times. In a country like Nigeria national interaction, unity and hence, development may be hampered if only the indigenous languages are used to achieve national development and vice versa. It is a fact to state that English is a language that brings with it a foreign culture which cannot completely take the place of the mother tongue. This study, therefore, is an attempt to examine the perception of the people on the use of English and mother tongue in national development in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of stake holders on the use of English language in national development?
2. What are the perceptions of stake holders on the use of mother tongue in national development?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significance relationship between the use of English language and national development.
2. There is no significance relationship between the use of mother tongue and national development.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a survey design of descriptive research. English users such as teachers, politicians, youths, and all other stakeholders constituted the population for this study. The sample comprised of one hundred (100) people selected with the use of purposive sampling technique from Ekiti State, Nigeria. The instrument used for this study was a self-developed questionnaire with Yes or No option. The instrument was validated by research experts whose corrections were strictly adhered to. The data were analyzed using inferential statistic of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient

RESULTS

Research question 1

What are the perceptions of stakeholders on the use of English language in national development?

The result in table 1 reveals that the respondents agreed items 1, 2, 4, and 5 but disagreed with item 3. This shows that the use of English increases stakeholders' participation in contributing to national development; enhances clearer expression of ideas in the course of national development; increases the pace of national development; and that the prestige and social status given to the language has brought about tremendous national development. The stakeholders did not agree that English language encourages imposition of foreign ideas in the course of national development.

Table 1: Percentage and means scores of perceptions of stakeholders on the use of English language

S/N	Items	Yes	No		Decision
1	English language increase stakeholders participation in contributing to national development	85	15	1.82	Agreed
2	English language enhances clearer expression of ideas in the course of national development	95	05	1.75	Agreed
3	English language encourages imposition of foreign ideas in the course of national development	45	55	1.23	Disagree
4	The use of English language increases the pace of national development	85	15	1.15	Agreed
5	The prestige and social status given to English language has brought about tremendous national development	80	20	1.12	Agreed

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions of stake holders on the use of mother tongue in national development?

Table 2: Percentage and means scores of perceptions of stakeholders on the use of mother tongue

S/N	Items	Yes	No		Decision
1	The use of mother tongue represents minor interest thereby hindering national development	85	15	0.15	Agreed
2	The use of mother tongue cannot tackle peculiar issues better in the course of national development	90	10	1.00	Agreed
3	The use of mother tongue increases cultural preservation	90	10	1.10	Agreed
4	The use of mother tongue plays little role in national development in the face of English	70	30	1.30	Agreed
5	Negative attitudes towards mother tongue have negative effects on national development	45	55	1.55	Disagreed

The result presented in table 2 shows that the respondents agreed with items 1, 2, 3, and 4 but disagreed with item 5. This result implies that the use of mother tongue represents minor interest thereby hindering national development; cannot tackle peculiar issues better in the course of national development; increases cultural preservation; plays little role in national development in the face of English; and that negative attitudes towards mother tongue have negative effects on national development. The result also implies that the use of mother tongue does not hinder national development.

Hypothesis Testing

Ho1: There is no significance relationship between the use of English language and national development.

Table 3: Person Correlation Coefficient for use of English Language and National Development

Variables	N	r-cal	r-tab	Decision
Use of English language	100	0.83	0.12	Significant
National Development				

The result presented in table 3 shows that r-calculated (0.83) was greater than r-table (0.12) at 0.05 level of significance. This makes hypothesis one to be rejected. This means that there is a significant relationship between the use of English language and national development.

Ho2: There is no significance relationship between the use of mother tongue and national development.

Table 4: Person Correlation Coefficient for use of Mother Tongue and National Development

Variables	N	r-cal	r-tab	Decision
Use of Mother Tongue	100	0.24	0.44	Low Relationship
National Development				

The result presented in table 4 shows that the value of r-coefficient was 0.24 which implies a low relationship between the use of mother tongue and national development. This makes the hypothesis to be accepted

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that there is a significant relationship between the use of English language and national development. This corroborates the submission of scholars like Ogunsiji (2001), Babajide (2001), and Ariyo (2004) among others, that English language in Nigeria has played and still plays important roles in the overall development of both the individual and the society at large, binding the diverse ethno-cultural groups in Nigeria together, giving room for unity and promoting peaceful co-existence among people of different cultural stance and beliefs. In other words, the language is serving as a solution to the problem created by the issue of selecting an indigenous language that will foster socio-economic interaction among the diverse linguistic and cultural groups in the country and at the same time promote national unity. Besides, with the use of English, Nigeria has gained access to the rest of the world. Its use as the language of instruction at all education levels and its capacity to fulfill the human needs in this age of grand science and technology; and commerce and industry; cannot be overemphasized. English has always been a medium through which everybody who wishes to be part of the whole process of advancement and globalization could achieve same.

