

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Is language crucial for a successful education? The answer is undoubtedly yes. If we construct our cognitive development with the help of language it can be stated that the language we think with the use for our daily life is crucial. A medium of instruction is a language used in teaching. It may or may not be the official language of the country or territory. Language of instruction is a vehicle through which education is delivered. As a matter of efficiency and efficacy, only the language which teachers and students understand can effectively function as the language of instruction.

Keywords: Language; education; medium of instruction schools; English language.

Kilgour (1999) orally, that language is obviously a vital tool. Not only is it a means of communicating thoughts and ideas, but it forges friendships, cultural ties, and economics relationships. Throughout history, many have reflected on the importance of language. For instance, the school Benjamin Whorf has noted that language shapes thoughts and emotions, determining one perception of reality. John Stuart Mill said that "Language is the light of the mind. For the linguist

Edward Sapir, language is not only a vehicle for the expression of thoughts, perceptions, sentiments, and values characteristic of a community; it also represents a fundamentals expression of social identity . Sapir said: "the mere fact of a common speech serves as a peculiar potent symbol of the social solidarity of those who speak the language." In short, language retention helps maintain feelings of cultural kinship.

A medium of instruction is a language used in teaching. It may or may not be the official language of the country or territory. Where the first language of students is different from the official language, it may be used as the medium of instruction for part or all of schooling. Bilingual or multilingual education may involve the use of more than one language of instruction. UNESCO considers that “providing education in a child’s mother tongue is indeed a critical issue” (UNESCO, 2008 and Wikipedia).

According to Musa (2012), the goals in language in Nigeria can best be addressed by examining these questions:

- a. What kind of language competence do we envisage of the products of our primary school system?
- b. What are the language needs of the educated Nigerian?

English language plays a central and strategic role in the school system because almost all the school subjects are taught using English language (Atanda and Jaiyeola, 2011). In fact, attested to this that a child cannot learn most of the elementary facts or ideas unless he understands the language in which these ideas are expressed.

What is Education?

Education is a development process that often includes a particular understanding of nature of knowledge.

The understanding is given expression in a particular social or ideological context with its particular policy and implementation agendas. It is an expression of how human learning and development occur and how they can be encouraged. Education is seen as a developmental process of change for the better in the interest of the society that designs it and the individual that receives it.

Education can be informal or formal. Different societies may have different views about what formal education is, which in turn determines how curriculum is seen or viewed by different societies. For example, those who see curriculum mainly in terms of content see education primarily as a process of transmitting that content. Those who see it as mainly concerned with a product see education primarily as instrumental towards the achievement of the product. And those who see curriculum primarily in terms of a process see education primarily as development.

Expectations of society, according to Mmari (2000), are expressed in terms of educational goals that can broadly be classified into three categories, namely:

- (i) Learning goals which focus on equipping learners with knowledge, skills values and attitudes as defined in a given curriculum.

- (ii) System goals, which relate to measurable inputs and outputs that keep the system working; and
- (iii) Educational goals, which are based on the dominant ideas, it follows that the goals of education between societies will naturally differ; and to that extent the meaning of quality of education will also differ.

According to Qorro (2006), the societal objectives of secondary education are as follows:

- To consolidate and broaden the scope of baseline values, knowledge skills and principles acquired and developed at the primary education level;
- To enhance further development and appreciation of national unity, identity and ethnic, personal integrity, respect for and readiness to work, human rights, cultural and moral values, customs, traditions, and civic responsibilities skills;
- To promote opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and understanding in prescribed or selected fields of study;
- To prepare students for tertiary and higher education, vocational, technical and professional training;

- To inculcate a sense and ability for self – study, self – confidence and self – advancement in new frontiers of science and technology, academic and occupational knowledge, and skills;

- To prepare the students to join the world of work.

Language and Education

According to Obanya (1992 & 1996), language in education embraces the wider questions of:

- (a) The languages taught and learnt in the educational system, and
- (b) The language used for educating at various levels and sectors of a national system.

Most African countries (referring specifically to Africa South of the Sahara) were colonized from the middle of the 19th century to the 1960s. The only notable exception to this general trend is Ethiopia, but the fact that the country was occupied in the 1930s by the Italians also meant that it cannot completely escapes from the colonial stamp.

