



Mother Tongue & Its Effect in Early Childhood Music Learning; A Study of Selected Nursery Schools in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

Chinyere Celestina Esimone¹, Iruoma Amaka Ugoo-Okonkwo²

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria^{1,2}

Abstract

*Music is as vital as life. It is a *sin quo non* in the day-to-day living of a man and the best, most accessible language that children understands better. Music is a language of the soul; hence, it touches the emotions of man to cause a change in the character and behaviour of the listener. Music affects all aspects of children's learning and life, but the means of communication of this one crucial subject remains paramount if its effect will be lasting. Mother tongue is the native language of a people, the language they are born and raised in. It is the language that defines who they are and tells them everything about them. Teaching children from home to school in their mother tongue helps them learn their native music and other music's as well as other subjects. This paper examines mother tongue's effect on early childhood music learning. The data for this study was collected through questionnaire and interview methods from a few mothers and some teachers in the selected Nursery Schools and drawn from the findings. The findings show collective opinions on the study. Both the mothers and the nursery teachers agreed that using the mother tongue in their teaching and learning activity at home and in school is very encouraging and overwhelming, hence the advocate for the continual use of the mother tongue in the state.*

Keywords: *Music, Early Childhood, Mother tongue, Music learning and Its effect.*

Introduction. Nigeria is a multi-tribe and bilingual Nation that adopted English Language as a general language of study and official language from home to school. The use of the English language has so much affected all families that there is little of the mother tongue spoken at home and in school, and this, if not addressed, mother tongue will be a thing of the past for the children as they grow; and will lead to loss of their identity since language is one fundamental fact of identity.

Objective / Statement of the Problem. This paper aims at advocacy for the use of mother tongue in a child's upbringing, as well as a means of communication through music in their teaching and learning activities in Nigerian Schools, beginning from the home. This advocacy is as a result of a constant observation that most families rarely speak their mother tongue at home, let alone teach their children their native language. Most of these families prefer speaking English, which should naturally be a second language; this has resulted in children's ignorant of their identity, their native language and even their native culture. This is a very bad sign and a stepping stone to a complete annihilation of a people's identity.

Research Questions. The questions for this research are: 1) Is mother tongue the best to be used in communication both at home and school more than English Language?. 2) Does the use of mother tongue make teaching and learning easier than with English language, with children in early childhood?. 3) Does Music in addition with mother tongue make teaching and learning easier in early childhood classes?.



Methodology. Survey Research Design was adopted for this work. The population for the study stood at 15 mothers and 30 nursery school teachers drawn from Awka South of Anambra State Nigeria, sampled out from a vast number of the schools and their teachers. Structured questionnaires bothering on forced answers with the likert scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Agreed (SD) were constructed, and the questions bothering on the objective of the study were distributed to the population and collected back for analysis using simple percentage against each test item by the researcher. Thus, the category which pooled greatest number of responses was used as an indicator for predicting the opinion of the population.

Literature Review. 1.1 Music. Music is an aesthetic art of combining or putting together sounds that are pleasant to the ear (Agu, 2006, p. 1). Little wonder it is seen and regarded as the language of the soul since it appeals to all, irrespective of colour, race or age. Music is a lovely asset that can affect our mental and emotional states and moods. It acts very positively on the general development of children in intellectual, emotional, psychological, and social. Children enjoy making music; singing and dancing to music melodies give them great joy, energy, and motivation. Exposing them to music quite early in life helps them learn about sounds and the meaning of words, which later in their lives, lead to their knowledge of mathematics and the sciences. Music-making inspires and stirs children's motor skills and creativity; it keeps them busy in any assignment, even when they are almost giving up. It enhances their self-esteem and self-expression while building their memory skills. Esimone (2014:5) observed that when children listen to music, they respond with their whole feelings and emotions, manipulative skills through intellectual means and a combination of all. When music is taught, performed and exposed to children in their mother tongue, it enhances their identity and makes them confident of who they are.

1.2 Early Childhood. Early Childhood is a time between birth and eight years of age. Psychologists believe that brains witness maximum development within this age. It is a curious age. Moral, social, psychological, academic and physiological development stages occur within this period. Any mistake in their upbringing at this age meets with little or no remedy in correction; hence, it requires carefulness and strong determination in shaping their developmental stages. In agreeing with the above, UNESCO defines early Childhood as the period between birth and eight years of age. To them, it is when the child's brain is susceptible to the environment surrounding them; and it is a time of remarkable growth that requires a specialized approach that ensures this age learns critical skills and foundational concepts to prepare them for future life and endeavours. UNESCO believes so much in early childhood care and education, called in short form ECCE, an entirely inclusive education rather than just preparation for primary school. To them, early childhood learning can be the foundation for emotional well-being. (unesco.org/en/early-childhood-education).

