

**LANGUAGE POLICY AND PLANNING VERSUS IMPLEMENTATION IN ONDO
STATE
A BLESSING OR A CURSE?**

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Abstract

Several efforts have been made to influence the function of language in Nigeria owing to its long historical antecedents in the country. Language policy, planning and development is a deliberate effort to influence the function, Structure, or acquisition of languages or language variety within a speech community. It is often associated with government planning, but is also used by a variety of non-governmental organizations, such as grass-roots organizations and even individuals. The goals of language planning differ depending on the nation or organization, but generally, it includes making planning decisions and possibly changes for the benefit of communication. Despite many efforts that have been made to influence the function of language in Nigeria owing to its long historical antecedents in the country, yet scholars are still observing successive governments attempts coming up with different language policies that seemingly contribute to the development and decline of the use of language in Nigeria. This paper attempts to analyze the contribution of language policy and planning to the development and function of languages in the pre-colonial Nigeria as well as the effects of language planning to the decline of languages as well as the reduction of students admitted for indigenous language in Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko (AAUA) and perhaps in other universities in Nigeria recently.

Keywords: Language Planning, Language Policy, Development, Decline, Successive Government

Introduction

This work tries to review the various types of language policy by the Federal Government and showcase the advantages and demerits derivable with the introduction of the new policy. Nigeria, a nation celebrated for its rich tapestry of linguistics diversity, grapples with the persistent complexities of language policy and planning. Home to over 500 languages (Eberhard et al., 2020), Nigeria's linguistic landscape is both a source of cultural richness and breeding ground for challenges in the areas such as education, governance and social cohesion. Language policies the deliberate and systematic efforts to influence the function, structure, or acquisition of languages within a speech community (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2005), are therefore vital to shaping the nation's linguistics ecology and sociopolitical fabric.

These policies, often multifaceted and encompassing diverse domains, aim to foster national unity while respecting plurality. The implementation of language policies in Nigeria is deeply rooted in its colonial history and subsequent nation-building efforts. Post-independence, the Nigerian government has oscillated between favoring the use of English as a unifying force and promoting the development of indigenous languages in education and public life. Such dynamics are evident in the National Policy of Education (NPE), which has undergone several iterations (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014), reflecting evolving perspectives on the role of language in national development. The NPE has consistently acknowledged the multilingual nature of the country, prescribing indigenous languages alongside English for instructions at the primary level, and providing options for their continued study in the secondary education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014), within this context, the recent introduction of a new National language Policy in 2022, which mandates the use of mother tongue for instruction in primary schools, represents a significant shift (Federal Executive Council, 2022). This policy, with the stated goal of preserving cultural heritage and promoting national identity, has sparked the debate amongst educators, policymakers and the public, concerning its potential impact on the quality of education, the development of multilingual abilities, and the overall linguistics ecology of the nation. This study aims to examine the implementation of language policy and planning in Ondo state, southwest Nigeria. It specifically investigates the implications of recent policy changes in the context of the state, while seeking to understand the factors that have hindered previous successful policy implementation. This paper aims to evaluate whether the implementation of new language policy represents a "blessing" or a "curse" for Ondo state. This paper will analyze the impact of the new policy on the decline of indigenous languages, as well as the reduction of students admitted for indigenous languages programs, using the case of Yoruba language education in Adekunle Ajasin University, Ondo State, Nigeria.

