
Mother-Tongue as Medium of Instruction: Examining Its Influence on Child's Educational Performance in Kogi-Central, Kogi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study builds upon existing research, including Fafunwa's seminal Ife Mother Tongue education project (1970-1978) and Afiesimama's (1991) language policy in Nigeria, to reexamine the role of mother tongue instruction in children's education. Focusing on selected primary schools in Kogi-Central Local Government Area, Kogi State, Nigeria, this research engages teachers and pupils from both private and public institutions to assess the efficacy of mother tongue teaching in achieving functional literacy. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on perceptions and outcomes related to literacy attainment at the primary level. The study found that pupils have a notable acceptance of mother tongue instruction, with minimal regard for it as a language of low esteem. These findings corroborate previous studies, underscoring the importance of mother tongue instruction, emphasising its potential to enhance learning processes and foster functional literacy. The utilisation of indigenous languages is posited as pivotal for optimising educational outcomes in primary classes, aligning instruction with the linguistic environment to bolster educational efficiency.

Keywords: Mother-Tongue Instruction, Primary Education, Functional Literacy, Language-in-Education Policy

1.0 Introduction

Language is a fundamental aspect of human interaction and culture, defined by (Robin, 2015) as a system of conventional spoken, manual, or written symbols through which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. Hall (2011) conceptualises language as an institution facilitating communication and interaction among humans via habitually employed oral-auditory symbols. Language serves multifaceted roles in human life: expressing thoughts and emotions, facilitating learning and communication, satisfying wants and needs, and establishing cultural norms. Language possesses creative and symbolic properties (Bell, 2010), with key functions including: facilitating acquisition of community speech habits, thereby fostering individual membership and identity; equipping individuals with capabilities for self-expression; serving as a tool for exploring and analysing of cognitive processes, granting access to others' experiences; acting as a chief instrument of social organisation.

In the context of language acquisition, parents significantly influence a child's linguistic exposure, shaping interaction with the environment and societal engagement. A child's first language, typically the mother tongue, is acquired from parents and extended to family and societal contexts, forming the basis of "home training" (UNESCO, 2003). The mother tongue is aptly described as "the language one thinks, dreams, and counts in" (Skutnabbkangas, 1981), underscoring its centrality in cognitive and cultural orientation.

Research indicates language is intricately linked to cognitive processes, conceptualisation, and thought (Chumbow, 1993;

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Moshman, 2013). The mother tongue plays a pivotal role in intellectual development and cultural orientation, expressing shared cultural experiences of a speech community. Notably, skills acquired in a first language can transfer to subsequent languages; for instance, reading proficiency in Ebira may facilitate reading in English. However, the recent cancellation of the National Language Policy (2022) by the Minister of Education, Dr. Tunji Alausa has sparked controversy; the policy mandated the use of indigenous languages as the medium of instruction in primary schools. Many argue that this decision will hinder educational development and functional literacy, as children taught in their mother tongue tend to grasp concepts faster and are less confused when understanding basic concepts. The Nigerian Academy of Letters (NAL) has expressed displeasure over the decision, citing UNESCO guidelines and international studies that show mother-tongue education improves literacy, cognitive development, and academic performance.

Several studies have highlighted the significance of mother tongue instruction in primary education, particularly in Nigeria. Aliu Babatunde Fafunwa's seminal work, the Ife Mother Tongue education research project (1970-1978), demonstrated that children taught in their native language performed better academically than those taught in English. This project led to the development of textbooks and materials in Yoruba which have been widely used in Nigerian schools. Afiesimama's (1991) language policy in Nigeria, also advocated the use of the mother tongue instruction in primary education. Eme (2018) explored the role of Nigerian languages in education and national development, highlighting the importance of language in fostering national unity and development. Akintola

and Adetunji (2020) examined mother tongue education for sustainable development goals and findings support the use of mother tongue education for achieving sustainable development goals. Similarly, Ntuli and Mudau (2024) study shows that using indigenous languages positively shapes classroom interactions and discourses, leading to meaningful learning and better performance. As well, Tsuare and Sani (2024) stated the importance of indigenous languages in Nigerian primary schools asserting that improved academic performance and cultural preservation are the significance and implications of utilising indigenous languages.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The utilisation of the mother tongue in primary education settings within Kogi-Central Local Government Area (LGA), Nigeria, is beset by prevalent misconceptions and implementation challenges. A pervasive perception exists among segments of the community that mother tongue, specifically Ebira, is relegated to informal or non-academic contexts, deemed inconsequential for formal learning processes. This viewpoint undermines the potential pedagogical benefits of mother tongue instruction, despite its recognised role in facilitating cognitive and linguistic development (UNESCO, 2006).

