



EXPLORING ALTERNATIVES TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of the language situation in Nigeria on the learning of Nigerian students in relation to knowledge acquisition. It focuses on the exalted status of English as Nigeria's official language and the medium of instruction, its effects on the indigenous languages, on one hand, and on the comprehension uptake of the undergraduates, on the other. It queries the continued use of English as a medium of instruction in tertiary education and suggests that the option of indigenous language(s) be explored. The study is a qualitative and quantitative survey of the language behaviour of one hundred undergraduate students of English and ten lecturers at the University of Jos, analysed within the context of the Nigerian language situation. The study adopted the questionnaire and interview methods as instruments for data collection. The theoretical framework on which the study is anchored is Hyme's theory of language choice. The findings revealed that 73.5% of the population sample are favourably disposed to the use of indigenous languages, leveraging on multilingualism as an advantage, but are constrained by the imposition of English as an official language. 66.3% of the population sample has an average proficiency in English, thus denying them sufficient linguistic resources for expressing their socio-cultural realities. The study argues that the students' abysmal failure in the use and proficiency in English in the acquisition of knowledge and skill is detrimental to their all-round development. It concludes that since English is deficient in communicating effectively, the concepts and values necessary for social interaction and multicultural development, the functions of indigenous languages and the domains in which they are used should be expanded. It therefore recommends that some measures that would alter the linguistic architecture of the nation be legislated and urgently implemented for the actualization of real development of the Nigerian undergraduates, in order to foster national development.

Key words: Development, language, undergraduates, medium of instruction, indigenous

Introduction

Language and human development are critical for the sustenance and progress of every society. For humans to truly socialize with their kind they must necessarily employ some form of language. The development of any society anchors fundamentally on language; hence, no meaningful interaction: social, intellectual, economic, political, religious and others happens between humans without any form of language. Many scholars are of the consensus that linguistic factors immensely engender the progress and improvement of human persons and societies. Language is an invaluable instrument in the acquisition and impartation of skill and knowledge, and generally in the development of the human persons; thus, it plays the dual role of a tool for learning (medium of instruction) as well as a course/subject of study.

The medium of instruction in every teaching and learning process is of invaluable significance (Tsaure and Sani, 2024; Adegbite et al, 2023; Ozoemena et al, 2021). The reason for such elaborate emphasis rests on the fact that without an appropriate and effective language for the transfer of skill and knowledge to learners, the aims of such efforts are grossly underachieved. The necessity for effectiveness in the language of learning at all levels of education cannot therefore be underestimated. However, the relationship between the language of instruction and the quality of education (formal, informal and non-formal) has not been keenly addressed by parents, teachers, governments and other relevant stakeholders. The passivity with which the language of curriculum implementation is handled at all levels of education in Nigeria has rather culminated in further confusing the learners and sometimes, impeding the learning process.

For decades after independence, the Nigerian nation has failed to appropriate the benefits accruable to a national entity through the access to emblems of nationhood- indigenous languages. Studies have shown that there has been deliberate negligence on the part of the State in addressing the use of indigenous languages for training her young, especially undergraduates on technology and other forms of education. This

reflects in the auspicious status of English and the roles and functions it is assigned in the affairs of the nation.

To emphasise some of the functions, English is the language of instruction with which Nigerian children and the youths learn at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education in the country. The National Policy on Education formulated in 1977 (and revised several times until the most recent 6th edition of 2014) hinted on the significance of starting off learners on the right foundation by employing their indigenous languages or the language of the immediate community as the medium of instruction. However, it was soon to be realized that this was only a mere statement on paper (Iwara, 2008). There was no follow up to ensure its implementation or enforcement of any punitive measure to punish offenders (like teachers, head masters, proprietors, inspectors and other stakeholders). The spinelessness of government in implementing the language policy is premised on parents' attitude to indigenous languages generally, and as medium of instruction in schools particularly. No parent or guardian sends their children or wards to any school (from pre-primary to tertiary) in the country where an indigenous language is the medium of instruction. English Language is so much prioritized in the education sector that no university in Nigeria admits candidates who are deficient in the subject into any course of study. In most Nigerian universities the *Use of English* is a compulsory requirement for graduation. Upon graduation, the language becomes a source of mobility for the graduates as they pursue different careers and scout employment. Consequently, it becomes clear that Nigerian children are unable to detach themselves from the ubiquity of English.

