Language Immersion Programme: An International Concept

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Abstract

Language immersion programme (LIP) has the major purpose of enhancing learner's competence to become bilingual or multilingual, biliterate or Multiliterate, bicultural or multicultural with the ultimate goal of making the beneficiaries globally functional and relevant. LIP as a method of teaching a target language by using it as a media of Curriculum content and instruction is faced with certain challenges. The major thrust of this paper is to examine the international concept and value of LIP and to also expose the major challenges facing the effectiveness of the programme. The paper concludes that if factors such as human resources, curriculum, instructional materials, assessment among others are properly managed and harnessed towards the goal of the programme, it could be a powerful weapon for international relationship and unity.

ملخص البحث

إن لبرنامج انغماس اللغة (LIP)هدف رئيسي الذي يعني بتقوية كفاءة المتعلمين حتى يصيروا نجباء في فهم اللغتين أو أكثر، متقني قراءة وكتابة اللغتين أو أكثر، أو خبراء في ثقافة اللغتين أو أكثر، مع غالية همة اعطاء الفرصة الوظيفية المناسبة فى العلم.وبرنامج انغماس اللغة (LIP)عامل كطريقة تعليم اللغة خاصة باستخدامه كوسيلة محتويات المنهج والإعلام ، ما زال تواجهه بعض التعديات. إن هجم هذه الورقة هو استثبات المفهوم العالمى وأهمية برنامج انغماس اللغة وإظهار أهم التعديات التي تواجه فعاليات البرنامج (LIP). واختتمت الورقة بأن هناك حاجة ماسة إلي

إدارة العوامل التي منها الموارد البشرية، والمنهج، ووسائل التعليم ونحوها. وذلك بالإيمان أن إذا روقبت الأمور المذكورة بالدقة عبر تحقيق هدف البرنامج (LIP), يمكن أن يكون واسطة كبرى للوحدة والتضامن العالمى

Introduction

In term of communication, man is distinct from other species by language. This is because it is only man who communicates using a set of rule-binding codes in form of vocal sounds and graphic symbols referred to as language. Language functions as a major system of human communication. It is one of the most The core of a language involves the sound system, the syntactic structure and the vocabulary of prime importance among these is the vocabulary. The reader must know the meaning of enough of words in a sentence for adequate comprehension of the language (Adeniyi & Lawal 2016). Lexical competence implies more than just knowing what a word means, it also subsumes a number of other kinds of knowledge including knowing what differentiates one word from the other words that appear to mean the same, what other meanings a word might have, what links it has

intricate vehicles of communication that God gives to human beings (Abdulazeez, 2005) and it is a structured phenomenon that man uses to clarify, express and explain themselves and it makes human beings function as homoloquens that is talking beings (Adedimeji, 2009). Language is a complex human-specific system of communication that man uses intentionally and habitually (Adedimeji, 2005) to carry out various activities (Yusuf, 2013). Man acquires or learns this viable means of human communication consciously or subconsciously.

with other items in the lexicon, how it behaves syntactically and just as importantly, its limitation of use according to situation and function (Adeniyi & Lawal 2016}. This means that a central purpose in teaching language should be to encourage and help the learner to become more aware of how native speakers and other proficient speakers use the target language, and to be more sensitive to differences in nuances and shades of meaning. This could however be achieved through different strategies of teaching such as immersion

programme which is the focus of this paper.

Language acquisition is an aspect of developmental psycholinguistics that explores the stages and processes involved in acquiring a language. It involves subconscious efforts of picking up a language, in case of a new baby, starting from crying and cooing, babbling, holophrastic, telegraphic to true speech stage (Jolayemi, 1999). An adult can also acquire a language if he does not involve a conscious effort or formal schooling. Language acquisition is a natural process for people to acquire their first language which is the language they first exposed to.

Edgar (2016) describes language acquisition as the initial language which is referred to as people's first language, or native tongue, the language used by those with whom, by whom they are brought up from infancy. Edgar further explains that subsequent languages, which is usually regarded as 'second' languages are learned to different degrees of competence under various conditions. Complete mastery of two languages is designated as bilingualism and

children grow up as bilinguals when they are brought up by parents using different languages at home or being raised within a multilingual community. In traditionally monolingual cultures, the learning, to any extent, of a second or other language is an activity superimposed on the prior mastery of one's first language and is a different process intellectually.

