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## Multilingualism for University Education and Sustainable National Development

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### Abstract

*Multilingualism is an age long issue in sociolinguistics. It plays a pivotal role in social interactions among human beings. In today's global world, learning to improve man and society is facilitated by man's ability to communicate his mastery of knowledge in various fields of study without ambiguity. Although priority has been given to a monolingual approach to teaching and learning in some developing countries such as Nigeria, effectively communicating and transmitting the knowledge outcome of research findings in community development has not been very successful. This study sets to explore the role of multilingualism in university education and sustainable national development. Although the convenience sampling procedure was adopted by the researchers in choosing fifty (50) participants, a survey approach was adopted in setting the predetermined questions, which form the primary source of data collection. The published literature and internet materials comprised the secondary sources of information for this study. Anchoring on the sociocultural theoretical framework, responses to questionnaire have been analysed. Findings reveal that the use of pragmatic multilingualism in teaching motivates students to develop a high level of self-confidence and psychological preparedness to compete among their global contemporaries. Thus, pragmatic multilingualism is one of the remarkable determinants and facilitators of high level performance among university graduates. This paper therefore recommends*

*implementing pragmatic multilingualism as a proactive institutional language policy in Universities curricula.*

**Key words:** High level performance, pragmatic multilingualism, sustainable development

## **1.0 Introduction**

The primary essence of teaching and learning is to enhance people's ability to conceptualise and interpret ideas and opinions towards a better society. However, this may not be achievable without the crucial role of language used in communication. Language being a medium of expression of thoughts, permeates people's everyday activities to convey or reshape their worldviews (Okolo & Ezeikeojiaku, 2004). In higher institutions of learning where teaching, research and community development are the basic obligations, language plays a significant role in communicating human initiatives, potentials and research findings; which become utilised for the development of the society (Adams & Carfagna, 2006; Bamgbose, 2011; De Groot, 2011; Obiegbu, 2015). Invariably, in learning to improve man and society, language serves as a prerequisite for the mastery of knowledge and effective dissemination of innovations. This makes the choice of the medium of instruction in a learning environment a paramount concern to educators.

It is a well-documented fact that the use of indigenous languages as a medium of instruction makes for effective transfer of knowledge in learning (UNESCO, 1951; Fishman, 1968; Adams & Carfagna 2006; Mberia, 2015; Uwaezuoke, 2018). However, some developing countries still prefer using a foreign language as a medium of instruction in academic learning (Kolawale & Dele 2002; Phyak, 2018). The preference for a foreign language according to the latter scholars, is to bridge the communication gap

between teachers and learners. Notwithstanding their claim, it has been observed that a monolingual medium of instruction seems to give learners a lopsided understanding of ideas while their curiosity and dispositions tilt towards a particular ideology. As a result, learners' mindset and performances become narrowed or indirectly colonised. For instance, when a learner is exposed to only a foreign or indigenous medium of instruction at a particular time, such a learner very often struggles to grasp and practically translate innovative knowledge or ideas acquired in either of the used languages. The learners begin to learn by rote not wholly understanding the concepts. This undermines high level performance for some researchers who try to translate their world views into real world problems thereby reducing the speed of social development. It also creates a gap between the individual and the usefulness of the services such a person can extend to his rural community. When compared to India, which shares a similar colonial experience with Nigeria, there exist a robust policy in its tertiary institutions; unfortunately, no national language policy in Nigeria to the best of our knowledge supports the adoption the simultaneous use of indigenous and foreign languages in official teaching and learning practices in Nigeria. In India for instance, teaching and learning are done in Hindi and English, and students are permitted to present their bachelor's and master's researches in either Hindi or English. If there must be an extension of acquired knowledge to sustainably improve university education, the quality of information transmitted about a certain concept or idea, must be dependent on the grasp one has in more than one language. Consequently, grasping abstract theoretical dimensions and contemporary technological issues become much easier even within a multilingual context.

Multilingualism is a situation of linguistic diversity (Regoli, 2019). In a multilingual situation, the use of more than two languages in communication by an individual or group is allowed (Trudgill, 2003; Wardhugh, 2006; European Commission, 2007; Cenoz, 2013). As an age long issue, multilingualism has dwelt on social issues from different perspectives such as the geographical differences, class and social strata (Agbedo, 2019; Aronin 2015; Singleton, 2008). Although multilingualism has not received a supportive attention as bilingualism (the use of two languages) which is politically masterminded, it enhances the longevity of existing languages to avoid extinction (Crystal, 2002). The implication of a politically conceived choice in language is the fact that the other languages around may gradually appear irrelevant. However, with the cognitive, linguistic, affective and social significances of learning, accommodating more languages (multilingualism) in university education becomes necessary. As multilingual approach in education assist in disseminating research findings, it also broadens researchers' cultural mindset to discuss and appreciate contemporary global issues within and outside specialised disciplines. Thus, multilingualism becomes an efficient tool for reshaping thought processes of man for the dissemination of innovative strategies towards achieving solutions to real world problems for the reformation of the education system.

