

Towards An Active Quadrilingual Cum Pentalingual Acquisition in Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: A Precursor to National Unity and Integration

Opara Chika Glory, Anigbogu Ngozi C., Olekibe Chinenye C., Regis-Onuoha Adaeze, Egwim Favour O., and Ochigha Ijeoma, S.

Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria

Abstract

Nigeria is a multilingual nation with over 500 indigenous languages spoken within the country, yet the country is gradually drifting towards monolingualism. The English language is becoming the first language for the Nigerian child, yet the child is endowed with innate capacity to acquire any language. The study embarked on a comparative study of multilingual and monolingual children acquiring English; the objectives of the study were to determine whether the English monolingual will acquire English language more competently than the multilinguals and to determine the effect of language planning on the nation. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select families from different tribes in Nigeria. The subjects were observed both at their homes and in school. The findings reveal that the multilingual children acquire the English language more competently than the English monolinguals and recommend that English should be acquired as a fourth or fifth language in Nigeria.

KeyWords: Quadrilingual, Pentalingual, Language Acquisition, National unity and National integration

Introduction

Language acquisition is one of the most impressive aspects of human development. In fact, humans are so innately prepared to master languages such that it becomes almost impossible not to acquire language. Linguists explain that the capacity to use language successfully requires one to acquire a range of skills. These skills include: phonology, morphology, syntax, semiotics and vocabulary. By acquiring these tools humans gain language awareness, produce and use words and sentences to communicate. Akmajian (1990) has it that language acquisition occurs spontaneously from birth the child simply by exposure to language masters its linguistic features without systematic instruction. He explains that the human brain is automatically wired to acquire languages. Most scholars explain that children are born with an innate language faculty which atrophies with age. This implies that there is a limit to the innate ability. Hence the innate capacity has to be accessed before it wanes. Indeed humans are well prepared to acquire language. Language acquisition starts from birth. The beginning of child language is crying. As soon as the child cries and the mother runs to it, the basic pattern of language is established. In fact, most scholars confirm that new born babies strive to acquire first steps of language rapidly and gain perfection in complex grammatical abilities within a couple of years without obvious instruction about the features of language. For Chomsky (1975), language acquisition is more or less an unconscious process. Similarly, Cenoz and Genesee (1998) concur that children absorb language like a sponge. Indeed most linguists observe that children are efficient linguists, equipped from birth with a perfect theory of language - an in born capacity to acquire any language, a kind of genetic Programme for language acquisition.

Discussing the issue of child language acquisition Chomsky views the mind as having relatively independent innate faculty of knowledge where only specific faculty would activate the innate knowledge. Chomsky clearly expounds that the mind is programmed as a set of abstract rules whose physical bases were yet relatively unknown; but it matures according to a genetically

determined programme of development in interaction with the environment. Chomsky emphasized that the children are programmed genetically with universal grammar – a basic understanding of how communications are structured in a linguistic environment. Thus language acquisition device (LAD) is an innate intellectual device. This implies that hypothetical LAD is so constructed in such a way that it can formulate rules from the regularities that exist in speech input. It possesses information about the general form of human language but not specific to any particular language.

The LAD enables the child to make hypothesis about the structure of the language he is acquiring. The hypothesis which the child unconsciously sets up are tested in the use of language. Since the process is not a conscious one, Chomsky theorized that language is acquired.

Chomsky has it that humans acquire language by unconsciously storing information in the brain which can later be used for many types of oral and written communication.

Hence, the researchers posit that children should not be limited to a language or two at their early years, since they have the capacity to acquire languages, they should be given opportunity to acquire languages, they should acquire multiple languages at a time. LAD is most effective. In fact, it has been observed that the innate capacity is underutilized in Nigerian at early childhood education. Most Nigerian children are proudly becoming monolinguals. The researchers opine that multilingual education enhances national unity and integration.

Indeed acquisition of language cannot be explained without making an appeal to principles which are beyond the scope of any purely physiological account of human beings and no other species has the ability to use a common system in a creative rule governed nature as human. In other words, only humans have the ability to acquire multiple languages from an early stage, as such they should not be restricted to acquiring one or two languages. Since the hypothetical LAD gives them the capacity to acquire any language.

