

TEACHER PREPARATION AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN MOTHER-TONGUE EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA

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Abstract

Mother-tongue and multilingual education depends greatly on the quality of teachers who implement it. Teachers need more than knowledge of a local language. They require linguistic, pedagogical, cultural, multilingual, assessment, and material-development competences. They also require continuing professional learning that enables them to respond to changing classroom needs. The role of initial teacher preparation and continuing professional learning in strengthening mother-tongue education in Nigeria the competencies required by teachers working in multilingual classrooms and examin professional learning approaches such as workshops, seminars, mentoring, peer learning, classroom observation, professional learning communities, action research, and digital learning. also challenges associated with implementing mother-tongue education, including gaps between teacher preparation and classroom practice, limited learning materials, multilingual classroom realities, assessment difficulties, terminology development, and the need for sustained institutional support. The discussion informed by Cummins' perspective on bilingual education, a sociocultural perspective on learning, and the broader multilingual education perspective. UNESCO's recent guidance places multilingual education within a broader framework of inclusive and equitable education and emphasizes appropriate teacher preparation and professional support. The paper proposes an author-developed Mother-Tongue Teacher Preparation and Continuing Learning Framework (MTTPCF). The proposed framework integrates seven areas: language competence, pedagogical competence, multilingual competence, cultural competence, material-development competence, assessment competence, and continuing professional learning. The mother-tongue education should

not be viewed only as a language-policy issue. It should be treated as an educational system requiring appropriately prepared teachers, suitable learning resources, relevant assessment practices, and continuous professional support.

Keywords: Mother-tongue education, multilingual education, teacher preparation, continuing professional learning, teacher competence, language education

Introduction

Language is an important part of teaching and learning. Learners' ability to understand classroom instruction is closely related to the language used for teaching. For this reason, language choice in education has implications for participation, access to learning, identity, and educational inclusion. UNESCO has long recognized the importance of linguistic diversity in education. Its Education in a Multilingual World position paper discusses language of instruction, mother-tongue instruction, bilingual education, multilingual education, and the relationship between language and educational. More recent UNESCO guidance continues this position. Languages Matter: Global Guidance on Multilingual Education presents multilingualism as an important consideration in educational policy and practice and provides guidance for education systems seeking to respond to learners' linguistic backgrounds. Mother-tongue education is particularly important in multilingual societies. However, the use of a local or familiar language in education does not automatically guarantee effective learning. Teachers must be able to use the language for classroom explanation, interaction, literacy development, assessment, and subject teaching. They also need to understand how learners' other languages can support or affect learning. This issue is important in Nigeria. The Federal Republic of Nigeria's National Policy on Education recognizes the educational role of the mother tongue and the language of the immediate environment. The sixth edition was published in 2013 by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council. The policy context, however, creates an important practical question. If a language is selected for educational use, are teachers adequately prepared to teach through that language? The question is important because classroom language practices are more complex than policy statements may suggest. A teacher may work with learners who have different home languages, different levels of proficiency,

and different experiences with the language of instruction. The teacher may therefore need to use multilingual strategies while maintaining the objectives of the curriculum. Research and policy literature also indicate that teacher preparation is a central part of successful mother-tongue-based multilingual education. Ball (2011), for example, reviews evidence on mother-tongue-based bilingual and multilingual education and discusses the importance of language, educational practice, materials, and the wider community context. Teacher preparation, however, should not end when teachers complete their initial training. Teachers encounter new curricula, new technologies, different learner needs, and new classroom challenges throughout their careers. Continuing professional learning can therefore help teachers strengthen their knowledge and adapt their classroom practices. This paper focuses on the relationship between initial teacher preparation and continuing professional learning in mother-tongue education. It argues that both are necessary. Initial preparation establishes the foundation, while continuing professional learning helps teachers develop, apply, evaluate, and update their professional knowledge. The central argument of the paper is that mother-tongue education should be understood as a teacher-dependent multilingual education system. Its success requires teachers who possess appropriate language, pedagogical, cultural, multilingual, assessment, and material-development competences and who receive sustained professional support.

