
**Mother Tongue as First Language and its effect on Learning among Tertiary Institution
Students in Akwa Ibom State**

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine the Mother Tongue as First Language and its effect on Learning among Tertiary Institution Students in Akwa Ibom State. The study adopted an Expost facto research design. The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State using tertiary institutions in the state (University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State University, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Akwa Ibom State College of Education Afaha Nsit, and Akwa Ibom State College of Science and Technology). The population of the study comprised undergraduate students from the five institutions. Simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting 40 undergraduate students from each of the 5 institutions, giving a total of 200 respondents for the study. The main instrument used in this study was a questionnaire titled “Mother Tongue Effect on Learning among Tertiary Institution Students Questionnaire (MTELTISQ)”. Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to determine the level of reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.84 and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques such as simple regression analysis and independent t-test analysis. The test for significance was done at 0.05 alpha levels. The study revealed that mother tongue is the child’s environment and is the natural basis on which verbal skills can be built, children learn through communicating in a language, which they understood. It was concluded that there is significant effect of mother tongue on learning among tertiary institution students. There is significant difference between male and female students in the level of learning effectiveness due to mother tongue. One of the recommendations was that the Nigerian government should address the implementation of the National Policy on Education in the part of language of instruction in early childhood settings more seriously

KEYWORDS: Mother Tongue, Language, Effect, Tertiary Institution, Students

Introduction

Language, according to Araromi (2005) is a creation that every human being is endowed with or blessed; a unique gift of language is used naturally as one tool of expression consisting of different sub skills. It is an important tool that enhances human communication and interaction. Language is more complex in previously colonized multilingual countries where the official colonial language is different from the indigenous languages. Once the concepts of language are learnt, they can easily be reapplied to an education stream. Language is a vital instrument in cultural transmission and preservation of a social group. It is in a fundamental sense, a crucial tool in the preservation and propagation of the human species. An examination of the linguistic content of a particular speech community can provide information about the life style, occupation etc. of a given people.

According to Owu-Ewie, (2006) mother tongue is the first language that a person learnt. Hence, mother tongue (MT) as the language which a group of people considered to be inhabitants of an area acquired in the early years and which eventually become their natural instrument of thoughts and communication. Ogunsanwo (2003) opined that the use of mother tongue in the process of teaching and learning in the early years helps, not only to preserve and value ones culture but also to develop it lexically. He also noted that a citizen that is literate even only in the mother tongue would be sufficiently equipped to live a useful life in the fast changing world. Therefore, if permanent literacy is to be promoted in the primary schools the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in schools ought to be encouraged.

Statement of the Problem

Before the advent of British traders, missionaries and colonialists, indigenous Nigerian language defined every aspect of the speech community from its religious, cultural, political, economic, social to whatever else that can be through the language functioned effectively to deal with everything relating to the day existence people. The arrival of the British, concomitant with the English language provided a language contact situation with an attempt to a language shift in the population. Thus, students are being short-changed by the school system. Most students don't have the opportunity to learn how to communicate effectively in their own mother tongue due to excessive exposure to English language. Thus, it is not astounding seeing students in different tertiary institutions from other tribes and states experiencing social isolation, prejudice, and discrimination, because of the lack of language proficiency, which in turn causes psychological problems within these individuals. Therefore, it should be generally accepted by the Federal Ministry of Education and other educational statutory agencies that in teaching and learning process, the mother tongue of the child is of utmost importance. Thus, this paper therefore sought to examine the mother tongue as first language and its effect on learning among tertiary institution students in Akwa Ibom State.

Objectives of the study

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. To find out the effects of mother tongue on learning among tertiary institution students

2. To find out the differences between male and female students in the level of learning effectiveness due to mother tongue.

Research Questions

1. What are the effects of mother tongue on learning among tertiary institution students.
2. What are the differences between male and female students in the level of learning effectiveness due to mother tongue?

Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant effect of mother tongue on learning among tertiary institution students.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between male and female students in the level of learning effectiveness due to mother tongue.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Mother Tongue as a Language

Mother tongue is one's native language. A language besides being the major distinguishing phenomenon between man and other creatures is evidently the most enduring of every people's cultural heritage. According to Bloomfield, (1994), a first language, native tongue, native language, or mother/father/parent tongue (also known as arterial language or L1), is a language that a person had been exposed to from birth or within the critical period. In some countries, the term native language or mother tongue refers to the language of one's ethnic group rather than one's first language (Davies, 2003). Sometimes, the term "*mother tongue*" or "*mother language*" (or "*father tongue*"/"*father language*") is used for the language that a person learned as a child. Children growing up in bilingual homes can according to this definition, have more than one mother tongue or native language. The first language of a child is part of that child's personal, social and cultural identity (Hirst, 2010). Another impact of the first language is that it brings about the reflection and learning of successful social patterns of acting and speaking (Boroditsky, 2001). Hence, one of the more widely accepted definitions of mother tongue is that they were born in a particular country (and) raised to speak the language of that country during the critical period of their development (Saniei, 2011).