Commenting on the process of language acquisition Krashen presents a different view. Krashen (1981) states that there are two independent ways of mastering a language: acquisition and learning. For Krashen language acquisition is a subconscious process while language learning is a conscious process that results in knowledge about language. Krashen explains that the ability to produce utterances comes from the acquired competence through the subconscious knowledge. Learning serves as an 'editor' or 'monitor'. Krashen further proposes what he terms, input hypothesis for second language acquisition. He argues that students acquire a language only if they obtain comprehensible input and if their affective filter is low enough to allow input. Thus comprehensible input in Krashen's view is the main explanation for language development. Krashen's input hypothesis has two corollaries:

- a) Speech cannot be taught directly but emerges on its own as a result of building competence via comprehensible input.

b) If input is understood the learner receives.

Corder (1981) maintains that language cannot be taught at the childhood stage, we only create the environment in which learning could develop spontaneously in the mind on its own. Corder stresses that human are all endowed by nature with the capacity to assimilate language and this capacity remains available to us in a latent stage after the acquisition of the first language. He posits that adults are as capable as the children in acquiring language. Corder stresses that the child possesses a body of knowledge which underlies the utterances he makes and it is constantly developing. From all indication the basic skills to acquire at this stage are listening, speaking, reading skills and vocabulary, writing skill comes at a later stage. Children show awareness of language categories at early ages, long before any overt instruction and they have common developmental patterns specifically as follows:

- i. Perceiving and producing sounds,
- ii. Babbling with consonant and vowel patterns,
- iii. Speaking the first rudiment :: ><< in terms of stimuli and response. For Skinner the frequency with which a certain utterance is uttered and structured in an environment will influence the language development of the child. Skinner emphasizes that reinforcement is needed to arrive at a higher level of proficiency.

Another suggested reason for child's language development in Steinberg (1982) opinion was the child's ability to memorize. Steinberg stresses that language development would not be possible without a prodigious use of memory. Because in the course of learning to identify the words and their relation to context, the child must remember a multitude of particular words, phrases and sentences along with the context in which they occurred. Such data provide the basis for analysis.

If the children do not remember many of the words, phrases and sentences which they heard, they will have little base abstracting rules and meanings. The child will have no data to search for underlying pattern and principles of language. For Steinberg child's ability to memorize is an important factor in child language development. Steinberg believes that environment provides the basics for speech development.

Despite the opposing views on child language acquisition the most practical outgrowth has been the idea that there is an optimal age for language acquisition among children. The younger the better is the prevailing idea. Children are primed for natural language acquisition than adult.

Acquisition of language is more effective at early childhood education. Humans are born with an innate understanding of any language. Whether our gene or our environment children acquire language faster at early stage. Our personality or behavior are fashioned from birth.

Thus the researcher expounds that since children are intrinsically endowed to acquire language faster and become proficient quicker than adult between the age 1-6 years, in Nigeria--a multilingual nation--where we have over five hundred indigenous languages--National Language Policy (NLP) and curriculum planners should take advantage of the innate ability and introduce or immerse the children in a trilingual, quadrilingual or pentalingual education before the innate ability wanes. Foreign languages should be introduced at a later stage.

TrilingualcumQuadrilingual/Pentalingualeducationalpolicywheretheindigenoulanguagesare taught first and English taught as a fourth or fifth languageshould be actively implemented at early stage in schools before fossilization set in.Nigerian is a multilingual society.National language Policy should actively stipulate and ensure that every Nigerian Child acquires three to four indigenous languages before the introduction of foreign languages since the child has the capacity to acquire languages.The English language or any other foreign language should be studied as the third, fourth or fifth language in Nigeria at the earlystage, but after the acquisition of the native languages, because if properly programmed the Nigerian Child has innate multilingual capacity to handle five languages at an early stage.

Inanincreasingglobalizedworld,wherehumansseektocommunicateandunderstandoneanother and possess inter cultural competence and awareness,it is vital to awaken children's interest in other people and culture at a time when they are open and more receptive.

Nigeria is a multilingual nation, yet most Nigerian children cannot even speak their mother's tongue they struggle to learn English as a first or second language. Such attitude may not only lead to language extinction but also perpetuate national disintegration.

In fact, linguists observe that multilingual learning has biological chemical and physical capacity to reorganize brain structure and enhance its function.Multilingual children show sense of empathy which continue into adulthood, as such they grow into a more compassionate person. This attribute help them find greater success in the business world and inculcate the spirit of oneness in their minds .The emotional intelligence will enhance their ability to be accessible and to communicate in today's national and international communities especially in Nigeria where we pledged for unity in diversity yet anarchy looms as result of gross segregation and tribalism. The child will be ready to work and explore, because they have tools and skills to thrive anywhere as a multilingual child, the more languages one knows, the more keys to treasure one possesses.

