

North-Eastern Nigerian Teachers' Perception, Attitudes, Implementation and Effect of the Policy on Language of Instruction in Lower Primary Schools

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Abstract

This study investigated teachers' perception, attitudes, implementation and effects of the use of Mother-Tongue as an instructional medium in Nigerian lower primary schools, using Northeast Nigeria as a case study. Vygotsky's, (1978) Sociocultural theory guided the study theoretically. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised the entire primary schools in Northeast Nigeria. Purposive and Random sampling method were used. Purposive sampling method was used to select two major cities from each of the Northeastern Nigerian states by selecting a capital city and another major town with similar numeric strength. Random sampling method was thereafter used to select ten primary schools from each of the towns, after obtaining the list of schools in the focused cities from their State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB).

The instrument of data collection was the researchers-developed questionnaire which have five sections and nineteen items on teachers' perception, attitudes and implementation of the use of mother-tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools in Northeast Nigeria. Section "A" focused on the personal data of the respondents; section "B" required information on the perception of teachers on the mother-tongue policy. Section "C" required information on the attitudes of the teachers toward the policy, Section "D" required information on the level of implementation of the policy by the teachers, while Section "E" required information on the teachers' observed effects of the policy on the pupils. The response to the questionnaire was prepared in closed ended forms with four options of "Strongly Agreed" "Agreed" "Disagreed" and "Strongly Disagreed". The validation of the instrument was done by giving it to some educational research experts for scrutiny, corrections and suggestions which were incorporated in the instrument.

Split-half method of reliability was used to estimate the reliability of the instrument from a single administration of the questionnaire which was administered to a group of respondents divided into two halves. Results were thereafter correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (P.P.M.C) which yielded a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.718$. Six trained assistants with the inclusion of the researchers administered and retrieved the questionnaire which were done within a week. Descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentage was used to analyze the data by categorizing and computing the relevant questionnaire items into groups.

KEYWORDS: Language of instruction, Lower primary schools, North-East Nigeria, Teachers, Policy.

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I. Introduction

There is a consensus among educationists that a child especially at his/her early school years learns better if instructed in his/her mother tongue. In realization of the imperativeness of this strategy, Nigerian government in its National Policy on Education stipulates that children of lower primary schools – primary one to three, should have mother tongue as their medium of instructions. Studies have however shown that the most important aspect of any educational policy which is the implementation stage usually experience hitches especially from those to implement the policy—the teachers. Studies have also shown that the understanding of the policy, and mode of implementation by the teachers are determinants of the success or otherwise of the policy. The observed effects of the policy on the pupils who are the direct beneficiaries of the policy also worth investigating in ascertaining areas of weaknesses and strengths of the policy. Against all these backgrounds, this

study sets out to investigate teachers' perception, attitudes, implementation and observed effects of the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools using Northeast Nigeria as a case study. The Sociocultural theory which guided this research theoretically was propounded in 1978 by Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky (1978) posited that much important learning by the child occurs through social interaction with a skillful tutor. The tutor may model behaviour and /or provide verbal instructions for the child which he referred to as co-operative or collaborative dialogue. The child seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (often the parent or teacher, then internalizes the information using it to guide or regulate his/her own performance). He identified MKO and ZPD as principles guiding this kind of learning.

The acronym M.K.O means "More Knowledgeable Other" which refers to someone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner with respect to a particular task, process or concept. "Zone of Proximal Development" which was coded as Z.P.D relates to the difference between what a child can achieve independently and what a child can achieve with guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner.

Vygotsky (1978) viewed interaction with peers as an effective way of developing skills, and suggested this strategy for teachers which is also known as cooperative learning which involves exercises where less competent children develop with help from more skillful peers – within the Zone of Proximal Development. Using example of children's language acquisition, this theory can be exemplified in the child's language acquisition whereby a more knowledgeable other helps a child to pronounce words correctly. For example, a child pronouncing "Father" as "Dada" can be assisted to pronounce it correctly as father.

Berk (2008) quoting Rowe and Wertsch (2002) gave more explanation on sociocultural theory thus:

Sociocultural theory focuses on how culture, values, beliefs, customs, and skills of a social group is transmitted to the next generation with a particular aid of social interaction and co-operative dialogue with more knowledgeable member of society which is necessary for children to acquire the ways of thinking and behaving that make up a community's culture.

The sociocultural theory is considered germane to this study as the use of mother tongue, especially for young children generates better interaction. In Sociocultural theory, social interaction within the child's sociocultural setting is presented as a veritable way of aiding children's learning which is in agreement with what this study investigated.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory posited that much important learning by the child occurs through social interaction with a skillful tutor. It stated further that the tutor may model behaviour and /or provide verbal instructions for the child which was referred to as co-operative or collaborative dialogue. The theory also stated that the child seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (often the parent or teacher, then internalizes the information using it to guide or regulate his/her own performance).

A close look at these statements reveal that the theory emphasized learning through interaction within the sociocultural setting of the child and that the interaction could take place within peers or with adults. The need for a better sociocultural interaction for children as enhancement of their learning must have prompted the Nigerian government to formulate the policy on the use of mother tongue as instructional language in lower primary schools, this also prompted this study to investigate the success or otherwise of the policy.