Mother tongue or indigenous language education

The 2005 Ethnological data listed a total of 521 languages in Nigeria 510 of the languages are living languages, 2 are second languages, but there are no mother tongue speakers and have gone into extinction (Data 2012:57). This shows that 508 out of a total 510 living languages are indigenous languages with mother tongue speakers within Nigeria the presumption of language in the National policy on education

Languages in the National Policy on Education (NPE)

Prior to the attainment of political independence in Nigeria in 1960, both the nature and main thrust of language education in the formal school system were determined mostly by the Christian missionaries who encouraged the teaching and learning of English and indigenous languages in our schools (Fafunwa, 2007). Thus, from 1960-present, the Federal Government has published many versions of the National Policy on Education (1977, reprinted 1981, 1995, 1998, 2004, 2007 and 2013, reprinted 2014) and each of them recognizes the multilingual nature of the country as well as the importance of languages in various fields of human endeavour. For instance, building on the provisions of 1999 Constitution (Section 55), the 4th Edition of the NPE (2004) reinforces the various language communication needs of the country through the prescription of indigenous

languages as well as English, French and Arabic in both the primary and secondary school curricula. Specifically, at the primary education level, the NPE makes provisions for the teaching and learning of the mother tongue or "language of the immediate community" (L1) and English/French/Arabic language (L2) for the first three or four years of basic education. Thereafter, English is listed as a compulsory subject (L2) while French and Arabic are language options (L3) for the last three years in primary school (primary 4-6) and at the level of junior secondary school (JSS 1-3).

At the level of senior secondary education, the compulsory status of English language is upheld while L1 becomes "non-vocational electives" (Sections 1-3). However, in the 6th and current edition of the NPE (reprinted 2014), Yoruba and "any Nigerian language that has curriculum" are in the core curriculum of senior secondary education (Section 38.2), the clause "non-vocational electives" having been expunged from the policy document. Can this action on the part of policy-makers be translated as an upgrade of the status of L1 in the language provisions of this edition? What is the real status of mother tongue or indigenous language education in terms of policy formulation and implementation?

The old policy

The 1977 policy emphasized on the mother tongue education at the primary level was laudable attempt to build a foundation for literacy and cognitive development in the child's familiar language. However, the policy faced significant implementation challenges, including a lack of trained teachers, insufficient instructional materials, and a shift in priorities, especially in area where English was seen as the language of upward mobility. The policy also failed to account for the mobility of people across the country, and therefore did not fully reflect the linguistic realities of all children. The rationale behind this policy shift, as articulated by the Minister of Education, was the preservation of Nigerian culture and promotion of national identity through mother tongue education. However, the policy across Nigeria's diverse linguistic landscape, and the potential for widening educational inequalities. The policy's success depends on the availability of trained teachers, curriculum materials and a shift in attitude among parent and the general public. The policy's one-size-fits-all approach may not be suitable for all regions and therefore a flexible approach is necessary.

The official document titled Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education (NPE) was published in 1977 resisined in 1981 the Policy states that: In Primary School of six years, each child must study two languages; his mother tongue or an indigenous language of wider community where the child domiciles and gradually learn English from pre-primary to primary 3 as subject thee medium of instruction should be the mother tongue or language of his immediate environment. From primary 4-6 the medium of instruction should be English and the Child must also learn one of the major indigenous language in which he domiciles. Unfortunately present primary school teachers do not adhere to this policy and that operate at this level of educational system is amorphous. Teachers alternate or code switch or code mix mother tongue and English language that learners may not be able to comprehend what is taught. Al this state, learners memorize and parrot what is being taught just to Perform in their examination. Also, nothing is being said about other indigenous language

which pupils are supposed to learn as subjects at primary school level rather than in the secondary school level of education.

The New Policy

The national policy on education states that English Language should be the medium of instruction at School secondary school level of education, The learner must study his mother tongue or an indigenous language of wider communication of his area of domicile, English language and any one of the three major language, (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba), provided the language chosen is distinct from the child's mother tongue in junior secondary school (JSS) of three years duration. At senior secondary education, which is the last three years of education, the policy states that the child must study two languages; one indigenous language and English. However, the policy does not list any indigenous languages as elective. While the recent decline in admissions might be attributed to a multitude of factors, the New National Language Policy, with its emphasis on mother tongue instruction raises questions about it's potential impact on student choices and academic pathways. It's possible that students are been steered away from Yoruba languages because it is no longer seem as providing a pathway for broader education. The decline in student enrollment in Yoruba language program is a serious. It is important to understand the factors at play as the decline has implications for: the preservation of Yoruba language and culture; the development of Yoruba language scholars and educators, who are vital for transmission of the language; the representation of the Yoruba people in academic contexts; and the overall linguistics diversity of Nigeria. This case provides a tangible example of how national policies can influence language use and education at the local level. The complexities of language policies in Nigeria are further amplified by the tension between national unity and cultural preservation.

