

Full Length Research Paper

Parents' and teachers' preferred medium of instruction in primary schools in Enugu, Nigeria

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This study which investigated parents' and teachers' preferred medium of instruction in primary schools was conducted in Enugu, South East, Nigeria. It employed the descriptive survey research method. 500 respondents were used for the study. 250 teachers were selected through simple random sampling technique. Two researcher-designed questionnaires were used to elicit the required data. The generated data were analysed using percentage and χ^2 statistic. The findings showed that parents and teachers preferred the biliterate bilingual (code mixing) Education Policy in primary education. It also showed that there was a significant difference in parents' and teachers' preferences for medium of instruction in primary schools in Nigeria. It was concluded that the proper implementation of the language education policy spelt out in the National Policy on Education may still remain a mirage if proper consultation vis-à-vis education and sensitization of stakeholders –parents and teachers- is not carried out in due course. A thorough review of the existing policy is therefore recommended as part of educational reform agenda in Nigeria.

Key words: Language policy, bilingual, implementation, education, preferences, stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a medium of thought and expression which helps to organize and shape human faculty. The ability to participate in higher order cognitive reasoning depends almost solely and to a large extent on the use of language. Language helps to stabilize and maintain cultural uniformity and affinity thereby enhancing interpersonal cognitive communication and interaction. Without language, it will be impossible to develop and transmit the shared values and traditions of a particular community. This explains why an indigene of a given place is able to enjoy the jokes, comprehend the idiomatic expressions and figurative usages, and interpret correctly and accurately the non-verbal signs that make up the totality of that community's language (Olaoye, 2007).

Language is the basic tool for acquiring knowledge. It is very crucial to learning since learning is enshrouded in communication. Language is tied to meaning because, in communication an individual does not just respond to mere sounds but to the semantic import of the words communicated. The teacher must therefore be concerned

with the task of making learning very meaningful and interesting through building appropriate experiences using language. Ignoring the importance of language in the physical manipulation of the learner's environment amounts to cutting off the child/learner from the most powerful source of conceptual experience. Language widens the child's horizon by expanding the way he thinks and feels about his environment.

The use of language to facilitate teaching and learning has been the concern of most countries of the world. Walu (2009) reports that Germany has made great strides in promoting intercultural bilingual education through instruction in mother tongue towards achieving the aims and objectives of her universal basic education scheme. Tanzania and Zimbabwe are the two African countries that have gone far in the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the entire primary school. According to Bamgbose (1991) the benefits of this act are high rates of literacy and mass mobilization.

Nigeria is not left out in this desire and quest for the use of indigenous language as a medium of instruction

for effective teaching and learning. The 1969 Curriculum Conference was a wonderful step towards initiating an education that would relate to the needs, goals and aspirations of the Nigerian society. This gave birth to the National Policy on Education which has been revised severally. The policy clearly recognized and portrayed the importance and roles of indigenous and second languages in the educational sector. It thus stated:

...government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus the child learns the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (FRN, 2007).

The policy document goes further to state that:

The medium of instruction shall be the language of the immediate environment for the first three years. During this period, English shall be taught as a subject. From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment and French shall be taught as subjects (FRN, 2007).

Three forms of language education policy can be identified from the policy document. First is the mother tongue medium education policy which is a situation whereby the child's indigenous language is used as a medium of instruction. The second is the English Language medium education policy. The last one is the transitional bilingual education policy. This policy involves the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction for the first three years of the child's education and the subsequent introduction of English as a medium of instruction from the fourth year. However, the policy document was silent on the use of the biliterate bilingual education policy which is a variety of bilingualism. The model involves developing all the four language skills in both the mother tongue and the second language and using them for instructional purposes. Hence, the teacher is involved in simultaneous translation in his teaching procedure. In other words he engages in code-mixing and code-switching. The policy aims at producing coordinate bilinguals and balanced bilingualism (Olaoye, 2007).

The pronouncement in the policy document has also triggered off several researches and studies on the implementation of the mother tongue medium of instruction in Nigerian Primary Schools (Akinola, 2010; Muraina and Jibrili, 2011; Ene, 2008; Eyengho, 2009; Olajide, 2007; Walu, 2009). Findings from such studies

purely indicate that the policy document is far from being implemented in some parts of the country while it is partially implemented in some parts. Hence, Ene (2007) observes that the ineffective implementation of programmes in Nigeria has been a clog in the wheel of the nation's development and has remained the major cause of failure of programmes in Nigeria. Omolewa (2007) suggests among other points that for educational reforms to be successful in Nigeria there must be careful study before the launch, and wide consultation to ensure ownership by the stakeholders.