The removal of mother tongue from educational policy has led to non-compliance by state and private educational institutions within the state in incorporating mother tongue as a medium of instruction in primary schools. This may be due to a misconception that using mother tongue leads to students' poor performance, as well as a lack of instructional materials in indigenous languages. However, instructional delivery predominately in English may impede pupils' comprehension of key curricular concepts, potentially

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contributing to disengagement and negative perceptions of academic pursuits.

This research addresses critical gaps pertaining to mother tongue (Ebira) integration in Kogi-Central LGA primary schools, focusing on: prevailing societal attitudes and perceptions regarding mother tongue's role in formal primary education in Kogi-Central LGA, the availability and authenticity of instructional materials in Ebira for primary-level pedagogical development, the prospective enhancement of educational engagement and effectiveness through mother tongue (Ebira) utilisation in Kogi-Central LGA primary schools.

This study aims to contribute empirical insights informing language-in-education policies and practices in multilingual contexts like Nigeria, with specific reference to leveraging mother tongue (Ebira) for improved academic outcomes in Kogi-Central LGA.

1.2 Research Questions

This study is guided by these research questions: How does mother tongue influence child education in some selected schools in Kogi-Central?; Will students and teachers differ in their response to influence of mother tongue on child's education on the basis of sex?; Will students and teachers differ in their response to influence of mother tongue on child's education on the basis of school?

1.3 Scope of the Study

The study encompasses an examination of mother tongue influences on child education, circumscribed geographically to selected primary educational institutions Kogi-Central L.G.A.

1.4 Theoretical Framework: Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory

Socio-cultural theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the influence of mother tongue instruction on children's education (Daramola *et al*, 2024). According to Vygotsky, human development is shaped by social interactions and cultural context (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory posits that children learn best through collaboration and interaction with *More Knowledgeable Others* (MKO) within the social environment. Hence, this theory suggests that the use of indigenous languages can serve as a tool for learning, enabling children to access and engage with educational content more effectively (Daramola *et al*, 2024). It further highlights the importance of social interaction and collaboration among pupils, teachers, and parents, promoting a sense of community and shared understanding.

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a key concept in Vygotsky's theory, refers to the range of knowledge and skills that a child can master with guidance from MKO (Vygotsky, 1978). In mother tongue instruction, teachers can use the ZPD to scaffold learning, providing temporary support and guidance as children master new concept and skills.

Furthermore, Vygotsky's theory emphasises the role of language in cognitive development which suggest that mother tongue instruction influences cognitive development as children use language to think, reason, and solve problems. The use of mother tongue instruction also acknowledges and values the cultural heritage of Nigerian children, making learning more relevant and meaningful. Hence, Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory will be

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applied in this study for explanatory analysis, to elucidate the findings.

1.5 Research Design and Population

The research design employed in this study entails a survey-based approach, utilising a descriptive survey methodology to elucidate perceptions surrounding mother tongue instruction. Specifically, the study examines teacher perspectives on mother tongue teaching and pupils' responses regarding mother tongue, within selected primary schools in Kogi-Central LGA, Kogi State, Nigeria.

The study adopts a descriptive design, facilitating the collection of data pertaining to attitudes and perceptions of participants concerning mother tongue. The study population comprises primary five and six students, alongside teachers, from both public and private primary schools within Kogi-Central LGA. Respondents from this population contributed data via administered questionnaires. Teachers and pupils participated by responding to questionnaires, furnishing insights into their perceptions of mother tongue instruction and its relevance.