1.3 Mother tongue. Mother tongue is also called "native language". It is the language a child is born and raised in from his origin country and which should dominate the young or growing age of the child. A child may be born in another country other than the parent's original country; the language of that country, whether English or another, is not the child's native language. Though the English language seems to have dominated the universe, to nations other than the original owners of the English language, English is not their native language. Nigeria adopted English as a second and an official language, but it is not the native language or the mother tongue of Nigerians. Mother tongue is very crucial to the identity of a child because it helps the child value his identity, culture and heritage and helps that child build a positive self-esteem and concept. Mother tongue further allows a child to communicate with fellow natives and bond with them. It enables the child to understand and appreciate the history of his ancestors, which defines what he represents. The importance of mother tongue in a child's upbringing can never be over-emphasized. The advocacy for mother tongue to be the lingua franca of all nations, especially in Nigeria,



is very crucial now. Nigeria uses the English Language in the teaching and learning activities from pre-primary to tertiary institutions of learning, yet understanding things taught to many pupils and students has remained a struggle. No language in the world should beat the native language or mother tongue of a people, hence the advocate for using it from the home, especially in Nigeria. Using the mother tongue to raise children in early Childhood benefits the parents, teachers and the children in early learning.

1.5 Music Learning. Music learning is the ability of children to learn music within and outside of formal teaching and learning. Plato and Aristotle, the great philosophers, believed music can alter or change the listener's character, behaviour or disposition. To them, music plays a significant role in the upbringing of children so long as proper consideration of the type of music the children are allowed to listen to and perform is taken care of. Although music has a lot of great things that positively influence a child's lifestyle, it also has many negative influences it can give a child if not properly guided. Learning has had many definitions and impacts of what it could do from learning theories like the Skinners, Thorndike and Bloom. However, Bloom's theory touched on all aspects of the children's lives and learning. Bloom considered three areas: cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains on which life activities thrive. He believes the cognitive domain deals with the mental skills that involve recognizing and recalling concepts, specific facts and procedural patterns that lead to developing intellectual abilities and skills. The affective domain deals with feelings, emotional growth, motivations, attitudes, values, enthusiasm, and appreciation. The psychomotor domain takes care of the physical activities, demonstrating learning. All these three domains of learning theory are what music learning thrives to achieve. When children get acquainted with music learning even from home, and it is learnt in mother tongue, the result is that the three domains of knowledge experience conspicuous development.

1.6 The Effects of Music Learning on Early Childhood. The effects of music learning through the mother tongue on early childhood children are unquantifiable. Most mothers start theirs while carrying the baby in their womb, especially if she is a singing mum. With this the baby is said to have started his music class, and that goes a long way to creating a bond between the child and the mother. Nnamani (2004) concurred that the average Nigerian child begins to respond to music right from the cradle. The child starts quite early to acquire some experiences in life through rhythmic activities he receives as he is on his mother's back or claps rhythms in-game songs and other songs the mother makes to him/her; and that as early as six months of age, some children begin to respond to music by moving to drum, and through these musical experiences around a child, musical sounds and patterns are already formed for the child before pre-primary schooling. As this continues, the child's brain is developing, his social relationship is growing, and his emotional stability is established, as do other aspects of his development.

Findings from the Structured Research Questionnaire and Interview

Research Question One. The research question which states thus: "Is mother tongue the best to be used in communication both at home and school more than English Language?" was evaluated using three text items and four options to choose from, Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD). The findings from the respondents are shown in Table 1. The table contains the test items, the number of respondents that chose the available options together with the worked out percentages. More than 50% of the respondents (i.e. 53.3%) strongly agreed that mother tongue is best used for communication than English Language at home. Out of the 45 respondents, it was only 3 and 2 respondents (a total of 5 respondents) that disagreed and strongly disagreed with that assertion, respectively. Similarly, considering the 2nd test item of Table 1 which states that children understands with mother tongue faster than with English Language, 60% and 28.9% Strongly Agreed and Agreed,



respectively with the test item. Only 4.4% and 6.7% disagreed and strongly disagreed with that, respectively.

Table 1: Results of Respondents to Research Question1 Test Items

S/N	Research Question 1 Test Items	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	TOTAL (%)
1	Mother tongue is best used for communication than English Language at home	24	16	3	2	45
		(53.3)	(35.6)	(6.7)	(4.4)	(100)
2	Children understands with mother tongue faster than with English Language	27	13	2	3	45
		(60.0)	(28.9)	(4.4)	(6.7)	(100)
3	The use of mother tongue in the family puts everyone at ease than with English Language	28	13	3	1	45
		(62.2)	(28.9)	(6.7)	(2.2)	(100)

As regards the 3rd test item of research question 1 which states that the use of mother tongue in the family puts everyone at ease than with the English Language equally followed the same trend of positive alignment. Specifically, 62.2% strongly agreed and 28.9% agreed with that. This left out less than 10% for those that disagreed or strongly disagreed with the test item. Overall, for majority poll in the four-categorical opinions expressed by the respondents strongly agreed in all the 3 test items. Hence, the Use of mother tongue is most preferred for communication by the members of the family than with English Language. It is easier to understand and makes everyone feel at ease in the use of it than with English Language.

