

EFFECT OF STUDENTS' PREFERENCE TO OTHER SUBJECTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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Introduction

Language is an important factor of human life as well as the most important tool in education. It has been variously defined by scholars. For instance, Adegbite (1992:2) opines that, "language can be described as a system of sounds or vocal symbols which human beings use to communicate experiences. It is a special characteristic of human beings". Language is the most important factor in identifying who is who, where one comes from, what one are made of, one culture, and tradition. It is a vehicle which is used to impart knowledge and so a vehicle of thought, culture and communication. It has a dual function; as a subject on the curriculum as well as a medium of instruction.

Language is the pivot around which every activity rotates hence it is an instrument of public relations, medium of imparting knowledge, means of national and political interaction and a gateway to national unity.

According to Mgbodile (1998), language is the chief means of generating, maintaining and transferring culture and civilization. He stresses that man learns to speak a language in the way he learns to walk, to climb or swim. Consequently, language is the bedrock to nation building. For Aziza (1998:263), "Language is the most important tool with which society is organized and it is hardly possible to talk of national development without including the language with which the people formulate their thought, ideas and needs".

The aims of learning a second language are for effective communication, cultural understanding and cross fertilization of ideas. The issue of development and promotion of Nigerian languages for the attainment of the aims and objectives of the National Policy on Education deserves serious attention especially in the present day Nigeria where political and religious upheavals are hitting the unity of the nation.

Therefore, it becomes necessary for the National Policy on Education (NPE) to make provision for language in education in its formulation. The National Policy on Education recognizes primary education as the foundation of the entire educational structure and

prescribes as one of its aims, the inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy with emphasis on effective communication Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004). The language policy at best highlighted the importance of Nigeria's indigenous languages and their place in the educational system. Section 4 of the national policy on education (2004:17) dwells on language provisions on secondary education which is the main focus of this study. The provision in that section which relates to language includes the following:

The broad goals of secondary education are:

- (a) “Develop and produce Nigerian language, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage”. (Para. 17(d)).
- (b) “Language of environment to be taught as Li (Para. 19(a) iii).
- (c) “One major Nigerian language other than that of the environment to be taught as L2” (Para. 19(a) iv).
- (d) “At junior secondary school (JSS), two Nigerian languages are to be taught as core subjects, one of which is the language of the environment which shall be taught as Li where it has orthography and literature. But where it does not have, it shall be taught with emphasis on orality as L2” (para. 19(a) xi).
- (e) “A major Nigerian language as one of the subjects in the core curriculum at the senior secondary schools (SSS)” (para. 20(a) iii).

In order to achieve the specified objectives as in the relevant aspect of (A-E) above, Igbo, a major Nigerian language for instance is taught in Ebonyi state as the mother tongue/the language of the environment (MT/LIC) while Hausa and Yoruba are taught as L2 or the second indigenous languages. This is meant to achieve the lofty objective of the policy, which is not only for the advancement of national development but also as a means of preserving people's cultural heritage.

Furthermore, related to language education at secondary level is the prescription of English language as the language of instruction for secondary school education. However, the 2004 policy stipulated that students in junior secondary school (JSS) should offer English and two Nigerian languages as school subjects. While at the senior secondary school (SSS) student are to take English and one Nigerian language. Regrettably government did not make policy statement as to how the language policy stipulated in the national policy on education (NPE) is to be implemented. This according to Bamgbose (1991:134) is elapse on the part of the government. Thus, he asserts

“Nigeria’s official language policy about use of certain languages in the national assembly and education does not specify any implementation

agency; but the national language center through funding provided by the assembly has been trying to work out legislative terminology by making use of experts in the universities...”

He went further to identify some specific problems of the policy at the implementation levels as well as efforts made by the assembly to see that the national language policy is being implemented in schools.

