

Influence of Mother Tongue on Acquisition of English Language in the 21st Century and Implication for Adult Learners

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language in the 21st century and its likely implications for adult learners. The study adopted 'PRECEDE Theory' as its theoretical framework, descriptive cross-sectional design, and simple random sampling technique which was utilized in selecting 50 consenting adult English language instructors from Ibadan Metropolis. Research questions were analyzed using content analysis. Findings show that there are factors influencing the rise of English Language in the 21st century, influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English Language in the 21st century affects adult learners. It was recommended that suitable English language teaching and learning materials, as well as a conducive learning environment for acquisition of English language by adult learners be provided by the Federal and various State governments in Nigeria and beyond.

Keywords: Adult Learners, English Language, Mother tongue, Implication, 21st century.

Introduction

English language as a global medium of communication among different races has been found to be heightened with the advent of digital technologies which has helped to compress most English language series into audio-visual teaching and learning compilation, e- books, audio books, and other English language teaching/learning aids, with the intent of improving the quality of learning among second language adopters whether young or adults, thereby making them effective and efficient with respect to learning English Language with ease (Ellis, 2010).

However, the learning and teaching of English language has been found to be greatly influenced by mother tongue in the classroom setting with respect to spelling of words in English language, pronunciation of words, use of grammatical tenses, expression and composure of most English language tutors and learners (Freeman, Katz, Gomez & Burns, 2015). The above assertion made Ellis (2010) to describe Second Language Acquisition as the subconscious or conscious process by which a language (e.g. English language) other than the mother tongue is learnt in a natural or a tutored setting.

Besides, Cameron (2012) posited that the proficiency of most adults in English language in the 21st century has been substantially marginal due to the absence or inadequacy of teaching aids used for English language, teachers' inadequacy with respect to understanding the impact of mother tongue on any second language acquisition (e.g. English language), non-use of any specific teaching aids for English

language with an excuse of its preparation being time consuming, non-conducive teaching environment etc.

Nonetheless, it has also been discovered that if English language teaching and learning process is amplified with mother tongue, the progress report of teaching English language will not only be boosted, but also a positive performance and effective speedy acquisition by most English language learners (including adults) will be recorded (Ellis, Crystal & Johnson, 1999).

The English language teaching and learning process demands that the English language instructor inculcates the habit of speaking in the learners' mother tongue to explain some knotty words while teaching English language to the learners, especially adult learners, as most adults are addicted to their mother tongue which makes the acquisition of English language more difficult than for children who were brought up in the English language learning setting and process which makes it easier for them to assimilate, comprehend and communicate in English language as fast and as much as possible as they grow up (Cameron, 2012).

Aim and Objectives of the Paper

The broad goal of this paper is to explore the influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language and its implication for adult learners in the 21st century. The specific objectives of this paper are;

1. to explore reasons for the rise of English Language in the 21st century
2. to investigate influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language by adult learners in the 21st century.

3. to enumerate the implications of influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language for adult learners in the 21st century.

Moreover, to accomplish the above aim and specific objective, the following questions will be examined:

1. What are the reasons for the rise of English Language in the 21st century?
2. Are there influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language by adult learners in the 21st century?
3. What are the implications of influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language for adult learners in the 21st century?

Research Hypothesis

1. There will be no significant gender difference in terms of influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language by adult learners in the 21st century in Ibadan Metropolis.

Objective 1: Factors influencing the rise of English Language in the 21st century

The global official language of communication in global arena in past decades was French Language, not until the 21st century where English language was considered appropriate and adopted in most international podium because of the effortlessness of its alphabets, reliability in its order and worldwide usage (Patrick, Asratie & Rachel, 2013). Due to the global relevance of English language in the 21st century, most African countries with French ancestry are now officially declaring English language as their official language e.g. President Bongo Odimbwa of Gabon in 2010 publicly declared that English language is “a necessary working language”, because it has been found to be a paramount necessity for diversifying partnerships and productivity in the 21st century (Hasselriis, 2010).

Another major factor undermining the influence of mother tongue, but promoting the spread of English language in the 21st century has been found to be a strong connection between the reality of globalization and use of English language for comprehension of the globalization process, just as it has been discovered that the dominance of two successive English-speaking empires, British and American continues today with the new virtual empire of the internet, further aids the swiftness at

which English language has spread into other continents (Crystal, 2004; Dudeney, 2007; Mydans, 2007).

