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EXAMINING THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION FOR SUSTAINABLE BASIC EDUCATION IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined language of instruction for sustainable basic education in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study examined the effects of language of instruction for sustainable development basic education in Lagos State and determine the factors militating against the implementation of the language policy in Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design where questionnaire was used to acquire necessary data for the research work. Population comprises of all primary schools in Ibeju Lekki Local Government, Lagos State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select ten (10) Primary Schools in Ibeju Lekki Local Government area of Lagos State. Ten (10) teachers were randomly selected using simple random sampling technique from each of the chosen school to make a total of one hundred (100) as sample for study. Two (2) research questions were raised and answered in this study. To test the reliability of the instrument, five (5) Primary schools' teachers were selected randomly who are not part of the sample population and the value of 0.77 was obtained as correlation coefficient which is reliable enough for this study. Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and simple percentage statistical tool. The research findings revealed that, language of instruction is a good indicator and predictor of sustainable Basic Education in Nigeria, therefore, the language policy statement for the lower primary level of education will continue to be a mere statement of intention, not practicable in the classroom until the language of instruction is been considered as immediate language of the pupils for the sustainable education in Basic level of Education. Therefore, it was recommended that, government, educators, parents and the public in general should be adequately sensitised about the language policy on education. Parents and pupils should be enlightened on the importance of upholding their mother tongue in order to enable them change their attitude towards indigenous languages both mother tongue and language of the environment.

Keywords: Indigenous, Basic Education, Instruction, Sustainable, Mother-tongue

Introduction

A policy is a principle or protocol that guide decisions

and achieve rational outcomes. Language policy is the plan of course of action of a dynamic programme in directing language affairs as needed by government. It is what a government does either officially through legislation, court decisions, or policy to determine how languages are used, cultivate language skills needed to meet national priorities or to establish the rights of individuals or groups to use and maintain languages, (Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia). Many countries of the world have a language policy designed to favour or discourage the use of a particular language or set of languages.

Human communication is specifically called "language". Language is the unique characteristics of human species which serves as a medium of communication. The term language is purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols (Yule, 2009). Human beings have both the oral and written language. The oral language, as in listening and speaking, involves the use of vocal sounds while written language involves the arbitrary graphic representation of the sounds in writing. Human communication, that is language, is far more complex than the system of communication used by nonhuman. Human beings do not communicate in isolated sounds or words, rather sounds and words are woven together in connected discourse. Man's daily activities are conducted via language.

Language carries information; it is like a map that points to people, things and places all around us. It is a meaningful medium of sending a message from a sender to a receiver. How well individuals use language has much to do with what kind of people they are. Language is the most important tool of communication that distinguishes human beings from non-humans; educated from uneducated persons. Word power is as important as muscular power. With inspiring words, an individual will triumph over a formidable enemy (Ojetunde, 2012) stated that the strategic position occupied by language in human affairs can never be exaggerated, that whatever scientific and technological breakthroughs achieved by man to date is attributed to the existence of

language. Language is the most powerful tool of learning. It serves a crucial role in the teaching/learning process as all the educational messages the teacher has to pass on to the learner are encoded in language. How far a learner is able to learn depends very much on his ability to grasp and understand a spoken utterance in the language in which the instruction is passed on to him.

The language of instruction is so vital to the teaching-learning process that attention is given to it in the National Policy on Education. By language of instruction is meant the language which the teacher uses to pass on the instructional or educational messages to the learner in order to effect a change in the learner's behaviour in a desired direction. According to Ogbonyomi (2013), it is the language used as a teaching medium (in) informal and formal setting for the transmission of knowledge and skill aimed at developing the pupils' or students' mind and character. Studies have shown that the child will learn very little, if he has not mastered the language of instruction. Basic Education pupils cannot learn the most elementary facts and ideas until he has understood the language in which those (educational) ideas are expressed (Danmaigoro, 2013).

Basic Education which teaches literacy, numeracy and encourages cognitive, affective and social development is a pedagogic experience shared in one form or another by majority of human beings. No matter what other educational experiences that may follow, Basic Education is generally formative and lasting. It is at this point that the students have the greatest power to effect powerful and positive life altering change. The basic goals of UBE therefore, remain the laying of a foundation for life-long learning for all sections of the population, whatever be their conditions in life. The National antecedents to Universal Basic Education are part and parcel of Nigeria's educational history. The anti-colonial struggles which stressed the liberation of the people with a strong emphasis on educational opportunities must be mentioned and the post-colonial educational policy of the three regional governments which has different approaches but which pursued the common goal of widening Nigerian's educational base and re-shaping the educational pyramid. The relationship between language instruction and sustainable Basic Education has triggered the attention of different scholars (Prinsloo, Rogers, & Harvey (2018). Generally, it is construed that language is a vehicle to transfer and acquire knowledge and skills. The proficiency in the language of training and learning by both teachers and students enhances the quality of

education. The quality of education is enhanced by making training and learning interactive and hence learning taking place.

