

BRIDGING COMMUNICATION BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE TEACHING IN NIGERIAN LANGUAGES: THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

Having established the fact that the mother tongue is a very effective medium of instruction for any child, this paper observes that the implementation of this in Nigeria cannot but meet with problems, the most important of which are the communication barrier that would be put bear upon the easy passage of this idea through Nigeria's multi-lingua society. This paper examines some of these problems and, having the issues of direct hindrance to communicate in mind, observes that these could be weakened or obliterated through a language that could be regarded as universal, a language not necessarily spoken, but provided by educational technology.

Introduction

For quite some time now, it has been a vogue in Nigeria to brain-storm on the quasi-endless controversy of providing western education through the mother tongue. The controversy has stemmed from the attempt (or is it the practice?) by the Federal government to encourage the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction at the primary school level. This attempt, in turn, was informed by the obvious importance of the mother tongue in the learning process. Many scholars agree that the mother tongue is - a very effective medium through which a child acquires, or should acquire education within a given society. This assertion can be supported the fact that every society has it, indigenous way of education its children. As Fafunwa (974) rightly points out, education for the good life has been one of the most persistent concerns of men throughout history. This each society has achieved through its mother tongue which it has also employed to transmit its cultural heritage form generation to generation.

In the Yoruba community, for example, the mother tongue is the manifestation of traditional education per se. The goal of making the individual functional within the society and of the good character in all ramifications is entrenched in the mother tongue. Hence, reflecting of the philosophy of life, the trade traditional medicine, value of tolerance, perseverance, honesty, truthfulness, et cetera are all effectively inculcated the individual through the mother tongue.

All these realities have so much influenced the conviction of many scholars on the great strength of the mother tongue that, one of these, Awoniyi (1978), even claims that no other subject taught in schools has a greater influence on a child's all-round education than his mother tongue. Even to European writers like Tiffen (1975), it seems highly reasonable that very young children learn best through, their mother tongue. That may explain why the Phelps-Stokes Commission 'of inquiry noticed the failure of the missionaries to adapt school work to African conditions and, hence, in its reports of 1922, recommended, among other things, that the tribal language be used in the lower elementary standards. This conviction, as it has been pointed out, promoted the Federal Government to make it a policy to provide an education at the primary school level, grounded in the children's mother tongues. But how possible or desirable it is to use the major Nigerian languages as media of instruction in our primary schools?

Communication Barriers to Teaching in Nigeria Languages

Communication, which is the process of information exchange between two or more individuals, could be hindered either directly or indirectly. Indirect hindrance to communication refers to the psychological noise factors impinging on an individual when the information is being given. These include hunger, absent-mindedness, bad mood, feelings of superiority, and a host of others. These, however, have nothing to do with the change in the language used in passing the information' as they are applicable to all languages. Direct hindrance to communication, on the other hand, refers to misinterpretation of message due to language factors. Let us imagine a situation in a classroom in Yorubaland

where a child was shown the picture of Coconut and he was asked, to give its name in Yoruba language. Instead of saying 'Agbon', which is the general Yoruba term for it, the child searched through the reservoir of his dialect and luckily discovered the right word for it, "Kokodiya". This is the direct hindrance this paper will think about. What is the implication for teaching in Nigerian languages?

As it was pointed out earlier, the mother tongue has been used by various communities in Nigeria to effect all-round traditional education within the society. The mother tongue knew no Western 'formal' education. Hence, one would not but expect problems if the same mother tongue is now expected to transit Western education and, hence Western culture because one cannot totally disengage education from culture. Problems are expected because, first, both the mother tongue and Western education are not compatible as both aim at making the individual functional within their different environments. Second, they', do not complement each other and, hence, this attempt may destroy the aim of the mother tongue, which is traditional education, as it is now being used to fulfil the aims of another system, thereby neglecting its own aim.