In addition, English has been officially declared the official language of Nigeria and the language of administration, commerce and industry, media, judiciary and other social, religious and wider communication. Brann (2006) explicitly stated that there is a growing number of Nigerian children whose first language is now English as a result of intertribal marriages. With the advent of technology and globalization, it is practically impossible for both young and old

to function in Nigeria (and elsewhere) without the use of the English language.

The constant interaction of the Nigerian children with English notwithstanding, it is disheartening to note that the proficiency and competence of these language users continue to nose-dive. Several studies have shown that the quality of English written and spoken by Nigerian undergraduates and other youths has continued to deteriorate over time. Fallen/ falling standard of education and failure in other forms of knowledge acquisition are usually blamed on low performance in English. Lamenting the abysmal standard of education, Banjo quoted in Jowitt (2008) raises concern about the quality of English of secondary school students and undergraduates thus: "...there is a general dissatisfaction with the level of proficiency in English among the products of secondary schools, but also of universities." The causes of students' problem and areas of difficulty in English are diverse. Major issues have been raised along the line of grammar: Aje (2002) has observed that "Tense errors are the commonest errors that students make and which teachers of English find most difficult to remedy among ESL students." Expressing a similar concern, Ibe quoted in Ekundayo, Teilanyo and Longe (2013) asserts that "the usage of verbs is one area where the performance of students (up to tertiary institution) in this country is rather woeful and continues to get more so...." Banjo (2012) generalizes the problem and areas of occurrence, noting that the differences in the grammars of English and those of indigenous languages basically create problem for Nigerian users of English. Particular mention is made of grammatical categories such as tense, number, concord and gender that need remediation at different levels.

This study also investigates the competence and proficiency of undergraduates in the use of English and therefore hypothesizes that the perennial difficulties encountered by Nigerian undergraduates in the learning and use of English are precipitated by irreconcilable differences in the language of instruction and the mother tongues; resulting in confusion rather than competence and progress. Studies have also shown that linguistic misunderstanding has been

found to affect cognition and other human development outputs (Vigotsky 2012, Trudell, 2009). Consequently, these authors argue that, if, after sixty-three years of learning and using English in higher education (as the medium of instruction) with little or nothing to show for it, except lamentations, alternative methods of inculcating our cultural norms and national consciousness in Nigerian undergraduates should be explored. This study challenges the poor result of English in equipping the undergraduates to proficiently acquire knowledge and skills for a better life. The question one may ask at this juncture is: 'Since English has failed, are there other options that could be explored?'

Statement of the Problem

The issue of fallen standard, low academic performance and failure across all levels of the education sector has raised enormous concern among scholars and other stakeholders in the sector. The fundamental problem leading to such degeneration in standards can be traced to the language of delivery. Learning cannot adequately take place where the medium of instruction is unfamiliar and incomprehensible to the learner. Concerted efforts have been made by experts to draw the attention of governments, educationists, parents and other stakeholders to the precarious nature of the language issues in Nigeria, and the medium of instruction in schools. No concrete language policy had hitherto been designed except a mention in the National Policy on Education and the Constitution, which has remained unimplemented over the years as a result of lack of commitment on the part of policy makers and the implementers. It is therefore hypothesized that the learning and development of the Nigerian undergraduates have been affected by the ineffective medium of instruction employed in institutions of higher learning. Recently, the government took the bull by the horns by drafting and promulgating a National Language Policy. On the basis of this development, this paper proposes exploring alternative medium of instruction in the training of undergraduates in tertiary education.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of the language of instruction in tertiary education. The objectives include to:

1. identify the linguistic challenges posed by the medium of instruction in tertiary education;
2. isolate these problems and their causes; and
3. proffer possible solutions for curbing them.

Research Questions

The paper seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges posed by the use of English as medium of instruction in tertiary education?
2. How can these problems and their causes be isolated?
3. What possible solutions can be proffered to ameliorate them?