In the 2004 edition of the National Policy on Education, it is clearly stated thus: The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the environment for the first three years, and that during this period, English shall be taught as a subject. Then from the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment shall be taught as subjects. The language of the environment is by implication, the mother-tongue (MT) or the language spoken by the people of the community. The second implication is to cater for situations where the MT may not be viable as language of instruction. The implementation of this policy is not being pursued with any degree of seriousness, anywhere in the country. English language has remained the language of instruction despite the policy statement.

Nigeria, like any other African country, suffers from an extraordinarily high degree linguistic diversity with a population of over 148 million (Wikipedia, The free Encyclopaedia). Nigeria ranks third in the world with 516 ethnic languages spoken, below Papua New Guinea with 820 and Indonesia with 742 (Vistawide). The linguistic map of Nigeria depicts it as a multi-lingual nation. This is predicated on the fact that there are diverse ethnic groups with their varying languages in each of the regions that make up the nation, Nigeria, (Ojetunde, 2012).

An independent mono-lingual and mono-cultural country has little or no problem of choosing its own language (if it wishes) as a medium of instruction. A country like Nigeria just like many countries in the world particularly in Africa, due to their multi-lingual and multi-cultural nature, have problems in assigning roles to languages. The policy provisions on language in the NPE are very explicit; however, the implementation had been plagued with a lot of challenges. The following are some of the challenges militating against with the implementation of the language policy.

Lack of Awareness: Most teachers as well as political leaders, education managers, parents and the public are not enlightened about the use of indigenous languages as language of instruction. This has led to seeming misunderstanding, misconception and misapplication of the language policy provisions, (Obioma, 2011). Linguistically Mixed Classroom: Considering the fact that Nigeria is a multilingual and

a multicultural nation, it becomes virtually impossible to find a classroom that is composed of learners from one linguistic group particularly in parts of the country where the three major Nigerian languages – Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa are not spoken. Lack of Teachers: Teachers are key players in the implementation of any curriculum package. A teacher's ability to use his own mother tongue to teach is different from a teacher being trained to use his mother tongue to teach. How possible will it be for the government to train teachers in over 500 indigenous languages? Where are the institutions? What about the financial implication? As at 1988, the total number of teachers required for the teaching of three major Nigerian languages was 55,237. Only 6,383 or 11.6 of these were available, (Emenanjo in Obioma, 2011).

Now, one can imagine the number of teachers needed in all primary schools in the federation to teach in the mother tongue or language of the environment and the cost of training them. Lack of Necessary Materials: For effective teaching and learning to take place, necessary materials in form of books, teaching or instructional materials, must be available. It is on record that government agencies such as Nigeria Education Research and Development Council (NERDC), National Teachers Institute (NTI), Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), West African Examination Council (WAEC) etc. have developed some materials like L1 primary school curricula, L2 & L2 JSS curricula, L1 SSS curricula, orthographies, textbooks and materials in the three major Nigerian languages.

The Government: There is no strong political will and leadership on the part of the government to implement the language provisions. This is probably because the language provisions are not in any way considered a priority. So, there is no clearly worked out action plan that will guide implementation at the lowest level. Pupils' and Parental Attitude: Most children use the English language as their first language (L1). Such children enter the lower primary classes knowing nothing about their mother tongue or the language of the environment they live in. The Private Schools: There are so many private schools littered all through the federation. Ogbonyomi (2013) observed that many parents who send their children to private nursery and primary schools expect them to be taught in English even at the pre-primary level. All private schools are profit making ventures and will certainly succumb to what their patronisers want, rather than adhering to government policies that do not attract any form of penalty.

Duration of the use of the Specified Language: The policy specifies that the language of the environment

will be used to teach the child in the nursery and the lower primary classes (1-3). This duration does not connote any form of seriousness. Critics have questioned thus: if the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community is considered a very important medium for achieving initial and permanent literacy and numeracy, why should it be only used 'initial' and not throughout the whole of primary education? They have also asked: if the mother tongue (MT) or the language of the immediate community is considered so important at the pre-primary level as an integral part of the child's culture and the link between the home and the school, why should it be "principal" and not "solely" at this level?

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the language of instruction for sustainable basic education in Lagos State. Specifically; the objectives of the study are to:

1. examine the effects of language of instruction for sustainable basic education in Lagos State?
2. determine the factors militating against the implementation of the language policy in Nigeria?

Research Questions

1. What are the effects of language of instruction on sustainable basic education in Lagos State?
2. What are the factors militating against the implementation of the language policy in Nigeria?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Population comprises of all primary schools in Ibeju Lekki Local Government, Lagos State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select ten (10) Primary Schools in Ibeju Lekki Local Government area of Lagos State. Ten (10) teachers were randomly selected from using simple random sampling technique each of the chosen school to make a total of one hundred (100) as sample for study. Two (2) research questions were raised and answered in this study. A self-developed questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. The questionnaire contained items on the main title of study. To ensure the validity of the instrument, the researcher gave the draft of the questionnaire to the experts to restructure the instrument in line with the research questions. To determine the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted and the scores were tabulated and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient

formula was applied and a correlation coefficient of 0.77 was obtained. On the basis of the corrections done on the questionnaire items, and the test-retest reliability coefficient computed, the instrument was judged adequate, valid and reliable for the purpose of

Results

Research Question one: What are the effects of language of instruction on sustainable basic education in Lagos State?

