

Challenges of Language Planning and Education in Multilingual Societies

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ABSTRACT

The aim and objectives of this research is to identify the implications for implementing the national policy on Education in multilingual countries with special reference to the Nigerian situations. Theories of multilingualism and language planning were discussed. Five research questions were formulated to guide the study. Due to the linguistic plurality of Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) assigned different function to the many languages in the nation's education. The outcome of this is that more than one language is used both in the classroom and the course of a child's education especially in the primary and lower secondary schools. This paper examined the current practice of multilingual education in Nigerian primary and lower secondary schools and the challenges encountered by teachers in the implementation of the NPE. Questionnaires were administered to answer research questions on the following variables – students' attitude, parental factors and lack of materials.

Key words: *Multilingualism, Language, Education, National Policy,*

INTRODUCTION

As a linguistic heterogeneous nation, Nigeria qualifies as a good example of a multilingual nation with its accompanying problems of language choice, planning and implementation. According to Olagbaju (2009:4), Nigeria is a perfect example of a multilingual nation with the resultant effect of the majority of her citizens having access to a minimum of two languages. Therefore, there are individuals who are bilingual or multilingual either in the indigenous languages (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) or indigenous languages and the English language (Igbo, Yoruba and English).

Nigeria is a West African nation with a population of about 140 million people (Ajulo (2008). It covers an area of 923,766 square kilometers, with over 200 different ethnic groups. Presently, the country is politically composed of 36 States and Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. It is estimated that over 400 languages are spoken in Nigeria (Crozier and Blench (1992), Elugbe (1994)). Kari (2002) analysed the linguistic situation of Nigeria by stating that of the four phyla (Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, Afro-Asiatic, Khoisan) to which African languages are grouped, three phyla are represented in the Nigerian linguistic terrain. These language phyla are Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, and Afro-Asiatic.

When a nation has access to more than a language in her national day – to – day experience, then the reality of a language contact situation cannot be ruled out. Language contact as explained by Ajulo (2008) is a situation which arises whenever there is a meeting of speakers who do not all share the same language and who need to communicate. When the communicative needs of such people go beyond what gestures and other paralinguistic signals can achieve, the use of a second language becomes necessary. Thus, in a bid to cater for all the languages and assign responsibility to each; there is a need for language planning, policy development and implementation. To this end, an official document first published in 1977 (revised in 1981, 1998 and 2004) titled the National Policy on Education (NPE) has made explicit what could be described as a national language in education policy. The policy prescribed the medium of instruction to be used at various levels of education as well as languages to be taught at different stages of Nigerian education and for how long. The policy states that the medium of instruction during the pre-primary school stage shall be the mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment. At the primary school level, the medium of instruction shall be the language of the immediate environment for the first three years while English shall be taught as a school subject.

From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction while the language of the immediate environment and French shall be taught as subjects.

Even though it has been established among many linguists that language defies exact and summative definition, its functionality as a vehicle of thought and a means through which communication of human ideas, felling emotions and desires remains incontrovertible in academic/theoretical circles. So here, the term shall limit itself to what Lyons (1970) comments on language for its multilingual undertone. To him, "language are the principal systems of human communication used by particular group of human beings within the particular society (linguistic community) of which they are members." The mention of "language", "particular groups of human" and particular society," however, sets a template for the notion of multilingualism which is define as the ability to speak two or more languages either by an individual or within a society. (Fromkin Rodman and Hyames, 2011:460).

Kristen (1991) still identified two situations of multilingualism in terms of status: what he calls horizontal and diagonal multilingualism. He says that if the languages spoken in a multilingual society have equal status in the official, cultural and family life of the society, the situation is referred to as horizontal multilingualism. Canada, to him is a typical horizontal multilingual country. Diagonal multilingualism obtains only when one of the languages has official status. Tanzania is an example of a diagonal multilingual country. Pohl (1965) identifies what he calls vertical multilingualism. This is a case of diglossia, but one thing is that this involves dialects of the same language rather than different languages.

Aim and objectives

So far, the study has looked at different aspects of multilingualism as defined by various scholars; therefore it will now look at the opinions of other scholars on the issue of multilingualism and national development. Having presented the prevailing language situation in Nigeria (which is predominantly multilingual), this paper hopes to ascertain the level of multilingual education in Nigeria by finding out the policy provisions, reality on ground, investigating challenges and solutions. To achieve the set objectives of this study, the following questions are raised and answered in this study:

1. Are teachers aware of the multilingual education provisions of the NPE?

2. What, according to teachers are the attitude of the students to multilingual instruction or education in class?
3. Do teachers implement the multilingual provisions of the NPE?
4. Do teachers see parents as being supportive of the use of multilingual education in school?
5. Are there enough (text and non- text) materials to implement the multilingual education provisions of the NPE in schools?