Methodology

The study is a survey adopting both qualitative and quantitative designs in the collection and analysis of data. The questionnaire and interview were used as instruments for data collection. English Language teachers (lecturers) and students of departments of English and Languages and Linguistics of the University of Jos constituted the population of the study. A sample size of one hundred students from four hundred level (400L) and ten lecturers was used for data elicitation. Random and purposive sampling techniques were adopted to arrive at the choice of respondents. One hundred copies of the structured questionnaire with questions bordering on language use in relation to learning and development were administered to the respondents out of which ninety-five were filled in and returned. The lecturers were interviewed, seeking their views on the use of English as medium of instruction based on their experiences and in relation to the development of the students. A descriptive method of analysis was employed, comprising the use of simple percentages and numerical interpretation.

The justification for the use of such methods was based on the fact that the researchers are also members of the community and English

Language teachers. The availability, convenience and ease of obtaining data, and the guarantee of objectivity of the analysis considering the variables of experience and genuineness of the problem were also considered.

Conceptual Review

Dell Hymes in his philosophy of linguistic empowerment observes that language is first and foremost a tool for communication in given contexts. Johnstone and Marcelino (2010), making a historical overview of Hymes' ethnographic efforts, maintain that he conceptualizes language as a set of ways of speaking or using language. His theorizing stipulates that language is not so much about grammaticality but rather, an instrument of communication in a social context. To him, speech must be contextualized, putting into cognizance its appropriateness and the sociocultural context in which participants engage in it. Hymes' idea of language and its choice emphasize the description and analysis of the native speakers' ability to use language for communication in real situations, an idea he terms 'communicative competence' and which gave rise to the ethnography of communication.

The ability to learn and know appropriate patterns of language use in different communities and how these are learned is crucial in the discussion of education, skill acquisition and development generally. Linguistic competence in the opinion of Hymes, is learned; it is therefore necessary that a people group be given the liberty to learn and be nurtured through languages they can easily relate or identify with. This opinion was reiterated by Emenanjo (1996) when he observed that "The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around is best done and realized in the languages in which the students are most familiar." Hence, real development can thrive only when the language issue, especially the medium of instruction in higher education is reasonably addressed. Unfortunately, the linguistic terrain of the Nigerian society is so complex and hazy that attacking the problem headlong has remained a humongous challenge. Nigeria is a multilingual society with a multiplicity of codes, yet a foreign

language is used as the official language serving several civil purposes, and particularly, the medium of instruction in the transfer of knowledge. Regrettably, the Nigerian undergraduates are caught in the web of this complexity and confusion since they are neither proficient in the indigenous languages nor in the official language of the nation.

A medium of instruction could be understood as a linguistic code employed in teaching pupils and students; it is a language used in the impartation of knowledge and skill. The medium of instruction in education and other sectors of many countries across the globe has been an issue of much concern. As was earlier alluded and rightly corroborated by Trudell (2019:8), the medium of instruction employed in “any learning event plays a central role in the extent of information uptake, depending on how well the learner understands the information being conveyed.” (Ozoemena et al 2021; Adegbitc et al 2023). This statement simply means that the linguistic choice made by a school, teachers, the government and other stakeholders invariably determines the quality of learning that takes place in learners, whether formally or informally.

Nigeria is a multilingual society with well over 500 indigenous languages (Brann 1978 quoted in Alebiosu 2016:22). Its linguistic and ethnic diversity make it almost impossible for the nation to frankly legislate on language issues. According to Adegbija (2004:181) quoted in Trudell (2019:12), “Because language issues in Nigeria are often quite explosive and conflict ridden, censuses never have items or questions on languages.” As an offshoot of this endemic scenario, the country's language policy has always been an 'attachment' in the Constitution and in the National Policy on Education. These two documents formulated in 1979, 1999 respectively and their reviewed versions cursorily mentioned the language provision with respect to education and the medium of instruction at the primary level along with all the transitional stages thus:

The medium of instruction in the Primary School shall be the language of immediate environment for the first three years in

monolingual communities. During this period,

English shall be taught as a subject; from the fourth year. English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment,

French and Arabic shall be taught as subjects (2014, pp.11-12).

The document is silent on the medium of instruction in higher/tertiary education; insinuating therefore that this automatically becomes the official language of the nation, and on the assumption that this level of education leverages on maturity and linguistic competence, over time. It is presumptuously believed that the undergraduates who have passed through elementary education schooled in mother tongue or/and language of the immediate community *must* be proficient in all the required native tongues and the official language (English). Thankfully, the newly formulated National Language Policy (2022) clearly defines the medium of instruction to be adopted at every level of the nation's educational efforts. For tertiary/university education, it stipulates that, “Bilingualism, in which every student is to learn one Nigerian Language other than the mother tongue, shall be encouraged in all universities. This shall be available to all students, as an elective course, irrespective of their area of study” (22).