That each colonial power imposed its own language on the African countries it colonized is a well known fact. It is also well known that imperial educational and colonial policies often determined: (a) the level of entrenchment of the colonial language, and (b) the extent to which indigenous language were tolerated and consciously promoted in the

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educational system . In board outline, the colonial legacy in matters relating to language in education in Africa can be summarized as follows:

- Countries colonized by the French taught the French language at all levels, and from the first day in school
- Countries colonized by the Spanish and the Portuguese had a practice very similar to that of the French:
- Countries colonized by the British taught English at all level, but always made sure that the first years of formal education were conducted in the first language of learners or in the language of their immediate environment.
- Countries colonized by the Germans, while seriously promoting the German language, also gave prominence to indigenous language in the early years of schooling.

The Zambian experience shows that the language of instruction post 1996 is still officially English, but with a directive from the permanent secretary to schools that this should be an aspiration to be achieved by the end of Grade 4 at a pace that is appropriate to learning needs. Textbooks are still in English, but teachers are encouraged to use the local language whenever it benefits learning and understanding.

In reality, local languages predominate in the early grades, particularly in the rural areas. In a new departure, *Educating Our Future* states clearly that children must have the right to be introduced to literacy and numeracy through a familiar language: The fact that initial reading skills are taught in and through a language that is unfamiliar to the majority of children is believed to be a major contributory factor in fostering role learning, since from the outset the child has difficulties in associating the printed forms of words with their real underlying meaning (Hardman, 1965 & Higgins, 2000).

The Primary Reading Programme (PRP) has managed to improve learning achievement quite significantly in the area of Reading and Writing (Kanyika, 2002 & Kelly, 1995). PRP has developed syllabuses for literacy, produced materials to support them and then practical training in the use of these materials, which together have resulted in improved training achievement. The traditional 'quality mix' of materials, training and contact time, have succeeded in this case, but it is more in the way that PRP has managed to work across departments and directorates that has given it such success (DFID,2002 & Kelly 2000). Literacy skills more easily and successfully through their mother tongue, and subsequently they are able to transfer these skills quickly and with

ease to English or another language' (Linehan, 2004).

The language situation in south Africa is similar to the Namibian one in the sense that English become the medium of instruction at some point in primary school. Depending on the school it is introduced sometimes from the first grade while sometimes there is a language switch in a higher grade (Desai 2011). As indicated by Wolfaardt (2001) there are some difficulties with both the switch and with learning in English from the first grade; therefore she suggests bilingual programmes that according to her could be suitable for the Nambian schools (Cantoni, 2007).

Effect of Language on Education

The language of instruction in educational institutions in multilingual societies has always been a matter of concern to educators and educational planners (Musa, 2012). The African situation is aptly captured by Quadraogo (2000), when he asserts that "education and language issues are very complex in Africa because of the of the multi – ethnic and multi – lingual situations.

Language of instruction is a vehicle through which education is delivered. The role of language of instruction can be likened to that of pipes in carrying water from one destination to another or that of copper wires in transmitting electricity from

one station to another. Just as a pipe is an important medium in carrying water, and a copper wire an important medium for transmitting electricity, the language of insertion is an indispensable medium for carrying or transmitting education from teachers to learners and among learners.

As a matter of efficiency and efficacy, only the language which teachers and students understands can effectively function as the language of instruction. Only when teachers and students understand the language of instruction are they able to discuss, debate, ask and answer questions, ask for clarification and therefore construct and generate knowledge. These are activities that are a pre – requisite to learning and whose levels determines the quality of education. Thus, the language of instruction is an important factor in determining the quality of education (Qorro, 2006).

Studies by Andersen (1975) and Mvungi (1982) show that proficiency in the language of instruction is an important factor in educational performance. The corollary of this is that lack of proficiency in the language of instruction, in our case English, result in poor performance in subject taught in English. Elsewhere, studies by Cummins (1979, 1981) and Krashen (1985) show that poor performance in the language of instruction results in poor performance not only in other subjects,

but also in overall poor performance in the second or foreign language.

Conclusions

Is Language crucial for a successful education? The answer is undoubtedly yes. If we construct our cognitive development with the help of language it can be stated that the language we think the use for our daily life is crucial. Education is part of our daily life, be it in formal or informal Ways.

The quality of instruction has significant relationship with students academic achievement in language and also contributes significantly to students' achievement in language. It means that teachers' quality of instruction matters a lot in improving students' achievement in Education.

This finding does not differ from submission of previous findings. Teachers' related factors that could bring about quality of instruction which have been found related and contributed to students' achievement include, teachers' effectiveness (sanders & Rivers, 1996; Horn Sanders, 1997) teachers' efficacy (Tschanuen – Moran and Hoy, 2001), teachers' subject matters (Monk and King, 1994) and Effects of School – Based Quality factors on Secondary school students' Achievement in English language in South – Western and North – Central Nigeria (Atandan and jaiyeoba, 2011).

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