

EFFECTS OF ABOLITION OF THE MOTHER TONGUE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION ON THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN EARLY PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KANO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the effects of the abolition of the mother tongue medium of instruction on the quality of education in early primary schools in Kano State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Four research objectives and corresponding research questions guided this study. The population consisted of all primary school teachers in public primary schools in Kano State. The total population is 46,520 teachers'. A multistage sampling technique, including stratified sampling and purposeful sampling, was used to select teachers. A sample size of 300 teachers was selected. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Effects of Abolition of Mother Tongue Medium of Instruction Questionnaire (EAMTMIQ)." The instrument was validated by experts. Reliability was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, and the reliability coefficient yielded 0.8. The researcher administered the questionnaires personally with the assistance of trained research assistants. The data collected were analyzed using the mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that the abolition of mother tongue instruction negatively affects the quality of education in early primary schools. Also the findings revealed that abolishing mother tongue instruction undermine learning effectiveness, comprehension, and educational quality in early primary education. It was concluded that mother tongue instruction facilitates deeper understanding of concepts and enhances quality education in early primary school. Based on the findings recommendations were made that teachers should adopt bilingual teaching approaches that combine mother tongue and English to enhance comprehension, also government should reinstate the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in early primary education as recommended in the National Policy on Education.

Keywords: Abolition, Mother tongue, Medium of Instruction, Quality of education, Early primary schools.

Introduction

Language plays a central role in the teaching and learning process, particularly at the early stages of education. In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (NPE) recommends that the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment should be used as the medium of instruction in the early years of primary education to enhance pupils' understanding and cognitive development. This policy was introduced because children learn best in a language they understand during the formative years of schooling.

Mother tongue refers to the first language a child acquires at home. Mother tongue medium of instruction involves the use of this language for teaching and learning, particularly in early childhood education. Mother tongue instruction has been widely recognized as a crucial tool for improving learning outcomes. According to Musa and Osa-Omoregie (2020), the use of indigenous languages in education enables pupils to understand concepts faster, participate actively in classroom activities, and develop strong literacy foundations. The authors argue that early education delivered in the child's first language helps to eradicate illiteracy and promotes effective communication between teachers and learners. Similarly, Adamu (2023) emphasized that children taught in their mother tongue demonstrate higher comprehension, better participation, and improved academic performance compared with those taught solely in a second language. The author notes that using English as the sole medium of instruction at the early stage may create comprehension barriers because many pupils enter school with little exposure to the language.

Empirical evidence also supports the educational benefits of mother tongue instruction. For instance, Aiyedun, Ogundairo, and Ajibola (2023) found that students taught academic subjects using their indigenous language performed significantly better than those taught using English only. The researchers concluded that indigenous language instruction facilitates deeper understanding of concepts and enhances academic achievement. According to Okeke and Eze (2022), mother tongue instruction enhances cognitive processing, conceptual understanding, and literacy skills among early learners. Similarly, Yusuf (2023) asserts that children grasp numeracy and scientific concepts more effectively when taught in familiar linguistic contexts.

According to Musa (2023) stated that the abolition of mother tongue instruction has led to increased dropout rates and poor academic performance among early primary school students. Also Okeke et al. (2022) stated that children learn best when taught in their mother tongue, as it facilitates better understanding and retention of knowledge. This assertion is supported by the findings of Adamu and Ibrahim (2022), who argue that mother tongue instruction enhances cognitive development and promotes a positive learning environment. In contrast, the use of a foreign language, such as English, can create barriers to comprehension and hinder academic performance (Baba & Sulaiman, 2023). Premature abolition of mother tongue medium of instruction may undermine foundational learning, especially among disadvantaged learners (Eze & Mohammed, 2024). Despite these advantages, recent debates and policy shifts in Nigeria have raised concerns about the continued use of mother tongue instruction in schools. Some policymakers argue that exclusive reliance on local languages may hinder pupils' proficiency in English, which is the official language of instruction in higher education and national examinations. Consequently, discussions have emerged regarding the abolition or reduction of mother tongue instruction in early primary education.

The abolition of mother tongue instruction may have serious implications for the quality of education, particularly in regions such as Kano State where many pupils begin schooling with limited English language exposure. When children are taught in a language they do not understand, it may lead to poor comprehension, low participation, and weak academic foundations. Therefore,

examining the effects of abolishing mother tongue instruction on educational quality is essential for informing policy decisions and improving teaching practices in early primary schools.