Moreover, so long as no more was expected of the mother tongue than to make individuals functional and of good character within the society, it mattered little how numerically small or linguistically isolated the group employing it is. But with this new aim, that of effecting Western education through the formal school system, there is bound to be problems since Nigeria is a multi-lingual nation. As Osokoya (1987) observed, one wonders what language would be adopted in states like Bendel and Benue which are multi-lingual states coupled with this is the problem of manpower development.

How could we organise teacher-training in this situation? Do we begin to train teachers in the mother tongue? We know that there are so many literate Nigerians who cannot speak or understand their mother tongues as much as they understand the English Language (which they do not even understand well). Hence, teachers need to be trained in the mother tongue. One wonders

how cumbersome this task would be if it would not be made a crash-programme.

There is also the problem of non-availability of adequate textbooks for the languages and the fact that very few of the Nigerian languages have been developed for school use. Again, what language do we employ in schools where we have children from various communities and ethnic groups? What local terms, also, do we give the scientific terms? Do we continue to call science 'sayensi' in Yorubaland? Doesn't it sound stranger than the term 'science'?

The aim of this paper, however, is not to discuss the problems of logistics per se but to direct attention to the solution Educational Technology could give to these problems. It is the writer's conviction that any language used as a medium of instruction matters little to the effectiveness of the instruction process unless it is packed full with a universal language which Educational Technology provides, a language that is not necessarily spoken.

Rationale for the paper

Since it has been established that the mother tongue is very effective means of educating the child, its use in Nigeria is a welcome idea. It is also clear that, due to the multi-lingual nature of our society, we cannot but run into problems in trying to effect this idea. This multi-lingual and heterogeneous nature of *our* society is even recognised by the National Policy on Education which, under section 1, number 7.5, states categorically that universal basic education, in a variety of *forms*, depending on needs and possibilities, will be proved *for* all citizens. That rightly implies that what is possible in a part of it.

The importance of this paper, therefore, lies in its proffering of solutions to the communication barriers to effective teaching in Nigerian Languages. The solution proffered, if pursued with all seriousness, will obliterate the direct hindrance to communication through whatever mother tongue we employ in the school system. It will also improve the performance of school children, make teaching and learning easier and help produce *or* effect uniformity in educational practices in the country to some appreciable extent.

Educational Technology

In the course of its development, the Educational Technology concept was accorded different meanings. These included the Hardware concept which emphasized the importance of educational media and also the software concept which emphasized the application of the System Approach towards achieving educational objectives and goals. This has made some writers assume that very many terms exist which mean the same as Educational Technology. Ogunmilade (1984), *for example*, claims that differences in terminology still exist in relation to the meaning of Educational Technology, depending *on* who is talking. In *fact*, to him, Educational Technology is to be equated with 'technology in education'.

This writer, however, wishes to make clear that Educational Technology has no other term but 'technology of education'. It is also not to be equated with 'technology in education', a term which is supposed to refer to the use of electronic gadgets and other instructional materials in the teaching and learning situations but which, unfortunately, adds the use of the products of modern technology in the activities of educational institutions (like the use of escalator in the University's cafeteria system) to its meaning. Its supposed meaning is even a misconception as Educational Technology is not just learning by machines *or* other audio-visual aids.

Like, Hunter-Grundin (1979) asserts, the word 'technology' means control and, so, Educational Technology is an approach to teaching/learning which emphasized the need for control of the educational process and of the outcomes of that process. Hence, Educational Technology could be defined as the design, development" application and evaluation of systems, and techniques for discovering educational problems and resolving these problems. Therefore, it follows that the use of instructional materials and equipment may be included in this systematic attempt to promote learning but not the sum total of it. Many systems using the Educational Technology approach may also do without any kind of machinery or sophisticated audio-visual equipment as the major focus is detecting educational problems and finding lasting solutions to them by all

desirable means. In which case, so many variables other than audio-visual equipment must have constituted inputs to the system developed through Educational Technology since it is a problem-solving approach to education.