The stakeholders that should not be waved aside in the implementation agenda of the language education policy in Nigeria are the parents and the teachers. The first contact the child makes with language is via the parents. Every child learns a first language successfully in a matter of a few years without the need for formal lessons. The period of language acquisition is of great significance to the child, the surrounding adults, the entire community and the world at large. It is a period the child forms a worldview and prepares for future learning. Much of what he/she would be in the future is shaped at this stage. And by the time he/she gets to school, he already thinks in the language he/she has acquired (Olajide, 2007).

The teacher has much role to play in the language education of the child. He is an initiator and a facilitator in the teaching and learning exercise. His orientation and mindset towards the use of any medium of instruction in his classroom activity will mar or facilitate effective implementation of educational policies. Thus, Ijaiya (2008) asserts that current reforms in the education sector can only be successful with the recognition of teachers as key players in the field. On the basis of this, it is the aim of this paper therefore to investigate parents' and teachers' preferred medium of instruction in primary schools for successful and effective reforms and implementation of the language policy in Nigeria. The paper will also examine whether there is a difference in teachers and parents preference for medium of instruction to be used in primary schools.

Statement of problem

The medium of instruction to be used in Nigerian primary schools has been an age long issue in the education industry. Researches and studies have also been conducted on the implementation of the mother tongue medium of instruction in primary schools in different parts of the country. None of these researches has investigated parents' and teachers' preferred medium of instruction in Enugu, Nigeria. This creates the research gap this study intends to fill.

Research questions

The study will provide answers to the following research

Table 1. Frequency and percentage table indicating parents' preferred medium of instruction.

Medium of Instruction Model	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mother Tongue Model (MTM)	20	8
English Language Model (ELM)	100	40
Biliterate Bilingual(Code Mixing) Model (BBM)	110	44
Transitional Bilingual Model (TBM)	20	8

Table 2. Frequency and percentage table showing teachers' preferred medium of instruction.

Medium of Instruction Model	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mother Tongue Model (MTM)	40	16
English Language Model (ELM)	40	16
Biliterate Bilingual(Code Mixing) Model (BBM)	150	60
Transitional Bilingual Model (TBM)	20	8

questions:

1. What medium of instruction do parents prefer for children in the primary school?
2. What medium of instruction do teachers prefer for children in the primary school?

Research hypothesis

The hypothesis below was raised and answered in the study:

Ho₁: There is no significant difference in the parents' and teachers' preferred medium of instruction for children in the primary schools.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed the descriptive survey method. A total of 500 respondents were selected from each of the three local government areas that make up Enugu metropolis. 250 teachers were selected through simple random sampling technique from 30 schools while 250 educated parents were selected through cluster sampling technique. Two researcher-designed questionnaires titled Parents' Preferred Medium of Instruction (PPMI) and Teachers' Preferred Medium of Instruction (TPMI) were used to elicit the required data. Interview was also used to obtain information on the reasons for parents and teachers' preferences. The validity of the instruments was tested using the content validity approach while the reliability was tested through the test-retest method. A reliability index of 0.80 was obtained. The generated data were analysed using percentages and the chi-square statistic.

RESULTS

The answers to the raised research questions are

presented in the various tables. Table 1 indicates that 8% of parents preferred the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in primary schools. 32% of them preferred the English Language model, 44% preferred the biliterate bilingual (code mixing) model while 8% preferred the transitional bilingual model as mediums of instruction to be used in primary schools. Thus, majority of the parents preferred the biliterate bilingual language education policy followed by the English Language policy.

Table 2 shows that 16% of teachers preferred the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in primary schools. 16% of them preferred the use of English Language. 60% of them preferred the biliterate bilingual (code mixing) model while only 8% of them preferred the use of the transitional bilingual model. In effect, majority of the teachers preferred the use of the biliterate bilingual (code mixing) language education policy while only a few preferred the transitional bilingual policy prescribed in the Nigerian National Policy on Education.

