
Preference of Mother Tongue for Effective Understanding of Covid-19 Pandemic Disease in Three Selected Local Governments in Jigawa State of Nigeria

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/bjmas.2022.04957>

Published November 02, 2025

Citation: Sarki M. (2025) Preference of Mother Tongue for Effective Understanding of Covid-19 Pandemic Disease in Three Selected Local Governments in Jigawa State of Nigeria, *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies*, 6(6),1-8

Abstract: *The study examined the preference of Mother Tongue (MT) for effective understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic in three selected Local Government Areas of Jigawa State, Nigeria. Two research questions were formulated to guide the study. The population consisted of residents from the three selected Local Government Areas, from which 215 respondents were randomly sampled. A structured questionnaire developed by the researcher served as the main instrument for data collection. The collected data were analyzed using frequency and percentage. The findings of the study revealed that the respondents prefer the use of Mother Tongue (MT) for effective understanding of COVID-19 disease in both social and official settings. It further showed that communication in MT through radio and mobile phones facilitates effective understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study recommended, among others, that public health campaigns and awareness programs should adopt local languages to improve the effectiveness of health communication, especially in rural communities where literacy levels are low. In addition, government at all levels should ensure timely procurement of all relevant facilities to fight the pandemic disease when it emerges.*

Keywords: mother tongue, COVID-19, pandemic, health communication, Jigawa State, public awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Mother Tongue MT is recognized in this study and by many scholars as a medium through which many people are effectively educated, informed, and inspired. It plays a better role in

communication and understanding which enables its users to interact with others and find out about what is happening within and beyond their society. For instance, when there is an emergent outbreak of a disease in an area and the people are ignorant about it, the immediate step of reducing the scourge is to use the native language for orientation. Over the years, COVID-19 cases have taken numerous and unstable directions. Unfortunately, people in different linguistic communities, both rural and urban, have raised doubts about the reality or otherwise of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in Nigeria, it has been noticed that people skipped the safety protocols such as social distancing and wearing face masks. Nevertheless, they have refused two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. Suddenly, at that time, TVC World News 2021 reports that the Presidential Steering Committee on COVID-19 put six states under Abuja or red alert amid fears of a second wave.

In that regard, the World Health Organization, WHO 2020, stresses that people should be told by clinical psychologists and medical consultants that COVID-19 exists and it may kill humans if they don't abide by the rules governing its protection. The organization proposed several methods to prevent the spread of the virus and safe health systems across the world from a complete collapse. However, it has been emphasized as a matter of urgency, people in different linguistic communities need appropriate communication strategies to enable easier and faster understanding of the disease. Studies have shown that less than 20% of the Nigerian population is able to speak and understand the English language with functional fluency. Oyetade (2001) and Adegbite (2004) advocate that in the sub-urban localities, the majority of the people, if not all, found it easier to understand things and express themselves in their mother tongue, MT. This study, entitled Preference of Mother Tongue for Effective Understanding of COVID-19 Pandemic Disease in Three Selected Local Government Areas of Jigawa State, is inspired by the low compliance with the safety protocols, which is probably due to the ignorance or poor understanding of the COVID-19 disease. More importantly, this research believes that emphasis on utilizing MT like Hausa during public orientation about COVID-19 or any other pandemic will minimize persistent doubts about the virus.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, most official texts and speeches are often written and broadcasted in the English language and later translated into various mother tongues, MTs. Sometimes, this translation is so poorly done that it fails to communicate the original ideas of the English text. As a result of that, this study observed that there are tendencies of ineffective understanding if public orientations are done using a second language, L2, especially in the suburban areas. Consequently, a substantial proportion of people remain unprotected from the COVID-19 waves as well as other pandemics, as they do not pay attention to the safety protocols written or said in English, even if they carry out negative signals. It is against this background that the present study is designed to examine the preference of mother tongue for effective understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic in three selected local government areas in Jigawa state of Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

This study is carried out based on the following objectives:

1. To find out whether or not the people prefer mother tongue MT for effective understanding of COVID-19 pandemic in the three selected local government areas of Jigawa state.
2. To identify preferred MT communication sources for the effective understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic in the three selected local government areas of Jigawa state.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