1.6 Sample and Sample Procedure

A sample of 100 pupils was selected utilising a simple random technique from selected primary schools in Kogi-Central LGA. The school selection encompassed three public schools and four private schools, facilitating an examination of potential variances between these institutional types. For pupil respondents, class monitors from each participating school were designated by the researcher to assist in questionnaire distribution. Conversely, teacher questionnaires were disseminated directly by the researcher. The primary schools include: Christ the King Primary

School, Divine Kiddies Group of Schools, Safi Sunshine Primary School, and Champions Group of Schools, which are all private primary schools, while the public primary schools are St. Andrews Primary School, Okomayi Nursery & Primary School, and Eika Adagu LGEA Primary School.

1.7 Research instruments

The research instrument utilised in this study comprises an objectively structured questionnaire with open-ended components, custom-designed by the researcher. The questionnaire exists in dual formats: one variant targeted at teachers and a corresponding version for pupils in the upper primary classes (primary 5 and 6). The selection of upper classes is predicated on the premise that these students possess requisite cognitive and communicative abilities to comprehend questionnaire items and respond autonomously, mitigating potential teacher-influenced bias. The questionnaire is divided into distinct sections, Sections **A** and **B**. Section **A** encompasses demographic information pertaining to respondents, capturing pertinent personal and contextual attributes while Section **B** constitutes the substantive component, wherein respondents address queries germane to the research focus, with data amenable to descriptive analytical procedures.

1.8 Reliability of Instrument

To ascertain the reliability of the research instrument, a test re-test methodology was employed. The questionnaire was administered to the same cohort of pupils and teachers on two separate occasions, with an intervening period of two weeks between the initial and subsequent administrations. Result from both test iterations were collated and subjected to comparative analysis. Utilising Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient

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formula, the resultant reliability index was determined to be 0.69. This suggests a significant positive correlation between mother tongue instruction and educational development/functional literacy. This implies that as the use of mother tongue instruction increases, educational development and functional literacy also tend to increase.

1.9 Administration Instrument

The researcher distributed 100 copies of the pupil-oriented questionnaire and 100 copies of the teacher-oriented questionnaire to respective respondents within selected primary schools in Kogi-Central LGA. Data collection occurred immediately upon completion, with the researcher retrieving the administered questionnaires directly from respondents.

1.10 Method of Data Analysis

Data collected from administered questionnaires were subjected to analysis utilising a combination of descriptive statistical technique. Representations of respondent data included tabular summaries for teacher responses illustrating percentage distributions of answers furnished by both teachers and pupils. Analytical procedures encompassed computation of mean values and percentages. Additionally, Spearman's correlation was employed to examine relationships between pertinent variables.

1.10.1 Presentation of Results (Teachers' Respondents)

Analysis of research question one: How does mother tongue influence child education in some selected schools in Kogi-Central?

Table 1: Responses to Questionnaire Items

S/N	QUESTIONS	AGREE	DISAGREE
		M F	M F
1	Pupils will be motivated to attend classes because the use of mother tongues in classrooms.	25% 49%	19% 7%
2	The use of mother tongue (Ebira) will help pupils to understand the intended points.	50% 43%	2% 5%
3	Pupils will participate more in classrooms when subjects are taught in the mother tongue.	40% 46%	8% 6%
4.	Textbooks in Ebira should be made available for better understanding.	41% 41%	11% 7%
5	As a teacher, I have more positive feedbacks when I teach using the Ebira language.	41% 48%	6% 5%
6	Education will be made easier with the use of mother tongue in classrooms.	49% 41%	5% 4%
7	Classroom discussions and exchange of ideas will be improved with the use of mother tongue (Ebira).	37% 37%	15% 11%
8	Pupils will be interested in learning when taught in Ebira.	46% 40%	6% 8%
9	The use of mother tongue will solve the problem of misunderstood words during lesson delivery.	48% 41%	5% 6%
10	Pupils will express themselves better when mother tongue is used during lessons.	45% 50%	5% -

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Table 1 indicates the analysis of research question 1 in which each question was answered using percentage. A total percentage of 74% agree that pupils will be motivated to attend classes because of the use of mother tongue in classrooms while 26% disagreed. In analysing question 2, 93% respondents (both male and female as analysed in the table) agree that the use of mother tongue will help the student to understand intended points while 7% respondents disagree.