Research has shown, however, that the language of curriculum content delivery is a challenge at every level of education. And this study lends its voice to numerous other investigations on the subject. The diminishing quality of English spoken and written by undergraduates raises much trepidation; and it is feared that linguistic incompetence in the language of learning (medium of instruction) hampers the learners' performance in their various fields/areas of learning. This point of view corroborates Alebiosu's perspective when he observes that “Ironically the use of a foreign language rather than enhance academic performance actually contributes to its decline” (24). It is on this premise that some scholars have explored the idea of employing mother tongue in the education of the young. Such advocacy has

been strong and persistent because of the immense benefits it offers, not only the learners, but also to the government and other stakeholders. (See UNESCO, 1953, Benson, 2002, Fafunwa, 1989, Bamgbose, 2000, Adriosh, 2016, Spernes and Ruto-Korir, 2018, Orji and Udeze, 2021).

Empirical Review

Many studies have been carried out on the use of indigenous languages as the medium of instruction in education both in Nigeria, and in other parts of Africa/the world. Tsaure and Sani (2024:35-36) catalogued countries of the world that employ indigenous languages as medium of instruction, African countries inclusive. Many scholars appreciate the indispensability of the early introduction of children to the symbol of their identity and culture by insisting that pre-primary and primary education is done in the mother tongue (Trudell, 2019). Some have also queried the lack of consonance between the language policy supposedly in operation and the actual practice (Goteng, 2021:395) in schools and real speech contexts- classrooms in this context. Some of these works are reviewed below.

Ezeokoli and Ugwu (2019) explored the respondents' perception and belief about the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction in secondary schools. Their study involved twelve public secondary schools in a local government area of Oyo State. Using a population of two hundred and eleven (211) literate parents, one hundred and ninety-five (195) teachers, and two hundred and thirty-seven (237) SSII students, and using the questionnaire as data elicitation instrument, they found that the mother tongue is pedagogically and socioculturally impertinent. However, the study revealed that bilingual education should be encouraged in secondary schools.

Igboanusi (2008) investigated "Mother Tongue-based Bilingual Education in Nigeria: Attitudes and Practice." He used the questionnaire to obtain information from one thousand (1000) respondents from five states of the country. The findings revealed preference of both English and mother tongue in education.

In addition, Ozoemena, Ngwoke and Nwokolo (2021) studied the "Prospects of Mother

Tongue as a Medium of Instruction in Nigerian Primary Level Education". The study solicited responses from one hundred and fifty primary school teachers in Gwagwalada Area Council of the FCT through the use of structured questionnaire, and the data analysed using Crombach Alpha. The findings revealed that several factors militate against the feasibility of the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction in Nigerian primary schools.

Orji and Udeze (2021) explored the use of indigenous languages in tertiary institutions in Nigeria and analysed students' perception and attitudes toward the use of indigenous languages in their courses of study. The study employed structured questionnaire and found out that there was lower preference for the use of mother tongue, and that students were indifferent to the learning of their native tongues. The study recommended different ways of using indigenous languages for curriculum content delivery.

Furthermore, Adriosh (2016) in his paper "Investigating Nigerian University Students' Perception Towards English Language Dominance over their Indigenous Languages" looked at the effect of the dominance of English over indigenous languages and the inactive stance of the language policy in addressing the issue. Interview was used to elicit responses from eight undergraduates studying at two universities in Northern Cyprus and the findings revealed that the dominance of English in formal and informal usages of the students is gradually decreasing the undergraduates' competence and mastery of indigenous languages. The study recommended a reconsideration of the language policy in adopting national languages as official languages in addition to English.

Spernes and Ruto- Korr (2018) also considered the issue of mother tongue usage in education in Kenya. They investigated the language preferences of multilingual learners in the choice of a medium of instruction in primary schools. Questionnaire and interview methods were used to obtain information from learners, teachers and headteachers. The study revealed that Kiswahili which is both an indigenous and national language and English are preferred as the medium of instruction and the paper proffers its

recommendation in that light.

