

Teachers' Perception On The Extent Of Implementation Of The National Language Policy In Upper Basic Schools In Ebonyi State

Raphael I. Ngwoke
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki

Abstract

The study focused on Teachers' Perception on the Extent of Implementation of the National Language Policy in the upper basic schools in Ebonyi State. Specifically, the study sought to find out the extent language teachers perceive the national language policy objectives of promoting social interaction, national cohesion and preserving of cultures as having been implemented. 230 language teachers were sampled from the three Education Zones of Abakaliki, Afikpo, and Onueke. The method used was survey while questionnaire was used for data collection. Three research questions were formulated to guide the study and one hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions while t-test statistic was used to test the hypothesis. Findings showed that teachers were of the opinion that the national language policy objectives of promoting social interaction, national cohesion and preserving of cultures have been implemented to a high extent. Based on findings, recommendations were made.

Key words: Language Policy, Perception, Implementation

Introduction

Language is one human heritage that has distinguished man from other lower animals. It is an instrument for communication and communication itself is the essence of life. According to Wikipedia (2014) language is the human ability to acquire and use complex systems of communication. Essien and Okon (2003) defined language as a system of structured arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which human beings make meaning and communicate. It is an instrument of interpersonal, inter-ethnic and international relationships, and as such governs the commercial, political, religious, educational and other social interactions that constitute the life-wire of any nation.

In view of the importance of language in human existence, no nation in the world ever toys with the planning, management, development and spread of her languages. Policies are formulated as frame work to guide the use of nations' languages. These policies guide the selection of objectives in the teaching of languages in schools.

The advent of the English Language in Nigeria in the early 19th century changed the linguistic balance of the Nigerian people who prior to this time had existed as separate autonomous ethnic nations, each bound by a linguistic commonality. By the advent of the British and subsequent amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates, peopled by different ethno-linguistic nations into the Nigerian nation, complexity became a common definition for the Nigerian society. Ker in Lawal, Abanihe and Ohia (2002) rightly posits that the more complex society becomes and the more socially and technologically sophisticated man gets, the more communication problems tend to emerge.

For every emergent problem, there are always frantic efforts made to surmount it. With the coming together of the various ethno-linguistic groups, came up a language problem. How would there be communicative interaction among these ethno-linguistic

groups with no education system on ground to ensure the teaching of these ethnic languages. English language became the only viable option to the colonial masters, hence the introduction and imposition of the British language as a medium of communication. Since then, English has remained Nigeria's official language of communication. Aliyu in Eyisi (2007: 3) posits.

English occupies a unique place in Nigerian education because of its significant role and status in the national life. English is socio-linguistically important in Nigeria, in spite of its colonial origin, having become, over the years, both the language of official business and a vital link language between the various ethnic groups in the country. It is pedagogically significant as the language of instruction in virtually the entire school system, from the upper primary to the highest tertiary levels. It thus enjoys a lot of prestige as a language over and above other Nigerian languages, big or small. Accordingly, a good pass in English has become mandatory for transition from primary to Junior Secondary School (JSS), from JSS to Senior Secondary School (SSS) and for admission to all levels of higher education in the country.

However, it must be accepted that no nation can have a meaningful and sustainable development using only a foreign language. For that reason, it became imperative for education planners to formulate the language policy which should form the basis for deriving the objectives of language instruction in Nigerian schools.

National language policies are made as framework to govern the use of language (s) that are used and taught as media of communications in the nation.

Ngubane (2002) posits that language policy framework is fundamental to the management of diverse language resources and achievement of government's goal to promote democracy, justice, equity and national unity and concludes that it was in that spirit that the promotion of all eleven official languages in his South African home nation was provided for in their constitution.

What we can today call the Nigerian national language policy are extracts from the National policy on Education by Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) (2004). The National Policy on Education has been revised severally since 1977. The language policy of any country governs the use of that country's language; the teaching of such language in schools and its office use generally. The National Language Policy (NLP) as enunciated by Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) (2004) is hinged on four cardinal objectives of:

- promoting social Interaction, national cohesion and preserving of cultures
- promoting smooth interaction with our neighbours (through the teaching and speaking of French)
- the use of Mother tongue or the language of the immediate community as principal medium of instruction.
- The use of English language as the principal language of instruction in later academic pursuit.

This study is focusing on the first cardinal objective of promoting social interaction, national cohesion and preserving of cultures.