Furthermore, 86% respondents (both male and female) agree that pupils will participate more in classrooms when subjects are taught in the mother tongue while 14% disagrees. In analysing question 4, 82% respondents agree that textbooks in Ebira should be made available for better understanding while 18% respondents disagree. Also, in analysing question 5, 89% of respondents both male and female agree that as a teacher, there is more positive feedback when teaching in the mother tongue while 11% disagrees.

In analysing question 6 through the use of percentage calculation, 91% of both the male and female teacher respondents agree that education will be made easier with the use of mother tongue while 9% of teacher respondents disagree with the statement. The table also indicates that 74% of teacher respondents agree that question 7 which is: classroom discussion and exchange of ideas will be improved with the use of mother tongue while a percentage of 26 in total disagree. 86% of teacher respondents also agree to the statement that pupils will be interested in learning when taught in the mother tongue (question 8) while 14% teacher respondents disagree to the notion that pupils will be interested in learning when taught in the mother tongue.

Table 1 also indicates that in responding to question 9, 89% of teacher respondents agree that the use of mother tongue (Ebira) will solve the problem of misunderstood words during lesson delivery while 11% of respondents (male and female teachers) disagree to the notion. 95% of respondents agree to question 10 which say: pupils will express themselves better when the mother tongue is used during lessons while 5% disagrees.

Therefore, the findings from the analysis of the ten research questions indicate strong consensus among male and female teacher respondents on the benefits of using mother tongue (Ebira) as a medium of instruction. The positive responses span several key areas, suggesting that mother tongue instruction significantly enhance learning experience.

Analysis of research question two: Will teachers differ in their response to influence of mother tongue on child’s education on the basis of sex?

Table 2: Responses to Questionnaire Items

S/N	QUESTIONS	AGREE		DISAGREE	
		M	F	M	F
1	Pupils will be motivated to attend classes because of the use of mother tongue in classrooms.	66%	83%	34%	17%
2	The use of mother tongue (Ebira) will help pupils to understand the intended points.	86%	100%	14%	-
3	Pupils will participate more in classrooms when subjects are taught in	80%	91%	20%	9%

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the mother tongue.			
4.	Textbooks in Ebira should be made available for better understanding.	71% 29%	91% 9%
5	As a teacher, I have more positive feedbacks when I teach using the Ebira language.	77% 23%	100% -
6	Education will be made easier with the use of mother tongue in classrooms.	74% 26%	100% -
7	Classroom discussions and exchange of ideas will be improved with the use of mother tongue (Ebira).	71% 29%	77% 23%
8	Pupils will be interested in learning when taught in Ebira.	71% 100%	29% -
9	The use of mother tongue will solve the problem of misunderstood words during lesson delivery.	83% 94%	6% 17%
10	Pupils will express themselves better when mother tongue is used during lessons.	91% 100%	9% -

Table 2 indicates that both male and female teacher respondents agree with a high percentage of 66% and 83% respectively to question 1 which says that pupils will be motivated to attend classes because of the use of mother tongue in classrooms. 86% and 100% of male and female agree respectively also to question 2 which says that the use of mother tongue will help pupils to understand intended points. In analysing question 3, 80% and 91% of male and female respectively agree that pupils will participate more in classrooms when subjects are taught in the mother tongue compared to a mere 20% and 9% who disagreed.

Furthermore, 71% and 91% of both male and female agree to question 4 which say that textbooks in Ebira should be made available for better understanding while 29% and 9% disagrees. In

analysing question 5 which says that teachers has more positive feedback when teaching with the mother tongue, 77% and 100% of both male and female agree to the statement. 74% and 100% of both male and female agree that education will be made easier with the use of mother tongue (i.e. question 6) while 23% of male disagrees.