In 1992, the then Minister of Education, Prof. Aliu Babatunde Fafunwa outlined what his Ministry was able to achieve towards the implementation of the language provisions contained in the National Policy on Education. They are as follows:

- (i) Provision of approved syllabus for Nigeria languages (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba).
- (ii) Provision of approved syllabus for English, Arabic and French.
- (iii) Setting up a technical committee on the production of teachers for the three major Nigerian languages.
- (iv) Funding of a national workshop on the production of teachers of the major Nigerian languages.
- (v) Organization of a National Curriculum Conference.
- (vi) The production of texts on the vocabulary of primary science and mathematics in nine Nigerian languages.
- (vii) The production of quadrangular glossary of legislative terms in English; Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba.
- (viii) The development of orthography for thirty-one Nigerian languages.
- (ix) The production of Meta-language manuals for the three major Nigerian languages.

Some of the relevant language projects were also carried out by the Nigerian Education Research and Development Council (NERDC). Unfortunately, the effects of these concrete achievements are not so much felt in schools.

In addition to all these, the Federal Ministry of Education two years ago went ahead to establish the National Institute of Nigerian languages at Aba, Abia state of Nigeria. This institute was saddled with the responsibility of fostering the development and teaching of Nigerian languages (Epuchie, 2008).

The policy aims at making the Nigerian child bilingual at the end of primary and secondary education with the acquisition of at least one of the major Nigerian languages apart from the individual's Mother Tongue (M.T) or language of the immediate community (LIC) and English. This calls for the need to plan the educational system, so as to give every Nigerian child a sound and worthwhile education, which is one of the greatest legacies any

nation can bequeath to her citizens. Supporting this view, Ugonna (1982:24) explains that: “Nigeria can benefit immensely from proper planning and adopting a virile language policy deliberately aimed at producing an indigenous lingua franca”.

Statement of the Problem

In a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual polity like Nigeria, where pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial experiences have politicized inter-ethnic relationships, a language policy which promotes (and by implication adopts) the teaching and learning of the languages of the major nationalities, is bound to raise some fundamental problems on the national question. The emphasis placed on a sound knowledge of English language and its use as a yardstick both for admission into institutions of learning and also for employment purposes, has produced great effects on the nation and her cultures.

First, it is gradually eroding people's interest and enthusiasm in the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages, which are presently looked at as inferior school subjects. Secondly, the interest that should have been on the Nigerian languages is transferred to the study of English language and other foreign languages such as French and German. Aware of the imminent loss of cultural as well as national identity through gross neglect of the vital role of indigenous languages, the Federal Government of Nigeria took the initiative to formulate a language policy, the implementation of which it was hoped, would produce far-reaching effects.

There is the fear therefore that if the extent of government involvement in the implementation of the national language policy is not ascertained with the view to determining any militating factor and proffering possible solutions, our hope for a national language that will serve as a principal medium of instruction, commerce, and national development will remain elusive. The problem of this study therefore is: what is the extent of students' preference to other subjects in the implementation of the national language policy in secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to ascertain the effect students' preference to other subjects in the implementation of the language policy among the secondary schools in Ebonyi State. Specifically, the study ascertains:

1. Level of interest on the students and Nigerian language teachers in the learning and teaching of the Nigerian languages.
2. Level of underestimation of the value of the study of Nigerian languages.

3. Level of belief that the learning a Nigerian languages is meant for disadvantaged people, as a result of academics or gender.

Significance of the Study

This study may be considered significant in many ways: To Nigerian Language Educators, To Curriculum Planners, To Teachers, To Students, To Parents, To Ministry of Education, To Researchers. It is most likely that the study will give some insight into the extent to which the language provisions in the national policy on education is being implemented in Ebonyi State. The research work will be of immense value to all the stakeholders and policy-makers. Findings of the study will be of benefit to the Ministry of Education and State Secondary Education Board, as they will see the need to employ effective strategies in enforcing the implementation of national language policy.

Both the state secondary and Zonal Secondary Education Boards will benefit from the findings of this study as the findings will be directing the board's attention to the salient language areas that need proper supervision to ensure effective implementation. It will also be valuable to the teachers, students and general public in addressing the problem posed by the implementation of the language provision of the National Language Policy on Education. The findings will enable the teachers to improve on their teaching methods and also help other multilingual nations other than Nigeria which are finding it difficult to adopt the mother-tongue education policy, to find a lasting solution to their problems. The findings will also serve as a guide to researchers for further educational research in other areas similar to this. Above all, the theoretical significance of this study will add to the already existing literature.