Multilingualism Education in Nigeria: Policy Provisions

There are arguments and counter claims as to the availability of an explicit National Language Policy in Nigeria. Scholars (Emenanjo (1985), Oyetade (2003)) opine that Nigeria does not have a well - articulated and explicit national language policy that can be found in one document. From the immediate foregoing, Oyetade (2003: 107) states that:

There has not been a comprehensive language policy for Nigeria as a deliberate and planned exercise. Indeed, language planning as an organized and systematic pursuit of solutions to language problems has remained largely peripheral to the mainstream of national planning. What can be regarded as our language policy came about in the context of other more centrally defined national concerns, such as the development of a National Policy on Education and the drafting of a Constitution for the country. It is in connection with these two documents, i.e. the National Policy on Education and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that we can talk about language policy and planning in Nigeria.

However, some other scholars (Ajibola 2008 and Ogunyemi 2009) in their recent studies consider the provisions of the NPE as being explicit enough. To them the National Policy on Education (NPE) has made explicit what could be described as a national language in education policy. The National Policy on Education (**NPE 2004**), **Section 1, Paragraph 10a** states:

Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn 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.

The (b) aspect of the paragraph

For smooth interaction with our neighbors, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in Primary and the Junior Secondary Schools but Non – vocational elective at the Senior Secondary School.

Language Policy and Planning In Multilingual Societies

We are not unmindful of the large number of multilingual societies and for the fact of the large figures; the research shall be limit its references to few countries that are having more unintelligible languages yet could come up with a single language and be adopted:

i. The Philippine Example

Philippine, is one of the country with about 120 mutually unintelligible languages, established a policy that recognized Filipino as both the official and the national language in the Philippines 1987 Constitution, after several reforms which spanned between 1935, and 1984. Initially Spanish was used as a temporal official language along with Tagalog, a local language before Filipino was selected and adopted as the national language and the official language. But the predominance of English remained a big threat to Filipino, coupled with negative attitudes of some philippines to the status of Filipino as the national language.

Besides, the removal of Tagalog, which was hitherto the Philippines national language through the 1987 Constitutional Covention, made the speakers of Tagalog envious of filipino as the national and official language philippines (paauw, 200:1-16). However, in present day philippine, English has assumed the statuas of co-officail language alongside filipino which is the national language. It is important to note that in practice, English is used in Education, Government, and Administration.

ii. The Indonesian

Indonesia's language policy and planning is also of great interest to us because it is the fourth most populous nation in the world after China, India and the United States with an estimated population of nearly 250 million. It is also a typical example of a multilingual nation with an estimate of 600 languages (Ethnologue of language, 2013). Choosing a language as either the official or national language would be rightly thought to be a Herculean task but the reverse is the case in Indonesia. Through the First Congress of Indonesia Youths, Bahasa Indonesia was proclaimed as the national and

official language in 1926.

Wright (2004:92) cited in Paauw (2009:5) asserts that: "Indonesian had a dual function in Indonesian societies, as it is the language of national identity, and also the language of education, literacy, modernization and social mobility." However, the choice of Bahasa Indonesia formally called Malay had a slight opposition because Dutch, the colonial language, Javanese, the language of the largest ethnic group and other Indigenous languages were envious of the choice of Bahasa (Indonesia). This envy, however, was not evident because Bahasa Indonesia was never viewed by the people of Indonesia as a threat to their ethnic identity. Besides, it was neither the language of numerically large group nor the language of a group which held political or economic powers (Paauw, 2009:7).

iii. Tanzanian

Tanzania like many African countries, after gaining independence in 1961, was faced with the problem of selecting which language to be used as official/national language, because of the heterogeneous nature of her community. This was a delicate decision to make as any wrong choice could provoke discontent and even spark violence. Julius Nyerere, the first Tanzanian president chose Swahili which was widely spoken as lingua franca throughout the country and its usefulness had already been established during the colonial era across East Africa, and was also the language of the anti-colonial political movement. Apart from this, it was already the medium of instruction in primary education which all Tanzanians learnt at school, and so was a unifying or common language.