Hypothesis testing

Ho₁: There is no significant difference in parents' and teachers' preferred medium of instruction for children in primary school.

Table 3 shows that χ^2 calculated value 38.54 is greater than the table value 7.82. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. It is therefore concluded that there is a significant difference in parents' and teachers' preference for medium of instruction to be used for children in primary schools.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that most parents

Table 3. X^2 Analysis of parents' and teachers' preferred medium of instruction in primary schools.

Variables	Medium of instruction model				Total	df	X^2 cal.	X^2 tab-val
	MTM	ELM	BBM	TBM				
Parents	20 (30)	100 (70)	110 (130)	20 (20)	250	3	38.54	7.82
Teachers	40 (30)	40 (70)	150 (130)	20 (20)	250			

preferred the use of the biliterate bilingual (code mixing) model of instruction in primary school. They seem to believe that if the teacher engages in simultaneous translation in both the mother tongue and second language in his instructional procedure, learning would be enhanced. This is suggestive of the desire to bridge the gap between learners from low and high educational backgrounds. They also seem to believe that the model may help learners to conceptualise appropriately in both languages. This seems to conform to Olaoye's (2007) view that biliterate bilingual language education policy aims at producing co-ordinate bilinguals and balanced bilingualism.

The findings of the study also revealed that a significant percentage of parents preferred the use of the English Language medium of instruction in primary schools. This tends to be in line with Muraina and Jibril's (2011) findings that parents vehemently opted for English Medium Education, a situation where English Language is used as a medium of instruction throughout primary education. According to them, parents preferred to take their children/wards to primary schools where English Language is mainly used as a medium of instruction. The parents' preference may probably be as a result of their opinion that early exposure of the child to English based education may be advantageous for him/her later in life. They seem to believe that English, being a language of wider communication in a multilingual setting like Nigeria is more relevant to the child's education. This has genesis in the belief that the mother tongue is merely limited to the child's ethnic milieu unlike the English Language which has international acceptability.

The findings of the study also showed that most teachers preferred the biliterate bilingual (code mixing) medium during primary education. This is a situation whereby the teacher teaches in one language and simultaneously translates same in a second language. This tends to negate Muraina and Jibril's (2011) findings that teachers preferred the transitional bilingual education, a situation where mother tongue is used as a medium of instruction for the first three years after which English Language is introduced as a medium of instruction from the fourth year. The teachers' preference could perhaps be as a result of their belief that teaching children simultaneously in the first and second language may enhance better understanding of subject matter and prepare them better for future academic attainment. They seem to believe that the method will help the children to

be balanced bilinguals as they may not be disadvantaged in either of the two languages.

The results of the study further revealed that majority of the parents and teachers were not disposed to the use of mother tongue medium education and the transitional bilingual medium education in primary schools. This tends to corroborate Ene's (2008) assertion that most Nigerians especially the Igbos have a negative attitude towards their indigenous language. However parents' and teachers' lack of predisposition to the use of the mother tongue medium may be in line with Walu's (2009) fears of its divisive tendency in a multilingual setting like Nigeria.

Finally the findings of the study revealed that there is a significant difference in parents' and teachers' preference for medium of instruction in primary schools. In effect, most teachers opted for the biliterate bilingual education policy while parents in addition to opting for the same medium also significantly preferred the English Language medium. In other words, greater proportion of parents preferred the English Language medium compared to the teachers.

Conclusion

From the discussion it could be observed that biliterate bilingual education policy is preferred over transitional bilingual education policy spelt out in the Nigerian National Policy on Education. And this may imply that proper implementation of the language policy in Nigeria may still remain a mirage and far-fetched. There is therefore need for a 'town hall' meeting on issues of language policy with parents and teachers who are major stakeholders in the education industry. This may help to resolve the issues of language development, national language, effective implementation of language policy and general education reforms in Nigeria.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it was therefore recommended that:

- i) Government and policy makers should organize mass literacy programmes to educate parents and teachers on the inherent values of using indigenous language as a medium of instruction for inclusive education.

ii) Parents and teachers should have proper orientation on the functions of language as vehicle of culture, heritage and nationalism.

iii) Government should consider a total review of the existing language policy based on the outcome of their consultation with parents and teachers. With this a more viable and implementable language policy is likely to emerge.

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