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MOTHER TONGUE AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION:  
LOWER BASIC SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTION

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A. YUSUF, M. B. BELLO & K. E. OBAFEMI

Department of Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Education,  
University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

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**Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to find out the perception of lower basic school teachers on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. A total of two hundred and twenty-one (221) lower basic school teachers were randomly selected from eighty-one (81) Basic Schools in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State. One hundred and one (101) teachers were male while one hundred and twenty (120) teachers were female. A researchers' designed questionnaire titled, "Questionnaire on Caregivers' Perception of Play as a Way of Learning" (QCPPWL) was used to obtain the data for this study. The data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire and was analysed with the use frequency count, percentage, t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The findings revealed that lower basic school teachers had positive perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. The findings also showed that there was no significant difference in the perceptions of male and female lower basic school teachers on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. It was also unfolded that school type and teaching experience had significant influence on the perception of lower basic school teachers

on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. Among others, it was recommended that government should ensure that the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at the lower basic level was implemented.

Key words: Mother tongue, medium of instruction, lowers basic school, teachers' perception

### Introduction

Language is the primary vehicle through which human culture is acquired, shared and transmitted. Language is a treasure of culture and self-identity. Without language, there is bound to be problem in the society for thoughts, ideas, information, and the society would become incommunicado. Richard, Platt and Platt (1992) defined language as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication, while Wilson (1986) viewed language as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates. Olaoye (2013) noted that language is a distinctively human system of communication based on oral and written symbols. It is the vehicle through which people's culture is transmitted. Language can be seen as a set of arbitrary vocal symbols shared by a group of people who are connected by mutual and natural trust. A reasonable proficiency in language is a pre-requisite for effective learning. This is so because language serves as a guide for thinking and thinking is requisite for effective communication. Language is very important in the education of young children.

Language skills include listening, speaking, reading and writing. The child receives verbal messages and acts on them. This continuous verbal give –and - take process forms the basis for social interaction as well as the development of the cognitive processes. Language is, therefore, central to the interactive process (Ademowo, 2012). Hanafi (2014) perceived language as the foundation of every culture. Language is an abstract system of word, meaning and symbols for all aspects of culture which includes speech, written characters, numerals, symbols, and gestures and expressions of non-verbal communication. Language is central to the sustenance of a group of people, for it is the vehicle through which other constituents of cultures are communicated.

Also, 'waThiong'o (1994) viewed language as having a dual character; it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. Language as communication and as culture is a product of each other. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which people come to perceive themselves and their place in the world. Language is thus inseparable from a community of human beings with a specific form and character; a specific history and a specific relationship (Adeosun, 2008).

The importance of language cannot be overemphasized as it is also used in teaching and learning situations. The most common language in Nigeria, used in teaching and learning situations, which is been described as a medium of instruction, is English language. However, it is no longer tenable to posit that the use of English language as the official language of Nigeria has solved the problems of equal access to knowledge, divisiveness and grounding poverty and underdevelopment. Conversely, it can be argued that English language as a medium of instruction in schools has become a formidable and impenetrable barrier to access to knowledge and information, for a great part of the Nigerian society by ostracizing the languages of the environment and disengaging them from the business of education (Attahiru, 2015). Attahiru further noted that if we were not prepared to accept the fact that foreign languages cannot be sufficient for the educational needs of Nigeria, then the aspiration for a knowledge driven and modern society will remain a mirage to Nigerians.

Isola (1995) also advocated for the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in schools, when he submitted that the socialization of a child into culture or society involves the use of indigenous language, which he describes as the life blood of any culture. To Solanke (2006), mother tongue is an indispensable cultural legacy with which all forms of human interaction are carried out. According to Nwadike (2004), language is the key to the heart of the people. If the key is lost, the people will also be lost. If the key is treasured and kept safe, it will unlock the door to wealth or affluence.

This line of argument is supported by the reports of a longitudinal research at the Institute of Education, University of Ife (Now ObafemiAwolowo University). Fafunwa, Macaulay and Sokoya (1989) had consistently expressed their belief in the use of Yoruba, or any other mother tongue as a medium for learning school subjects including science and Mathematics

In the six-year Yoruba Medium Primary Education Project at the University of Ife, the Yoruba Language was employed to bridge the gap between the home and the school. The Project was predicated on the assertion that if a child was helped to lay a solid foundation of his future development in his own mother tongue, he/she would be better able to build upon it in later years, even in another language.