The decision to promote multiple languages in educational context reflect and attempt to find a balance between these competing goals. This tension is particularly visible in the context of the New National Language Policy. This examines the relationship between the implementation of language policies in Nigeria, including the implementation of new national language policy and the outcome of indigenous languages with a particular focus on Yoruba language education. Neglecting Provision of the NPE: The compulsory, free, universal and qualitative basic education, as mandated by the NPE (Section 2.12) has not been consistently enforced. The factors include adequate funding, corruption and insufficient oversight. This often results in dilapidated school infrastructure, a shortage of learning materials, and lack of qualified teachers. The lack of implementation directly impact the quality of language education, undermining the policy goals. While these issues are present in many parts of Nigeria, they are particularly evident in Ondo State, which, due to limited financial resources, faces a shortage qualified language teachers, limited instructional resources, and curriculum challenges, all of which impact the effective implementation of language education. These issues can be broadly categorised into resources constraints (inadequate funding, instructional materials); issues around teachers training and deployment (inadequate teaching staff, curriculum issues); and finally, societal factors which includes the negative perception of language education. The 1999 Constitution's recognition of English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as languages for official business

(Section 55) has implications for education, reinforcing English as the official language while acknowledging the importance of major indigenous languages. The question this raises is whether the federal government's preferences for English as the official language could be one factor that influences student choices and that results in reduced admission. The recognition of indigenous languages in the constitution (Owhotu, 2010), is a step toward promoting linguistics diversity. However, its impact on policy and education is still ambitious. This paper examines the impact of these policies on indigenous languages and the challenge is faced in their implementation.

The Latest Policy

On November 30, 2022, the Federal Executive Council (FEC) approved a new national language policy. The gist of the policy is Nigerian students from primary one to six must be taught only in their mother tongue. According to the Minister of Education, Mallam Adamu Adamu, the chosen native language will be the dominant one spoken in the community. When the policy is implemented, Nigerian students won't use the English language until the junior secondary school level. The government is implementing this policy to promote and preserve our culture, as some of it is already lost. Although this policy appears to be a step in the right direction, Nigeria has over 600 indigenous languages. So, what are the implications of this policy? Nigeria is a diverse country and people, regardless of their tribes or language, settle down in different parts of the country. It's normal to see Igalas in the West or Igbos in the North. Some children, unlike others, speak and understand their native tongue even more than the colonizers language. This new policy gives them a chance to shine. Subjects that have always seemed alien to them will suddenly make more sense, and they can finally feel more comfortable and perform better in their studies.

Many Nigerian parents are really concerned and monitor their children as spoken English because they believe English Language is a wide window to civilization. Government is going to turn their word around with this new policy. They will probably have to pay for coaching classes for their children to understand English before secondary school. While the government's goal to preserve on this Omotoyinbo (2015). Noted that on this, most parent and guardians seems not conscious of mother tongue education and the cognitive and linguistic benefit it provides. They rather believe student should learn in languages that are more valuable for acquiring job and assessing higher education. As a result they which that children yet abhor the language (English) that has benefited the elite through Indigenous language isn't bad idea most people also out culture as paganism and may not fully support it because of misinformation. Much funding has to into teacher training and the provision of books written in the mother tongues. Student may face a painful shift when learning in English when they get to secondary schools and higher institutions. This policy looks like it would create many unnecessary issues for students and teachers and asides , it doesn't even have an implementation timeline yet. Again in Ondo State of Nigeria for instance Yoruba Language is more compulsory for students the WAEC and NECO final Exams. Students as a result loose interest in the only endogenous language of the area.