S/N	ITEMS	YES		NO		TOTAL	
		Freq (N)	Percent %	Freq (N)	Percent %	Freq (N)	Percent %
1.	Language of instruction is a vehicle to transfer and acquire knowledge and skills	74.00	74.00	26.00	26.00	100.00	100.00
2.	Language of instruction enhances the quality of education	46.00	46.00	54.00	54.00	100.00	100.00
3.	Language of instruction promote easy understanding land comprehension	60.00	60.00	40.00	40.00	100.00	100.00
TOTAL		180.00	60.00	120.00	40.00	300.00	100.00

The study shows that majority of the respondents 74.00% chose 'Yes' for item 1 while the remaining 26.00% opted for 'No'. For item 2, majority of the respondents 46.00% chose 'Yes' while the remaining

gathering relevant data for the study. Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and simple percentage.

54.00% selected 'No'. 60 of the respondents 60.00% selected 'Yes' for item 3 while the remaining 40.00% chose 'No'. Since, the cumulative values of YES (60.00%) is higher than NO (40.00%) responses.

Research Question Two: What are the factors militating against the implementation of the language policy in Nigeria?

S/N	ITEMS	YES		NO		TOTAL	
		Freq (N)	Percent %	Freq (N)	Percent %	Freq (N)	Percent %
1.	Duration of the use of the specified Language	90.00	90.00	10.00	10.00	100.00	100.00
2.	Lack of Necessary Materials	58.00	58.00	42.00	42.00	100.00	100.00
3.	Linguistically Mixed Classroom	82.00	82.00	18.00	18.00	100.00	100.00
TOTAL		230.00	76.70	70.00	23.00	300.00	100.00

The study shows that majority of the respondents 90.00% chose 'Yes' for item 1 while the remaining 10.00% chose 'No'. For item 2, majority of the respondents 58.00% selected 'Yes' while the remaining 42.00% selected 'No'. Majority of the respondents 82.00% opted for 'Yes' for item 3 while the remaining 18.00% chose 'No'. Therefore, since the cumulative value of Yes (76.7%) is greater than No (23.3%) value.

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 indicates the effect of language of instruction

on sustainable basic education in Lagos State. The result of the study revealed that language of instruction is a vehicle to transfer and acquire knowledge and skills, enhances the quality of education and promote easy understanding and comprehension. This result is in line with Prinsloo, Rogers and Harvey (2018) who revealed that the relationship between language instruction and sustainable Basic Education has triggered the attention of different scholars. Generally, it is construed that language instruction is a vehicle to transfer and acquire knowledge and skills. The proficiency in the language of training and learning by

both teachers and students enhances the quality of education. The quality of education is enhanced by making training and learning interactive and hence learning taking place.

Table 2 indicates the factors militating against the implementation of the language policy in Nigeria. The study also identified the duration of the use of the specified language, lack of necessary materials and linguistically mixed classroom etc are some factors militating against the implementation of the language policy in Nigeria. This result agreed with Ojetunde, (2012) that lack of awareness, lack of teachers, duration of the use of the specified language, lack of necessary materials, linguistically mixed classroom, the government, pupils' and parental attitude are factors militating against the implementation of the language policy in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study found that language of instruction is a good indicator and predictor of sustainable Basic Education in Nigeria, therefore, the language policy statement for the lower primary level of education will continue to be a mere statement of intention, not practicable in the classroom until the language of instruction is been considered as immediate language of the pupils for the sustainable education in Basic level of Education.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made.

1. Political leaders, educators, parents and the public in general should be adequately sensitized about the language policy on education.
2. Parents and pupils should be enlightened on the importance of upholding their mother tongue in other to enable them change their attitude towards indigenous languages (both mother tongue and language of the environment).
3. There should be laid down sanctions for defaulters at all levels – federal, state, local and even school. Thus, the federal government should specify sanctions for defaulting states, and state government should do same for

defaulting local government, and an effective and efficient monitoring team should be delegated to ensure that mother tongue or the language of the environment is used strictly in teaching pupils at the lower primary level of education.

4. The above is however dependent on adequate provision of all that is needed to effectively implement the policy. Hence teaching and learning materials for example, text books and instructional materials, as well as qualified teachers should be made available to cater for all the languages – over 500.
5. Colleges of education and Faculties of Education in the Universities should plan language education courses for all the languages in a given state so that would-be-teachers will be trained to have rudimentary knowledge of their mother-tongue as well as the language of the immediate environment.

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