Okorie, Oyedapo, Amodu, Adesina and Afolabi (2019) proposed the adoption of indigenous languages in teaching communication and engineering education in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, gleaned from South African universities' experience. The study adopted a mixed method to examine the use of Afrikaans and IsiXhosa to study communication and engineering in South African universities. Exploiting the curricular of the universities covered by the study, the findings indicated that an integration of the two indigenous languages was already operational in the teaching of such courses in the country. It therefore concluded that such experiment could be replicated in Nigerian tertiary education in order to facilitate social

integration and multicultural development.

The reviewed studies above are related to the current study, nevertheless, none of them has addressed the inadequacy, inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the English Language as medium of instruction in relation to the learning and development of undergraduates in tertiary education. That is, the low/average proficiency of the undergraduates in English in relation to the comprehension of the knowledge and skills imparted to them and its implications in their progress, growth and development. None has also proffered alternatives to the challenges posed by the continued use of English in tertiary education. These are the gaps this study has identified and aims to fill.

Data Analysis/Discussion

Ten questions seeking the proficiency/competence level of the undergraduates in English were asked in the questionnaire, apart from their bio-data. Below are the responses to the questions.

Table 1: showing the number of respondents and the languages spoken

No of respondents	No of languages spoken
45 respondents	3 languages
27 respondents	2 languages
17 respondents	4 languages
4 respondents	5 languages
1 respondent	6 languages
1 respondent	7 languages
Total = 95 respondents	Total = 27 languages

1. On the number of languages spoken by each respondent, 45 out of the 95 youths spoke 3 languages, 27 spoke 2 languages, 17 spoke 4 languages, 4 spoke 5 languages, while 1 spoke 6 and 7 languages respectively. From this analysis, it is seen that the multilingual nature of the community also produces multilingual individuals. It was noted that most of the respondents spoke Hausa, which is regarded as the language of the immediate community (LIC),

irrespective of their different mother tongues. For those who spoke 3, 4, languages and above, the multiplicity of languages spoken was attributed to other foreign languages they were made to learn in their course of study such as Arabic, German, French, etcetera.

2. From the question on whether they would function better if allowed to use indigenous languages as medium of instruction, 37 of the respondents representing (38.9%) of the total

population sample were affirmative, while 58 (61.05%) were negatively disposed to the idea. This shows that the language of instruction constitutes a hindrance to the students' comprehension and acquisition of knowledge and how much the learners crave being schooled in mother tongue; meaning that if unrestrained by the imposition of a foreign language as an official and language of instruction, their performance, effectiveness and productivity would greatly appreciate.

3. When asked if they were happy using English as the official language, 75 respondents representing (78%) of the sample size stated they were, while 20 (22%) said they were not. Those who are comfortable with the status quo proffered reasons such as the fact that English enhances wider communication; it is a bridge between different languages and douses tension/conflict that may arise as a result of certain preferences and choices. Also, it is a government's pronouncement that must be heeded. It does not allow the citizenry other choices; and that it is a

global language. Those who are unhappy with the situation protest its inability to equip them sufficiently; its perpetual reminder of its colonisation legacy and current agenda, and the loss/death being suffered by indigenous languages, especially minority ones, as a result of the spread and status of English in Nigeria. This picture again, depicts the fact that English is thriving as a result of lack of determination in developing and raising the status of Nigeria's indigenous languages. This is also identified as a problem because a culture, policy or law which is not meeting its original expectation is usually reviewed for better results, but in the case of the language policy in Nigeria, silence, avoidance and indifference apparently hold sway. Even where it appears deliberate efforts are being made as recorded by Trudell (2019:10), such efforts are not backed up by visible results that encourage change. The learners have no choice than to stick with the provision the government has made, whether or not it contributes to their development. 4. "What is your attitude to your mother tongue?"