Language learning, involves a conscious effort and active participation of people to learn a language. Language learning is a part of pedagogical linguistics which deals with the learning of language (Ayodabo, 2007). Here, language is "exposed to learners in a well-structured manner from simple to complex and from known to unknown" (Jolayemi, 1999:).

Language acquisition is natural and personal in processes because of its priority on the spoken form, practices, inductive coaching, activities in the language, and production of ability that focuses on communication. The language acquired is not affected by any language because it does not involve translation. On the contrary,

language learning is artificial and technical because of its priority on the written form, theory, deductive teaching, activities about the language, and production of knowledge that focuses on the language form and structure. The language learned is influenced by the first language, and it involves translation. Many people learn their second or foreign language, after acquiring their mother or first language. It is evident that many people are bilingual or multilingual through either language acquisition or learning, or both approaches/ a balanced approach.

In a multilingual country such as Nigeria, a lot of people can speak more than their mother tongue or first language; especially when the English language is the lingua franca, medium of instruction in schools, second language, administrative language, formally national language, and a compulsory subject/ course at all levels of education. These among others have inspired and made many western educated Nigerians to communicate in English with their children right from the cradle, while the children grow up acquiring the language. Hence, English has become the mother tongue or first

language of many Nigerian children, especially those in the cities (Yusuf, 2013).

The thrust for getting their children speak English and be proficient in it makes some elite enrol them into an immersion school where the target language is used as a medium of instruction to teach all other subjects, right from pre-nursery school. Generally, both the national and the international roles of language in human daily activities have led to a greater interest in the learning of second or foreign language. The interest brings about studies, researches, concepts, approaches, methods, techniques, among other things on the teaching and learning of language, part of which is language immersion. Therefore, language is now taught and learned through immersion programmes.

Concept of Language Immersion Programme

Immersion is an international concept defined in different ways in the discourse of educational linguistics. On one hand, immersion is referred to as a programme organised and planned in forms of bilingual education in which

students are exposed to a target or second language instruction with the goal of developing proficiency in two languages. At the beginning of the programme, the first language instruction is introduced within one or two years. On the other hand, immersion refers to the immersing immigrant or children of minority language in a classroom setting where instruction is conducted exclusively through their second, foreign or target language which is usually the dominant language of the society or a global language of wider communication (Cummins, 2009).

Historically, the term came to use implicitly in Canada in 1960s when the French language was used as an initial medium of instruction to teach elementary school pupils whose first language is English (Lenker & Rhodes, 2007; Cummins 2009,). According to Cummins (2009), the purpose of immersion language programmes is to promote fluency and literacy in students' first and second languages. It was first introduced as foreign language immersion programmes (FLIP) in the United States in 1971. The immersion programme recorded a high growth in the United States

because of the parents' strong pressure for their children's quality and proficient language learning; parents' increased interest in a multicultural approach to education; an increase in schooling options that enable immersion to be offered as an educational alternative; a strong body of published researches on the effectiveness of the programmes; and the growing needs for Americans to be proficient in foreign languages for personal, educational, economic, and national security reasons (Lenker & Rhodes, 2007).

Language immersion is a method of teaching a target language and the language is used as media of curriculum content and instruction. Lenker and Rhodes (2007) defined it as an approach to teaching another language which involves immersing students in the target language throughout the school day. Cummins (2009) submitted that "immersion programs, as conceptualized within the educational research community, are a form of bilingual education that immerse students in a second language instructional environment for between 50% and 100% of instructional time

with the goal of developing fluency and literacy in both languages".

Language immersion is different from language submersion programmes which provide 100% of instruction using the second, target or dominant language. In this kind of language programme, teachers typically do not understand learners' first language (L1) and they provide various pedagogic methods and strategies and other support to help learners understand instruction or express themselves through either first or second/target language.

Language immersion is basically a method that is developed to teach people a second or target language, in which the language being taught is used specifically for instruction purposes. Language immersion is a tool which is used to immerse learners completely within the subject and it focuses more on the second language. This method is to foster bilingualism and develop learners' communicative competence in their first and second languages. There are four generic levels of language immersion that are primarily based on the age group the learners fall into. They are:

1. Early immersion: students begin to be taught a second or target language from age five (5) or (6).

2. Middle immersion: students begin learning a second or target language from age nine (9) or (10).

3. Late immersion: students are exposed to the learning of a second or target language at age eleven (11) or fourteen (14).