In this paper, while reformation entails the strategies employed by a people to improve their future, sustainability refers to the ability to retain that improvement (Gboyega, 2003). Thus, sustainable reformation here is the ability to improve and upgrade education for the expansion of human potentials (Ohaugwu, 2010) in various areas of life such as health, feeding, technological innovations and educational system. Related studies in Education for sustainability include Cotton's et al. (2008) study on

*sustainable development, higher education and pedagogy: a study of lecturer's beliefs and attitude.* Cotton and his colleagues investigated lecturer's views of sustainable development and its contribution to the higher education curriculum. Although no theoretical framework was adopted, an online questionnaire was administered on many lecturers from across disciplines. The findings reveal that many lecturers were unable to access the language of Education for sustainable development (ESD). Although the implication of the finding shows the uncertainty of the extent to which ESD would go, a good number of the lecturers notwithstanding, responded well in support of ESD. Although Cotton's et al. study is similar to the present study in that it was carried out for the purposes of sustainable development in Education and administering questionnaires. They differ in that while Cotton et al concentrates on curriculum, the present study focuses on language. In a similar study, Breidid (2009) worked on *culture, Indigenous knowledge system and sustainable development: A critical view of education in an African context.* Focusing on excerpts from World summit on education in Johannesburg in 2002, as well as those of the United nations decade of Education for sustainable development and South Africa's curriculum initiated in 2005 by African Nation Congress, Breidid concentrates on the impact of culture, indigenous knowledge system, sustainable development and education. His study showcases the disadvantages of adopting western-based scientific knowledge in a cultural context based on indigenous epistemology. He finally recommends the study of more researches on the practicability of indigenous knowledge system as a potential tool for sustainable development. Although the present study shares a similar idea with Breidid (2009) on incorporating culture

based content into education, it however differs from the present study in that while it concentrates on south Africa and culture, the present study focuses on using multilingualism in education to encourage and change learner's skills, values and attitudes.

In a related study discusses Adom̄bent et al (2014) discusses the capabilities required for useful business professionals for the transformation of the future of education. Their study interrogates sustainability concept in the university curricula for coal mining and urban planning. Their point of divergence from the present study is their concern on economic situation with regards to sustainable consumption. While these past studies deal with the different challenges and developments of university curricula and economic situations, this study explores the possibility of integrating pragmatic multilingualism as a paradigm shift in the education reformation strategies of Nigeria. Pragmatic Multilingualism (PM) in this study refers to the practical use of variety of linguistic forms within a coexisting contact. Thus, the significance of the present study. Premised on the need to encourage people to take full advantage of natural environment in order to meet every day needs of man, this study addresses such questions as:

- i. To what extent has the conventional monolingual approach to teaching and learning improved the performance of students in Nigerian Universities?
- ii. In what ways can communicating research findings in multilingual ways contribute to enhancing high level performance for the development of the society?

## **2.0 Theoretical framework**

This study adopts the Sociocultural Theoretical Approach (subsequently SCT) to learning and development propounded by

Vygotsky (1978) and modified by Beddows (2016). SCT is a broad representation of how society and culture impact the opinions, approaches, and performances of an individual or a group. It lays emphasis on the ability of human beings to control cultural communicative and developing natural activities. Since the introduction of this theory by Vygotsky (1978), it has been modified by many scholars, such as: Lantolf & Steven (2006), Beddows (2016), Lantolf, Poehner & Swain (2018) and Vasileva & Balyasnikova (2019). Vygosty acknowledges that the distinguishing aspect of human responsiveness was the capacity for deliberate control over environment through the use of higher level cultural tools such as language, literacy, logic, which act as shield between the person and the environment and to mediate the relationship between the individual and social- material world (Lantolf & Steven, 2006). Generally, SCT claims that the human mental functioning is basically a mediated process prearranged by cultural activities, artefacts and concepts. Based on the views of Beddows (2016), the primary means of developing the human mind centres on language use and mediation of the semiotic symbols. This study aligns with the views of Beddow, (2016).

### **3.0 Methodology**

This study adopts the survey approach, which involves the use of a predetermined set of questions to obtain responses from participants. It also adopts the convenience sampling procedure in choosing fifty (50) participants, who are graduates from different higher institutions of learning in Nigeria and distributed as presented in the table below:

<b>S/n</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>No. of participants</b>
1.	Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu Alike Ikwo	5
2	Ebonyi State University	5
3	Federal University of Technology Owerri	2
4	Abia State University	16
5	Federal University of Technology Akure	1
6	University of Nigeria Nsukka	3
7	University of Calabar	3
8	University of Port Harcourt	2
9	Alvan Ikoku College of education	2
10	Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka	1
11	Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike	10

The participants were not based in the same city. This made it convenient for the researchers to administer the questionnaires at different times. However, each participant was given twenty hours to fill and return the questionnaire. At the points of returning the questionnaires, the researcher interacted with them on the overall



understanding of the topic treated. All the questionnaires were returned and correctly filled.