Objectives of the Paper

The paper aims to: Examine the role of teacher preparation in mother-tongue-based multilingual education; Identify the major linguistic, pedagogical, cultural, multilingual, assessment, and material-development competences required by teachers; Examine approaches to continuing professional learning that can support teachers in multilingual classrooms; Identify major challenges affecting the preparation and continuing development of mother-tongue teachers in Nigeria; and Propose a Mother-Tongue Teacher Preparation and Continuing Learning Framework (MTTPCF) for strengthening teacher preparation and professional learning in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Mother-Tongue-Based Multilingual Education

Mother-Tongue Education

Mother-tongue education generally refers to education in which a learner's first, home, or familiar community language is used as a language of learning and instruction. However, the concept requires care because a learner's first language is not always the same as the language used by the wider community. In multilingual societies, children may grow up using more than one language. Therefore, mother-tongue education can be understood within the wider concept of bilingual or multilingual education. UNESCO's 2003 position paper places mother-tongue instruction within a wider framework of linguistic diversity, bilingual education, multilingual education, and language rights. Ball (2011) mother-tongue-based bilingual and multilingual education as an approach that recognizes the linguistic and cultural resources that children bring to education. For this reason, this paper uses the term mother-tongue-based multilingual education when discussing educational that begin from learners' familiar languages while also recognizing the planned educational role of additional languages.

Mother-Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in Nigeria

Nigeria's National Policy on Education provides a policy basis for the educational use of Nigerian languages. The 2013 sixth edition is the relevant policy document used in this paper. The existence of a language policy, however, does not by itself guarantee successful implementation. A functioning mother-tongue education system requires teachers who can teach through the selected language, appropriate instructional materials, suitable terminology, assessment procedures, and continuing professional support. The issue is therefore broader than the selection of a language. It involves the relationship among policy, teachers, classroom practice, materials, assessment, and professional learning. This paper conceptualizes the relationship as: Language policy - teacher preparation - classroom practice - assessment - reflection - continuing professional learning and improved practice. The teacher occupies a central position in this relationship because policy is ultimately implemented through classroom interaction.

Theoretical Foundation

The paper draws on three complementary perspectives: Cummins' perspective on bilingual education and language learning; a sociocultural

perspective on learning; and the multilingual education perspective. The three perspectives are complementary rather than competing.

Cummins' Perspective on Bilingual Education

provides an important theoretical basis for understanding bilingual education. Language, Power and Pedagogy examines bilingual education, language proficiency, assessment, classroom interaction, and the relationship between language and educational development. A key implication of this perspective is that learners' languages should not necessarily be treated as unrelated resources. Knowledge and academic development established through one language can have implications for learning through another language. For mother-tongue education, this suggests that strengthening learners' linguistic and academic resources in a familiar language can contribute to their wider educational development. The implication for teachers is important. need to understand how learners' languages relate to learning rather than treating the home language simply as a barrier to learning an additional language.

Sociocultural Perspective

A sociocultural perspective learning as a process that develops through interaction with other people and within particular social and cultural contexts. Language is therefore not merely a means of transferring information. It is also connected to identity, culture, participation, and social interaction. This perspective is relevant to mother-tongue education because learners bring cultural and linguistic knowledge from their homes and communities into the classroom. Teachers can use this existing knowledge as a foundation for new learning. Teacher preparation should therefore include cultural competence as well as language competence.

Multilingual Education Perspective

The multilingual education perspective provides the broader framework for this paper. UNESCO's 2003 position paper recognizes multilingualism as an important issue for education policy and discusses bilingual and multilingual education, mother-tongue instruction, and language of instruction. UNESCO's 2025 guidance develops this position by providing current principles and practical guidance for integrating multilingual education into policy and educational practice. This perspective is

particularly relevant to Nigeria because educational settings may involve several languages. Teachers therefore need to understand linguistic diversity and make appropriate decisions about language use. The perspective also helps distinguish code-switching from translanguaging. Code-switching generally describes movement between named languages during communication, whereas translanguaging refers more broadly to the flexible use of a person's linguistic resources to communicate and construct meaning. The two concepts should therefore not be treated as identical. The argument of this paper is not that teachers should mix languages without purpose. Rather, multilingual practices should be used deliberately to support comprehension, participation, learning, and the development of additional-language competence.