Statement of the Problem

Laudable as the old National policy on Education and the language selection seems to be, the Federal Government in November 2022 rolled out a language policy mandating the new compulsory teaching of mother tongue to all pupils in every primary school in Nigeria. This could be as a result of shortcoming observed in the old language policy, more by the teaching of mother tongue with restrictions to the first three years of primary education in Nigeria. This present study examines the factors that led to the emergence of the new National Languages Policy in Nigeria. It also considered the of the causes of decline of students admitted for Yoruba language in Arts Education in Adekunle Ajasin University and perhaps in some other universities in Nigeria. For instance, in 2023/24 academic session Four (4) candidates were admitted for Yoruba Education and this incredible figure reduced to a ridiculous one of One (01) candidate in 2024/25 academic session. For Yoruba Arts, Twelve (12) candidates were admitted in 2023/24, only six (6) candidates gained admission for Yoruba Arts in 2024/25 session. English language Education had one hundred and seventeen candidates admitted for 2023/24 session and the number increased to 140 students in 2024/25 session. These discrepancies are what become the headache of this paper.

Aims and Objectives

The specific objectives will rigorously examine the old language policy, the new language policy, the latest language policy, the factors that led to migrate the old language policy and the significance of the latest language policy in Nigeria. It aims at showcasing the faults of the policies and the non-implementation hurdles of same.

Language Situation in Nigeria

In Nigeria, language policy on education dates back to the colonial era when in 1927 the British Advisory Committee on native education in tropical Africa recommended that indigenous languages should serve as medium of instruction in the lower years of primary education (Musa R.J., 2010). Language policy on education which passed through many stages is a pressing contemporary concern in the highly multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Nigeria of about 500 indigenous languages spoken within its borders (Blench R., 2002). The English language was the medium of instruction before the National Policy on Education advocated the use of indigenous languages in teaching at the basic level of education. Language plays different roles in teaching and learning such as official documents, legislature, mass media, politics, official business, education etc. in a particular setting. Language here can either be language learnt and taught in the school system or the language used for educating at various levels and sectors of a national system (Obanya, 2004). Terry (2004) sees policy as an overall guide that gives the general limits and direction in which administrative action will take place. This implies that policy only defines the area in which decisions can be made but cannot give the decision, instead ensuring consistency of an action since an administration is governed by approved principles. The concentration here is on Educational policy which gives the direction for educational activities. Despite the fact that the government through the National Policy on Education can be said to favour the use of two or more languages in the educational system.

The language of instruction in multilingual Nigeria has always been a matter of concern to educators and educational planners. The African situation is aptly captured by Quadraogo (2000) when he asserts that, "education and language issues are very complex in Africa because of the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual situations". Due to this linguistic plurality, the government appreciated the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion as well as preserving culture. Thus, there was the need for language policy, planning and development as well as implementation. In 2004, an official document titled National Policy on Education was promulgated which was revised in 2014. This document assigned different roles to the many Nigerian languages in the nation's education at various levels. The policy stated that every child shall learn in the language of the immediate environment in the first three years while English language shall be taught as a school subject. However, in the interest of national unity among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria, every child is required to learn one of the three national languages (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba). The provision of the NPE (2004), Section 4, Paragraph 19 (e) and (f) cited below confirms that the multilingual education is in existence:

The policy made it explicit that from the fourth year of basic education, the medium of instruction shall progressively be the English language, while the language of the immediate environment and French shall be taught as subjects. At secondary level, English shall be the language of instruction while the language of the immediate environment, one of the three major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba) other than that of the immediate environment and French, shall be taught as school subjects (Olagbaju, 2014).