Scope of the Study

The study focuses mainly on the effect of students' preference to other subjects in the implementation of the language policy in secondary schools in Ebonyi State. The study was delimited to the language teachers in the three education zones in Ebonyi State. It is hoped that these teachers being the language teachers are in advantaged position to supply the information needed for the achievement of the objectives of the study.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. To what extent is the level of interest of the students and Nigerian language teachers in the learning and teaching of Nigerian languages?
2. What is the level of underestimation of the value of the study of Nigerian languages?

3. To what extent is the level of belief that the learning of Nigerian languages is meant for disadvantaged people, as a result of academics or gender?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated to guide the study and will be tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H0₁: There is no significant difference in the level of interest of the students and Nigerian language teachers in the learning and teaching of Nigerian languages in secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

H0₂: There is no significant difference in the level of underestimation of the value of the study of Nigerian languages in secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

H0₃: There is no significant difference in the level of belief that the learning of Nigerian languages is meant for disadvantaged people, as a result of academics or gender in secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Methodology

Design of the Study: The researcher adopted a descriptive research design. This was carried out in all the public secondary schools in Ebonyi State. It was concentrated on the three Education zone of the state namely: Abakaliki, Onueke and Afikpo Education Zones. The population of this study comprises all language teachers in secondary schools in the three education zones of Ebonyi State. The teachers are distributed as follows: Abakaliki zone – 264 teachers, Onueke Zone – 183 teachers and Afikpo zone – 155 teachers. Six hundred and two (602) language teachers were involved in the study. In other words, all the language teachers were included in the study because of the manageable size of the population (Nwana, 1992). The researcher used a self-developed questionnaire, the national language policy assessment questionnaire (NLPAQ) which consists of 8 items. The respondents were required to indicate on a 4 point scale, the extent to which the government is involved in the implementation of the Nigerian language policy using to a Very Great Extent (VGE).

The instrument was validated by five experts, three of the experts were from Arts and Social Science Education (Igbo Option) of the Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, while two experts from Measurement and Evaluation Unit of Science Education Department.

The reliability of the instrument was computed using Cronbach alpha statistics and a reliability coefficient of 0.875 were obtained. The researcher adopted Direct Delivery Technique (DDT) in data collection with the help of three research assistants, one from each Education zones in the state.

Data collected were analyzed using mean (\bar{x}) score and standard deviation to answer the research questions. Hypotheses were tested using t-test. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Decision Rule: 3.1-4.0 Very Great Extent (VGE); 2.1 – 3.0 Great Extent (GE); 1.1 – 2.0 Less Extent (LE); 0.1 – 1.0 Very Less Extent (VLE).

Results

Research question 1: What is the level of interest of the students and Nigerian language teachers in the learning and teaching of Nigerian languages in secondary schools in Ebonyi State?

Table 1: Students Prefer other Subjects to Nigerian Languages

Teachers	No	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Decision
Urban	239	2.54	0.71	GE
Rural	361	2.86	0.59	GE

The result of the data analysis presented on Table 1 shows that students prefer other subjects to Nigerian languages in secondary schools in Ebonyi State to a great extent. This is because the mean (\bar{x}) score of 2.54 is obtained by the urban teachers while the mean (\bar{x}) score of 2.86 is obtained by the rural teachers. Both the urban and rural teachers have a similar response of students' preference of other subjects to Nigerian languages therefore location was not determinant of students' interest in Nigerian language.

Research question 2: What is the level of underestimation of the value of the study of Nigerian languages in secondary schools in Ebonyi State as perceived by teachers?

Table 2: Level of Underestimation of the Value of the Study of Nigerian Language

Teachers	No	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Decision
Male	289	2.88	0.01	GE
Female	311	3.19	0.69	VGE

The result of data analysis presented on Table 2 shows that Nigerian languages does not lead anybody far to a very extent as perceived by female teachers while the male teachers' response is to a great extent. This is because the mean (\bar{x}) of 2.88 is obtained by the male teachers while the mean (\bar{x}) of 3.19 is obtained by the female Nigerian language teachers respectively.