Table 2: showing respondents' disposition to native tongue

Disposition	Number of respondents	Percentage
Favourably disposed	70	73.7%
Unfavourably disposed	25	26.3%
Total	95	100%

Seventy (70) of the respondents constituting (73.7%) are favourably disposed to their native tongues, indicating a positive attitude. This is evident in some word choices used to express their disposition such as 'love', 'excellent', 'favourable', 'positive', and so on. Twenty-five (25) respondents representing (26.3%) have a negative attitude towards their language, using words like 'negative', 'indifferent', 'nonchalant', 'dislike', and 'unfavourable' to qualify their feelings. This response clearly accents to the high expectations of students of tertiary education of being afforded the liberty to function unfettered, deploying their mother tongue. If a people's attitude towards a language is positive/

favourable, the likelihood of that language thriving and assuming more functions is high. The theory of language choice adopted here encourages the use of appropriate language for effectiveness in communication; consequently, assigning the role of a medium of instruction to any such language is deemed appropriate and promises fruitful outcomes.

5. On how they would rate their proficiency in English (both in speech and writing), sixty-three (63) of the respondents constituting (66.3%) of the population rated themselves 'low'/'average', while thirty-two (32) -(33%) said theirs was high. This feedback reflects the sorry state of the undergraduates in their use of a foreign language

as a medium of instruction and official language. It further exposes the harm and disservice done to this group of citizens in the actualisation of their developmental aspirations. It shows that if learners are not properly grounded in the language of instruction, much of the curriculum content is under-communicated and misunderstood, given that the teachers can only give what they have.

6. Another question posed was the aspect of English that constituted an area of difficulty to the

students. While sixty respondents representing (63.2%) said tenses, lexical inadequacy, spelling(syntax) and pronunciation posed much difficulty and hindered their competence/proficiency in English, forty of them generalized the problem by blaming their incompetence on the complexity of the language. They noted that there is a lot of inconsistency in every aspect of the language and this leaves them confused and impairs their understanding of the language.

Table 3: showing factors responsible for students' low performance in the course of study

Factors	Number of respondents	Percentage
Lack of learning materials	20	21.4%
Unqualified teachers	31	32.5%
Inappropriate medium	34	35.7%
Nature of curriculum	10	10.4%
Total	95	100%

5. This question itemized factors responsible for students' low performance in the various courses of study as –'lack of learning materials'; – 'unqualified teachers/lecturers'; - 'inappropriate medium of instruction'; and – 'the nature of the curriculum'. In response, thirty-four students representing (35.7%) of the respondents ticked 'inappropriate medium of instruction', thirty-one representing (32.5%) accepted 'unqualified teachers/lecturers' as the cause; twenty of them representing (21.4%) agreed to 'lack of learning materials' while ten (10.4%) blamed it on the 'nature of the curriculum'.

6. On what they think about the multilingual nature of the country, whether it is a blessing or a curse, sixty-four of the respondents which formed (67.3%) said it is more disadvantageous than advantageous, while thirty-five (36.8%) believed it is a blessing if well managed.

7. Responding to the question on how they would accept the idea of learning, using the language of the immediate community, sixty-five of the respondents constituting (68.4%) said it is impracticable, while thirty, representing (31.6%) agreed it is possible if well implemented. From the response above, the idea of utilizing an

indigenous language as a medium of instruction can be experimented since it promises to enhance understanding by connecting students more deeply to their culture, identity and values. Moreover, it can foster a stronger sense of belonging and pride in one's heritage, potentially improving learning outcomes.

8. This question sought to know whether the language policy is realistic and implementable. Out of the ninety-five respondents, fifty-three (55.8%) said it will go the way other policies on education had been handled lackadaisically, while forty-one (43.2%) were of the opinion that it would receive the anticipated success if given the necessary impetus.

The structured interview was based on five questions relating to the effectiveness of English as a medium of instruction in relation to teaching and learning and the responses descriptively analysed. All the ten lecturers interviewed acquiesced to the effectiveness of English as a medium of instruction in tertiary education. On whether the language should be held responsible for the fallen standard of education, seven said no, providing other factors as culprit; two agreed that English is responsible, while one was undecided.

Responding to the question of translanguaging, six agreed to the experiment, while four opposed the idea for reasons such as manpower, government policy, funds and so on. Sharing their thoughts on the use of the language of the immediate community (LIC), eight of the respondents said the feasibility is low because of a myriad of factors, while two were optimistic it would work. On whether the lack of proficiency of students in English affects their comprehension in learning, nine of the interviewees were affirmative, while one did not think it was a problem for students whose first language is English. Those who saw it as a problem provided reasons such as poor language background, inappropriate pronunciation, tense errors and many others.