There is the tendency that proficiency in indigenous language at early stage of education will bring national development, unity and integration, because language strengthens unity. The English language is hegemonic. You reject a part of whom you are as you prioritize proficiency in English language over the indigenous language.

Against this background the researchers propound that quadrilingual and or pentalingual acquisition policy should be actively implemented in early childhood education in Nigeria; between 1-6 years of age. Language is culture, the Nigerian child should acquire his or her culture first before any other culture'

1.2 Language Verses Language Policy

It will be appropriate to briefly define language before we examine the importance the Nigerian government attached to indigenous languages in a multilingual setting base on its educational policies. This will provide the backdrop for us to examine the policy and its relation to early multilingual acquisition. Ayakoroma (2012) states that language is a human and non-instructive way of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. Continuing he expresses that language is the central feature of any community and a reflection of

thought, feelings, values, beliefs and the experience of a community of speakers, hence a knowledge of the language (s) of a people is needed for one to function socially, culturally and economically in his or her society. Since language is central to human existence it should be well planned, nurtured, transmitted and preserved. A child who has more than two or three languages has a wide range of knowledge about people around him/her and will be more efficient and productive in his profession and in the world around him.

Contrarily in Nigeria today most Nigerian children strive to acquire English not even as a second language but as the first or sole language. Even illiterate parents struggle to teach their children English language at home at an early stage.

The English language was introduced in Nigeria in 19th century. At that time, English was seen as the most important heritage from the colonial masters who introduced English as the language of education, administration, commerce and industry, media, religion and politics (Dadzie, 2004).

The Nigerian child has no option than to embrace the English language as a means of survival both internally and externally. As such when the Federal government enacted national language policies Nigerians gave deaf ears to the policies.

The language issue has been a thorny and much deliberated subject in Nigeria. It is now a linguistic and political problem based on the attention it has generated over a period of time (Udofot, 2012). Yet drastic steps have not been taken to address the language situation in Nigeria up to 21st century. Most Nigerians believe that acquiring and learning the indigenous language will hinder competency in English language- the supposed key to success. Hence acquisition of the English language is preferred over and above indigenous languages at the detriment of the national unity and development.

National Language Policy (NPL)

Language policy is an official pronouncement on a set of deliberate activities for selecting, organizing and developing the language resources of a country for the utilization and development of the people, (Osuafor 2004). In fact, language planning has its root in language problems.

In Nigeria there is an estimated number of (450-500) indigenous languages (Dadzie 2004). A country with such linguistic situation is bound to have problems ranging from, linguistic diversity, un-harmonized languages, political and ethnic disintegration, un-patriotism, political confusion, language crises and ethnic conflict. To solve these problems Nigerians chose the English language as a lingua Franca, over and above the 500 indigenous languages.

It has been a common belief that when a people speak a common language they become united. How then will a nation that speaks 500 indigenous languages be united if they don't acquire or have interest in their languages. Such a nation will not accomplish much because language brings oneness.

There is need to harmonize the various indigenous languages in Nigeria through effective planning. This could only be achieved by reinforcing active multilingual education from early stage.

Three, four or five indigenous languages should be acquired and mastered at early childhood education before the introduction of English as a foreign language at a later stage, preferably at five years. Multilingual education can reduce the rate of failure in students' academic pursuit in future.

In retrospect, the British government advisory committee for education in Africa recommended the introduction of English at an early age by 1927. It emphasized the need to harmonize and develop the indigenous languages by providing standard orthographies, training teachers and writing books.

By 1943 the Colonial officers' memorandum on language in African education recommended that instruction from primaries 1-3 be conducted in the indigenous languages. While English should be introduced in primary 4 as a teaching subject and the teaching of selected subjects in primary 6. Yet Nigerians paid lip service to the policy.

Again, the 1952 UNESCO conference on the use in education of African languages in relation to English held in Jos in Nigeria, recommended the introduction of English as a subject in primary one and its use as a medium of instruction from primary three. It however, reaffirmed that an indigenous language should be

the ideal language of instruction for the Nigerian child.