Findings have shown that some Nigerian languages are wobbling into extinction due to the non-challant attitude of the owners of such languages towards the use of their language for inter- personal communication. Not long ago, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Abanobi (2012) warned that unless some drastic measures were taken and on time too, the Igbo language could go into extinction by year

2025. Narrating his own experience, Ewuzie in Abanobi (2012) said: “In a term paper by a student of Nigerian Languages, the student found that of one hundred and twenty under ten kids she sampled outside their geographical area, only eight could speak their mother tongue with varied degrees of fluency.”

According to Ewuzie, this researcher found that those kids who were growing up outside their home States had little or no grasp of their mother tongue. Some did but they could hardly speak well. This is a situation that calls for concern. When a people cannot speak their indigenous languages well and cannot use them for social interaction and promoting of their cultures, it then means that such people have little or no identity.

The introduction of the English language as Nigeria’s official language seems to have brought about the undermining of Nigerian languages. For some elites, the English language is richer in vocabulary, wider in circulation and acceptance and so should replace the indigenous languages. To such elites, national unity in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria can only be achieved with the use of the English language. Eyisi (2007: 3) agrees with Afolayan (1986) that:

It is unrealistic for anybody in Nigeria today to think that national unity can be forged in the Country without recourse to the utilization of the English language. It has been the language of the creation of the political entity itself and also the language of its politics, economic unification and administration. Furthermore, the fact that it is now functioning as the language of Nigerian nationalism cannot be denied.

But to accept these postulations and to live in them would amount to sinking into intellectual lameness. To accept that because the British imposed on us their language of conquest as a means of wielding the various Nigerian ethno-linguistic nationalities together, and so there is no other means whereby national unity can be possible but by the British language, is to live in perpetual intellectual laziness whereby we are incapable of developing our own indigenous languages. If social interaction among Nigerian ethnic groups cannot be possible in Nigerian languages, then we have not made substantial efforts at realizing the objective of the National language policy of promoting social interaction and national cohesion.

Ewuzie in Abanobi (2012), still lamenting the poor performance of most Nigerians in spoken indigenous languages said that some ten year olds do not even understand their mother tongue let alone speak it, and while some felt bad about it, most others saw nothing wrong in that. If children at that level cannot communicate in their mother tongues for the simple reason that they are growing up outside their linguistic geographical location, then how can they interact with their aged grand parents when they eventually travel home, when it is evident that most of those aged parents at home cannot communicate in English? It appears that this national language policy objective of promoting social interaction is far from being pursued and being realized. Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (2004) posits that the medium of instruction in the primary schools shall be the language of the environment for the first three years, during which period; English shall be taught as a subject. Again, FRN (2004) equally states that 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. It appears then that neither the language of the immediate environment nor any of the recommended three major languages of Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba, was taught those experimental children in Ewuzie’s reference. This does not show that the language policy objectives are being pursued to be realized.

Lamenting on the second class attention paid to our indigenous language, Acholonu in Zadok (2012) expressed her regrets thus:

In Nigeria, we have over 250 ethnic groups and over 400 languages; but if I hear someone from any minority group speak outside, I will not even recognize the person is a Nigerian unless he speaks Igbo or Hausa or Yoruba. If we have a unifying language, it would have been beautiful. It will bind us. The place of language cannot be overlooked and should be imbibed in a child.

Acholonu's observation quickly reveals three functions which language should perform to Nigerians as enunciated in the National language policy and these are; social interaction, national cohesion and cultural preservation. She laments that she cannot distinguish a minority as a Nigerian when he/she communicates outside Nigeria. This may be likely as a result of the speakers' complete Western accent which is made possible by long time loss of contact with one's local language. She wishes Nigeria should have a unifying language as is the case in Tanzania. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) in adopting the three major ethnic languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba may have had in mind adopting one of the three languages that becomes able to develop and have a wider spread than others. When this happens, one indigenous language can serve as a language of national social interaction and cohesion.

This research work is very necessary because findings from this study will help to reveal the lapses that have existed so far in the implementation of the Nigerian language policy expressions especially in Ebonyi State. This will make the States and Federal Government to invest more in developing indigenous languages as well as encourage their teaching in our schools. When that happens, it will encourage the posting of language teachers to other states which are not their ethno-linguistic settings. This will give rise to cultural cross- breeding, thus giving rise to national cohesion. Survey research method was used to sample the opinion of language teachers while a simple random sampling was used to select 230 language teachers from the three education zones of Ebonyi State.