The Role of Educational Technology in Effective Teaching in Nigerian Languages'

(a) *System Approach*: Educational Technology provides the system Approach to learning. The Systems Approach, according to Adeosun (1988), is the break-up of a task into many parts, the study of the connections between these parts, and the utilization of these connections to achieve cost-effective results on the task. The application of this approach to the teaching-learning situation refers to the step-by-step and systemic planning and delivery of instruction. This would involve what Balogun (1972) refers to as the specification of objectives, the planning of the implementation of the objectives, the implementation of the objectives, the evaluation of the effectiveness of the operation and the revision of the processes.

These are however, to be, preceded by a clear, thorough, realistic and accurate understanding of the present system to identify future goals and the necessary modifications on present functions.

Through this analysis of the present system, which could also be regarded as initial evaluation aimed at identifying future goals, many factors are considered including the theories of learning. Through these theories, we know how learning could be enhanced. Through the perception process we know the five Sensory modalities through which the learner becomes aware of his environment. These are the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body.

Okoye (1987) makes it emphatic that learning is better facilitated through multi-modal perceptual utilization than by unimodal perceptual utilization. A child will gain a better learning of what Okro Soup is by seeing it, hearing its name, touching the soup, smelling it., touching the soup, smelling it and finally tasting it than by only hearing its name or by only seeing it.

This goes on to show that the more sensory modalities we involve in the learning process, the more learning we achieve Educational Technology makes

use of these theories through its systems approach and this is where instructional materials come in. A teacher may have problems with verbal communication in the class due to the language factors explained earlier but there are languages understood by everybody. If the teacher strives very hard to effect the utilization of as many sensory modalities as possible by the students, he would achieve the set goal. Some of the students will understand through visual perception, some through auditory perception, etc. Whoever does not see may hear, or be able to feel, the language he speaks notwithstanding. After all we watch Chinese and Indian films and we still enjoy and understand them to some appreciable levels.

Therefore, it is only left to the teacher to determine which experience will easily achieve his objectives, knowing fully what language problems he has with the children. Hence, he must have the knowledge of the existence of various instructional materials and their uses. There are so many varieties of these and they were not developed without purpose as they are functions of research embarked upon in an attempt to solve various educational problems.

All these analyses the teacher must be able to do before planning the delivery of instruction. After any delivery, he would still do some analysis for further improvement, depending on the feedback he gets from the students. Some of us were taught by foreigners whose pronunciations gave us hectic times and, yet, we understand to some appreciable level even without a 'tooling up' of the learning system with learning materials. Hence, this idea of teaching in Nigerian Languages will work with this systems approach.

(b) Gybernetic Pedagogy: A further development of the functioning of the System Approach gave rise to the development of automation in its revision system as applied to education; hence the practice of Cybernetic Pedagogy, an aspect of Educational Technology. The central feature of Cybernetic, as Rose (1974) puts it, is the concept of negative feedback which is at the base of adaptive and learning system. The concept is explained by envisaging a system as a closed loop which enables a part of the output to be fed back into the

Conclusions and Suggestions

Considering the strength of the mother tongue in learning, it is a welcome idea to teach Nigerians in Nigerian Languages. If this is to be done, we cannot but run into problems by virtue of our multi-lingual and heterogeneous nature. – These problems could, however, be avoided or weakened such that they do not hinder the goal of learning under any linguistic circumstance. This could be achieved through the proper application of Educational Technology in the educational process.

With adequate understanding and application of the Systems. Approach in all its ramifications and Cybernetic Pedagogy to the teaching-learning situations, Nigerian students will have no difficulties in learning; they would indeed learn more easily and have equal opportunity to education.

It. is in this light that the writer suggests that:

- (a) Teachers should be given good training in the applicati9n of Educational Technology to the teaching-learning situation. This can be done frequent workshops and' seminars.
- (b) The education system of the country. Should be tooled up, that is, various instructional materials and equipment should be adequately provided and maintained for use in Schools.
- (c) The number of the existing Educational Resources Centres should be increased to serve the needs of teachers and these Educational Resource Centres should be made more active than they' are.
- (d) The present system of public examinations used for evaluation and certification should be totally disengaged with to make continuous assessment the totality of evaluation for certification so as to give room for innovations and ingenuity on the part' of students.

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