Succinctly, the influence of mother tongue on the acquisition of English language seem to have great implications for most adult learners in the 21st century as they are limited in terms of participation in most political, economic, religious and educational spheres globally. For instance, Crystal (2003) asserted that politically, English is being used as an official or working language of most international political gatherings throughout the world, just as the triumph of English (2011) posited that 85% of international organizations use English as the language of official communications, while Neeley (2012) affirmed that economically, “the global language of business and economics is English Language”.

The above assertion implies that adults who have not acquired English language are bound to be governed either positively or negatively by others who are good at comprehending and communicating in English language. Although, the influence of mother tongue has been found to be very potent, as it is a better means of positively influencing younger individuals towards adopting most societal acceptable norms, however this influence seem very limited, as it strongly applies to local and traditional setting (Yasir, 2016).

Objective 2. Influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language by adult learners in the 21st century

The relationship between mother tongue on the acquisition of any other language (e.g. English language) has been found to be inseparable, as several scholars have concluded that it is quite impossible to master a language without indulging in its culture (Merah and Tahraoui, 2019). Mother tongue helps to better communicate what is being taught in English language on the part of the teacher, while it helps the adult English language learners to develop a rich vocabulary and master it at the level of the four skills; speaking, writing, listening and reading.

Obiegbu (2015) opined that the influence of mother tongue is stronger in most adults and certainly interferes with their ability to acquire English language, however should these adults succeed in acquiring English language, their community certainly experiences a positive development. The changing and fast evolving times have witnessed the growing importance of English language in all

spheres of life with conscious and unconscious use of English words in our everyday conversation, which has made some adults cranky due to their attached bond to their mother tongue which has been encouraged by the society over a long period of time.

Therefore, living in the era of globalization, adults inevitably must learn to comprehend and communicate in English language, as well as engage in other cultural aspects it carries within because global citizenship is becoming a mandatory requirement for countries as well as individuals, because contemporary economies are more globally integrated than ever before with visible manifestations in trade, flow of capital and the openness of the labour market (Saxena&Omoniyi, 2008).

Objective 3. Implications of influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language for adult learners in the 21st century.

The implications associated with the influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language for adult learners in the 21st century seem relatively divergent and different from one adult to another. English language has become a vast and interconnected language web through technology and travel with widespread business and social networks, as people from all language backgrounds crave to find a mutual medium for communication. As a result, acquisition of English language in the 21st century has become compulsory for all adults, including children because English language has become a universal language that is being taught all over the world, due to the increasing demand for English-speaking applicants which has made it an invaluable skill to master in order to have more befitting career opportunities (Xue&Zuo, 2013).

As the world changes and advance in different aspects, an adult's deliberate choice to compliment his/her mother tongue with acquisition of English language in the 21st century is the only way to survive in this present globalized world with increase in education, economy, sports, entertainment and training options, and prospect in tourism. The implications associated with acquisition of English language for adult learners in the 21st century include:

a. Possibility of Personal and Community development

Another helpful implication associated with an adult acquiring English language in the 21st century despite the strong influence of their mother

tongue is that there is a sure guarantee that personal and community development will certainly spring up because acquiring English language in addition to their mother tongue will expose these adults advanced features that will trigger ability to ask questions from whoever they have elected to rule over them with respect to dividends of democracy aimed at sustainable development in their immediate communities (Obiegbo, 2015). Hence, acquisition of English by an adult does not in any way negatively affect the conservation and influence of mother tongue, rather the influence of mother tongue further strengthen the easy learning and total comprehension of English language in the 21st century.

b. Possibility of Access to formal education

If an adult acquires English language in addition to his mother tongue, the possibility of him/her to acquire formal education in the 21st century becomes higher, as most educational texts and other learning/teaching materials are majorly written in English language. Therefore, Merah and Tahraoui (2019) argued that acquisition of English language by an adult learner in the 21st century could be for globalization or westernization, but it is capable of bringing about a positive transformation to all segments of the society, boosting economic viability, as well as reduce possibility of disease spread, etc.