But, there have been utter disregard for the indigenous languages upto 1977 when the language policy and was reenacted by the then military government of Nigeria and it was published as a component of the National Policy on Education (NPE) base on the country ideology to build a united, strong self-reliant nation and democratic society - a land of bright and equal opportunity for all citizens: The following stipulations were made:

- i) That at the completion of early childhood education a Nigerian child must have acquired three Nigerian languages. The medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community.
- ii) That a language center be set up as part of educational service complex under Federal ministry of education to monitor the activities.
- iii) that government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is the mother tongue or the language of immediate community from the onset and at a later stage, English (Osuafor, 2004, UNESCO 2003/2011).

A cursory look at these policies reveal an obvious zeal to introduce indigenous languages at pre- primary and primary level. The national Language Policy also recognized the importance of acquisition of the mother tongue and other indigenous languages at early stage of education, which was mainly to develop the spirit of oneness and citizenship.

Thus the National Language Policy was integrated in the national policy on education (NPE) in 1977, revised in 1981 (Osuafor, 2004). The integration of NLP into NPE was as a result of the need to direct national ideologies and tenets. The major objectives of NLP include:

- 1) To introduce the spirit of oneness in a multilingual setting.
- 2) To acquire appropriate skills and competence both mental and physical
- 3) To enable the child to live in and contribute to the development of Nigerian society.
- 4) To inculcate the right type of values and attitudes in the Nigerian child for the survival of the child as well as the Nigerian society.
- 4) To train the child's mind to understand his society.

But most Nigerians believe that the best way to achieve these objectives is by being monolingual or mastering only English, the better English you speak the more intelligent person you become. But this is not so. Language ensures certain amount of unity which in turn facilitate interpersonal cognitive communication, as people share their different values and tradition, they bond and relate with one another peacefully.

There is need to build a healthy inter-ethnic relationship, such foundation will improve communication and harmonious co-existence (Adzre, 1976). Moreso, as Ayakorom (2012) paints it, language acquired is knowledge gained, and knowledge is power, and knowledge brings about development which Nigeria is in dire need of.

The more languages you know the more keys to treasure houses you possess. If you know your language and add other languages, that is called empowerment. The contention is that when the child is very young you must build in his mind, images that will guide him throughout his life, (Adesola, 2010).

Despite the calls for multilingualism globally, most Nigerians in the 21st century are becoming near-monolingual citizens. English language 'a foreign language' is now becoming the first language of the present generation. English language a colonial vestige that cannot afford Nigerians opportunity to express their innermost feelings like they would in their indigenous languages is the most preferred language in Nigeria.

There is hardly any school in Nigeria where early childhood education instructions are done in indigenous language. In some schools in Nigeria, speaking of indigenous languages is prohibited. Recommended textbooks written in our indigenous languages are interpreted and taught in English

language. We often hear our children report: 'our teacher said we should not speak our language in the class.' Today most Nigerians children cannot speak their languages. This is one of the major reasons for national disintegration.

At primary level which Ayokoroma regards as key to the success or failure of the whole educational system, the pupils were taught English, French and sometimes German. The medium of instruction in the primary school is expected to be the language of the environment for the first three years with English being taught as a subject and progressively English will be used at fourth year as the medium of instruction. Though the government recognized the importance of language as a means of promoting social integration, national cohesion and identity, there have always been a problem of implementation of the policy. The policy needs to be implemented.

As Ayokoroma (2012) observes, a country that is aspiring to be counted among the most developed economy in the world by year 2020 is losing her voice, as nine out of the 500 indigenous languages have gone extinct after 63 years of independence. By adopting English as the language of the government and the lingua franca, Nigerians are losing their identity and intellectual wealth.

The citizens believe that the child should acquire English language in order to survive.

The violation and negligence of NLP at an early and crucial stage of child educational development is like planting a bomb in a country. The implication is that Nigerians will hardly be united because there is no greater bond that could hold a people together than language. A country where a foreign language is compulsory and indigenous languages optional, will never be civilized or united.

The researchers posit that an active implementation of quadrilingual cum pentalingual early childhood education is needed in the pursuit of knowledge, power and national integration in the country. Acquisition of indigenous language at the early stage will not mar competence in English.

Nigerian system of education, should be revolutionized and the major tool of revolution is language. As LAD enables the child to acquire any language before six years, the researchers propound a simultaneous acquisition of four or more indigenous languages at pre-primary and primary level and subsequent introduction of English language at a later stage before the age of six. The researchers posit that multi-language acquisition is possible at early childhood education when fluency comes quickly and easily. The only way to preserve the indigenous language in Nigeria in the face of national monolingualism is for NLP to embrace multilingualism in Nigeria at early childhood education. Because a hegemonic language ideology impacts one's sense of identity. Nigerians reject their identity by patronizing proficiency in English. The researchers set out to conduct and analyse a horizontal multilingual and monolingual language acquisition cases to determine whether a child can acquire three or four indigenous languages alongside with the English language competently at the early stage between five and six years of age.