1. Do people prefer their mother tongue for effective understanding of COVID-19 pandemic in the three selected local government areas of Jigawa state?
2. What are the preferred MT communication sources for the effective understanding of COVID-19 pandemic in the three selected local government areas of Jigawa state?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it offers valuable insights into how the use of mother tongue (MT) can enhance communication and understanding, particularly among people in rural and semi-urban communities who may be disadvantaged by the dominance of English as the main medium of public orientation and information dissemination. The findings of this study are expected to highlight the strong connection between mother tongue education (MTE) and the effective understanding of safety instructions related to COVID-19 and other pandemic diseases. It may also serve as a useful guide to national orientation agencies and health communication units by encouraging them to give greater priority to the use of MT over Language of the Elite (LTE) in health-related campaigns. Given the generally low proficiency in English among a large proportion of Nigerians, adopting MT-based communication strategies can ensure broader comprehension, compliance and community engagement. Furthermore, the study will serve as a reference point for future research on language and public health communication in Nigeria and beyond.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The study is limited to three Local Government Areas across the three senatorial districts of Jigawa State. The researcher considers that the selected areas represent approximately 10% of the total 27 Local Government Areas in the state and will also enhance the effective conduct of the research as well as the gathering of qualitative data. The researcher will delimit the investigation to using “Hausa” language for effective perception and communication strategies during COVID-19 or any other pandemic disease. However, the result of this study could be generalized to other local government areas in the state.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The major language of expression in rural and semi-urban communities in Nigeria is mainly MT. It enhances effective understanding, which enables its users to interact with others and discover things within their area or beyond. For instance, in Jigawa State, Nigeria, Hausa is considered the major language of interaction, especially in markets, hospitals, motor parks, and other social gatherings.

Koledade (2013) emphasizes the influence of MT for achieving the exchange of information by normal human beings. She further explains that MT is usually the first language of a bilingual or multilingual person, which is referred to as the acquired speech in the native environment and that meets all the linguistic needs of its users. Scholars and health professionals observe that when there is an emergent outbreak of a disease and the people are ignorant about it, the immediate step for reducing its scourge is to use the native language for orientation. Damagum (2021) realizes that:

“People in Nigeria raised doubts on the reality or otherwise of the Covid-19 Pandemic as they widely believe that it is an issue surrounded by uncertainties. She concludes that much orientation is needed because while they are ignorant about the disease, they have already thrown all cautions to the wind”.

In addition to that, Ure (1979) claims for higher preference for the local language because the majority of people find it easier to understand things and express themselves in their MT. In relation to this, Johnston (2003) advocates the concept of audience, which focuses on using appropriate language in the proper setting. Mosunmola (2017) and Del Valle (2021) examine the sociolinguistic perspective on the effectiveness of the use of euphemism use in healthcare communications. This, according to their comments, will help health professionals to communicate with the patient in a way they will understand.

Jibir Daura and Dan Abdu (2015) emphasize that on the one hand English language is used in our Nigerian offices and schools, but on the other hand, MT is used in other places of the society, such as markets and motor parks. For instance, during public orientation on Covid-19 English language manipulates ways of communication, which showed that people do not pay attention to the safety protocols even if they carry negative signals.

Nevertheless, the people's inability to pay attention derives largely from the fact that they do not understand the form and meaning of the messages on COVID-19 pandemic. Although translation could be possible, Agbo (2011) argues that a translated text does not always resemble with the ideas and intentions as conceived in the original English text. According to Yunusa (2017), English language studies benefit from the diversity and richness of indigenous languages. Therefore, in a multicultural society like Nigeria, indigenous languages have to be given appropriate roles, especially when there is an emergent issue like COVID-19. Also, other communication sources like radio, flyers, notices, posters, and television can be utilized appropriately using the MT of the immediate community. According to some scholars like Esowso (2011) and Amry (2014), social interaction can be enhanced by sharing through mobile devices. They clarify that the devices provide online users with the ability to send and receive a variety of media, such as images, videos, and audio messages.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey research design was used to answer the research questions in the course of this study. The target population of the study consisted of all twenty-seven local governments LGS in Jigawa State. Two hundred and fifteen 215 in Dutse, Ringim, and Kaugama LGAs were sampled for the study. the selection of these three LGs was based on the fact that Hausa Language is commonly used in the areas, and among them, two are urban and one is rural. Furthermore, the three LGAs were selected from the three senatorial districts in the state. The table below shows the distribution of the sample:

S/N	LGA	Number of Respondents
1.	Dutse	65
2.	Ringim	80
3.	Kaugama	70
	Total	215

The self-developed questionnaire has been employed as a data collection instrument. It is characterized by the demographic breakdown of the participants in part “A”, while part “B” investigates the participants' preferences for using their mother tongue to understand the COVID-19 pandemic. The simple percentage was used as a method of data analysis to answer the research questions.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data collected were analyzed in line with two research questions and presented in Tables 4.1 and 4.2, respectively.