Research Question 3: To what extent is the level of belief that the learning of Nigerian languages is meant for disadvantaged people, as a result of academics or gender?

Table 3: Extent of Belief that the Learning of Nigerian Languages is Meant for Disadvantaged People as a Result of academics or Gender in Secondary Schools in Ebonyi State

Teachers	No	Mean (\bar{x})	SD	Decision
Urban	239	2.66	0.83	GE
Rural	361	2.79	0.66	GE

The result of data analysis presented on Table 3 shows that the respondents rated the belief that the learning of Nigerian languages is meant for disadvantaged people as a result of academics or gender to a great extent. This is because the mean (\bar{x}) score obtained by the teachers in urban is 2.66 while the mean (\bar{x}) obtained by teachers in rural is 2.79 respectively. This implies that teachers of the major Nigerian languages believed that learning of Nigerian languages is meant for disadvantaged people as a result of academics or gender to a great extent in secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean achievement of students' preference of other subjects to Nigerian languages in secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Table 4: t-test analysis on the opinion of urban and rural Nigerian language teachers as determinants of students' preference of other subjects to Nigerian languages in secondary schools in Ebonyi State

Teacher	N	\bar{x}	SD	df	t-cal	t-tab	Decision
Urban	239	2.54	0.71	598	5.896	1.960	S
Rural	361	2.86	0.59				

The result of t-test analysis presented on Table 4 shows that there was a significant difference in the mean achievement score of urban and rural teachers in secondary schools in Ebonyi State. This is because from the responses of the teachers the t-calculated value of 5.896 obtained is higher than t-tabulated value of 1.960 as shown on the table. The research therefore rejected the null hypothesis.

H₀₂: There is a significant difference in the opinion of male and female Nigerian language teachers on the level of underestimation of the value of the study of Nigerian languages in secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Table 5: t-test analysis on the opinion of male and female teachers on the level of underestimation of the value of the study of Nigerian languages

Teacher	N	\bar{x}	SD	df	t-cal	t-tab	Decision
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Male	289	2.88	1.01	598	4.336	1.960	S
Female	311	3.19	0.69				

The result of t-test analysis presented on Table 5 shows that the t-calculated value of 4.336 is greater than the t-tabulated value of 1.960. Since the t-calculated value is greater than t-tabulated, there is therefore a significant difference in the mean responses of male and female teachers on the level of underestimation of the value of the study of Nigerian languages in secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in the opinion of teachers' belief that Nigerian languages is meant for disadvantaged people as a result of academics or gender on the basis of urban and rural secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Table 6: t-test Analysis on the Opinion of Urban and Rural Nigerian Language Teachers on the Extent of Belief that the Learning of Nigerian Languages is Meant for Disadvantaged People as a Result of Academics or Gender

Teacher	N	\bar{x}	SD	df	t-cal	t-tab	Decision
Urban	239	2.66	0.83	598	2.253	1.960	NS
Rural	361	2.79	0.66				

The result of the t-test analysis presented on Table 6 shows that there is a significant difference in the responses of teachers in urban and rural secondary schools in Ebonyi State. This is because the t-calculated value of 2.153 obtained is greater than the t-tabulated value of 1.960. Based on this, the researcher failed to uphold the null hypothesis.

Discussion of Findings

This is done under interest of students and Nigerian language teachers, underestimation of the value of the study of Nigerian languages and the belief that Nigerian languages is meant for disadvantaged people, as a result of academics or gender.

Interest of students and Nigerian language teachers in learning and teaching of Nigerian languages

The result of the study in Table 1 indicates that the mean (\bar{x}) of 2.54 was obtained by the urban teachers while 2.86 was obtained by the rural teachers signifying that students preference to other subjects is to a great extent. This implies that students' preference to other subjects affected the implementation of the national language policy in secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Bamgbose (1996) attributed this preference to the historical low status of Nigerian languages in the school curriculum. He noted that there is a tendency that the students who

study these Nigerian languages as subject in schools and teachers who teach them might be looked down upon in their field of endeavour. To lend credence to this, Emenyonu (1993) opined that students' preference to studying other subjects to neglect of the Nigerian languages is a cog in the implementation of the Nigerian language policy in secondary schools in Nigeria.