Theoretical Framework: Precede Theory

The Predisposing, Reinforcing, Enabling Constructs in Educational/ Environmental Diagnosis and Evaluation (PRECEDE) theory was adopted to further buttress and simplify the whole thrust of this work. *PRECEDE* theoretical framework is a planning theory as well as a model, as it does not predict or explain factors linked to the outcomes of interest, but offers a framework for identifying intervention strategies to address identifiable factors that may help to explore the influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language and its implication for adult learners in the 21st century.

This theory, now considered a model was developed by Green, Kreuter, and associates in 1970s, and also provides a road map for designing education and training programs because it guides planners through a process that starts with desired outcomes and works backwards to identify a mix of strategies for achieving objectives. However, because the theory views social and health behaviours as being influenced by both individual and environmental forces, it helps educators and

social work practitioners plan programs that exemplify an ecological and standard perspective (Glanz, Rimer & Lewis, 2002).

To conduct educational and *social assessment of the adult learner progress with respect to his/her level of acquisition of English language*, the English language instructor may use multiple data collection activities (e.g., key informant interviews, focus groups, participant observation, surveys etc.) to understand the *adult learners' perceived needs*. Also, other *educational assessment to be adopted by the English language instructor* may include periodic examination performance analysis to prioritize the adult learners' English language acquisition needs, so as to establish program goals and objectives, while *behavioural and environmental assessment will help to identify factors that are both internal and external to the adult learners' which might be deterrent to their acquisition of English language in the 21st century* (Glanz, Rimer and Lewis, (2002).

Method

Three research questions were examined through a descriptive cross-sectional survey, with the aid of a key informant interview guide contains three (3) sections designed in line with the aim of the study which is to explore the influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language and its implication for adult learners in the 21st century. Section A examined the factors influencing the rise of English Language in the 21st century; while Section B explored influences of mother tongue on acquisition of English language by adult learners in the 21st century and while Section C scrutinized the **implications** of influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language for adult learners in the 21st century. The sample used was drawn from the population of adult English language instructors who engage in learning English Language within Ibadan Metropolis, simple random sampling technique was used to select fifty (50) consenting adult English language instructors who participate in the study, and the period of fieldwork execution was between 10th of March 2020 to 20th of April, 2020. Descriptive statistics and content analysis were used for data analysis and thereafter the findings of the study were stated. Most of the key informants who participated in the study in Ibadan Metropolis, comprise a mixture of both Muslims and Christians, of which most are married with children.

Research Objective 1: factors influencing the rise of English Language in the 21st century.

On factors influencing the rise of English Language in the 21st century:

The key informants interviewed demonstrated a mastery of the factors influencing the rise of English language in the 21st century, as they explained that the rise of English language in the 21st century is important for global positive inter-boundary social interaction, even development and better economic positioning leading to an egalitarian society and self-reliance.

Source: Fieldwork 2020.

On categories of learners who strive to acquire English language education in the 21st century:

The key informants interviewed explained that they are mostly adults who have for one reason or the other lost the opportunity to go through formal education in their childhood and adolescent stage, but are now opportune to either travel out of Nigeria and/or now knows the importance of acquiring English language education in this 21st century due to the advent of different media (e.g. mobile phone, laptop, movies etc.) whose usage is often in English language. However, it was restated that these adult learners are often of low retentive memory, shy and some with regrets associated with their inability to commune in English language.

Source: Fieldwork 2020.

On the rise in acquisition of English language by adults in Africa in the 21st century:

The key informants maintained that the rise in acquisition of English language will likely continue into the foreseeable future because of supposed benefits that can be derived by most Africans and African countries who are able to communicate in English language. Also, there is a possibility that English language dominance might

become global across different continents in no distant time, hence Africans who do not have the ability to write, read, comprehend and/or speak English language might not be able to find suitable work, obtain primary, secondary and tertiary education, and might not be able to contend favourably in the global economy.

Source: Fieldwork 2020.

Research Objective 2: Influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language by adult learners in the 21st Century.

On whether the acquisition of English language by adult learners in the 21st Century is being influenced by mother tongue at Ibadan Metropolis:

Most of the key informants asserted that acquisition of English language by most striving adults in the 21st century (for instance, Ibadan Metropolis) is not as easy as people think, as it comes with great challenges which ranges from illiteracy on the part of the adult learner, lack of understanding of elementary English language words, society unfair remarks over blunders made by most adults who dared to commune in English language and to crown it up, the immutable influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language education by most Adults.. They mentioned other challenges like shortage of English language instructors, inadequate family support and neglect by government.

