

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LANGUAGE POLICY AT THE JUNIOR PRIMARY LEVEL IN OWERRI EDUCATIONAL ZONE

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### **Abstract**

This study investigated the implementation of the language policy at the primary school level in Owerri educational zone three research questions and a hypothesis were formulated to guide the study. A purposeful sampling technique was used to sample 418 teachers from the area of study. The researcher made use of structured questionnaire as instrument for data collection. The data were analyzed using percentages, mean, Standard deviations and t-test statistics. From the results, it was discovered that apart from English, most teachers use Igbo to teach the various subjects which is in line with policy statement: textbooks are not written in the mother tongue: there is inadequate supply of teaching materials; this inadequacy is experienced by both rural and rural schools: teachers are not fully prepared for the implementation and seminar/workshops are not organized hence they need further training.

Language is one of the symbols of a nation and it expresses the culture of the people. Language is the most important medium of communication. This is because it is the main process through which the teacher puts information across to learners, while the learner responds to teaching mainly by means of language (Ibukun, 1991). In our country today, emphasis is being laid on learning the three main Nigerian Languages as a means of preserving the three main Nigerian Languages as a means of preserving the people's culture,

Language policy is a deliberate, logical and systematic activity designed by a given government of a nation to select a language or

languages from the many languages spoken by the people in the country and assign roles to them in order to organize and develop human and material resources of the country Njoku & Izuagba, (2004). With this in mind, the Federal Government of Nigeria came up with the National Language Policy which says that:

In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process, and as a means of preserving the people's culture, they consider it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue. In this connection, the government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. (FRN, 1981:8).

This is to foster national unity and for intertribal communication among Nigerians. The policy also states that "Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the Primary School is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and, at a later stage. English" (N.P.E 1981:113). Afolayan (1989) asserts that the policy rather than being the basic of a dynamic educational programme that would result in greater growth and development of both the individual citizens and the nation as a whole...

Thus, realizing the importance of mother tongue, Awoniyi (1980:29) says that "the first language of the child is part of his personality which no teacher can ignore". He further maintained that the mother tongue is part of the stuff of which his mind is built. Mother tongue is the language through which the child acquires the earliest experiences of life which forms the

foundation and basis for later education. This is why Fafunwa (1985:5) maintains that “local languages are the only way to the promised land”. He further describes mother tongue education as an inalienable right, its denial means, and the denial of the child’s fundamental human right.

Primary education is foundational for further learning and an effective language of instruction is indispensable for both retention and application of learning experiences. Such a language which has been pointed out by education authorities world-wide should be the matter of concern to all those interested in the child’s mother tongue as is actually the practice in the advanced countries. In view of this, it is a matter of concern to all those interested in the child’s education that the implementation of this policy should be checked after years of policy statement.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

With the continued use of English Language as a medium of instruction at the three levels of Nigerian education system and a relatively undue emphasis given to English Language to the detriment of indigenous languages, there had been a growing concern among educationists about the deprivation which the African child suffers as a result of this approach. The introduction of the Language Policy came as an official reaction of the age-long protest against the over emphasis given to the English Language in the Nigerian School curriculum. This policy which had stipulated the use of local language in teaching all subjects except English at the beginning stage of primary school was supposed to have been implemented from 1982. The concern about the state of learning in primary school with regard to the implementation of this policy thus necessitated this study.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The Study aimed at:

- I. Identifying the medium of instruction which teachers employ in classroom instruction:
- II. Finding out the adequacy of instructional materials:
- III. Finding out teachers’ preparedness for the effective implementation of the national language policy.

#### **Research Questions**

- I. What medium of instruction do teachers use in the early primary classes?
- II. How adequate are the instructional materials?
- III. What is the state of preparedness to teachers to effectively implement the national language policy?

#### **Hypothesis**

**Ho1.** There is no significant difference in the extent of adequacy of teaching materials in urban and rural schools

#### **Methodology**

##### **Design**

This study was a descriptive survey design meant to study the implementation of the language policy in the primary school in Owerri education zone of Imo State.