4. Adult immersion: students begin to learn a second or target language at age seventeen (17) or older (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010; www.teach-nology.com/teachers/bilingual_ed/langimmersion.html)

The four levels are not strictly determined by the age ranges given above. In some immersion programmes, learners may enrol into and begin to learn a second or target language at different levels and ages. Findings showed that there are five types of immersion; they are:

1. Total immersion: a method in which all subjects are taught in the second or target language. 100 percent of the teaching and learning time is spent on using the target language. It is also known as complete immersion.

2. Partial language immersion: postulates that half of the learning time is spent on studying a target language, usually fifty (50) percent. That is about half of the class time is spent on learning subject matter in the second, target or foreign language; with the purposes of making learners become functionally proficient in the second language, master subject content taught in the foreign languages, and acquire an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures (Wikipedia.com).

3. Two-way immersion: is a type of language programmes popular in the United States. It can also be referred to as two-way bilingual or two-way dual immersion bilingual. It integrates both students of minority and majority languages in the same classroom so as to achieve academic excellence and become proficiently bilingual (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010). This source identified three characteristics of two-way immersion programmes and they are: instruction in two languages, one language at a time, and peer-to-peer facilitated language sharing. In this type of programme, both contents and delivery are provided in two languages. This feature differentiates bilingual immersion from English as a Second Language (ESL) programme in which English is the only language of curriculum content and instruction.

4. Content-based foreign language in elementary schools (FLES): is a type of language immersion in which about 15–50% of class time is spent on the learning of second, foreign or target language and such time is also spent on learning subject matter in the language. The

programme is meant to develop proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing the foreign language in learners. The subject content is used as a tool for acquiring foreign language skills, and it also enables learners to understand and appreciate other cultures. There is a form of foreign language elementary programme with 5-15% of class time spent on learning a foreign language. In this programme, a minimum of 75 minutes is spent at least on every other day per week. The aim of this programme is to enable learners acquire proficiency in listening and speaking skills in foreign language; understand and appreciate the foreign culture; and also acquire some proficiency in reading and writing skills in the language (Wikipedia.com).

5. Foreign Language Experience (*FLEX*) programs: only 1-5% of class time is spent learning one or more foreign languages or about the sampled language;

classes are almost always conducted in the first language. The purpose of this programme is to enable learners develop an interest in foreign languages for future language study, and develop listening skills, cultural and linguistic awareness. This type of language immersion is provided in a short period of time and it is not usually continuous(www.teachnology.com/teachers/bilingual_ed/langimmersion.html).

The ultimate goal of all the types of language immersion programmes is to enable students to become proficient or develop some proficiency in the second, foreign or target language in addition to their mother tongue or first language.

Values of Language Immersion Programmes

Studies showed that immersion programmes have a great value because they have made half of the world population bilingual and contributed to more linguistic and cultural awareness (Lindholm-Leary, 2005; Lenker & Rhodes, 2007; Cummins, 2009; Pacific Policy

Research Center, 2010). Learning a foreign language has its assets; immersion language programmes serve as outstanding way of learning it. According to Carrera-Carrillo and Smith (2006), the immersion programme enables students to gain bilingual, biliterate and bicultural competence, thereby giving them an opportunity to become successful participants in the global community and economy. It is an international language programme that makes students "experience the world even if they are confined within the walls of the school building" (p. xiv). The following are values of immersion language programmes.

1. **Linguistic value**: the programme enables students to learn a foreign or target language, and therefore possess knowledge about the language. They can become bilingual or have a certain level of proficiency in the language. They can do comparative studies of their first and second or foreign languages, thereby enhancing their communicative competence and performance in the two languages. It enhances learners' linguistic and metalinguistic awareness which develops the skills for learning to

read in them, and in turn facilitating their decoding abilities. According to Curtain and Dahlberg (2004) cited in Fortune and Tedick (2004), immersion is a school-based programme for learning language that enables students to learn and display fluency and confidence in the second or target language. It helps develop a native-like listening and reading skills, with various levels of comprehension.

2. **Academic/educational value**: the programme enables learners to achieve high levels of functional proficiency in language as well as in academics. In the United States, dual immersion progrmme has become an elementary means of educating students and enriching their educational experience. Potowski (2004) finds out that immersion students whose first language is not English become more balanced bilinguals and develop higher levels of bilingualism and biliteracy when compared with English proficient students or home language peers participating in other educational programming.

3. **Cognitive value**: the immersion programme helps in cognitive

development of learners. Bilingual students display more competence and faculty in learning third language and outperform than their monolingual counterparts in thinking, reasoning, problem-solving and pattern recognition. The programme widens the cognitive ability of learners.