Statement of the Problem

The use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in early primary education has long been recommended in Nigeria's educational policy because it supports effective learning and comprehension among young pupils. However, recent debates and policy changes have led to the abolition or reduced emphasis on mother tongue instruction, replacing it with English as the dominant medium of instruction. In many parts of Nigeria, including Kano State, a significant number of pupils begin primary school with limited proficiency in English. When instruction is delivered exclusively in English, pupils may struggle to understand lessons, communicate with teachers, and participate in classroom activities. This situation may lead to poor academic performance, low literacy development, and reduced interest in learning.

Several scholars have argued that the removal of indigenous languages from early education may negatively affect pupils' cognitive development and learning outcomes. According to Ogara and Anidi (2024), the marginalization of local languages in education contributes to educational inequality and undermines the cultural identity of learners. Furthermore, challenges associated with language policy implementation such as shortage of instructional materials and trained teachers have often been cited as reasons for abandoning mother tongue instruction rather than improving it. Nwachukwu and Joseph (2024) observe that gaps between language policy and classroom practice have contributed to ineffective implementation of mother tongue education in Nigeria.

Despite these concerns, there is limited empirical research examining the effects of abolishing mother tongue instruction on the quality of education in early primary schools, particularly in Kano State. Without adequate evidence, policymakers may adopt language policies that negatively affect pupils' learning experiences. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the effects of the abolition of mother tongue instruction on the quality of education in early primary schools in Kano State, Nigeria.

Research Objectives

1. To find out effects for the abolition of mother tongue medium of instruction in early primary schools on educational quality.
2. Examine the effects for the abolition of mother tongue medium of instruction in early primary schools on cognitive development
3. To find out effects for the abolition of mother tongue medium of instruction in early primary schools on cultural & social implications
4. To find out effects for the Abolition of Mother Tongue Medium of Instruction in Early Primary Schools on Policy & Implementation Issues.

Research Questions

1. What are effects for the abolition of mother tongue medium of instruction in early primary schools on educational quality?
2. What are effects for the abolition of mother tongue medium of instruction in early primary schools on cognitive development?
3. What are effects for the abolition of mother tongue medium of instruction in early primary schools on cultural & social implications?
4. What are effects for the abolition of mother tongue medium of instruction in early primary schools on policy & implementation issues?

Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was chosen because it allowed the researcher to collect data from a large sample of respondents across Kano State and describe the characteristics, perceptions, and prevailing practices related to the language of instruction policy in early primary schools. The descriptive survey design was considered appropriate as it enabled the systematic description of the situation as it existed at the time of the study, focusing on the relationship between the abolition of mother tongue instruction and the perceived quality of education without manipulating any variables. The study was conducted in Kano State, Nigeria, one of the most populous states in northern Nigeria where Hausa is the predominant indigenous language. The target population for this study comprised all public primary schools teachers. The total population is 46,520 teachers in public primary schools in Kano State. A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed to select the sample for this study. The selection of Local Government Areas (LGAs). Purposive sampling was used to select LGAs. This was a deliberate choice to ensure that the diverse characteristics of urban, semi-urban, and rural settings were captured in the study. The selection of schools from the LGAs, proportionate stratified random sampling was used to select schools. Schools were stratified based on their educational zone within the LGA. A total of 20 schools were selected for the study. The selection of respondents, all Primary 1, 2, and 3 teachers were included in the sample. The sample of 300 were used for the study. This ensured that all teachers directly impacted by the language policy in those schools were represented.

The instrument for data collection in this study was a researcher-designed questionnaire titled: "Effects of Abolition of Mother Tongue Medium of Instruction Questionnaire (EAMTMIQ)". The questionnaire was structured into sections A - D. Section A: effects of mother tongue abolition on academic implications with 8 items, Section B: cognitive development with 5 items, Section C: cultural & social implications with 5 items and Section D: policy & implementation issues with 5 items. The questionnaire contained 23 items structured on a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1.

To ensure the face and content validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was subjected to rigorous scrutiny by experts. The draft copies of the EAMTMIQ were submitted to three experts from Language Education, Educational Foundations and Measurement and Evaluation at Yusuf Maitama Sule, Federal University of Education Kano. These experts were requested to examine the instrument in terms of: The clarity and appropriateness of the language used, relevance of the items to the research objectives and questions, and adequate coverage of the content domain. Their corrections, suggestions, and modifications were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire before it was administered to the respondents, thereby establishing its validity. To establish the reliability of the EAMTMIQ, a pilot study was conducted. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 40 teachers from 5 public primary schools that are not part of the main study area. The data collected from the pilot study were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The internal consistency of the instrument was measured using Cronbach's Alpha method. An overall reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above will be considered acceptable (Yusuf, 2023). This coefficient was considered high enough. Therefore, the instrument was considered reliable.