If Nigeria children are not taught and spoken to in Nigerian languages, there is hardly any way they would develop communication skills and competence in their languages. When this becomes the case, ability to interact socially is hindered, there would equally be a national friction in inter-ethnic cohesion, and subsequently, our national cultural heritages become extinct. The narration of professor Adichie in Abanobi (2012) on his efforts to teach his children the indigenous (Igbo) language even in a foreign land should be the ideal practice by parents even at home. According to Adichie:

When I was in the United States, I was teaching my children Igbo language. I am a traditional Igbo man. Because of that I would not like my children not to understand or speak our language. You can speak French. You can speak Spanish. You can speak American English. You can speak whatever foreign language you like, but you must understand that you are an Igbo before you came in contact with these other languages. That was why my wife and I decided when our first child was two years old and she has started talking, that we would not use English, but Igbo to speak to her whenever she came back from school.

Ebonyi State has about 98% of its population as Igbo language speakers. Even Effium and Ntezi communities that speak the Kori language still have Igbo language as their rallying point. It appears only Igbo language is taught in Ebonyi State schools among the three major languages. Data collected from Ebonyi State Examination Development Centre (EEDC)

Abakaliki reveal that between year 2000 and 2006 no student enrolled for either Hausa or Yoruba in the Junior School Certificate Examination (JSCE) as revealed in the table below.

Table 1. Upper Basic students' Enrolment in English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba in Ebonyi State (2000-2006).

Source: EEDC Abakaliki (2007)

Year	Subject	Total Registered
2000	English	10458
	Hausa	-
	Igbo	12081
	Yoruba	-
2001	English	19896
	Hausa	-
	Igbo	19896
	Yoruba	-
2002	209892	-
2003	English	33187
	Hausa	-
	Igbo	32256
	Yoruba	-
2004	English	31555
	Hausa	-
	Igbo	32256
	Yoruba	-
2005	English	31358
	Hausa	-
	Igbo	31611
	Yoruba	-
2006	English	32176
	Hausa	-
	Igbo	31858
	Yoruba	-

It equally appears that even though Igbo language is taught in the upper basic schools in Ebonyi State, not much effort is made to make the language a medium of official interaction. It is equally feared that the cultural aspect of the spoken language is not given enough attention if at all. Culture should be seen as reflecting a people's mode of dressing, food habits and certain other traditional practices.

Given the unacceptable State of Nigerian languages in Nigeria Vis-à-vis the English language, it is not unlikely that teachers of languages in the upper basic levels in Ebonyi State may have a different perception about the whole situation. The perception of teachers of languages in Ebonyi State will define the level of efforts they will make towards improving language instruction in the upper basic schools. This paper is therefore set to find out what language teachers' perception are on the implementation of the National Language policy in Ebonyi State upper basic Schools.

Statement of the Problem

There is a perceived poor attitude of people towards the written and spoken Nigerian languages. In a study conducted in the enrolment of upper basic examination classes (JSS 3) data collected from Ebonyi State Examination Development Centre (EBEDC) Abakaliki (2007) showed that apart from Igbo language, no other Nigerian language (Hausa and Yoruba) got any student enrolment in the Junior school Certificate Examination. Also those who enroll the Igbo language though they pass it in the examination do hardly use Igbo in their day-to-day communications. It is feared that there may be serious danger facing the realization of the National language policy objectives of promoting social interaction, national cohesion and preserving of cultures. It is uncertain the extent of awareness of teachers who are the curriculum implementers of upper basic students' performance in the use the languages that could be said to be leading to the realization of the language policy objectives. The problem of this study is what is language teachers' perception on the extent of implementation of the National language policy in the upper basic schools in Ebonyi State?

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to find out language teachers' perception on the extent of implementation of the National language policy objectives of promoting social interaction, national cohesion and preserving of cultures in the upper basic schools in Ebonyi State. Specifically the study will seek to find out

1. The extent teachers perceive the objective of promoting social interaction as having been implemented in the upper basic schools in Ebonyi State.
2. The extent teachers perceive the objective of promoting national cohesion as having been implemented in the upper basic schools in Ebonyi State.
3. The extent teachers perceive the objective of preserving of cultures as having been implemented in the upper basic schools in Ebonyi State.