Similarly, Fafunwa (1982) posits that a child learns best in his mother-tongue and that the mother-tongue is as natural to him as the mother's milk. He concluded that

“if the Nigerian child is to be encouraged from the start to develop curiosity, initiative, industry, manipulative ability, spontaneous flexibility, manual dexterity, mechanical comprehension and the co-ordination of hand and eye, he should acquire these skills and attitudes through his mother-tongue”.

Language of instruction is the language a teacher uses to teach in the classroom. The language of instruction at one level of education differs from another. This is why the language of instruction in the pre-primary school level is different from that which is used at middle, basic level of education upward. However, the language of immediate environment, popularly called mother tongue, is recommended, as documented in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013), as the language of instruction for lower basic children and pupils. In spite of this recommendation, some, if not many, teachers are not in compliance with this recommendation as some teachers are forced to adopt English language as a medium of instruction at the lower basic level. These teachers used English language because of the directives received from their school

proprietors. Many proprietors also said that most parents/guardians of pupils preferred their wards to be taught with English language to language of immediate environment (Iyamu&Ogiegbaen, 2007). Hence, in an attempt to satisfy the demand of the parents, many proprietors instruct their teachers to use English language as a medium of instruction. It is felt that the perceptions of teachers, who are the implementers of the language policy in the school setting, have not been given deserved research attention. It is in the light of the above that this study investigated the perception of lower basic school teachers on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at the lower basic level.

The teachers' gender, teaching experience and the type of school are also variables of interest in the study. The gender of the teachers, the years the teachers have spent in teaching and the type of school (either public school or private school) are all important variables which must be considered in the study so as to know the influence the variables have on teachers' perception of mother tongue as a medium of instruction.

Since teachers are regarded as the facilitators and disseminators of knowledge via the use of language identified as a medium of instruction, it is highly important to study and analyse their perceptions on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at the lower basic school level so as to know their view, since many schools failed to adopt the use of mother tongue of a medium of instruction. Perception goes a long way in affecting individual attitudes, values and beliefs. If an issue is perceived sensitive, such perception fertilizes individual beliefs, attitudes and values. The perceptions of teachers have several implications for language policy implementation in the school. It is against this background that this study investigated the perception of lower basic teachers on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction.

### Research Question

What is the perception of teachers on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction?

### Hypotheses

- H<sub>0</sub>1: There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction.
- H<sub>0</sub>2: There is no significant difference between private and public schools teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction.
- H<sub>0</sub>3: There is no significant influence of teaching experience on teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at lower basic level.

### Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Two hundred and twenty one (221) teachers were randomly selected from 81 Basic Schools in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara state. One hundred and one (101) teachers were male while one hundred and twenty (120) teachers were female. A researchers' designed questionnaire titled "Teachers' Perception on the Use Mother Tongue Questionnaire" (TPUMTQ) was used to obtain the data for this study. The questionnaire contained 10 items measuring teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. A 4 point-likert type scale of strongly Agree (4-points), Agree (3-points), Disagree (2-points) and Strongly Disagree (1-point) was used to elicit the needed data from the respondents. Afterwards, Expert judgment, from Educational Research Measurement and Evaluation Unit of the Department of Social Sciences Education, University of Ilorin, was used to validate the instrument. To trial test the instrument, the instrument was administered to thirty Lower Basic School teachers who were not part of the sample. Cronbachalpha was used to test the reliability of the instrument and its coefficient stood at .78. Descriptive statistics was used to answer the research question while independent sample t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test the stated hypotheses.

Research Question One: What is teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at lower basic level?

Table 1: Table showing teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at lower basic level

S/N	Teachers' perception	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1.	Using mother tongue as a language of instruction is appropriate	175(79.2)	25(11.3)	21(9.5)		3.70
2	Not using mother tongue as a language of instruction makes pupils to experience stress when learning	65(29.4)	151(68.3)		5(2.3)	3.27
3.	Using mother tongue as a language of instruction saves teachers some efforts	148(67.0)	63(28.5)	3(1.4)	7(3.2)	3.59
4.	Teaching with mother tongue will help pupils to understand better	97(43.9)	117(52.9)		7(3.2)	3.41
5.	Government should enforce the use of mother tongue as a language of instruction	114(51.6)	104(47.1)		3(1.4)	3.50
6.	It is good to teach using mother tongue	136(61.5)	81(36.7)	4(1.8)		3.60
7.	The use of mother tongue stimulates pupils to be active in teaching-learning situation	111(50.2)	91(41.2)	12(5.4)	7(3.2)	3.38
8.	The use of mother tongue engenders pupils' confidence	82(37.1)	120(54.3)		19(8.6)	3.29
9.	Using mother tongue as a language of instruction fosters teacher-pupils relations	128(57.9)	93(42.1)			3.58
10.	The use of mother tongue as a language of instruction facilitates learning	94(42.5)	120(54.3)		7(3.2)	3.36
	Weighted Average					3.5