The researcher administered the questionnaires personally with the assistance of trained research assistants after permission was obtained from the school authority. The questionnaires were collected on the spot after respondents had filled it, to ensure a high return rate.

The data collected were analyzed using Mean and Standard Deviation to answer research questions. A mean score of 2.50 and above (on a 4-point scale) was used as the criteria for agreeing with an item or accepting it as a positive effect, while any mean score below 2.50 was regarded as disagreement or rejection of the item .

Results

Answering of Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are effects for the abolition of mother tongue medium of instruction in early primary schools on educational quality?

Table 1: Effects of Abolition of the Mother Tongue on Educational Quality N = 300

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Pupils find it difficult to understand lessons taught only in English	3.41	0.78	Agreed
2	Abolition of mother tongue reduces pupils' classroom participation	3.22	0.72	Agreed
3	Pupils perform poorly in literacy and numeracy when taught in unfamiliar language	3.30	0.76	Agreed
4	Teachers spend more time explaining concepts due to language barriers	3.18	0.80	Agreed
5	Learning becomes more difficult for pupils with limited English proficiency	3.44	0.79	Agreed
6	Abolition of mother tongue affects pupils' academic confidence	3.10	0.72	Agreed
7	Use of English only creates communication gaps between teachers and pupils.	3.25	0.71	Agreed
8	Pupils show reduced interest in learning when they do not understand instruction language	3.33	0.75	Agreed
Grand Mean = 3.28				

The results show that grand mean of 3.28 is greater than the criteria mean of 2.50, therefore, respondents agreed that abolishing mother tongue instruction negatively affects the quality of education in early primary schools. The mean score of respondents agreed that Pupils find it difficult to understand lessons taught only in English (3.41), Abolition of mother tongue reduces pupils' classroom participation (3.22), Pupils perform poorly in literacy and numeracy when taught in unfamiliar language (3.30), Teachers spend more time explaining concepts due to language barriers (3.18), Learning becomes more difficult for pupils with limited English proficiency (3.44), Abolition of mother tongue affects pupils' academic confidence (3.10), Use of English only creates communication gaps between teachers and pupils (3.25), Pupils show reduced interest in learning when they do not understand instruction language (3.33).

Research Question 2: What are effects for the abolition of mother tongue medium of instruction in early primary schools on cognitive development?

Table 2: Effects of Abolition of the Mother Tongue on Cognitive Development N = 300

SN	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
9	Pupils think more critically when taught in English.	2.25	0.93	Disagreed
10	Mother tongue promotes better cognitive development.	2.88	0.94	Agreed
11	Abolishing mother tongue improves comprehension skills.	2.18	1.02	Disagreed
12	Pupils participate more actively when taught in English.	2.25	0.93	Disagreed
13	Learning in mother tongue enhances concept formation.	3.05	0.87	Agreed

Grand Mean = 2.52

Table 2 above shows effects for the abolition of mother tongue on cognitive development. The result indicated that mother tongue promotes better cognitive development and enhances concept formation, these were agreed by respondents to effects of abolition mother tongue base on cognitive development because the items has criteria mean above 2.50 while Pupils participate more actively when taught in English, abolishing mother tongue improves comprehension skills and Pupils think more critically when taught in English were disagreed because the means are below the criteria mean of 2.50.

Research Question 3: What are effects for the abolition of mother tongue medium of instruction in early primary schools on cultural & social implications?

Table 3: Effects of Abolition of Mother Tongue on Cultural & Social Implications. N = 300

SN	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
14	Abolishing mother tongue may weaken pupils' cultural identity	2.84	0.89	Agreed
15	English-only instruction promotes national unity	3.05	0.87	Agreed
16	Mother tongue helps preserve indigenous languages.	2.67	0.97	Agreed
17	English medium increases pupils' global competitiveness.	3.18	0.80	Agreed
18	Abolishing mother tongue reduces cultural diversity in schools	2.84	0.89	Agreed

Grand Mean = 2.92

Table 3 above shows effects for the abolition of mother tongue on cultural & social implications. The result indicated that abolition mother tongue may weaken pupils' cultural identity, reduces cultural diversity in schools, mother tongue helps preserve indigenous languages and English-only instruction promotes national unity, English medium of instruction increases pupils' global competitiveness. All the items were agreed to be effects for the abolition of mother tongue on cultural & social implications because the means are above criteria mean of 2.50.

Research Question 4: What are effects for the abolition of mother tongue medium of instruction in early primary schools on policy & implementation issues?