Relationship among the Perspectives

The three perspectives contribute different but connected insights. Cummins' perspective helps explain relationships between language and academic development. The sociocultural perspective highlights interaction, culture, identity, and learners' existing knowledge. The multilingual education perspective provides a broader framework for managing linguistic diversity within education. Together, they support the central proposition of this paper: Effective mother-tongue education requires teachers who can connect language, pedagogy, culture, multilingual practice, assessment, and learner development.

Teacher Competences for Mother-Tongue Education

Teacher competence is central to the implementation of mother-tongue education. Knowledge of a local language is important, but it is not sufficient. Mata (2014) argues for the development of professional standards and specific pedagogical competencies for mother-tongue teacher education. The study specifically addresses competencies required in initial teacher preparation. Based on the literature reviewed in this paper, seven interconnected areas of competence are identified: language competence; pedagogical competence; multilingual competence; cultural competence; material-development competence; assessment competence; and continuing professional learning competence.

Language Competence

Teachers who teach through a mother tongue or local language require adequate knowledge of that language. This includes vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, discourse, literacy, and appropriate academic language. However, everyday fluency is not necessarily the same as instructional competence. A teacher may speak a language fluently but still need additional preparation to explain abstract academic concepts through that language. Teachers should therefore be prepared to adapt language to learners' age, educational level, and learning needs.

Pedagogical Competence

Pedagogical competence refers to the ability to turn subject knowledge into effective learning experiences. It includes lesson planning, classroom management, questioning, explanation, learner participation, and differentiation, teaching strategies, use of learning materials, assessment, and feedback. Mata's (2014) study the importance of identifying specific pedagogical competencies in mother-tongue teacher education. For mother-tongue education, these competencies need to be applied within the linguistic and cultural context of the learners.

Multilingual Competence

Teachers in multilingual classrooms need an understanding of how different languages affect classroom interaction and learning. They should be able to identify learners' linguistic backgrounds and make appropriate decisions about language use. This does not mean that teachers must have equal proficiency in all languages spoken by their learners. Rather, they need sufficient multilingual awareness and strategies for managing linguistic diversity.

Cultural Competence

Language is connected to culture. Teachers therefore need knowledge of the cultural contexts associated with the languages used in their classrooms. Cultural competence includes awareness of local knowledge, communication patterns, stories, social practices, and community experiences that can contribute to teaching and learning. UNESCO's multilingual education work connects multilingual education with linguistic and cultural diversity.

Material-Development Competence

Mother-tongue education requires appropriate learning resources. Teachers should therefore have basic skills for selecting, adapting, developing, and evaluating learning materials. These may include reading passages, vocabulary lists, stories, worksheets, pictures, charts, audio recordings, and digital materials. Teachers should not be expected to replace government or publisher-produced materials. Rather, they should be able to supplement and adapt materials when necessary. UNESCO's recent guidance identifies learning resources as an important component of multilingual education.

Assessment Competence

Teachers need to determine whether learners understand what they have been taught. In multilingual classrooms, language can affect assessment performance. A learner may understand a concept but have difficulty expressing that understanding in the language required by the assessment. Teachers therefore need appropriate assessment strategies and an understanding of the relationship between language and assessment. Formative assessment is particularly important because it allows teachers to identify learning difficulties during instruction and adjust their teaching.

Continuing Professional Learning Competence

Teacher competence should not be regarded as complete when a teacher graduates. Teachers continue to encounter new curricula, technologies, learner needs, and classroom challenges. They therefore require opportunities for workshops, seminars, mentoring, peer learning, classroom observation, professional learning communities, action research, and digital learning. Evidence from Nigeria's Learning Lab initiative supports contextualized, school-based, collaborative teacher development involving mentoring and cycles of inquiry.

Initial Teacher Preparation

Initial teacher preparation provides the foundation for professional practice. For mother-tongue education, teacher preparation should combine language knowledge, pedagogy, classroom practice, cultural understanding, multilingual awareness, and assessment.

Linguistic Knowledge

Trainees should study the structure and use of the language they are expected to teach. Preparation may include grammar, vocabulary, phonology, literacy, discourse, and academic language. Where languages have significant internal variation, trainees should also develop awareness of language variation.