On the other hand, the availability, enormous value and neutrality of English to Nigeria have adversely effected the development of our indigenous language. Since none of the indigenous languages are seen as a necessity, none of them is adequately developed to function in place of English. Thus, it appears that these indigenous languages are neglected and/or relegated to the background. If our local languages are used as supposed, new words and expressions will be formed and the languages will be enriched. However, because of this inadequate development, some concepts and ideas in these languages may be difficult if not impossible to explain especially in this era of astounding science and technology. This has explained the reason for part of the findings of this study presented in table 4. The study reveals that there is low relationship between the use of mother tongue and national development. It implies that the use of mother tongue represents minor interest thereby hindering national development; cannot tackle peculiar issues better in the course of national development; plays little role in national development in the face of English. It is also glaring that some stakeholders put up negative attitudes towards the use of mother tongue as a national language.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It has long been established that Nigeria, being a nation characterized by diversity of languages, has national language problems. There is the need for a common language which has the capacity of international intelligibility, inter-ethnic intelligibility, and equally the ability to foster peaceful co-existence among the entire people. Making a choice of this common language has been a very difficult task as there abound a handful of native languages existing alongside English. A number of reasons have been cited for this loss of choice among the native languages. Some of the reasons have been described by Bamisaye (2006) as multifaceted controversies which, include; politics, economics and linguistic questions. Other linguistic groups rightly suppose that the selected language will gain superior prominence and all other languages will now function in a subordinate capacity. Besides this, our indigenous languages are so much incapacitated in terms of human development in all spheres of human interaction, technological advancement, international value and also inability to explain concepts and ideas in science, politics, education, economics, and security related issues.

However, it cannot be concluded that the use of English, without the complement of the native languages, has solved the problems of equal access to knowledge, divisiveness, grounding poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria. The fact still remains that mother tongue is a language in which many Nigerians has more intuitive knowledge. Akmajian et al (2001) believes that the usefulness of any language lies precisely in its capacity to meet the needs of a person for self-expression and for communication, especially in his/her daily interaction with the world around him/her. Hence, languages are not only needed for communication of experiences, but also to enhance a person's cognitive abilities and functioning relevant to his/her survival and personal development. Without any doubt, this can be better achieved through the use of mother tongue. The need for a unifying neutral language as an official language should not send our indigenous languages to oblivion. It is the responsibility of every stakeholder to work towards developing these indigenous languages to serve us better.

In the remark made by Dr. Henry Hunjo on the use of mother tongue as presented by Aponmade (2012), mother tongue has been described as a means of promoting quality education and national development. Hunjo stated further that indigenous languages will uphold indigenous technology, philosophy, religion, architectural development, textile, medicine, engineering and chemical and physical science among others. He, therefore, urged Nigerians to rescue our indigenous languages from being wiped out. Hence the study recommends the following:

- Nigerians should be made to understand the importance and relevance of our indigenous languages in national development. Every individual should accept the potentials of our indigenous languages for domestication of knowledge which in turn will lead to national development. Nigerians should cease to have negative attitudes towards the indigenous languages.
- Government should make conscious effort to develop the indigenous languages by engaging linguists and language experts to work towards their standardization and modernization. This will enable the languages to be viable and as well has the capacity to function at various levels of national development.
- Assignment of higher roles to mother tongue in Nigeria will have a positive impact on national development by improving the quality of education, reducing illiteracy, increasing public awareness in public programmes and encourage mass participation in public affairs. Therefore, the policy makers should find a way of engaging the indigenous languages in issues germane to national development.

REFERENCES

- Akmajian, A. et al. (2001) *Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication* Cambridge U. S. A.: MIT Press.
- Aponmade K. (2012) "Mother Tongue Promotes National Development" P.M. News Nigeria.
- Ariyo, K.S. (2004). Teaching English for Specific Purpose in Nigeria in Bamisaye, T. O. (Ed) *An Integrated Study in Language and Society*. (pg. 90 – 108) Lagos: MAJAB Publishers.
- Awobuluyi, O. (1998) "Language Education in Nigeria". *Fafunwa Foundation Internet Journal of Education*. (available at <http://fafunwafoundation.tripod.com/fafunwafoundation/id8.html>) Accessed on July 2011
- Ayeni, O. (2011) Education for Empowerment. Paper Presented at the Annual Week of Educational Management, Students' Association, Lead City University, Ibadan
- Babajide, A. (2001) "Language Patterns of Nigerians". In Igboanusi, H. (ed.) *Language attitude and language conflict in west africa*. Ibadan: Enicrownfit, 1-13.
- Bamgbose, A. (1971). "The English Language in Nigeria". In Spencer, J. (ed.) *The English Language in West Africa*. London: Longman, 35-48.
- Bamgbose, A. (1991). *Nigeria Language and Cultural Development* in Ikara, B.(ed). Lagos: The National Language Center.
- Bamisaye, T. (2006). *Studies in Language and Linguistics: An introductory Text*, Ibadan: Mortem Paperbacks.
- Deji-Afuye, O.O. (2000) "The English Language in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects" in *Ikere Journal of Education*. 4, (1), 216 – 224.

- Emenanjo, N.E. (1990). *Multilingualism, Minority Languages and Language Policy in Nigeria*. Port – Harcourt; Central Books Limited in Collaboration with Linguistics Association of Nigeria.
- Fafunwa, A. B. (1989). *Education in Mother Tongue: The Ife – Primary Education Research Project (1970 - 1978)*. Ibadan: University Press
- Ogunsiji, A. (2001) “Utilitarian Dimensions of Language in Nigeria” in Igboanusi, H. (ed.) *Language Attitude and Language Conflict in West Africa*. Ibadan: Enicrownfit Publishers, 152-164.
- Olofin A.O. (2012) “Effects of English Language on National Development” *Greener Journal of Social Sciences* vol. 2 (4), 134-139
- Oluwole, A. (2008) “The Impact of Mother Tongue on Students’ Achievement in English Language in Junior Secondary Certificate Examination in Western Nigeria”. *Journal of Social Science*. 17 (1): 41-49
- Simon, J (1989) “Why Good English is Good for you” in Gosgharian G (ed) *Exploring Language*. Scott Foresman and Co. 19-32
- Seweje, O. (2006) Second Language Acquisition: Integrating Technology into Language Learning. Proceedings of the First National Conference on Language Teaching in a Technological World, Held Between 25th and 28th April. Pg 32-37