From the presentation above, it is clear that the medium of instruction, even though it has been lauded over the years as the official language and the language of education in Nigeria, has not made much positive impact on the comprehension capacity of the undergraduates. The findings of this study differ from those of Orji and Udeze (2021) in the attitude of undergraduates to the use of indigenous languages as medium of instruction in tertiary education.

The data analysis and discussion presented above converge in one statement: the linguistic provisions of the nation seriously need a revisitation. It is also necessary to observe that English which is now learnt straight from the pre-primary school up to the tertiary level is still being failed at all levels, and the more it is promoted in status and function, the lower the proficiency and competence of its speakers. It is therefore suggested that other options, such as the language of the immediate community where the institution is domiciled or the language of the environment be adopted as the medium of instruction. This proposal is tenable in view of the findings of the study and the newly formulated National Language Policy.

Recommendations

Having considered the linguistic predicament of students in tertiary education, the study hereby proffers the following recommendations:

1. Since the government has begun to address the issue of language policy in relation to education and national development, all Nigerians should applaud the initiative by ensuring that it does not remain a mere printed document. It is a step in the right direction which is hoped to meet the current educational and linguistic needs of the youths and the nation at large. If empowering English has been socio-culturally disadvantageous in content delivery, indigenous languages should be vested with such responsibility as stipulated in the policy. The courage to take the bull by the horns by all and sundry is required for any serious positive outcome. There is therefore the dire need of ensuring proper implementation of the new language policy.
2. Children and youths should be encouraged to speak their native languages freely so that they can develop more interest in learning and using them. By this, the positive attitude some of the students have towards their mother tongues would be optimized. Parents should also be made to understand that there is nothing inferior about our indigenous languages and in using them as medium of instruction. This reorientation and awareness can be done by governmental agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA), media organisations, schools, and the grassroots.
3. Institutions of higher learning should consider language learning/acquisition a priority in the discharge of their responsibilities. Nigerian indigenous language teachers should be trained and employed in every course/area of study. This work is suggesting experimenting the use of the language of immediate community (LIC), therefore language teachers of such languages should be employed in every faculty/department to enhance the learning and use of the language(s) concerned. Such training would also involve the development of relevant materials as is the case in the study and use of foreign languages. The study/learning of any indigenous Nigerian language should be a non-credit unit course in every faculty and students who perform excellently in them should be given some incentive to encourage interest.
4. The education sector, government, parents, linguists, sociolinguists and other stakeholders

should take responsibility in ensuring that the indigenous languages are given a boost by allowing them to function in the impartation/delivery of skills and knowledge. This expanded functions /domain would in essence, enhance better communication, facilitate cultural relevance in the learning process, foster deeper understanding of concepts and promote our unity in diversity linguistically.

5. More deliberate steps should be advanced towards developing the orthographies/codification of indigenous languages. The work being done by the Bible Translation Trust (SIL, Nigeria), concerned individuals and language enthusiasts like Ogonnaya Okoro, who wrote a Physics textbook in Igbo language should be complemented and funded for more robust results.

6. Curbing language endangerment and death should be seen as everyone's business in Nigeria. Enlightenment campaigns on the stark reality of the linguistic tapestry of the country and its effects on the development of the future generation should be carried out by linguists, concerned citizens and other stakeholders. The evolving consciousness of people to this fact over time would ultimately result in a more organized, accurate choice of a national language.

Conclusion

This article has examined the language situation of Nigeria in the light of the practicality of a review of the medium of instruction in tertiary education. It noted the usefulness of language generally, and particularly the language of one's nativity in the learning and acquisition of knowledge and skills. Mother tongue education has been advocated by many education specialists, especially starting from infancy, however, it is believed that such style of learning will similarly be profitable to older children: students of tertiary institutions. From the data analysed, it is clear that with all the functions and advantages the English language has over the indigenous languages, it has not successfully brought about meaningful lasting development in the youths. This study therefore recommends that the use of indigenous languages as the medium of instruction in higher education be experimented

in the country. This would mean that any language ('majority' or 'minority') that is predominant within the spheres of any tertiary institution, automatically stands the chance of being adopted as a medium of instruction. This will not only enhance the comprehension and performance of the students but also promote the expansion and sustenance of the nation's multicultural heritage.

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