Table 4: Effects of Abolition of Mother Tongue on Policy & Implementation Issues **N = 300**

SN	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
19	Government policy should prioritize English from Primary 1	2.40	0.99	Disagree
20	Teachers are better trained to teach in English than in mother tongue.	2.90	0.92	Agreed
21	Instructional materials are more available in English.	3.26	0.78	Agreed
22	Abolishing mother tongue will simplify curriculum implementation.	2.75	0.96	Agreed
23	Mother tongue policy is difficult to implement effectively.	2.83	0.88	Agreed
Grand Mean = 2.83				

Table 4 above shows effects for the abolition of mother tongue on policy & implementation issues. The result indicated that abolition mother tongue will simplify curriculum implementation, mother tongue policy is difficult to implement effectively, instructional materials are more available in English and teachers are better trained to teach in English than in mother tongue were agreed because means are above criteria mean of 2.50 while Government policy should prioritize English from Primary 1 was disagreed because the response mean is less than criteria mean of 2.50.

Discussion of findings

The study examined the effects of the abolition of mother tongue medium of instruction on the quality of education in early primary schools in Kano State Nigeria. The findings revealed that the abolition of mother tongue instruction negatively affects the quality of education in early primary schools. Respondents agreed that pupils experience difficulties understanding lessons when English is used as the sole medium of instruction. This finding supports the view of Musa and Osa-Omoregie (2020) that children learn concepts more easily when instruction is delivered in their first language because it enhances comprehension and participation.

The study also found that the removal of mother tongue instruction reduces pupils' classroom participation and confidence. Young learners often feel more comfortable communicating in their native language, and removing it from the classroom may discourage active engagement. Furthermore, the findings align with the empirical study of Aiyedun et al. (2023) which demonstrated that students taught using their mother tongue achieved better academic outcomes compared to those taught using English.

The results also highlight increased teaching difficulties for teachers when pupils do not understand the language of instruction. Teachers may spend more time translating or explaining concepts, thereby slowing down the teaching process. It was also discovered that mother tongue promotes better cognitive development, enhances concept formation, Pupils participate more actively in classroom, improves comprehension skills, and Pupils think more critically. This study agreed with Okeke et al. (2022) what stated mother tongue instruction enhances cognitive processing, conceptual understanding, and literacy skills among early learners. Similarly, Yusuf (2023) asserts that children grasp numeracy and scientific concepts more effectively when taught in familiar linguistic contexts, in the same vain Bello and Garba (2023) found that pupils instructed

in English-only classrooms demonstrated lower conceptual understanding compared to those in mother tongue-supported classrooms.

Furthermore, it was discovered that abolishing mother tongue may weaken pupils' cultural identity, reduces cultural diversity in schools, mother tongue helps preserve indigenous languages. This study is in agreement with Ibrahim (2021) who stated language is a key component of cultural identity, and the shift towards English can lead to a loss of cultural heritage among young learners. This cultural dislocation can have long-term effects on students' self-esteem and social cohesion within communities.

It was also discovered that mother tongue simplifies curriculum implementation in early primary school, mother tongue policy is difficult to implement effectively, instructional materials are more available in English and teachers are better trained to teach in English than in mother tongue. The study is in agreement with Eze and Mohammed (2024) who stated premature abolition of mother tongue medium of instruction may undermine foundational learning, especially among disadvantaged learners but among learners especially in urban areas it makes implementation of curriculum easy, because instructional materials are more available in English for teaching and learning process.

Conclusion

This study examined the effects of abolishing mother tongue instruction on the quality of education in early primary schools in Kano State, Nigeria. The study concluded that the removal of mother tongue instruction negatively affects pupils' comprehension, classroom participation, and academic performance. Also, abolishing mother tongue may weaken pupils' cultural identity, reduces cultural diversity in schools, and mother tongue also helps to preserve indigenous languages. Mother tongue simplifies curriculum implementation in early primary school. Abolishing mother tongue has negative effects on pupils in early primary school because many pupils entering school lack adequate proficiency in English; therefore, teaching exclusively in English creates communication barriers that hinder effective learning and quality education. Mother tongue instruction remains an important educational strategy for improving learning outcomes and strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Therefore, educational policies should reconsider the complete abolition of mother tongue instruction in early primary education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government should reinstate the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in early primary education as recommended in the National Policy on Education.
2. Teachers should adopt bilingual teaching approaches that combine mother tongue and English to enhance comprehension.
3. Educational authorities should develop instructional materials in indigenous languages to support effective teaching and learning.
4. Teacher training programs should include indigenous language pedagogy to equip teachers with the skills required for mother tongue instruction.
5. Further research should be conducted to evaluate the long-term effects of language policies on educational quality in Nigeria.

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