Source: Fieldwork 2020.

On whether there is an impact of the influence of mother tongue on the acquisition of English language by adult learners in the 21st Century:

The key informants interviewed for this study, all confessed that there is certainly an impact of the influence of mother tongue on the acquisition of English language by adult learners in the 21st century, as such impact could be negative or positive depending on the English language

teacher handling the English language learning process and setting. To this end, the key informants asserted that the negative influence of mother tongue can be greatly felt when adult English language learners want to pronounce some elementary or complex English language words, while the positive influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language by most adult learners is that certain strange or unfamiliar words in English language can be explained or simplified using mother tongue by the English language instructor.

Source: Fieldwork 2020.

Research Objective 3: Implications related to the influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language for adult learners in the 21st century.

On the implications related to the influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language for adult learners in the 21st century at Ibadan metropolis:

The key informants interviewed for this study responded that there are multiple implications related to the influence of mother tongue on the acquisition of English language for adult learners in the 21st century. They posited that should adults in the various villages/local setting within Ibadan metropolis, Nigeria and beyond be able to acquire English language, the divergent inter-personal differences and disputes with other tribes, economic woes and challenges, financial exploitations and community development stagnation would have been resolved with ease. Also, they maintain that there were occasions when these adult learners who are striving to acquire English language in this 21st century affirmed that their inability to write, read or communicate effectively in English language have deterred them from receiving government support.

Source: Fieldwork 2020.

On the likely implications of influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language for adult learners in the 21st century at Ibadan metropolis:

The key informants interviewed for this study stated that the influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language by adult learners in the 21st century comes with social, security, economic and political implications. They further posited that adults in the 21st century who are unable to comprehend English language are liable to experience social isolation, become more involved in communal crises, susceptible to economic exploitation and political marginalization by deceptive politicians in this democratic era.

Source: Fieldwork 2020.

Results

The findings of the study revealed that more adults are willing to acquire English language in the 21st century irrespective of their age and influence of mother tongue, as it was discovered that many exploitations and political marginalization in different communities could have been avoided, if adults representing their communities were able to read, write and commune in English language. Also, findings revealed that due to the absence of well merged influence of mother tongue with pronunciations of words in English language by the English language instructor, more harm have been done on adults who strive to acquire English language in the 21st century, especially with respect to pronunciations of English language by most adults.

Furthermore, findings showed that the main factor behind the strong influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language is respect for traditional practices by adults in the 21st century, as the fear of being isolated or stigmatized by the tradocultural society has prevented many adults who strong desire to acquire English language from doing so in this 21st century.

Likewise, it was also discovered that most adult traders who are mostly women (men inclusive too) at Ibadan metropolis long to acquire English language education if rendered at little or no cost to be able to increase their customer patronage, minimize financial exploitations, harassment of all sorts and other economic challenges from both arm bandits and

corrupt security personnel. From the responses of the key informants interviewed for this study, one can infer that the influence of mother tongue on acquisition of English language by adult learners in the 21st century certainly comes with diverse implications, as most adults seem fed up with existing financial exploitation, social isolation and political marginalization they have experienced thus far, hence more adults are willing to acquire English language in the 21st century.

Recommendations

With respect to the outcome of the study, the following recommendations were tendered:

1. Adequate English language teaching and learning materials, as well as a conducive learning environment for acquisition of English language by adult English language learners be provided by the Federal and various State governments in Nigeria and beyond.
2. English language instructors must adopt learner-centred teaching methods in line with the individual differences and challenges experienced by most adult learners who are striving to learn, comprehend or pronounce words in English language.

Conclusion

The use of suitable learner-centred teaching methods and appropriate learning English language materials by English language instructor while teaching English language to most adult English language learners will not only help to complement the influence of mother tongue on the acquisition of English language by most adults in the 21st century, but will also help to mitigate wrong comprehension of words in English language by the adult English language learners in different spheres of life, be it economy, education, social, inter-personal and cross-cultural boundaries etc.

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