4. **Socio-economic value**: the programme exposes learners to foreign cultures on daily basis and enables them to meet and relate with different sets of people from different socio-economic status and cultural background. Therefore, it lets them develop an ability to think globally and it provides them with the capability to enhance their social and economic opportunities.

5. **Economic and political value**: the immersion language programme enhances bilingual proficiency, and such proficiency gives room for both economic and political benefits at local, national and international levels. "Proficiency in a second language and intercultural competence open up employment possibilities in areas that require involvement in the global economy such as international businesses, tourism, communications, and the diplomatic corps. High-level, high-paying employment in the future will necessitate competence in more than one language" (García & Otheguy, 1994; Halliwell, 1999 cited in Fortune & Tedick, 2004:1).

6. **Security value:** proficiency in languages is proven to enhance a certain degree of security at personal, local and global levels. The immersion programme has led the National Security Language Initiative in the United State to call for an increase in the availability and quality of long-term foreign language programmes in order to aid in global awareness, national security, and economic competitiveness (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). As stated in the document of the National Security Language Initiative, immersion programs are a proven model to help students acquire the language fluency needed to help in reaching these goals.

As an effective instrument, Lindholm-Leary (2005) stated that language immersion programmes are designed, implemented and refined in order to develop bilingualism, biliteracy, multicultural competence, and

academic achievement in learners. Carrera-Carrillo and Smith (2006) affirmed that it is obvious that the programme provides cognitive advantages to learners because it enables them to study in two languages and enhances their high academic achievement.

Challenges of Language Immersion Programmes

Despites the values, some factors affect the high level of the success and the achievement of the goals of language immersion programmes. The factors are referred to as challenges of the programmes; they include the seven factors that Lindholm-Leary (2005) identified as effective features of immersion programmes. They are assessment and accountability, curriculum, instructional practices, staff quality and professional development, program structure, family and community involvement, and support and resources. If these factors are not aligned with the goal of the programme and well planned, organised and implemented, they can inhibit rather than facilitate the achievement of the goals of the immersion programmes.

For instance, poor curriculum planning and implementation is identified as one of the challenges of language immersion programmes if it does not align with immersion goals. According to Lindholm-Leary, K. J. (2005), curriculum of dual language programme should be based on the goals of bilingualism, biliteracy, multicultural competence, and academic achievement; it should reflect and value students' culture(s). It should be academically challenging, and should integrate higher-order thinking, technology. Importantly, the curriculum should be developed with enriched rather than remedial instructional model. This is because a remedial model has led to the failure of some dual language programmes and "led to high failure rates in ELL students' ability to pass high school exit exams" (Garcia & Gopal, 2003 cited in Lindholm-Leary, 2005).

Also, there are inadequate professional teachers in dual immersion programmes. The teachers in the programmes need to have adequate trainning in native or native-like ability in the two languages in order to achieve the set goals. They need to have positive attitudes towards the

programme and select adapted teaching approaches and strategies and resources suitable for a multilingual class. Chen (2008) cited Dr. Robert Slater who found that the greatest challenge of immersion language is the demand for multilingual teachers that can also provide high-quality instruction.

Fortune (2012) posits that Immersion teachers face significant hurdles in the sheer range of learner differences. The impact of students' variations in language proficiency, literacy development, learning support available to the student in the home, achievement abilities, learning styles, and special needs grows exponentially when teaching and learning occurs in two languages. Educators and parents struggle to identify and implement research-based policies and practices for learners who have language, literacy, and learning difficulties. Many immersion programmes lack the necessary resources and bilingual specialists to provide appropriate instructional support, assessment, and interventions.

Conclusion

The study posits that language immersion programme is meant to enable bilingual/multilingual, biliterate/multiliterate, bicultural/multicultural competence of students and enhance their higher-level thinking and academic development across the globe. As international concept, it is academically, culturally, linguistically, economically, socially and cognitively invaluable because the programme cultivates in immersed students an ability to become active and successful participants in the local, national or global community. However, it is found that stakeholders (such as teachers, parents, community leaders, school managers), curriculum, resources, instructional practice, assessment among others constitute the challenges of the language immersion programme. If these factors are properly managed and tailored towards the goals of the immersion programme, it can be a means to enhance linguistic and cultural awareness and appreciation, and in turn achieve more international relationship and unity. Language immersion programme does not only make learners become proficient in both their mother tongue and target or second language but also enhance their socio-cultural awareness

and the language variations and deviations of the second or target language.

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