Significance of study

Findings from this study will be of immense help to education planners especially in Ebonyi State to assess the outcome of their efforts and then see areas of improvement. Principals of schools who are charged with the day-to-day instructional supervision of their various schools will derive maximum benefits from findings of this study as it will make them to assess their supervisory works with a view to improving on it. Parents and indeed the larger society will be able to compare the teachers' perception with their own experience and offer suggestions for improvement.

Scope of the Study

This study focused on Teachers' Perception on the extent of Implementation of the National Language Policy objectives of promoting social interaction, national cohesion and preserving of cultures. It also focused on effect of gender on the mean rating of teachers on the promotion of social interaction, national cohesion and preserving of cultures. It covered the upper basic schools in the three education zones of Ebonyi State- Abakaliki, Afikpo and

Onueke. Ebonyi State is about 98% Igbo speakers with about 2% speakers of Kori language found in Effium and Ntezi communities. It covered language teachers in the state.

Research Questions

Three research questions were formulated to guide this study namely:

1. To what extent do teachers perceive the national language policy objective of promoting social interaction as having been implemented in upper basic schools in Ebonyi State?
2. To what extent do teachers perceive the National language policy objective of promoting national cohesion as having been implemented in the upper basic schools in Ebonyi State?
3. To what extent do teachers perceive the national language policy objective of preserving of cultures as having been implemented in the upper basic levels of Ebonyi State?

Hypothesis

One null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance namely:

HO1. Gender has no significant effect on the mean rating of language teachers on the promotion of social interaction, national cohesion and preserving of cultures.

METHODOLOGY

The research method adopted for this work is survey. 230 language teachers were sampled from the three education zones of Abakaliki Afikpo and Onueke. Language teachers were selected for this work because they are adjudged better experienced and at a vantage academic position to assess the changes that have taken place in their students. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire entitled Teachers' Perception on the Extent of Implementation of the National Language Policy in Ebonyi State (TPEINLPES). Questionnaires were administered and collected using research assistants. Results of finding were analyzed using mean and standard deviation measures. Hypothesis was tested at the alpha level of 0.05 using t-test statistic.

The decision on the teachers' perception was obtained using

Very High Extent (VHE) = 3.1-4.0

High Extent (HE) = 2.1-3.0

Low Extent (LE) = 1.1-2.0

Very Low Extent (VLE) = 0.1-1.0

/ **Table 2** : Mean Rating of Extent of the Implementation of promotion of social Interaction

S/N	Extent Of Promoting Social Interaction	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	X	SD	
1	Upper Basic students associate freely with fellow students as a result of being able to speak a common language.	90	88	41	11	3.11	.86	
2	Most upper basic students cannot communicate freely with aged parents due to inability to speak the mother tongue freely	99	77	41	13	3.13		
3	Most upper basic students can communicate freely in English but in the mother tongue	6	35	113	76	3.12	.76	
4	Students prefer communicating in their mother tongue more than in any other language	104	75	48	3	2.27	.84	
Grade Total							2.34	

Results obtained from table 2 showed that teachers' perception on promoting social interaction was to a high extent with a grand mean of 2.34.

Table 3. Mean Rating of Extent of the Implementation of Promoting National Cohesion

S/N	Extent Of Promoting Social Interaction	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	X	SD
1	Hausa and Yoruba are taught in all upper basic schools	11	41	88	90	1.88	.86
2	Upper Basic students do not organizes excursion to non Igbo speaking States	98	85	41	6	3.03	.83
3	Most upper basic students in Ebonyi State do not offer Hausa and Yoruba in the Junior school Certificate Examination because there are no teachers for those languages	11	90	25	4	3.34	.73
4	Most upper Basic students in Ebonyi State love traveling and co-habiting with other ethnic groups	96	92	22	20	3.15	.92
Grade Total							2.85

With a grand mean of 2.85 language teachers agreed that implementation of promoting national cohesion has been to a high extent. However, they still affirmed that Hausa and Yoruba are taught to a low extent. This confirms that these two indigenous languages are not taught in Ebonyi State.

Table 3: Mean Rating of Extent of the Implementation of Preserving of Cultures

S/N	Extent Of Promoting Social Interaction	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	X	SD
1	Most upper Basic students prefer Western style of dressing to local one	85	88	32	25	3.01	.97
2	Students cherish dressing in Igbo style especially during occasion	89	99	28	14	3.7	.86
3	Students have interest in local foods than in foreign food	74	103	43	10	3.04	.84
4	Upper Basic students in Ebonyi State love to perform drama senates writer in Igbo	100	80	40	10	3.17	5.22
Grade Total							3.09

With a grand mean of 3.09, language teachers agree that the preserving of culture has been implemented to a high extent.