Concept of Learning

Learning is an act of getting experience, knowledge, skills and values by understanding what to do and how to do any task by synthesizing the different types of information. Learning brings about changes in the existing behavior of an individual, animal and plants (Dharmaraj, 2015). Kingsley and Garry (1957) defines learning as a process by which behaviour (in the broader sense) is originated or changes through practice or training. Also Smith (1962) asserted that learning is the acquisition of new behaviour or the strengthening or weakening of old behaviour as the result of experience. Thus, learning covers every modification in behaviour to meet environmental requirements (Murphy, 1968)

Since the end of the last century, the phenomenon of learning has received increasingly more attention. Both nationally and internationally, there is a political focus on learning and a “call for harnessing knowledge about learning and applying it more systematically to education” (Dumont, Istance & Benavides, 2013). Learning is a process that occupies an important role in moulding the structure of our personality and behavior. It develops socially accepted behaviours and there is equal chance of building negative side of human behaviour. Learning necessities to meet some personal need as it is a purposeful and goal oriented. Recognising and identifying such needs enable us to evaluate whether that learning has been worthwhile and successful (Dharmaraj, 2015). Learning involves new ways of doing things with no limit to adopt the ways and means to attain the goal. It is a continuous, comprehensive process which involves different methods and covers conative, cognitive and affective domains of human behaviour.

Impact of Mother Tongue on Students’ Learning

Mother tongue is the first language that a person learned. It is generally accepted that in teaching and learning processes, the child’s mother tongue is of utmost importance. For one thing, it categorizes a large part of the child’s environment, that is, it has names for most of the objects, actions, ideas, attributes and so on that are so important to him (Zergani, 2016). This no doubt will go a long way to foster proper and adequate communication between teachers and pupils, and further promote learning as the child feels more comfortable to express himself in a language he/she understands and can identify with. Akinbote, Olusegun & Iroegbu, (2001) and Ogunsanwo (2003) opined that the use of mother tongue in the process of teaching and learning in the early years helps, not only to preserve and value one’s culture but also to develop it lexically. Also, the use of English language in the early primary school makes the average primary school child unable to be sufficiently literate in either the mother tongue or English language. Although English language retains its dominant position in the education delivery system in Nigeria, the thrust of our educational language policy is the use of the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community in pre-primary and primary education (Oluwole, 2008). The mother tongue medium education at the primary school level is provided in less than twenty Nigerian languages throughout the country. It was in recognition of the importance and contributions of mother tongue to education that made the Federal Ministry of Education, in Collaboration with other educational statutory agencies include in the National Policy on Education published in 1977, revised in 1981, the use of mother tongue as a medium of educating pupils at the pre-primary and primary level throughout the country. Hence, the mother tongue is the child’s environment and is the natural basis on which verbal skills can be built, children learn through communicating in a language, which they understood (Olanipekun, Atteh, Zaku, Sarki, 2014).

Lovas (2011) opined that mother tongue is more conversational, supportive and interpretive in communication with daughters than with sons, from infancy through elementary school. She further argues that this differential verbal behaviour reflects parents’ conscious or unconscious conformity with their society’s stereotypical gender roles (Lovas, 2011). The gender difference in language development shows a clear female advantage in verbal ability (Browne, 2005; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). The reasons for these gender differences is still a matter of some controversy although research literature focus on three major areas to explain differences: biological gender differences in infancy, gender socialization and fathers’ influence on language development (Lovas, 2011). Social factors or gender socialization (Browne, 2005) also constitute

for language differences between males and females. Lietz (2006), Rosén (2001) observed the existence of a gender gap in many countries around the world, favoring women over men, regarding language abilities. Gender differences in L1 acquisition have also been found to occur in the earliest stages of the life span. Girls develop communicative skills at a younger age than boys exhibiting larger vocabularies and using a larger variety of sentences.

Method

The study adopted an Expost facto research design. The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State using tertiary institutions in the state (University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State University, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Akwa Ibom State College of Education Afaha Nsit, and Akwa Ibom State College of Science and Technology). The population of the study comprised undergraduate students from the five institutions. Simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting 40 undergraduate students from each of the 5 institutions, giving a total of 200 respondents for the study. The main instrument used in this study was a questionnaire titled “Mother Tongue Effect on Learning among Tertiary Institution Students Questionnaire (MTELTISQ)”. Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to determine the level of reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.84 and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques such as simple regression and t-test analysis. The test for significance was done at 0.05 alpha levels.

Results and Discussion

Hypothesis One

The null hypothesis states that there is significant effect of mother tongue on learning among tertiary institution students. In order to test the hypothesis, multiple regression was used to analyse the data, (see table 1).