Teaching through the Target Language

Teacher trainees should learn how to teach through the target language. Training should include lesson planning, micro-teaching, demonstration lessons, supervised teaching practice, material development, and assessment.

Multilingual Classroom Management

Teacher education should reflect real classroom conditions. Trainees should learn how to: identify learners' language backgrounds; support learners with different levels of language proficiency; use multilingual resources appropriately; explain difficult concepts; manage movement between languages; and support additional-language development.

Language Mediation

Teachers may sometimes need to mediate between the language used by learners and another language used in textbooks, assessment, or wider communication. Teacher preparation should therefore provide basic language-mediation skills.

Teaching Practice

Teaching practice should provide opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real classrooms. Where possible, trainees preparing for mother-tongue education should undertake practice in schools where the target language is actually used.

Community and Cultural Knowledge

Teacher education should also provide meaningful connections with local communities. Community members may contribute stories, oral histories, local terminology, cultural knowledge, and other resources relevant to

teaching. This can strengthen the relationship between school learning and learners' existing knowledge.

Initial teacher preparation cannot address every professional challenge teachers will encounter. Continuing professional learning refers to structured and informal activities through which teachers develop their knowledge, skills, confidence, and reflective practice after initial preparation. The Nigerian Learning Lab provides a relevant example. UNICEF reports that the model used school-based, contextualized and needs-based teacher development, instructional leadership, mentoring, collaborative learning, and cycles of inquiry. Such approaches are relevant to mother-tongue education because teachers often face context-specific language and classroom problems.

Workshops

Workshops can provide concentrated opportunities for teachers to learn new approaches and develop teaching materials. For mother-tongue education, workshops may focus on: local-language literacy; terminology; lesson planning; multilingual pedagogy; assessment; material development; and digital resources. However, workshops should be supported by opportunities for classroom application and follow-up.

Seminars

Seminars can provide opportunities to discuss research, policy, curriculum, and classroom experience. Universities, colleges of education, schools, education authorities, and professional associations can organize seminars on mother-tongue education and multilingual pedagogy.

Mentoring

Mentoring connects less-experienced teachers with experienced colleagues. Mentors can support lesson planning, classroom observation, material development, assessment, and reflection. UNICEF's Nigerian Learning Lab included mentoring and collaborative learning within its school-based professional-development model.

Peer Learning

Teachers can learn from one another through collaborative lesson planning, peer observation, material sharing, and joint problem-solving. Peer learning

can be particularly useful where teachers work with the same language or similar classroom conditions.

Classroom Observation

Classroom observation can provide direct evidence about teaching practice. It should not be used only for inspection. It can also serve as a professional learning activity. Teachers can observe language use, questioning, classroom management, assessment, and material use and then discuss the observed lesson with colleagues.

Digital Professional Learning

Digital technologies provide additional opportunities for teacher development. Teachers can use online courses, webinars, electronic resources, recorded lessons, digital libraries, messaging groups, and language resources. However, digital professional learning must consider differences in access to devices, electricity, connectivity, and digital skills.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities provide a structured way for teachers to learn collaboratively. A professional learning community may involve teachers from the same school, subject area, language group, district, or professional network. Members can identify classroom problems, share experience, examine evidence, plan lessons, and evaluate solutions. Soares and Galisson (2021) examined professional learning communities using survey data from more than 2,300 preschool and primary teachers in Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, and Nigeria. Their study found relationships between aspects of PLC participation and student-centred teaching practices. This evidence is relevant because it includes Nigerian teachers and therefore provides a stronger basis for discussing PLCs in the Nigerian context. A mother-tongue education PLC could focus on: language and literacy; local-language terminology; multilingual classroom strategies; instructional materials; assessment; language mediation; digital language resources; and classroom-based research.

Action Research and Teacher Development

Action research provides another approach to professional learning. It involves identifying a classroom problem, collecting information, trying an

intervention, observing the result, and reflecting on the outcome. Teachers could investigate questions such as: How does the use of local-language reading material affect learner participation? How does planned multilingual practice affect comprehension? Which vocabulary causes difficulty for learners? How can bilingual assessment support learner understanding? How can locally produce digital materials support language learning? Action research is useful because it connects professional learning with actual classroom problems. However, teachers should receive appropriate methodological support from teacher educators, universities, colleges of education, and education authorities.