LEVELS OF MULTILINGUALISM

Trilingualism entails an ability to speak and understand three languages. Pentalingual person speaks, reads and writes five languages, the bilingual child is proficient in two languages. A person should be defined as trilingual if he can use his three languages to communicate in both oral and written language. Hoffmann (1999) maintains that trilingual means the presence of three languages in one speaker while quadrilingual involves mastering four languages either separately or simultaneously.

There are several types of multilingual speakers our focus in this study is on children acquiring two, three, four or five indigenous languages at a young age before the acquisition of English language in a school context that is children who are acquiring English as a second, third, fourth and , or fifth language. .

Research Questions

- 1) Can the Nigerian child acquire proficiency in three to five indigenous languages simultaneously with

English language?

- 2) Does multilingual education in indigenous languages hinder proficiency in English language?
- 3) Are Nigerian English monolingual children more proficient in the use of the English language than the multilingual children?
- 4) Does early multilingual education in Nigeria foster national unity and integration?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework is based on the nativist linguistic theory. The nativist linguistic theory postulates that every human being is born with innate language ability. Chomsky's nativist theory gave us insight into LAD, Chomsky expounds that language is innately acquired.

He affirms that humans come to the world equipped with language-learning system that a child comes to the world with capacity for language learning that is, a built-in tool which he terms language Acquisition Device (LAD). Thus, LAD allows the child to acquire linguistic skills rapidly.

He further explains that there is universal grammar shared between all human languages and from the universal grammar all languages take their likes.

Since this study is on early childhood language acquisition and it hypothesizes that the child has the ability to acquire any language at early stage between the age of 4 and 6, the nativist theory which stipulates that children are innately equipped with UG and LAD to acquire language rapidly, provides the framework for the study. The study seeks to find out how multilingual versus monolingual children acquire English proficiency. Chomskian theory which posits that children could acquire any language they are exposed to, provides the framework for the study. It gives a base for the researchers to investigate the capacity of LAD in children between the age four and five.

METHODOLOGY:

The multilingual setting of Port-Harcourt in River state of Nigeria provides a unique background for the study. Port-Harcourt is a densely populated state, endowed with international oil companies which attract citizens both within and outside the country. The company workers comprise people from various tribes in Nigeria. The study was pitched at shell camp where we have mixed citizens- Shell company staff in Port-Harcourt.

Subject

The subject of the study consists of children selected from different families in Nigeria. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select ten families living and working in Shell Company. A total of twenty children were selected for the study. There were two children from each family, the children were from different types of multilingual families. These were grouped into five. They include: Pentalingual, Quadrlingual, Trilingual and Bilingual families, two families for each group. The Monolingual families were also made up of two families

The subjects were grouped as follows: Pentalingual children who have acquired four languages and are enrolled to learn English as a fifth language in a school setting were in group- A Quadrlingual Children who have acquired three indigenous languages: at home and one from the immediate environment and were ready to learn English as a fourth language were in group- B. Trilingual children who were acquiring English as a third Language after the acquisition of two indigenous languages from both parent were in group C, Bilingual who have acquired their mother tongue and were enrolled to acquire English as a second language were in group D. The monolinguals were in group E.

The multilingual families adopted one parent one language strategy. Each parent speaks his or her language in turn to the child. The parents alternate their dialects in schedules. English was taught in a school context for all the subjects after the acquisition of the indigenous Languages. The indigenous languages include: Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Efik, Kanuri, Ibibio, Ikwere, Ogoni, Orogbu, Oron, kalabari, Ijaw, and Buguma.

The monolingual children were selected from the two different monolingual families. Although this group

lived in an English speaking community and their parents equally have their different dialects, yet English was the language at home. The families choose to speak solely English to their children. They believed that English as a sole language will sharpen their children's cognitive abilities. The children acquire English as their first language. English was the language at home. All the children in the groups live with grandparents, uncles, aunts and caregivers. They were all four years old at the time of study.