TABLE 1: simple regression of the effect of mother tongue on learning among tertiary institution students

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	0.98a	0.95	0.95	0.45	0.95

***Significant at 0.05 level; df = 198; N = 200; critical r-value = 0.139**

The above table 1 shows that the calculated R-value 0.98 was greater than the critical R-value of 0.139 at 0.5 alpha level with 198 degree of freedom. The R-square value of 0.95 predicts 95% of the effect of mother tongue on learning among tertiary institution students. This rate of percentage is highly positive and therefore means that there is significant effect of mother tongue on learning among tertiary institution students. It was also deemed necessary to find out the extent of the variance of each class of independent variable as responded by each respondent (see table 2).

TABLE 2: Analysis of variance of the effect of mother tongue on learning among tertiary institution students

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	802.53	1	802.53	4025.32	.000b
Residual	39.48	198	0.20		
Total	842.00	199			

a. Dependent Variable: Learning.

b. Predictors: (Constant), Mother tongue

The above table 5 presents the calculated F-value as (4025.32) and the critical f-value as (000). Being that the critical f-value (000a) is below the probability level of 0.05, the result therefore means that there is significant influence exerted by the independent variables (mother tongue) on the dependent variable which is learning.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference between male and female students in the level of learning effectiveness due to mother tongue. In order to answer the hypothesis, independent t-test analysis was performed on the data as shown in table 3.

TABLE 3: Independent t-test analysis of difference between male and female students in the level of learning effectiveness due to mother tongue

GENDER	N	X	SD	t
MALE	100	19.00	0.90	
FEMALE	100	15.60	1.36	20.82*

***Significant at 0.05; df = 198; N = 200; critical t = 1.960**

The above table 3 indicates that the calculated t-value (20.82) was higher than the critical t-value (1.960) at 0.05 level of significance with 198 degrees of freedom. Hence, the result therefore means that there is significant difference between male and female students in the level of learning effectiveness due to mother tongue. Thus, mother tongue has impact on level of learning effectiveness of male and female students in the tertiary institution.

Discussion of the Findings

The result of the data analysis in table 1 and 2 was significant due to the fact that the calculated R-value 0.95 and F-4025.32 were greater than the critical R-value of 0.139 at 0.05 level with 198 degree of freedom. The result implies that there is significant effect of mother tongue on learning among tertiary institution students. The result therefore is in agreement with the research findings of Akinbote, Olusegun & Iroegbu, (2001) and Ogunsanwo (2003) who opined that the use of mother tongue in the process of teaching and learning in the early years helps not only to preserve and value one's culture but also to develop it lexically. Hence, mother tongue is the

child's environment and is the natural basis on which verbal skills can be built. Children learn through communicating in a language, which they understand (Olanipekun, Atteh, Zaku, Sarki, 2014). The significance of the result caused the null hypotheses to be rejected while the alternative was accepted.

The result of the data analysis in table 3 was significant due to the fact that the calculated t-value (20.82) was greater than the critical t-value (1.980) at 0.05 level of significant with 198 degree of freedom. The result implies that there is significant difference between male and female students in the level of learning effectiveness due to mother tongue. The result was in agreement with the research finding of Lovas (2011) who asserted that mother tongue is more conversational, supportive and interpretive in communication with daughters than with sons, from infancy through elementary school. Also, differential verbal behaviour reflects parents' conscious or unconscious conformity with their society's stereotypical gender roles. The gender difference in language development, shows a clear female advantage in verbal ability. Gender differences in L1 acquisition have also been found to occur in the earliest stages of the life span. Girls develop communicative skills at a younger age than boys exhibiting larger vocabularies and using a larger variety of sentences (Rosén, 2001). The significance of the result caused the null hypothesis to be rejected while the alternative was accepted.

Conclusion

Mother tongue is the first language that a person learned. Thus, it is generally accepted that in teaching and learning processes, the child's mother tongue is of utmost importance which helps not only to preserve and value one's culture but also to develop it lexically. Learning is a process, which occupies an important role in moulding the structure of our personality and behavior to meet environmental requirements. Teaching of the mother tongue alongside the second language, allows the sounds and structures of the language to be transferred more easily. Hence, the mother tongue is the child's environment and is the natural basis on which verbal skills can be built. Children learn through communicating in a language, which they understand. Therefore, it was concluded that there is significant effect of mother tongue on learning among tertiary institution students. There is significant difference between male and female students in the level of learning effectiveness due to mother tongue.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. The Nigerian Government should address the implementation of the National Policy on Education in the part of language of instruction in early childhood settings more seriously in such a way that the mother tongue is encouraged.
2. Schools should organize forums for parents to educate them on the importance of the language of the immediate environment in a child's life and on how to encourage children to speak their native language at home.
3. Lecturers/Teachers need to do more than teaching theories in class. Proper method of teaching and appropriate instructional materials should be adopted to compliment teacher's knowledge.

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