Challenges of Teacher Preparation and Professional Learning in Nigeria

The implementation of mother-tongue education involves several interconnected challenges.

Gap between Preparation and Classroom Practice

Teacher preparation may provide theoretical knowledge without providing enough opportunities to practice multilingual teaching in real classrooms. UNICEF's Nigerian Learning Lab was developed partly in response to concerns about teaching quality and limitations of conventional teacher-development approaches. Its model sought to make professional learning more contextualized and connected to classroom practice.

Limited Professional Development

Teachers need regular opportunities to update their knowledge. Professional development that is occasional or disconnected from classroom needs may have limited value. The Nigerian Learning Lab provides evidence supporting more contextualized, school-based professional learning.

Learning Materials

Mother-tongue education requires textbooks, readers, teacher guides, assessment resources, terminology resources, and other materials. Where such materials are limited, teachers may need to adapt available resources.

Linguistic Diversity

The language selected for instruction may not be the strongest language of every learner. Teachers therefore need preparation for multilingual

classrooms rather than preparation based on an assumption of linguistic uniformity.

Terminology Development

Teaching subjects through local languages may require appropriate terminology. Language specialists, teachers, curriculum developers, subject specialists, and communities may need to collaborate in developing and validating terminology.

Assessment

Assessment may become difficult where the language of instruction differs from the language used in assessment. Teachers need guidance on how to distinguish language difficulty from lack of subject knowledge.

Institutional and Financial Support

Teacher preparation, professional learning, material development, assessment, language research, and digital resources require institutional and financial support. Mother-tongue education therefore requires cooperation among government, teacher education institutions, schools, communities, researchers, language specialists, and other relevant stakeholders.

Proposed Mother-Tongue Teacher Preparation and Continuing Learning Framework (MTTPCF)

The Mother-Tongue Teacher Preparation and Continuing Learning Framework (MTTPCF) is proposed in this paper as an original conceptual synthesis by the authors. It is important to state clearly that the MTTPCF is not presented as an established framework in the literature. It is developed from the literature reviewed in this paper and adapted to the Nigerian mother-tongue education context. The framework contains seven interconnected components:

Language Competence

Teachers develop strong knowledge and practical command of the language used for instruction.

Pedagogical Competence

Teachers develop the ability to plan, teach, manage classrooms, explain concepts, use appropriate teaching strategies, and support learner participation.

Multilingual Competence

Teachers develop the ability to understand and manage linguistic diversity and to use multiple languages purposefully when appropriate.

Cultural Competence

Teachers develop knowledge of the cultural contexts associated with learners' languages and communities.

Material-Development Competence

Teachers learn to select, adapt, develop, and evaluate print and digital learning resources.

Assessment Competence

Teachers develop the ability to design and use appropriate assessment methods in multilingual settings.

Continuing Professional Learning

Teachers participate continuously in mentoring, peer learning, workshops, seminars, professional learning communities, classroom observation, action research, and digital learning. The seven components operate as an interconnected system rather than as isolated stages.

MTTPCF Development Cycle

The framework can be represented as: Initial Teacher Preparation; Language + Pedagogical + Multilingual + Cultural Competence; Material Development + Assessment Competence; Classroom Practice; Assessment and Classroom Evidence; Reflection; Continuing Professional Learning and Improved Classroom Practice. The cycle demonstrates that teacher development does not end with initial certification. Classroom experience generates new professional needs. Those needs should feed back into continuing professional learning.

Roles of Key Stakeholders within the MTTPCF

Teacher Education Institutions

Universities and colleges of education should: prepare teachers in relevant Nigerian languages; develop multilingual pedagogical competence; provide teaching practice; train teachers in assessment; support material development; and connect teacher trainees with schools and communities.

Schools

Schools should provide opportunities for: mentoring; peer observation; collaborative lesson planning; professional learning communities; classroom inquiry; and sharing of instructional resources.