##### **Area of the Study**

The study was conducted in Imo-State. Owerri education zone was used and this zone is made up of 9 local government areas;

##### **Population of the Study**

The population of the study comprised of 6966 teachers in the 503 public primary schools in Owerri Education Zone. The researcher worked on 418 teachers from the 50 schools sampled.

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

Two sampling techniques used were stratified and simple random sampling techniques. First the population was stratified into (two) sub zones. Out of the nine local government areas that make up the sub zone; 25 schools were selected from each making a total of 50 schools, from the two sub zones.

### **Instrument of Data Collection**

Structured questionnaire was developed by the researchers relating to the topic under study. The questionnaire which is meant to answer the three research questions and the hypotheses formulated for the study using the four point likert type of rating scale of strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D). It sought to know the medium of instruction which teachers employ in the classroom, the adequacy of instructional materials and teachers' preparedness for the effective implementation of the language policy.

### **Reliability of the Instrument**

To ascertain, the reliability of the instrument the instrument was administered twice on these respondents at an interval of two weeks. Two public schools in the area were used for the test - retest reliability method. The results of the separate exercise were correlated by applying the Pearson's Product Moment correlation statistics. The coefficient of  $r = 0.76$  was obtained and this was considered adequate enough in checking the consistency of the items in the instrument.

### **Administration of the Instrument**

The questionnaire was administered on the 697 respondents (teachers) in all sampled primary schools in the Owerri Education zone. The researchers personally administered the questionnaire and collected the filled ones on the spot to ensure high rate

of returns. This was done within a period of two weeks.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

The three research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. An acceptance criterion mean of 2.50 was used for the research questions. The t-test statistics was used to test the hypotheses at an alpha level of 0.05.

### **Result**

Results are presented in the tables below;

#### **Research Question One**

Which medium of instruction do the teachers employ in classroom instructions?

**Table 1: Medium of Instruction Used in Teaching Various Subjects**

Subject	English		Igbo		Both	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
English	418	100	-	-	-	-
Mathematics	141	33.1	208	49.8	69	16.50
Igbo	-	-	418	100	-	-
Social Studies	40	9.6361		86.4	17	4.1
Bible Knowledge	35	8.4	367	87.8	16	3.8
Agric Science	45	10.8	357	85.5	16	3.80
Primary Science	52	12.40	349	83.5	17	4.1
Home Economics	50	12.0	351	84.0	17	4.1
P.H.E	54	12.9	348	83.2	16	3.80

It is evident from Table I that all the teachers used English to teach English Language and also all used Igbo to teach Igbo Language which is in line with the policy. Meanwhile, most teachers used Igbo to teach the various subjects while some used both English and Igbo to teach.

**Research Question 2**

How adequate are the instructional materials? In response to the research question, the subject two below:

**Table 2: Mean Rating on Adequacy of Instructional Materials**

Items	No. of Teachers	CWS	Mean	Decision
Adequate of texts books written in Mother Tongue	418	495	1.18	Negative
Adequacy of other teaching materials	418	511	1.22	Negative

It could be seen from Table 2 that the item on whether the textbooks are written in mother tongue has a mean of 1.18; it shows that they are highly inadequate while the other item has a mean of 1.22 which also shows that they are very inadequate.

**Research Question 3**

What is the state of preparedness of teachers to effectively implement the national language policy?

**Table 3: Mean Rating on Levels of Teachers' Preparedness for the Implementation on the Language Policy.**

Items	Indications of Preparedness	No. of Teachers	CWS	X	Decision
A	Not speaking local dialects well enough	418	1056	2.53	Positive
B	Not confident in class discussion	4188	1121	2.68	Positive
C	Attendance at workshop	418	634	1.52	Negative
D	Not deserving further training	418	948	2.27	Negative

Table 3; shows that Teachers are not fully prepared for the effective implementation of the national language policy.