Table 2 also indicates that 71% and 77% of both male and female agree that classroom discussion and exchange of ideas will be improved with the use of mother tongue while 29% and 23% disagrees. 71% and 100% of male and female teacher respondents agree to question 8 which say that pupils will be interested when taught with the mother tongue. In analysing question 9 which states that the use of mother tongue will solve the problem of misunderstood words during lesson delivery, 83% and 94% of male and female respondents agree to the statement. Table 2 shows that just 9% of both male and female teacher respondents disagree to question 10 which state that pupils will express themselves better when mother tongue is used during lesson.

Hence, the analysis of Table 2 reveals overwhelmingly positive responses from both male and female teacher respondents concerning the use of mother tongue (Ebira) as a medium of instruction. The percentages presented in the table underscores strong agreement across various aspects of mother tongue instruction, indicating teachers perceive significant benefits in using Ebira for teaching and learning.

Analysis of research question three: Will teachers differ in their response to influence of mother tongue on child's education on the basis of school?

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Table 3: Responses to Questionnaire Items

S/N	QUESTIONS	AGREE	DISAGREE
		PRI PUB	PRI PUB
1	Pupils will be motivated to attend classes because of the use of mother tongue in classrooms.	80% 50%	20% 33%
2	The use of mother tongue (Ebira) will help pupils to understand the intended points.	88% 100%	13% -
3	Pupils will participate more in classrooms when subjects are taught in the mother tongue (Ebira).	80% 93%	20% 7%
4.	Textbooks in Ebira should be made available for better understanding.	83% 80%	17% 20%
5	As a teacher, I have more positive feedbacks when I teach using the Ebira language.	90% 87%	10% 13%
6	Education will be made easier with the use of mother tongue in classrooms.	85% 100%	15% -
7	Classroom discussions and exchange of ideas will be improved with the use of mother tongue (Ebira).	58% 97%	42% 3%
8	Pupils will be interested in learning when taught in Ebira.	83% 90%	17% 10%
9	The use of mother tongue will solve the problem of misunderstood words during lesson delivery.	85% 93%	15% 7%
10	Pupils will express themselves better when mother tongue is used during lessons.	93% 100%	7% -

Table 3 shows the percentage analysis of responses of both the private and public school teachers to each questionnaire item. In the analysis of question 1 both school type teachers agree with 80% and 50% that pupils will be motivated to attend classes because of the use of mother tongue in classrooms. In analysing the responses of private and public school teachers to question 2, the percentages shown in the table reflects that a high number of teachers (both private and public) agree that the use of mother tongue will help the pupils to understand the intended point. Question 3 analysed response shows that 80% and 93% of both the private and public school teachers agree that pupils will participate more in classrooms when subjects are taught in the mother tongue. Furthermore, question 4 analysed responses shows a high percentage as indicated on the table of both the private and public school teachers agreeing that textbooks in Ebira should be made available for better understanding, while 17% and 20% disagrees. In analysing question 5, 90% of private school teachers and 87% of public school teachers agree that they have more positive feedback when they use the mother tongue in teaching. Question 6 also indicates from the table a high percentage response from teachers in both private and public school agreeing that education will be made easier with the use of the mother tongue in classrooms. Thus, the analysis of responses from both private and public school teachers presented in Table 3 regarding the use of mother tongue (Ebira) as a medium of instruction reveals strong agreement on its benefits.

1.10.2 Presentation of Analyses (Pupil Respondents)

Research question one: How does mother tongue influence child education in some selected schools in Kogi-Central?

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Table 4: Responses to Questionnaire Items

S/N	QUESTIONS	AGREE		DISAGREE	
		M	F	M	F
1	Mother tongue should be used in teaching in our school.	31%	45%	13%	11%
2	I will be more interested in learning if taught in my mother tongue (Ebira).	40%	53%	7%	-
3	Classroom will be more lively when pupils are taught in Ebira.	46%	45%	5%	4%
4.	Textbooks should be made available in Ebira.	47%	50%	1%	2%
5	As a pupil, I will express myself better when taught in my mother tongue.	35%	44%	12%	9%

Table 4 indicates the analysis of research question 1 (How does mother tongue influence child education in some selected schools in Kogi-Central?) in which each questions were answered using percentage. In analysing question 1, 76% of both male and female pupil respondents agree that mother tongue should be used in teaching in their school while 24% disagrees. 93% of pupil respondents (comprises of both male and female) agree to question 2 which says they (pupils) will be more interested in learning if taught with their mother tongue.