Government and Education Authorities

Government and education authorities should provide: policy direction; funding; teacher recruitment; professional standards; learning materials; language-development support; and sustainable professional development. Nigeria's Learning Lab experience illustrates the importance of instructional leadership and school-based professional support.

Communities

Communities can contribute: local knowledge; stories; oral traditions; terminology; cultural resources; language documentation; and support for children's learning.

Researchers and Language Specialists

Researchers, linguists, teacher educators, and curriculum specialists can contribute to: language documentation; terminology development; dictionary development; material production; assessment design; teacher training; monitoring and evaluation; and classroom research.

Discussion

The literature reviewed demonstrates that mother-tongue education cannot be separated from teacher preparation. A language policy may identify a language for educational use, but successful implementation requires teachers who can use that language effectively for teaching and learning. Three major points emerge. First, language competence is necessary but not

sufficient. Teachers need both linguistic knowledge and pedagogical competence. Second, mother-tongue education operates within multilingual educational environments. Teachers may therefore need to use several linguistic resources purposefully. Third, teacher development must be continuous. Initial teacher education provides a foundation, but classroom experience generates new professional needs. The Nigerian Learning Lab provides a useful example of a movement towards school-based, contextualized, collaborative professional development. The MTTPCF brings these ideas together. Its contribution is not the claim that each of the seven competencies is individually new. Rather, the proposed contribution is their organization into an integrated framework specifically focused on teacher preparation and continuing professional learning for mother-tongue-based multilingual education. The framework therefore shifts the discussion from the narrow question of which language should be used to the broader question of.

Implications for Nigeria

The discussion has several implications for Nigerian education. First, teacher education institutions should strengthen multilingual pedagogy within pre-service teacher preparation. Second, language competence should be combined with pedagogical competence. Third, teacher trainees should receive practical experience in multilingual classrooms. Fourth, continuing professional development should become more regular, practical, collaborative, and needs-based. Fifth, schools should develop professional learning communities that allow teachers to discuss classroom problems and share solutions. Sixth, mother-tongue education requires investment in textbooks, readers, assessment resources, terminology, and digital materials. Seventh, language specialists, teacher educators, subject specialists, schools, communities, and government agencies should collaborate. Finally, the MTTPCF should be tested empirically rather than treated as a completed model.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion, the paper recommends that: Teacher education institutions should strengthen mother-tongue and multilingual pedagogy in pre-service teacher education. Teacher preparation should combine language competence with pedagogical competence. Teacher trainees should receive practical teaching experience in multilingual classrooms.

Continuing professional learning should be regular, contextualized, and connected to classroom needs. Professional learning communities should be strengthened at school and professional-network levels. Mentoring and peer learning should be integrated into teacher development. Teachers should receive support to develop and adapt local-language instructional materials. Assessment systems should recognize the language context of learners. Universities, colleges of education, schools, government agencies, and communities should collaborate in local-language resource development. Action research should be encouraged as a way of investigating classroom language problems. Digital technologies should be used to support teacher development and local-language resources, while recognizing differences in digital access. Government should provide sustained institutional and financial support for teacher preparation, professional learning, instructional materials, language development, and assessment. The proposed MTTPCF should be empirically tested in different Nigerian linguistic and educational contexts.

Conclusion

Mother-tongue education cannot succeed through language policy alone. It requires teachers who can transform language policy into effective classroom practice. This paper has argued that effective mother-tongue-based multilingual education requires seven interconnected areas of teacher competence: language competence, pedagogical competence, multilingual competence, cultural competence, material-development competence, assessment competence, and continuing professional learning. The Nigerian context makes this issue important because teachers work in linguistically diverse educational environments. Evidence from Nigerian teacher-development initiatives also demonstrates the value of contextualized, collaborative, school-based professional learning. The paper therefore proposes the Mother-Tongue Teacher Preparation and Continuing Learning Framework (MTTPCF) as an original conceptual synthesis. The framework connects initial teacher preparation with classroom practice, assessment, reflection, and continuing professional learning. The framework is not presented as a final solution. It requires empirical testing and refinement across different Nigerian linguistic contexts. Ultimately, the effectiveness of mother-tongue education depends not only on which language is selected, but also on whether teachers are adequately prepared and

continuously supported to use that language effectively for teaching and learning.

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