The subject comprises a total of twenty children in all. Twelve girls and eight boys. The twenty children were drawn from families from different ethnic groups, two from each family. The yardstick for stratification was the age of the subjects. The researchers, ensured that the children have not been taught English in a school setting before the commencement of the learning programme, only the monolinguals were exposed to English at home. See table 1 below for the groupings:

Table 1

Ethnic groups	Nature of acquisition	No of Subject/No of families		Age
Group A: Pentalingual Ogoni/Ikwere//kalabari/Ijaw speaking families.	English as a fifth language	4	2	4 years
Group B: Quadrilingual Families Kanuri/Yoruba/Efik/	English as a fourth language.	4	2	4 years
Group C: Trilingual families Buguma/Ibibio/ Orobo	English as a third language	4	2	4 years
Group D: Bilingual families Hausa/English Bilinguals	English as a second language	4	2	4 years
Group E: Monolinguals: English Monolinguals	English as a first language	4	2	4 years

The children were enrolled in the same school to learn English in a school context after the acquisition of their indigenous languages at home. The selection of the families and subject from shell camp is significant in that it is expected to have parents and children from different ethnic groups, the linguistic environment was also considered, to ensure uniformity in the quantitative approach adopted in the analysis. They were selected using a stratified random sampling technique, the yardstick for stratification was their age and Language status. The socio-economic status of the families and the level of proficiency in target language were considered.

The researchers ensured that the subjects were taught English by qualified teachers of Nigerian origin – three primary school teachers with BA certificate in English in collaboration with the researchers. The services of teachers who studied specified indigenous languages of the children under observation were employed to ensure that the multi-linguals have acquired their various indigenous languages.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

A pre-test on speaking, listening, reading and comprehension skills were conducted on the groups. The aim was to determine the children's proficiency in English language before the treatment i.e. teaching and learning English in school context. The test lasted for six hours. The researchers ensured that the subjects were on the same level of proficiency they were all exposed to an English linguistic environment but the multi-linguals were taught their indigenous languages at home.

The Programme lasted for 9 months (3 academic terms). The teaching centered on speaking, listening, pronunciation, reading and comprehension, and vocabulary development. They were taught for four hours a week. The children were also engaged in spontaneous interactions. They were assessed at intervals. The English language was used as the language in education and taught as a subject in the school context.

Instructive approach to communication and interactive child centered discourse, play songs, storytelling, folk tales, daily interaction with both teachers and researchers and structured observation were employed. Active recording of the children's language activities in school setting with tape recorder, as well as smartphone, filed notes were taken to capture spontaneous speeches. Daily entries of the children's activities were made as well.

Analytical procedure

A careful examination of the linguistic activities of the children were made. The services of four independent competent assessors with Masters in English Education were engaged.

The examiners in collaboration with the researchers investigated whether knowing indigenous languages impede English proficiency and/or whether acquiring English as a first language at early stage is more effective in early educational stage than acquiring it as a third or fourth or fifth language in a multilingual setting. The study also examined the overall effect of the acquisition of indigenous language on child social, emotional and mental development and the effect of these factors on national unity and integration.

The children participated in series of examinations, Such as: oral drills, pronunciation of vowels and consonants, blending of sounds into words, reading comprehension passages, spellings, sentence construction and storytelling. General behavior that is the social life was also observed, to determine the relevance to national integration and unity

The result of the study revealed ideas to the researchers about the subjects' level of proficiency in English as well their social behavior. The analysis of children's progress and their proficiency in English yielded some evident conclusion. There were fruitful and productive insights drawn from the study which can provide us with authentic information concerning monolinguals, bilinguals, trilinguals, quadrilinguals and pentalinguals and also enable us to determine the relationship between language and unity and national development. It will also enable the language planners to draw a more authentic curriculum for early childhood education in Nigeria. See table 2 below.

Table 2: Languageskillsof thesubjects

Sub Types	LS.			RS			SS			VD	
	NSG	NSU	%	NPG	NPRC	%	NWG	NWCP /U	%	NWA	
Pentalingual	100	89	89%	100	81	81	100	82	82	2034	
Quadriligul	100	83	83%	100	73	73%	100	78	78%	1689	
Trilingual	1000	78	78%	100	70	70%	100	69	69%	986	
Bilingual	100	67	67%	100	68	68%	100	65	65%	847	
Monolingual	100	58	58	100	62	62%	100	61	61%	715	

A total of 100 hundred passages made of fifty words a passage were used at the end of the study to examine the subjects' proficiency in the three language skills. The subjects were also asked to narrate stories, describe incidence, read poems and listen to folk tales to examine their listening skills and level of vocabulary.