The Tanzanian language policies are backed by adequate provisions in the constitution. Bamgbose (1991:120) submits that "the declaration of Swahili as the national language was followed by the following measures: creation of the Post Promoter of Swahili in 1964 in the Ministry of Community Development and National Culture with the task of coordinating Swahili development efforts being undertaken by various institutions and the Establishment of Swahili Groups in rural and urban areas; the establishment of an Inter-ministerial Swahili Committee to hasten the formation of technical terms in Swahili and to publish the government's directory in the language and the setting up of the National Swahili Council in 1967. The 1984 Official Linguistic Policy of Tanzania states "Swahili is the language of the social and political spheres as well as primary and adult education, whereas English is the language of secondary education, universities, technology and higher courts" (Wikipedia, 2013).

iv. The American Example

On the surface, the United States of America seems to be a monolingual society, but many Americans have different languages as their mother tongue other than English which is undoubtedly the predominantly spoken language in the States. Wardhaugh (2006:367) states that:

“recent census takers have shown that as many as one in six people in the United States do not have English as their mother tongue, that the majority of these are native born Americans and that the proportion is growing particularly in Southwest i.e Texas, New Mexico Arizona and California and along parts of the eastern sea board”.

However, the language policy adopted by the United States of America is a covert policy. English is not constitutionally recognized as the official language of the States (Wardhaugh, 2006:368). Schiffman (1996:213) also submits that “the language policy of the United States is not neutral, it favours the English language. No statute or constitutional amendment or regulatory law is necessary to maintain this covert policy.” In the Ghanaian language policy, it was an English only policy between 1957 and 1966 until a military government took over in Ghana and the ruling National Liberation Council set up an Educational Review Committee 1967, and a return to the mother tongue medium was recommended and adopted (Bamgbose, 1991:115-117).

v. Ghana

The Ghanaian language policy and planning was, however, rather fluctuational. The years 1970 and 1971 also saw a new fluctuation in the Ghanaian language policy. The following Ghanaian languages Ga, Nzema, Akan and Ewe were recommended to be learnt along with every other Ghanaian pupil’s respective mother tongue by the Ministry of Education.

However, in 2003 with much heated argument, Ghana changed her policy, their indigenous languages are no longer used as the primary media of instruction in primary education. Mfum-Mensah (2005:76-77) further adds that “the purpose of this new initiative is to highlight the use of English at all levels of schooling, leading to the education mainly in English”.

It is important to recognize the fact that Ghanaian indigenous languages are still used in certain official domains in Ghana such as media houses especially languages like Ewe, Ashante, Dagare, Akan, Dagbami, etc.

iv. Nigeria

Nigeria has her language policy enshrined in the sections 51 and 91 of the 1979 Constitution and also in Section 59 of the 1999 Constitution. The constitution states: "The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English and in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba when adequate arrangement have been made thereof" (Section 51).

It goes further to say: "A house of Assembly may in addition to English conduct the house in one or more languages spoken in the states as the house by resolution may approve" (Section 91). Vagueness, lack of precision and a host of other problems are inherent in the statements above, and those problems will be looked into one of our subsequent headings. However, we shall look into Nigerian language, policy and planning in historical perspective.

Studies on Multilingual Education in Nigeria

The NPE supports the practice of multilingual education but the reality on ground is far from the provisions of the policy. Olagbaju (2009: 3) opines that although the National Policy on Education supports multilingualism education; in practice, most private nursery and primary schools teach even the pre-primary and junior primary classes using the English language as the medium of instruction without any restriction from the ministry of education officials who are never available. These so called 'private schools' do not allow the use of other languages either as the language of instruction or a school subject apart from the English language in the school system. Ogunbiyi (2008) asserts that despite the provisions of the NPE and the position of the government on the status of the English language and other Nigerian languages in education, some schools still relegate Nigerian languages to the background and promote the teaching of English and French languages.

Problems of Language Policy and Planning in Multilingual Societies

Language problems exist one way or the other in almost every nation of the world, since a linguistically homogenous nation, still remains a mirage. Bamgbose (1991:111-115) highlights a number of problems characteristic of African countries' language policies.

- a. Avoidance – i.e. Shyness from making any pronouncements or statements of policy by the government due to the heterogeneous complexities of African nations.

- b. Vagueness – i.e. making policies that lack precision, equivocal statements, unclear expressions pervade most African policies on language.
- c. Arbitrariness – i.e. most policies are made without adequate considerations of section 51 of the Nigerian constitution of 1999 which suggest the opinions of the majority and policy makers' expertise.
- d. Fluctuation – i.e. policies are formed and reformed based on the free will of any government in power.
- e. Declaration without Implementation – i.e. policies are formed but not often implemented.