Item (a) has a mean of 2.53 while item (b) has a mean of 2.68, which shows that the teachers do not speak the local dialects well enough and they are also not confident in class discussion. Furthermore, item (c) which has mean of 1.52 that seminars and workshops are not organized for teachers. Item (d) which has a mean 2.27 shows that teachers deserve further training for the implementation of the said policy. Finally, the result shows that the teachers are not fully prepared.

**Hypothesis 1 (HO<sub>1</sub>)**

There is no significant difference in the extent of adequacy teaching materials in urban and rural schools as measured by the mean rating scale on adequacy of materials (P<0.05).

**Table 4; Mean Perception of Urban and Rural Teachers on Adequacy of Teaching Materials**

Item	Urban CWS	Mean	SD	Rural CWS	Mean	SD
Adequacy of textbooks	260	1.19	0.35	235	1.18	0.52
Adequacy of other teaching materials	269	1.23	0.63	242	1.21	0.58

**Table 5; Measuring the Adequacy of Teaching Materials Data for Calculating T-Statistics for Hypothesis 1.**

Location	N	X	SD	Dr	S.E	t-eal	t-erit	Decision
Urban	218	1.21	0.59	416	0.60	0.18	1.96	
Rural	200	1.20	0.55					

From the table above, the calculated t, of 0.18 is far less than the critical value of t (1, 96, df 416, at 0.05 level). Therefore, the null hypothesis of no statistical significant difference between the mean rating of urban (1.21) and rural (1.20) schools teachers on adequacy of teaching materials is upheld. Both urban and rural school teachers experience the same inadequacy of materials in the schools.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study with respect to research questions revealed that the situation in Junior Primary school classes in Owerri Educational Zone falls short of the expectations of the government. Though most of the teachers indicated that they taught some subjects using Igbo Language, other teachers used English Language or a blend of English and Igbo Languages to execute their classroom

instruction. This is contrary to language policy prescriptions. The pupils at the Junior Primary level of education cannot be expected to be proficient of classroom instruction.

Adeloms (1991:78) maintains that “a child who is not taught in his local language is faced with two problems in the school. The first in the language of instruction and the second is the understanding of the course content in the curriculum”. The fact that two children in the same school and level, though under different teachers receive differential learning experiences, negate the good intention of the government. The child taught in his tongue should be learning better enjoying schooling more than his counterparts in English Language (Ojerinde, 1986).

In respect to the adequacy of teaching materials, Emenanjo (1985:130) says that “one of the greatest problems facing the language policy is in availability of language teaching materials and language laboratories. The implementation of this inadequacy of teaching, materials that teachers are not equipped with necessary teaching materials which implies, that the policy is not fully being implemented. From the analysis of data collected, table 5 shows that greater number of teachers did not speak the local dialect well enough and they were not confident in class discussion, more so, workshops/seminars were not organized hence they deserve further training. This implies that teachers were not fully prepared.

The training of the teacher is very essential and indispensable because, the teacher needs to be competent in spoken and writing standard Igbo. Their shortcomings will not improve except they go for further training, and also workshops organized for them on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction. The findings indicate that the inadequacy of teaching

materials affects both urban and rural schools and it is because it is the same government that runs both urban and rural schools.

### **Conclusion**

The observed differences in the media of instruction implies in learning experiences offered to children in Junior Primary Schools. This is antithetical to the Federal Government at standardizing educational practices, enhancing the quality of education and equalizing educational opportunities in Nigeria. Moreover, the teachers are not fully prepared for the implementation of this policy because, they are not well groomed in the language and since workshops are not organized, there is no room for them to up-date their knowledge and to be in touch with up-to-date information about what is expected of them. Some reason can be adduced for the observed shortcomings. They include; inadequate qualified teachers and inadequate instructional materials among others.

### **Recommendations**

Based in the findings of this research, the following recommendations are made:

1. That mother tongue will be only medium of instruction not only for some teachers but should be compulsory for all that are concerned, at the Junior Primary level.
2. Both the state and local education authorities should endeavour to provide materials, including texts written in mother tongue.
3. Government should organize workshops to the knowledge of the teachers.

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