H0₁: The result of the hypothesis in Table 4, the t-calculated value is 5.896 while the t-tabulated value of 1.96 as shown on the table. From the two values, the t-calculated value is higher than the t-tabulated value. Therefore, H0₁ which stated that there is no significant difference in the mean achievement of the level of the students' preference of other subjects to Nigerian languages in secondary schools in Ebonyi State was nulled and concludes that there is a significant difference in the opinion of urban and rural Nigerian language teachers on the students preference of other subjects to Nigerian languages in secondary schools in Ebonyi State. In urban schools it could be that Nigerian language teachers are very few to cover the classes. On the other hand, schools in rural areas might not have enough teachers and they will be confronted with rural challenges. All schools (urban and rural) have the same aims and objectives to accomplish. In line with the above Tyler in Chidi-Ehiem (2014) reported that schools in the inner part of the city are very different in many respects from that there were many variations found in thousands of schools he studied.

Underestimation of the value of the study of Nigerian languages

The result of the study in Table 2 shows that a mean (\bar{x}) of 2.88 for male Nigerian language teachers and mean (\bar{x}) of 3.19 for female Nigerian language teachers. This implies that there is a significant difference in the mean responses of the Nigerian language teachers in secondary schools in Ebonyi State based on gender of teachers on the implementation of the national language policy in secondary schools in Ebonyi State. This was indicated that the t-calculated of the opinion of male and female Nigerian teachers were greater than the t-tabulated value of 1.96, therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected for the given functions which showed that there is a significant difference in the mean rating of male and female teachers on the implementation of the national language policy in secondary schools in Ebonyi State. To support this, Bamgbose (1996) attributes it to the historical low status of Nigerian language in the school curriculum. He further noted that there is a tendency that the teachers who teach these languages might be looked down upon in their field of endeavour to lend credence to this Emenyonu in Chidi-Ehiem (2014) opines that girls tend to do better in languages than boys.

Extent of belief that Nigerian languages is meant for disadvantaged people, as a result of academics or gender

The result seeks to find out the level of belief that the learning of Nigerian languages is meant for disadvantaged people as a result of academics or gender. The result shows that teachers of the major Nigerian languages believed that learning of Nigerian languages is meant for disadvantaged people as a result of academics or gender to a great extent. This implies that teachers of Nigerian languages believed that Nigerian language is meant for disadvantaged people as a result of academics or gender in secondary schools in Ebonyi State. The implication of finding could be that language learning is meant for girls and also makes one to look primitive and this might in turn affect the implementation of the national language policy. Most often, science students often seen it as a subject for the arts students and hardly indicate interest in it. To lend credence to this, Emenyonu in Chidi-Ehiem (2014) opined that students' preference to studying other subjects to the neglect of the Nigerian languages is a cog in the implementation of the Nigerian language policy in secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Summary of Findings

From the analysis above, the following findings were made:

1. The respondents reported that the interest of students and Nigerian language teachers in learning and teaching of Nigerian languages is to a great extent.
2. Teachers' response shows that Nigerian languages does not lead anybody far to a great extent.
3. The teachers of the major Nigerian languages believed that Nigerian language is meant for disadvantaged people as a result of academics or gender to a great extent.
4. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement of students' preference of other subjects to Nigerian languages in secondary schools in Ebonyi State.
5. There is a significant difference in the opinion of male and female Nigerian language teachers on the level of underestimation of the value of the study of Nigerian languages in secondary schools in Ebonyi State.
6. There is no significant difference in the opinion of teachers' belief that Nigerian languages is meant for disadvantaged people as a result of academics or gender on the basis of urban and rural secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the researcher made the following recommendations.

1. Students should put in more effort in terms of learning and using their language, as it is a means of getting jobs that can earn them a living.
2. Nigerian language teachers/educators should on their part show more commitment to the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages.
3. Nigerian language teachers should also embark on a re-fresher courses and thereby update their knowledge in their area of specialization.
4. For the policy to sail through, parents, guardians, teachers and the society at large should try as much as possible to encourage their children and wards to learn their language because it is always said that an individual's pride lies in his language and culture.

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