The problems identified above by Bamgbose are true and evident in the language policies of African countries. Ghana's language policy, for instance, was fluctuation, arbitrary and devoid of implementation. The repeated shifts from the mother tongue medium to the English-only medium, then back to the mother tongue-cum-English medium point, based on the fluctuation nature of Ghana's language policy. It is, however, arbitrary when questions such as "who are the policy makers?", "Are they politicians?" sociologists, educationalist or language experts?", "Does the policy have the true consent of all ethnic groups in Ghana?", etc. are asked. South Africa and Tanzania are not exceptions to Bamgbose's identified problems, even though their language policies are not fluctuation like Ghana. Their policies on language assure vague and arbitrary (Bamgbose, 1991:112).

In Nigeria, however, the constitutional recognition of the three indigenous languages over about 500 other languages in reality makes a mockery of the languages: Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. It is sheer mockery because the three languages neither function as the medium through which "the business of national Assembly" is conducted nor as the national languages of the country. Their constitutional status is an exhibition of the fact that Nigeria's language policy and planning is vague, arbitrary and functionally impotent unlike English. Perhaps "when the adequate arrangements have been made been made thereof", Nigeria's language policy would be a great success.

Beyond the problems mentioned above, language policy and planning in multilingual societies are still characterized by the problems of identifying the right kinds of data that must go into planning decisions. Wardhaugh (2006:359) adds that

“census-takers for example may have considerable difficulty in determining just who speaks what language when and for what purpose”. Good information is needed as well as experts that would meaningfully utilize the good data provided in order to realize the central goal of language policy which is national development.

It must be stated, however, that the Western nations mentioned above are not devoid of problems in their languages policies. The United States of America’s language policy reflects the problems of avoidance and vagueness identified by Bamgbose because the status of English is not clearly defined either as the national or official language in the American constitution. Philippine language policy is, however, arbitrary and fluctuation because it lacks the approval of the speakers of Tagalog whose language was removed as a national language for Filipino in 1971 through a constitutional convention.

Methodology

A total number of 100 teachers were engaged from lower and the junior secondary schools in the seven local government of the south senatorial zone of Bauchi state. A multi stage sampling procedure was adopted in this research. The researchers therefore stratified the schools in the zone into categories, that is private and public schools. After which three schools were randomly picked from each of the categories. Fifteen (15) teachers were then selected through random sampling techniques from the seven local government of the zone were used in the research. Teachers were used for the study for the simple fact that, they are core in the process of implementation of the multilingual provisions of the Nigerian Policy in Education in the country.

Multilingual Education in Nigeria: The Challenges.

The multi – ethnic nature of Nigeria is a barrier to the successful implementation of the multilingual provisions of the policy. Oyetade (2003) asserts that the problems associated with the use of indigenous languages as media of instruction or as school subjects as stated in the NPE (that every Nigerian child should be encouraged to learn one of the major languages in addition to his own) has not been implemented. This is supposed to be progressively implemented from the fourth year of the primary school to the Junior Secondary School level, but this provision is being waived in many schools. Oyetade (2003) concludes that a stronger reason for the failure at the level of implementation might not be unconnected with the belief of the minority speakers

that their recommendation is an imposition. Thus, non-implementation is a way to certify their opposition.

The use of indigenous languages in education as contained in the NPE cannot be fully implemented. This is because only a few of the languages have enough materials to sustain teaching them as they really ought to be taught at any level. In practice, only the three 'major' indigenous languages - Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba can be said to satisfy this implied criterion of teaching materials for Primary and Secondary Schools, and to varying degrees for the tertiary level also. Other indigenous languages like Efik/Ibibio can satisfy that same criterion for Primary and Secondary School levels, but not for degree level. Awobuluyi (1992) opines that the majority of the indigenous languages in Nigeria have a very long way to go yet in terms of availability of educational resource materials, particularly for the languages that lack standard orthography or are yet to be reduced to writing.

In addition, scarcity of qualified language teachers in indigenous languages is another impediment to the successful implementation of the multilingual education provisions of the NPE. Awobuluyi (1992) and Olagbaju (2009) assert that only the three major indigenous languages can actually boast of enough teachers at all levels. Olagbaju (2009) termed the inadequacy of indigenous language teachers as a product of some attitudinal factors. These factors include: the status of the English language and other foreign languages in Nigeria, negative attitude of the elite parents and other societal – related sentiments

Scope and Limitation

The research will cover the concepts of multilingualism and the problems in Nigeria. It will also discuss some of the multilingual countries and their language policies and the ways to encourage multilingualism. The research is also limited to multilingualism and its positive and negative effects on our educational system. This research also examine what the National Policy on Education said about language in Nigeria, the problem of implementing this policy and perhaps the method to use in the implementation of these policies in order to meet the desired objectives.

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