Indigenous languages in the basic education curriculum, three of them having been accorded a federal status as national languages, that is, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as contained in both the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and National Policy on Education. However, what consider this paper as crucial in this research is the issue of incomplete formulation and non-implementation of the existing policy on the child's mother tongue. For instance, on the issue of "Early Child Care Development and Education" (ECCDE), there is no provision for languages in pre-primary education "given to children aged 5 prior to their entering primary school (2014, Section 2.17). At this stage, the teaching and learning of the child's mother tongue (L1) should be encouraged to ensure a smooth transition from pre-primary to primary education, given that the mother tongue or language of the immediate community is a compulsory subject during the first three years of primary education. Interestingly, the three major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) occupy a favored position in the NPE (2004) as follows:

Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion, and preserving culture. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Ashofor et al also rightly pointed out that "there are teachers that are teaching pre-primary/primary school pupils in Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba dominated areas in English language There is also the issue of using English language (L2) in teaching the mother tongue or language of the immediate community (L1). In view of the foregoing, the teaching and learning of the three major Nigerian languages Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba-and others should be strengthened in line with the

language provisions of the NPE, Nigeria being a highly multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural country. This explains why Section 55 of the 1999 Constitution recognizes English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as languages in which the official business of the National Assembly can be conducted, in English language being the official language and other major Nigerian languages.

In spite of several researched and papers in the area of language policy in Nigeria, there has not been solution hitherto proffered for formulating an effective medium of instruction in the practice and the learning process of pupils in the primary school as encourage by government, as more of them has been without controversy. The solutions seem to have only a minimal influence on the effectiveness of the existing mediums of instruction that is in use (Omotoyinbo, 2022)

Language Education Related Issues

This paper has also tried to identify for further discussion other language Education related issues that look like hindering implementation effectiveness of the language policy and curriculum.

The paper views them as (a) Neglecting some provision of the NPE. This means that some provision of the NPE have been rationed or not well implemented over the years, notably the provisions for "compulsory, free, universal and qualitative" basic education (Section 2.12).

Psychological issues: Negative perception of language education on the part of some Nigerian speakers, especially students and their sponsors, because they generally prefer "juicy courses" in medicine, pharmacy, engineering, law and others.

Inadequate Teaching Staff: Researcher decries the inadequacy of teaching staff in number and quality. Many public schools at the primary and secondary levels lack qualified, competent and dedicated teachers capable of responding to the demands of students and innovative teaching.

Inadequate instructional resources: Language demands a variety of experimental instructional resources and activities such as language laboratory, books, televisions, videos, pictorials, internet, debates, excursions, etc. The provision of these materials, especially the modern gadgets, is inadequate and this situation militates against my effective implementation of language curriculum.

Language Curriculum Issues: It has been observed that some Nigerian languages do not have a curriculum and that the existing language curriculum has not been adequately tailored to meet the students' and teachers demands.

Lack of Internal Quality Assurance Mechanism: In addition, it has been reported that functional internal quality assurance mechanism are not available in many schools.

Non-Existence of Umbrella Association of Language Teachers: There is no umbrella association of language teachers representing all levels of education for each of the languages in the curriculum: indigenous languages for instance, Afolabi (2012) observed that in some countries like Ghana, Republic of Benin, France and USA, there is only one national association of L1 teachers which cater for L1 teachers at the primary, secondary and tertiary education levels.

Language Policy and Language Shift in Nigeria

The Nigerian nation has been undergoing a period of anxious transition primarily from its decolonization in the recent past. As quoted before, the current shift as Noss (2012), argued, should include "three types of policy: official language policy, educational language policy and general