#### **4.0 Data presentation**

The data for this study are presented according to the participants responses to each of the six questions as shown below:

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>No of Respondents</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>To what extent has the conventional monolingual approach to teaching and learning improved the performance of students in Nigerian Universities?</b>		
<b>a</b>	What is your native language?	Efik	4
		Eton	1
		Hausa	4
		Igala	2
		Igbo	26
		Ikwere	5
		Tiv	2
		Yoruba	6
<b>b</b>	Which languages are you proficient in?	English	50
		German	2
		Native	18
		Spanish	1
<b>c</b>	How often were different languages used as media of instruction at different levels of	Foreign	Always
		Native	Rarely

	your education?		
<b>d</b>	With your level of proficiency in the foreign and native languages, do you envisage challenges in communicating global research findings for community development?	Challenging	43
		Not challenging	7
<b>e</b>	In what ways can the use of only one of these languages promote your performances in education?	profitable	50
		Not profitable	0
<b>2</b>	<b>In what ways can communicating research findings in multilingual ways contribute to enhancing high level performance for the development of the society?</b>		
		Multilingual approach	49
		Non multilingual approach	1

### 5.0 Data analysis

The table shows that the participants are from different linguistic environment, thus enabling the researchers to obtain information from different cultural backgrounds. From the data and interactions, all the participants claims English had been the language of instruction at their various levels of study while native languages were used to teach only native language classes. These

classes sometimes never lasted more than 45 minutes per week in primary and secondary schools. This made it possible for all the participants to be conversant with English language, yet they could not convey certain technical ideas to their mates outside their disciplines of study. It could be inferred from the above that adopting a monolingual approach in teaching and research limits comprehension of certain topics. One may also lose grasp of detailed knowledge needed in disseminating such information to target audience. It further implies that viewing the world from different cultural perspectives presents more opportunities to effectively utilise and disseminate information of research findings. For instance, in the bid to save lives during the global covid-19 pandemic, new ideas on masking, social and physical distancing were disseminated from different cultural backgrounds.

This multilingual approach helped to save people in remote communities from massive deaths. Invariably, it promotes socialization. When an Igbo learner of English tries to translate marriage rites to an Indian, he conveys the idea as a man paying dowry. This of course contradicts what the Indian knows or is taught on the concept of bride price. Predictably, this learner finds this topic very challenging. As a result, this learner is challenged by his monolingual and monocultural perspective to bride price. In other words, the learner's knowledge to contribute globally on such issue as bride price becomes very limited. Given that the historical monolingual approach to learning from the sociocultural theoretical framework (SCT) hinders skills that can facilitate divergent perspectives to development (Ratnerz, 2002); empowering an active human intellect becomes a paramount concern for social development. Although the data presented the use of native language as not very important, the psychological

capabilities of human beings evolve better from the cultural linguistic backgrounds. To sustainably reform education, therefore, suggests the inevitability of programming cultural activities, artefacts and concepts from multilingual perspective to teaching and research. This creates the opportunity for learners to culturally translate in-depth knowledge and comprehension that reflects on research findings and seminar reports from an interdisciplinary approach. Thus providing high performance solutions for existing problems especially within developing countries where education is compartmentalized and aimed at daily living.

Within the sociocultural framework (SCT) better job opportunities become accomplished as the economic value of the languages improve. Such economic attainment arouses the need to improve indigenous languages by developing or creating technical and scientific terms that meets the global standard. Moreso, in the health sector which is a very important aspect of man's existence, multilingualism becomes a tool for reducing the risk of some mental disorders such as dementia or alzheimer. In federal institutions situated in Igbo land for in instance, applying multilingual approach to teaching becomes an avenue to developing the less resourced languages. It may also afford foreigners the the opportunity to integrate socially and culturally while reducing chauvinism and bigotry which destabilise national peace and development.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

Although Education is a key component in the development of man, its goals can only be attained through language. In achieving this, creating a sustainable education reformation for higher institutions becomes imperative. In an effort to fulfil the quest for

satisfaction in research, teaching, and community development which are basic responsibilities of universities, there is the desire to grasp the knowledge of contemporary concepts. Pragmatic multilingualism is suggested in teaching approaches especially within technical fields, to contribute or attempt to accomplish global tasks and attain greater social heights with minimal or no external supervision. This enables young people to confidently further their studies and develop their careers beyond the borders of Nigeria without much linguistic challenges.

### **Recommendation**

In a contemporary society where daily innovations and technological skills emerge daily, this study recommends that:

- i. the national policy on multilingualism should be made and implemented in the curricula of institutions of higher learning.
- ii. findings of research be presented in more than two languages to ease comprehension and implementation.
- iii. young learners in higher institutions should be availed with the opportunity of studying a language of their environment as a general study course and foreign language(s) as ancillary language course in order to become better equipped to understand, interpret and solve daily challenges in a contemporary global world.

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