Table 1 showed the teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at lower basic level. The teachers strongly agreed with the following: Using mother tongue as a language of instruction is appropriate (3.70); Using mother tongue as a language of instruction saves teachers some efforts (3.59); Government should enforce the use of mother tongue as a language of instruction (3.50); It is good to teach using mother tongue (3.60); Using mother tongue as a language of instruction fosters teacher-pupils relations (3.58). The teachers agreed with the following: Not using mother tongue as a language of instruction makes pupils to experience stress when learning (3.27); Teaching with mother tongue will help pupils to understand better (3.41); The use of mother tongue stimulates pupils to be active in teaching-learning situation (3.38); The use of mother tongue engenders pupils' confidence (3.29); The use of mother tongue as a language of instruction facilitates learning (3.36). The weighted average is 3.5 which is a numeric indicator that caregivers have a positive perception of mother tongue as a language of instruction.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at lower basic level.

Table 2: Summary of t-test analysis showing male and female teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at lower basic level.

Variable	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.	Remark
Female	120	15.98	3.05	1.70	219	.900	Not Significant
Male	101	15.36	2.28				

Table 2 showed that there was no significant difference in male and female teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction ( $t = 1.70$ ;  $df = 219$ ;  $P > .05$ ). This implies that gender had no significant influence on teachers' perception of the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. The hypothesis is, therefore, not rejected.



Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between private and public school teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at lower basic level.

Table 3: Summary of t-test analysis showing private and public school teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at lower basic level.

Variable	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.	Remark
Private school	131	15.26	2.33	-2.911	219	.004	Significant
Public school	90	16.33	3.16				

Table 3 showed that there was significant difference in private and public school teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction ( $t = -2.911$ ;  $df = 219$ ;  $P < .05$ ). This implies that school type had significant influence on teachers' perception of the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. The hypothesis is, therefore, rejected.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant influence of teaching experience on teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at lower basic level.

Table 4: Summary of ANOVA analysis showing influence of teaching experience on teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at lower basic level.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Between Groups	1414.152	5	282.830	51.372	.000	Significant
Within Group	1128.635	215	5.806			
Total	2542.787	220				

Table 4 showed that there was significant influence of teaching experience on teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as

a medium of instruction at lower basic school ( $F_{(5, 215)} = 51.372$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). The hypothesis is, therefore, rejected.

### Discussion

Every child is said to have high proficiency in his/her mother tongue, since it is the first language acquired by the child. Mother tongue is often referred to as the language of thought since it is the first language acquired by a child with which the child thinks and speaks. The powerful role of mother tongue in thought and learning cannot be emphasized and that is why it is recommended in the National Policy on Education (2013) to be adopted as a medium of instruction. This study probed teachers' perception on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at the lower basic level. The analysis revealed that lower basic school teachers had positive perception on the use of mother as a medium of instruction. This finding tallies with the findings of Babajide, Nkidi, Ina and Cyclic (2014) who discovered that teachers had positive perception and values of Yoruba as a medium of instruction in primary 3 classes. The finding is also consistent with the assertion of Osungbemi, Olaniyan, Sanni and Olujuigbe (2013). Similarly, the findings of this study were corroborated by the findings of the survey research conducted by Safary (2014). Safary investigated 467 English teachers' perceptions about the importance of new educational policy that promotes learning in mother tongues in earlier years of primary education in the Philippines. The teachers had positive perception of using mother tongue in earlier years of primary education.

However, this finding negates the findings of Chinyere (2013), who claimed that teachers had negative perception of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. The negative perception of the teachers may be as a result of the fact there aren't enough literature written in mother tongue. Similar reason may be that mother tongue, in Nigeria, is not considered as an official language.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Researchers such as Babajide, Nkidi, Ina and Cyclic (2014), Osungbemi, Olaniyan, Sanni and Olujuigbe (2013) have

established that teachers had positive perception on the use of mothertongue as a medium of instruction. From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction has the potential to improve understanding and knowledge impartation in the classroom, and, by extention, improve academic achievement since mother tongue is the language with which the pupils think. From the findings, it is recommended that government should enforce the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at the lower level of basic education.

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