language policy; a three-way paradigm to which Bamgbose (2012) also adds a fourth which is the distinction between levels of decision making. In 1963, the constitution retained the independent Nigeria language policy established in 1954; However, the 1979 and 1989 constitutions (article 51 and 53) recommended a new policy of tri-lingualism, that means the business of the National Assembly in Nigeria to be conducted primarily in English, and in three additional crucial languages when adequate arrangement could be made. Perhaps it is safe to say that the government has stepped up to increase the status of indigenous languages in the society. Owhotu (2010), observed that, "both French and Arabic enjoys a "less-privileged status "and are non-vocational electives have been moved from being a compulsory language in the first three-years of secondary education', and no official recognition was given to Nigerian pidgin. This indicates that the status of language has been shifted. The new prime language policy forms a prominent part of 1977, (revised 1981) 1995 and 1998 national educational policy. According to the policy, the use of the child's mother-tongue or the language of the immediate environment as the language of instruction or medium of nursery and lower primary education, through later it became a subject of controversy among educationists and linguists such that by 1991, a team of Nigeria linguists recommended that it should be taken to represent the 'language of the wider community and not a language spoken by an ethnic community.

This position contradicts Emenanjo's (2015) interpretation, which says to imply all Nigeria languages, including Pidgin. (b) English as the language of introduction in schools from. mid primary through to the university, (c) In junior secondary schools, a Nigerian child shall in addition to his mother tongue study any of the three dominant languages. It means that this article has removed English from being a monopoly of authority, and it also indicates a language shift. For example, this represents the first official indication about the nature of skills and abilities envisaged for the ideal citizens about the future. Namely, trilingualism and trilingualism, consisting of the mother tongue, one of the three outstanding Nigerian languages (other than his or her mother tongue) and English. Central to the notion of equal opportunities is the notion of "federal character", defined under the constitution as the 'distinctive determination of peoples of Nigeria to promote national unity, strengthen national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation" (Federal ministry of information 1979: 277. This goal tends to pull the policies in different dimensions, for example. Cultural pluralism certainly contrasts with the call for unity and integration, just as the continued uses of the English language have drastically undermined the development of indigenous languages. Though English continues to enjoy the status of official language together with Hausa in the north who also enjoy a regional accredited position in its administrative capacity/functions.

Conclusion

The realization of the implementation of language policy at basic education is a source of concern to every Nigeria. This is because of the unsuccessful implementation and realization of students in basic schools to create more interest in indigenous languages. This presupposes that all hands should be on desk so as to find lasting solutions to most of these constraints that impede the implementation process of language policy. All stakeholders should therefore be involved in the realization and implementation of language policies to avoid extinction of mother tongues. This study revealed that,

although the intention of the New National Language Policy is to promote the use of mother tongue and preserve Nigerian culture, it faces significant challenges. The analysis of Yoruba language education in Ondo state reveal a complex interplay of factors, including: resource constraints, societal attitudes, and curriculum issues. While the intention behind the the New National Language Policy are laudable, the current situation suggests that without concrete steps to address identified implementation challenges, it's impact may be mixed. The policy has potential to be a blessing, by promoting indigenous languages and cultural heritage; but also risks of becoming a curse by causing disruption to the educational system.

Recommendations

In line with the entire discussions in this review, the following recommendations to proffer solutions to the implementation of language policy in Nigeria.

Government should maintain the existing language policies in education and monitor the implementation process on the curriculum in order to achieve effective teaching and learning of indigenous language.

The students should be encouraged to embrace the learning of indigenous language at the earlier stage of their career especially in basic education.

The school authorities should ensure that they manage all the available material resources including instructional materials and funds in teaching and learning of indigenous language in primary schools.

To address these challenges, government should equally provide adequate funding specifically earmarked for language education in Ondo state, focusing on Yoruba language instruction.

They (government) should launch a professional programme to train existing and new teachers in effective methods of teaching Yoruba language among other endeavours.

Government may influence JAMB to accept a pass like "D7" or "E8" in Mathematics (NECO or WASCE) for candidates intending to read any endogenous language thus encouraging more students applying for the course, rather than enforcing a credit pass which may scare some of the candidates from applying for the course. They will apply for Law if they possess a credit pass in Mathematics rather than applying for any endogenous language.

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