KEYS;

LS—LISTENINGSKLLS

NSG;NUMBEROFSENTENCES GIVEN

NSG;NUMBEROFSENTENCES UNDERSTOOD

RS;READINGSKLLS;

NPG;NUMBEROFPASSAGESGIVEN

NPRC;NUMBEROFPASSAGESREAD/COMPREHENDED **SPS;**

SPEAKNG SKLLS;

NWG;NUMBER OFWORDS GIVEN

NUMBEROFWORDSCRECTLYPRONOUNCED/NUMBEROFSENTENCESCONSTRUCTEDCORRECTLY

VD;

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

NUMBER OFWORDS ACQUIRED

Findings

The result of the study revealed that three aspects of language skills were subconsciously acquired at early childhood stage, these include: listening speaking and reading skills.

At the level of speaking the study reveals that there is no significant difference among the five groups: monolingual, bilinguals, trilinguals, quadrilinguals and Pentalingual. The subjects were able to make distinctions between vowels and consonants in their oral presentation. For instance in test of orals, which involve pronunciation drills, diction, narration of stories, impromptu discussions and recitation of poems, the Monolinguals scored 61%, bilinguals, 65%, Trilinguals 69, Quadrilingual 78, while Pentalinguals scored 82%. There was no interference from mother tongues in the speech productions of the monolinguals while the multilinguals recorded minor interference from their dialects. The monolinguals were exposed to English language from birth. English was their first and only language.

On the other hand the trilinguals, quadrilinguals and Pentalinguals did better than the bilinguals and monolinguals in sentence construction because they possess richer vocabulary from their indigenous languages which filtered across the acquisition of the English words. They were exposed to different cultures and were able to code-switch ideas and concepts from one linguistic context to another. They narrated their stories fluently and in a more impressive articulation than the monolinguals.

The multilingual Nigerian child can acquire English as a third, fourth or fifth language competently before the age of five. English Monolinguals or English as a first language which most Nigerians clamour for is not a prerequisite for proficiency in English language. Acquiring English as the first language does not make the Nigerian child more proficient in English language. There is no correlation between acquiring English as a first language and proficiency in English language.

Group A, B and C subjects performed better than the monolinguals in oral drills, pronunciation of words, folktales and storytelling, at the end of the program. It was observed that LAD was active at the early childhood stage and can be activated by exposure to any language the child comes in contact with. It also reveals that LAD has been underutilized in Nigerian educational system. The Nigerian child has been restricted to one or two languages at the time LAD is most active.

But the knowledge of three, four or five languages does not hinder proficiency in the English language. The trilingual, quadrilingual and pentalinguals relate more with other children and with the teachers and the researchers. Their level of interaction in their environment were higher than the monolinguals and bilinguals. Indeed the bonded and interacted freely with other children in the environment thereby develop a solid foundation for national awareness, unity and integration.

The study reveals that exposure to languages by immersion in the linguistic environment enhance acquisition of speaking skills, while exposure to multiple languages build the child's vocabulary, communication and interactive level in a society.

The research finding at the level of listening reveals that the trilinguals, quadrilinguals and pentalinguals were more active listeners than the monolinguals and bilinguals. They exhibit a natural ability to listen actively in the class. They acquire better listening skills than the monolinguals. The monolinguals were passive listeners and were also easily distracted, probably because they assumed that they have complete mastery of the language at home. Thus their passive attitude towards learning activities affected their overall performance. From 100 passages read for the subjects in a year and 50 stories narrated, Group A were able to comprehend 89% of the passages listened to Group B, 83%, Group C, 78%, Group D, 67%, Group E 58%.

The trilinguals, quadrilinguals and pentalinguals were able to engage and sustain discourse situations with peers, teachers and researchers, longer than the monolinguals and bilinguals who lose interest easily in dialogue. The multilinguals possess better cognitive and analytical skills. They therefore did better than monolinguals and bilinguals in the area of multitasking activities in the class. These facts confirm Mathias (2006) proposition that the easiest way to learn a foreign language from birth is to teach the children three languages from birth. Allow the children to reproduce what they hear in their

linguistic environment before school age. Let them understand their environment and culture before you introduce a foreign culture to them. You can't manage what you can't measure .