Furthermore, in analysing question 3, 91% pupil respondents (both male and female) agree that classroom will be more lively when taught with the mother tongue, while 9% disagrees. The table also indicates that 97% of pupil respondents agree to question 4 which say that textbooks should be made available in Ebira while 3%

disagrees. In analysing question 5, 79% of pupil respondents (male and female) agree that as pupils, they will be able to express themselves better when taught in their mother tongue.

Hence, the analysis of responses from male and female pupil respondents presented in Table 4 concerning mother tongue (Ebira) instruction shows strong support for its use.

Analysis of research question two: Will pupils differ in their responses to influence of mother tongue on child’s education on the basis of sex?

Table 5: Responses to Questionnaire Items

S/N	QUESTIONS	DISAGREE	
		AGREE	
		M	M
		F	F
1	Mother tongue should be used in teaching in our school.	56% 87%	44% 13%
2	I will be more interested in learning if taught in my mother tongue (Ebira).	92% 93%	8% 7%
3	Classroom will be more lively when pupils are taught in Ebira.	84% 96%	16% 4%
4.	Textbooks should be made available in Ebira.	92% 100%	8% -
5	As a pupil, I will express myself better when taught in my mother tongue.	76% 80%	24% 10%

Table 5 indicates that 56% of male pupil respondents and 87% of female pupil respondents agree to question 1 which says that mother tongue should be used in teaching in our schools as against a percentage of 44% and 13% of male and female that disagreed. In analysing question 2, 92% and 93% of both male and female

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pupil respondents agree that they will be more interested in learning if taught in their mother tongue.

Furthermore, 84% and 96% of both male and female pupil respondents agree to question 3 which say that classroom will be more lively when taught in the mother tongue. In analysing question 4, 92% and 100% of male and female pupil respondents respectively agree that textbooks should be made available in Ebira language. Table 5 also indicates that 76% and 80% of both the male and female pupil respondents agree that as pupils they express themselves better when taught in their mother tongue as oppose 24% and 10% that disagrees. Thus, Table 5 provides an analysis of the responses of male and female pupil respondents' on mother tongue (Ebira) instruction, indicating substantial backing for its implementation.

Research question three: Will pupils differ in their responses to influence of mother tongue on child's education on the basis of school?

Table 6: Responses to Questionnaire Items

S/N	QUESTIONS	DISAGREE	
		AGREE	
		M	M
		F	F
1	Mother tongue should be used in teaching in our school.	63% 93%	37% 7%
2	I will be more interested in learning if taught in my mother tongue (Ebira).	90% 97%	10% 3%
3	Classroom will be more lively when pupils are taught in Ebira.	93% 90%	7% 10%
4.	Textbooks should be made available in Ebira.	95% 100%	5% -
5	As a pupil, I will express myself better when taught in my mother	75% 83%	25% 17%

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Table 6 indicates that 63% of private school pupil respondents and 93% of public school pupil respondents agree to question 1 which says that mother tongue should be used in teaching in their schools as against a percentage of 37% and 7% of both private and public school that disagreed. In analysing question 2, 90% and 97% of both private and public school pupil respondents agree that they will be more interested in learning if taught in their mother tongue. Furthermore, 93% and 90% of both private and public school pupil respondents agree to question 3 which say that classroom will be more lively when taught in the mother tongue. In analysing question 4, 95% and 100% of private and public school pupil respondents respectively agree that textbooks should be made available in Ebira language. Table 6 also indicates that 75% and 83% of both the private and public school pupil respondents agree that as pupils they express themselves better when taught in their mother tongue as oppose 25% and 17% that disagrees. Therefore, Table 6 highlights the responses of private and public school pupils regarding mother tongue (Ebira) instruction, indicating endorsement for its use in both teaching and learning.

1.11 Discussion of Findings

Analysis of data from teacher and pupil respondents establishes key insights regarding perceptions and appropriateness of mother tongue use in teaching and learning, indicating strong support for enhanced educational experiences. Percentage records demonstrate both pupils and teachers anticipate positive teaching and learning outcomes via mother tongue integration.