Table 4: t-test Analysis of Male and Female Language Teachers on Teachers' Perception on the Extent of Promoting Social Interaction, National Cohesion, and Preserving of Culture.

S/N	Gender	N	\bar{X}	Std	Df	t-cal	t-crit.	Decision
1	Male	102	3.11	0.78	228	0.14	1.96	Not sig.
	Female	128	3.10	0.92				
2	Male	102	3.01	0.83	228	0.37	1.96	Not sig
	Female	128	3.06	0.88				
3	Male	102	3.15	0.85	228	3.72	1.96	Not Sig
	Female	128	3.50	0.57				
4	Male	102	3.00	0.88	228	0.04	1.96	Not sig
	Female	128	3.01	1.04				
5	Male	102	2.92	0.88	228	1.76	1.96	Not sig
	Female	128	3.11	0.80				
6	Male	102	3.01	1.00	228	2.44	1.96	Significant
	Female	128	3.29	0.71				
7	Male	102	3.03	0.86	228	0.07	1.96	Not sig
	Female	128	3.03	0.80				
t-test value				1.22	Not sig			

Table 4 shows that the obtained t-cal value is less than t-crit value. The t-cal value is 1.22 while the t-crit value is 1.96. Since t-cal is less than t-crit, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is therefore accepted. It therefore means that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female language teachers on their perception on the extent of promoting social interaction, national cohesion and preserving of cultures in the upper basic schools in Ebonyi State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Results as seen in tables 2-4 show that apart from the teaching of Hausa and Yoruba languages, upper basic language teachers perceive the implementation of promoting social interaction, national cohesion and preserving of cultures as having been implemented to a high extent. Their perception shows that students associate freely with fellow students as a result of being able to speak a common language. This is expected since Ebonyi State is a linguistically homogenous state. The English language is also commonly used as a medium of social interaction and so teachers are likely to use such situations to make their judgment. But what becomes of Hausa and Yoruba which are expected to be indigenous languages for social interaction?

Results show that most upper basic students cannot communicate freely with aged non English speaking parents due to the students' inability to communicate freely in the mother tongue. This is shown in the mean of 3.13 on item 2 of table 1. A support to this perception can be seen to reflect on the result of items 3 and 4. If students can communicate more in English but less in the mother tongue, that means there is a problem with the implementation of the use of the mother tongue. Similarly, the mean of 2.27 is yet on the lower side when compared to others in being the height of extent of communicating in the mother tongue in item 4. It implies that though students communicate with the mother tongue but that cannot be said to be with enthusiasm.

On preserving of cultures, results show that teachers perceive implementation to be high as well. None of the results showed perception on a very high extent, and that reveals the need for a critical evaluation of the implementation of the language policy in the state. More robust efforts need to be made by education managers in the state at not only getting at a very high implementation, but also a very high student performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made in view of the findings:

1. Efforts should be redoubled by language teachers in teaching the indigenous languages since no nation can meaningfully develop with a foreign language.
2. The government of Ebonyi State should see to it that language teachers of Hausa and Yoruba are recruited since records show that these languages are not registered by examination class of JSS3 probably due to absence of teachers in those languages.
3. Students should not only be taught these languages as subjects but be made to use them in communications outside the classroom situation.
4. Teachers should encourage indigenous dressing and local foods which portray our cultures.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, language is a human identity. Not even the human primate chimpanzee has the power to articulate and use language. Language is the human essence. It is the chief instrument of national development. No nation, no matter how economically endowed, can

progress developmentally without evolving a unifying language. It is no cheering news that after more than fifty years of political independence, Nigeria cannot boast of an indigenous language. The three major languages of Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba which should have been nurtured to produce a national language have not been fairly treated in terms of implementation in our schools. In Ebonyi State for instance, only Igbo language is taught out of the three major languages provided for in the National Language Policy. Though language teachers perceive the implementation of the objectives of promoting social interaction, national cohesion, and preserving of cultures as being to a high extent in Ebonyi State, a lot more needs to be done by teachers, government, parents and students in ensuring that indigenous languages perform utility roles of inter- ethnic interaction, national cohesion, and preserving of cultures, as it is only then we can say that we have an identity.

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