As Group A, B and C were already fluent in two, three and four indigenous languages, they developed confidence to acquire a new language. From experience gained from their indigenous languages they develop strong thesis for the acquisition of a foreign language which group D and E lacked. They acquire the skills for solving minor problems and assigned tasks'

At the level of reading and comprehension, Groups A, B and C manifested a high degree of comprehension skills than Group D and E. They acquired rich vocabulary from their indigenous languages hence they were able to code-switch from their various indigenous languages to the English language. Their comprehension rate were high. Group A, B and C were able to switch from one language to the other, they quickly cross check with their linguistic contexts and give accurate interpretation of words from the passages read. At the level of reading and comprehension group A scored 81%, group B 73%, group C 70 %, group D 68, group E 68.

This shows that multilingualism enhances reading comprehension and vocabulary development, that is, knowing ones indigenous languages can help to increase the child's vocabulary in a foreign language. Since language exists in context the multilingual children infer and transfer knowledge gained from their indigenous languages to the learning of the English Language. The inference helped them learn faster and retain the new words acquired in English as a foreign language. The trilinguals, quadrilinguals and pentalinguals performed far better than the monolinguals and bilinguals in reading and comprehension and vocabulary development.

They have greater mental flexibility and analytical skills which helped them to understand passages read. They developed a better cognitive ability than the monolinguals and Bilinguals. The data recorded at total of 2034 English words acquired by pentalinguals in a year. quadrilinguals had 1689, trilinguals had 986 words, bilinguals had 847 words while monolinguals recorded 715 words.

Discussion

Acquisition of indigenous languages before the learning of English or any other foreign language does not impede mastery of the English language. The study reveals that the pentalinguals, quadrilinguals and trilinguals performed better than mono-lingual and bilinguals in all the three language skills. This implies that Children under the age of six have the capacity to acquire multi- languages and should not be limited to a particular language at a time LAD is still active.

Also limiting the language capacity of the Nigerian child by compelling them to acquire English language first before acquiring their mother tongue perpetuates national disintegration and disunity. Language unifies. Indeed the knowledge of multi-language helps one to develop the ease of learning. The multilingual groups interacted actively in the learning environment than the monolinguals. The knowledge of their indigenous language open doors that maybe closed for the monolinguals ie, active and healthy interaction within the linguistic environment and society at large. They have ideas and knowledge that are not available to monolinguals. A firm knowledge of three or four languages enable the children to feel at ease in the school environment and in the long run in the society. It gives them the natural flexibility and easy adaptation to the school context and the society, thereby eradicating segregation and tribalism – a great impediment to national unity and development.

The acquisition of at least four or five indigenous languages or a language each from each geopolitical zones in Nigeria before the introduction of English language will enable the Nigerian child develop love for fellow citizens and curb the level of disintegration in the school context and in the country as a whole.

Again it was observed that at early stage, children have greater mental flexibility and better memory to reproduce any language they are exposed to. Hence language planners should utilize such capacity while planning the curriculum in early childhood education before the innate ability wanes.

Multilingual education should be actively introduced in Nigerian system of education when the Nigerian child is prepared to receive and learn any language because fluency occurs faster and easier in childhood than adulthood. A nation that does not teach her citizen her language will never be united because language is unity.

Conclusion

Every normal child has the capacity to acquire language, limiting the Nigerian child to acquisition of English language at a stage when s/he can conveniently acquire three or more indigenous languages is an abuse. Language and culture are inseparable. Culture, Traditions and customs play vital roles in the child's total development because we model ourselves after our culture. Since Nigerian is a multilingual national trilingualism / quadrilingualism and pentalingualism should be the norms in early childhood education because knowing the indigenous languages before the acquisition of a foreign language helps the child develop the ease of learning and also develop habits like critical thinking, mental flexibility, and rich vocabulary. These skills help them to adapt easily in the school and the society.

Language is a factor in building strong and united nation, because language is unity. Knowledge of one's language and other indigenous languages would promote national unity. Embracing multilingualism in early childhood education will generate a powerful force for the promotion of national unity and national consciousness and in the long run facilitate the mobilization of the national resources for national development.

The National language policy/ should therefore introduce active trilingual, quadrilingual/ pentalingual education, The Nigerian child should acquire at least five indigenous languages- a language from each geopolitical zones in Nigeria before the introduction of English language.

English as well as any other foreign language should also be introduced in school, as a fourth or fifth language, at the later stage of child language acquisition between age 4 and 6. A child should acquire his or her culture and language before the acquisition of any foreign language. This will help them develop national awareness at the early stage of life. Nigeria is a multilingual nation hence the Nigerian child should strive to acquire their indigenous languages first before s/he acquires any foreign language. This activity will instill both cultural and national awareness in every Nigerian child.

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