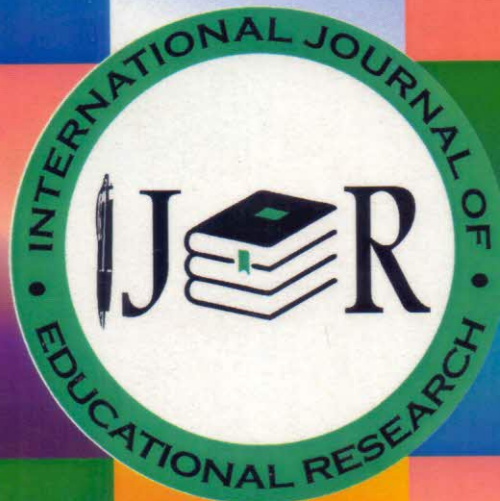




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# CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON RELEVANCE AND USE OF MOTHER TONGUE IN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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&

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## Abstract

*This paper critically investigated the linguistic aspect of Nigerian education policy. It examined the relevance of language of instruction in classroom learning. The philosophical nature of the study necessitated the analytic and speculative modes of research. The concept of mother tongue was analytically examined in order to give a clear-cut definition and facilitate a quick understanding; while the prescriptive mode was used to assess the place of indigenous languages in Nigerian curricula. The paper x-rayed arguments for and against the use of mother tongue in Nigerian schools. Among several works considered, the experimental work of Fafunwa was particularly showcased. The famous Ife Six Year Primary Project (SYPP), which was conducted between 1970 -1979, had established beyond any reasonable doubt that the Nigerian child will benefit immensely if schooled with mother tongue. Despite the success, it was however discovered that some challenges are constantly militating against the use of mother tongue in Nigerian schools. Such challenges range from one-nation-one-language myth; perception of English language as a global language; absence of orthography of some Nigerian languages; lack of trained teachers in the use of indigenous languages; lack of political will; among others. These challenges were addressed in this paper. The researchers, laconically, submitted that for education in Nigeria to function as it should, as elsewhere, her language policy should be revisited; and to actualize this, the researchers recommend that teacher education in Nigeria be revitalised, while adequate training is given to teachers, so as to enable them to comfortably and conveniently teach their subjects in indigenous languages. It was suggested that for cognitive, cultural purposes and national interest, use of mother tongue is a necessity as education is to the society what fuel is to a vehicle, and language is to education what blood is to humans.*

**Key words:** Mother tongue, Nigerian education, relevance and use.

## Introduction

Communication has been pivotal to man - his existence, co-existence and relationship with other men. Man must express his thoughts, share his opinions, exchange ideas, dish out instructions and of course extend to his offspring the accumulated body of knowledge and established values of the society. While communication is uniform to mankind, language is not. This explains the position of Dopamu (in Alamu, 2010) that "God hates monotony, but loves variety". The cultural diversity of the world explains the linguistic differences and distinctions among world societies. Language is in fact the socio-cultural characteristic and identity of individual societies. This distinctiveness indicates that an individual speaks or communicates first in a language he/she is first exposed to, thus, his mother tongue. Mother tongue is the language human beings acquire immediately after birth. Such language helps the child in his/her mental, moral and emotional development (Noormohamadi, 2008). Pocock in Tulasiewicz and Adams (2005) defined mother tongue as the language spoken in a region, which enables the process of enculturation, the initiation of an individual into a particular system of linguistic perception of the world and participation in the centuries old history of linguistic production. In every African state, mother tongue indicates the language of one's ethnic group.