The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) (2006) posits that people learn optimally when instruction occurs in a familiar

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language. Response patterns align with this assertion; 86% of teachers (**Table 1**, Question 8) concur pupils exhibit heightened interest and comprehension when taught in mother tongue. UNESCO (2006) highlights language's role in fostering long-term benefits including elevated self-esteem, confidence, and aspirations – a perspective resonating with pupil responses indicating 79% (**Table 4**, Question 5) affirm better self-expression in mother tongue instruction, likely enhancing self-belief and classroom participation.

Alignment with Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2022) advocating the production of Nigerian language textbooks is evident; respondents support Ebirá textbook availability for comprehension enhancement (82% teachers, 93% pupils). A substantial 89% of teachers report positive feedback teaching in mother tongue (Ebirá), corroborating The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) observations that learning prospers in mother tongue contexts.

Fafunwa (2000) underscores education's facilitation through mother tongue - a viewpoint consonant with 74% of teachers affirming easier education delivery via mother tongue (**Table 1**, Question 6) and pupils' positive responses (76%) advocating mother tongue classroom use.

1.12 Conclusion

The strategic integration of mother tongue in teaching enhances educational outcomes by leveraging a child's familiar language for academic content delivery. Mother tongue fosters critical engagement, mutual learning environments, and inclusivity, enabling learners who understand instructional language to meaningfully interact with content, query unknowns, and enhance

challenges. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL, 2006) underscores learning efficacy in familiar languages (i.e. the mother tongue). UNESCO (2006) identifies foreign language instruction as a persistent obstacle to *Education for All*, while mother tongue-based bilingual education boosts access, skill acquisition, and basic education quality via facilitated classroom interaction and knowledge integration.

Transitioning from submersion to immersion schooling validates children's home knowledge, culture, and language, potentially yielding long-term benefits like heightened self-esteem, confidence, and aspirations (UNESCO, 2006). Cummins (1979) notes the immersion teachers' familiarity with children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds enables responsive engagement. The role of educators, as Gacheche (2010) observes, is to offer children instruments to enable them to critically understand the value of their experience and express them through reading and writing. To adequately express their experiences and articulate their knowledge, children require an environment that uses the language they speak. It is in this regard that we call on Federal and State Government and indeed all major stake holders in education to rethink the use of indigenous languages as a medium of instruction in schools such as Ebira.

Developing the Ebira language use can cultivate "balanced bilinguals" reaping cognitive benefits: enhanced creativity, problem-solving, language awareness, inventiveness, global perspectives, and marketability which position learners for superior performances in intelligence and fluency tests compared to monolingual peers.

1.13 Recommendations

The underutilisation of the Ebira language in education sequesters indigenous knowledge, risking its extinction and limiting community empowerment against marginalisation, poverty, and illiteracy. Leveraging the Ebira language for representing indigenous knowledge can integrate it vitally into societal knowledge bases. The Ebira language is posited as a viable medium for primary school instruction, potentially enhancing pupils' comprehension and learning attitudes, which contradicts the report made by the Minister of Education, Dr. Alausa, stating that the use of indigenous languages has resulted in the massive failure of pupils in national secondary schools examinations such as WAEC, NECO and JAMB. Rather, it is due to the inability of pupils to adequately absorb concepts taught in English; however, the use of indigenous languages as the medium of instruction will produce better results as made evident in Fafunwa's seminal Ife Mother Tongue education project (1970-1978). Hence, government intervention is crucial for implementing mother tongue instruction; employers of teachers should facilitate enrollment in mother tongue instructional programs exceeding mere policy stipulation. Stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations like the Linguistics Association of Nigeria (LAN), Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN), and International Reading Association (IRA) can advocate enforcements of mother tongue policies in primary schools.

Review of mother tongue instructional policies is warranted given prevalent bilingual medium use in public schools and neglect in some private schools. Expansion of teaching and learning materials in Nigerian indigenous languages is necessary for advancing mother tongue education, teaching, and learning.

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