Research Question 1: Do people prefer their mother tongue for effective understanding of COVID-19 pandemic in three selected local government areas of Jigawa State?

Table 1: Preference of mother tongue for understanding the COVID-19 pandemic by the respondents in Jigawa State.

Questionnaire items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I prefer MT in the social settings only	73	34
I prefer MT in the official places only	41	19
I prefer MT in both social and official settings.	101	47
Total	215	100.0

The result in Table 1 above indicated that the majority of the respondents prefer MT both in the social and official settings, that is, 101 of the respondents, representing 47%. The table also showed that 73 respondents representing 34% prefer MT in social settings only, while 41 respondents

representing 19% prefer MT in official places. This implied that most of the participants chose MT for effective understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic in Jigawa State.

Research Question 2: What are the preferred MT communication sources for the effective understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic in the three selected LGAs of Jigawa State?

Table 2: Preferred MT communication sources for understanding COVID-19 pandemic by respondents in Jigawa State.

Questionnaire items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mobile phone	61	28
Radio	93	43
Internet	09	04
Flyers and posters	30	14
TV	22	11
Total	215	100

The table above showed that 93 (43%) of the respondents preferred radio as the MT communication source for effective understanding of COVID-19 pandemic disease, while 61 (28%) of the respondents preferred mobile phone item as the communication source. Only few respondents prefer flyers and posters 30 (14%), TV 22 (11%) and the internet 9 (4%) respectively. Thus, the results indicated that majority of the respondents preferred radio as a source of communication using their mother tongue MT for the effective understanding of COVID-19 pandemic disease in Jigawa State, especially in the rural areas.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The analysis in Table 1 has clearly indicated that MT could be preferred for both social and official places in the three selected governments in Jigawa State. The ignorance or poor understanding of COVID-19 disease might be due to the language of orientation, which could have been influenced by a second language (English). This finding is in agreement with the claims of Ure (1979), Naswer (1999), Adegbite (2004) and Damagum (2021) ... while people are ignorant about COVID-19 disease, much orientations are needed through the local language (MT) because the majority find it easier to understand things and express themselves in their MT. However, this finding did not align with Agbo's (2011) argument that a translated text does not always accurately convey the ideas and intentions as conceived in the original text, such as an English text translated into Hausa. In Table 2, which was concerned with preferred MT communication sources for an effective understanding of the COVID-19 disease. Based on the analysis of the data gathered, the respondents have preferred radio as the MT communication source for easier understanding of orientations about the COVID-19 pandemic. Twenty-eight percent of the total respondents have apparently preferred mobile phones as another source for understanding the disease, which is a plausible option for the highest 43%. This finding admits the fact that information communication facilities like radio, mobile phones, posters, etc, can be enhanced for effective understanding of

emergent issues if orientations are carried in the native language of the community (Chand 2005, Amry 20414, and Mosunmola 2017).

Summary of Findings

Based on the data presented and analyzed, the following are the findings:

1. The study found that the majority of the people in the three selected local government areas of Jigawa State are in favor of Mother Tongue for the effective understanding of COVID-19 disease in both social and official settings.
2. The results showed a significant frequency of the opinions that when MT is given preference for communication through radio and mobile phones in order to facilitates effective understanding of COVID-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed a moderate opinion that using the Mother Tongue could probably make people aware of safety protocols about the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, further preference of MT will stimulate people's minds by reducing doubts on the reality or otherwise of COVID-19. The study has been able to investigate the influence of MT on the information communication facilities, such as radio, mobile phones, and television, which are faster sources in the delivery of messages. Although translation from English to MT is claimed to distort the meanings of some medical words, this study advocated that MT manipulates ways of communication in the research areas of this work.

Recommendations

From the foregoing investigation and findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Mother Tongue MT should be used for much faster and easier orientation whenever there is an outbreak of pandemic disease as COVID-19. That could be possible through radio broadcasts, town criers, announcements, and mobile phone messages.
2. Health workers should prioritize the use of MT when they are delivering health services. This will enhance effective communication with the patients in such a way that they will understand and comply with all safety protocols.
3. Governments at all levels should ensure early and urgent provision of proactive measures that will minimize widespread of any pandemic. This is by the procurement of relevant facilities to fight the disease on time.
4. Literate members in communities should offer their possible contributions during times of pandemic, that is, by teaching or orienting the illiterates about the safety measures against the emergence of dangerous diseases.

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