Research Question Two

The research question two states: “Does the use of mother tongue make teaching and learning easier than with English language, with children in early childhood?” This question was equally evaluated using three text items with the four options to choose from. The findings from the respondents are shown in Table 2. It can easily be seen that over 90% (i.e. 62.2% and 31.1%) supports test item 1 of research question 2. Less than 10% (i.e. 4.4% and 2.3%) opposed the assertion. Equally, majority of the respondents strongly agreed (polled 60.0%) and agreed (polled 28.9%) to test item 2.

Table 2: Results of Respondents to Research Question 2 Test Items

S/N	Research Question 2 Test Items	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	TOTAL (%)
1	Teaching and learning activities with the children is easier with Mother tongue than with English Language	28	14	2	1	45
		(62.2)	(31.1)	(4.4)	(2.3)	(100)
2	Children enjoy the class when Mother Tongue is used than when English language is used	27	13	3	2	45
		(60.0)	(28.9)	(6.7)	(4.4)	(100)
3	Teachers and Pupils flow in communication with each other with the Mother Tongue than with English Language	27	15	2	1	45
		(60.0)	(33.3)	(4.4)	(2.3)	(100)

The same trend was repeated in test item 3 of Table 2. In fact, the 3rd test showed only 3 respondents (i.e. less than 10%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with it while the other 42 respondents (i.e. over 90%) either strongly agreed or agreed with the assertion.



Research Question Three The research question Three states: “Does Music in addition with mother tongue make teaching and learning easier in early childhood classes?” This question was also evaluated using three text items with the four options to choose from. The findings from the respondents are shown in Table 3, Close to 90% (i.e. 55.6% and 33.3%) of the respondents support test item 1, which states that music makes teaching and learning activity enjoyable for both the children and the teachers? Almost 90% (i.e. 62.2% and 26.7%) of the respondents rejected the assertion which states that music makes teaching and learning very dull and difficult to understand for children. In the 3rd test item of research question 2, only 3 out of the 45 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that music puts the children at ease and makes learning faster and easier for the children. Over 90% (i.e. 64.4% and 28.9%) agreed and strongly agreed with the assertion. In sum, Table 3 proves that Music makes teaching and learning activities in Early Childhood Education easier, faster and fun for both the teachers and the Children.

Table 3: Results of Respondents to Research Question 3 Test Items

S/N	Research Question 2 Test Items	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	TOTAL (%)
1	Music makes teaching and learning activity enjoyable for both the children and teachers	25	15	3	2	45
		(55.6)	(33.3)	(6.7)	(4.4)	(100)
2	Music makes teaching and learning very dull and difficult to understand for children	3	2	28	12	45
		(6.7)	(4.4)	(62.2)	(26.7)	(100)
3	Music puts the children at ease and makes learning faster and easier for the children	29	13	2	1	45
		(64.4)	(28.9)	(4.4)	(2.3)	(100)

Overall, all the 3 test items for the 3 research questions were compared with the interview conducted in this study. It was observed that the findings from the respondents are in agreement with the interview conducted which validates the findings.

Summary, Recommendation & Conclusion. The advocate for making the Nigerian Mother tongues the first language rather than the English language is very important at this time. Making English a national official language is important if all the members of the Nigerian Nation must communicate, but, English Language should not be made the first Language for all the multi-ethnic members of the Nation and even forced the schools to use English Language for their teaching and learning activities from kindergarten to Tertiary institutions. Curriculum developers should have all the ethnic members as board members to decide on which books should be used in schools and such books should be written in the languages of the ethnic members so that even though the books are the same, the language for teaching and learning is done in the ethnic language of those involved, while the English language is studied and used as a second language generally and everywhere even in the offices.

References

- [1] Agu, D.C.C. (2006), The Nigerian Policy on Education: its impact on music education programme and delivery in Nigeria. *Awka Journal of Research in Music and the Arts. (AJRMA)*. 3, 1-8
- [2] Esimone, C.C. (2014), The Role of Music in Family and Child Development. *Awka Journal of Music and the Arts. (AJRMA)*. 10, 63-73
- [3] Nnamani, S. N. (2004). The role of music in nursery education in Nigeria. *Awka Journal of Research in Music and the Arts (AJRMA)*. 2, 93-101