Statement of the Problem

There is a consensus among educationists that a child especially at his/her early school years learns better if instructed in his/her mother tongue. In realization of the imperativeness of this strategy, Nigerian government in its National Policy on Education stipulates that children of lower primary schools – primary one to three, should have mother tongue as their medium of instructions. Studies have however shown that the most important aspect of any educational policy which is the implementation stage usually experience hitches especially from those to implement the policy—the teachers. Studies have also shown that the understanding of the policy, and mode of implementation by the teachers are determinants of the success or otherwise of the policy. The observed effects of the policy on the pupils who are the direct beneficiaries of the policy also worth investigating in ascertaining areas of weaknesses and strengths of the policy. Against all these backgrounds, this study sets out to investigate teachers' perception, attitudes, implementation and observed effects of the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools using Northeast Nigeria as a case study.

Research Question

1. To what extents do lower primary schools' teachers in Northeast, Nigeria perceive the policy that mother tongue should be the medium of instruction?
2. What are the attitudes of lower primary schools' teachers in Northeast Nigeria toward the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction?
3. To what extents do lower primary schools' teachers in Northeast Nigeria implement the policy that states that mother-tongue should be the medium of instruction?
4. What are the teachers' observed effects of the policy on mother-tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools in Northeast Nigeria?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this research work will provide information on the level of understanding and attitudes of Northeast Nigerian teachers toward the policy of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools, in addition to providing information on the level of implementation. Information will also be provided on the observed effects of the implementation or otherwise of the policy which can be bases for comparisons in other Nigerian lower primary schools.

This study is also important because its findings will be useful to Nigerian policy makers and curriculum planners in the educational sector on the areas of weaknesses and strengths of the policy for appropriate actions which may be an intensification or a review of the policy.

The information gathered in this study will also help teachers who are indispensable personnel in the implementation of the policy to know their areas of strengths and weaknesses in their perception, attitudes, and implementation of the policy for necessary adjustments and intensifications.

The study is also significant because its findings can serve as reference materials for educationists, which can lead to further researches on the policy. Such further researches can eventually lead to a case whereby the policy can serve as a model for educating children at lower primary schools in other countries of the world.

II. Research Methodology

Descriptive survey is the research design found suitable for this study. The study investigated perception, attitudes, implementation and observed effect of the policy on the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools of Northeast Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design is concerned with the collection of data for the purpose of describing and interpreting existing conditions, prevailing circumstances, beliefs, attitudes or ongoing process in-case of policies. (Yabo, 2007). Akinboye and Akinboye(1998) also stated that descriptive survey relies heavily on careful observation of existing events in the real world which does not manipulate, add or delete anything in the study. These descriptions of the cited authors on descriptive survey fit into this study, hence the choice of the design.

Selecting the sample for this study involved two stages. The first stage involved a purposive sampling of two towns from each of the six states of Northeast Nigeria. This was done by selecting each of the states' capital city and another town in the state with similar numeric strength. Ten primary schools were then randomly sampled from each of the towns by liaising with the States' Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) of each state. In all, a total of one hundred and twenty lower primary schools were investigated.

The instrument for data collection in this study was the researchers-developed questionnaire. According to Sidhu (2013) questionnaire has been used for studying a wide range of problems in education, including opinions, attitudes and judgment. He expatiated further that many questionnaires include both open and close type items, the open being an open-end or unrestricted type which call for a free response while the closed forms questions call for short check responses which provide marking a "Yes" or "No", a short response, or checking an item out of a list of given responses. Sidhu, (2013) expatiated further that closed forms of questionnaires are easy to fill out, takes less time and keeps the respondents on the subject in addition to being relatively objective, more acceptable and convenient to the respondents.

For the purpose of this research, the closed form of the questionnaire was adopted. The questionnaire has sections A, B, C, D, and E. section "A" collected data like age, name of school, school status (Private or Public) gender, and qualification. Section "B" contained four items which examined the teachers' perception of the mother tongue policy as instructional medium, section "C" contained five items which collected data on the teachers' attitudes toward the mother-tongue policy, section "D" contained four items which collected data on the level in which the teachers put the policy into practice while section "E" contains six items which investigated the teachers' observed effect of the policy on the pupils. Except section "A", the questionnaire is in closed-ended forms where respondents are to choose from these options: "Strongly Agreed", "Agreed", "Disagreed" and "Strongly Disagreed"

In order to ensure that the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure, the instrument, which is the questionnaire was given to experts in the field of primary education, psychology of education and language education for validation. Their corrections, critique and suggestions were incorporated into the instrument.

The reliability of the instrument which is the questionnaire was established by adopting split-half method which involved administering the questionnaire to a group of respondents /population of the study after being divided into two halves. The result obtained from each group was compared by using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient which yielded a reliability co-efficient of $r = 0.718$.

Six trained research assistants were employed, after which they were trained by the lead and associate researchers for the purpose of administering and retrieving the questionnaires. The researchers thoroughly explained each of the items in the instrument (Questionnaire) to enable the research assistants in turn explain to the respondents before administering the questionnaire. The lead researcher, associate researchers and research assistants took the instruments to the sampled schools, sought the permission of the schools' heads, explained

the contents of the questionnaire to the respondents, administered them, and came back later to collect the responses. Twenty primary schools were covered in each of these states: Bauchi, Gombe, Borno, Adamawa, Yobe and Taraba State. In all, one hundred and twenty primary schools were covered. However, out of the one hundred and twenty questionnaires, only one hundred and sixteen were retrieved, representing 97 percent.

Population of the Research

The research population of this study comprised of all the teachers in lower primary schools in Bauchi State, Borno State, Adamawa State, Gombe State, Yobe State and Taraba State. These states are the states that constitute the Northeastern States in Nigeria. The primary schools in the aforementioned schools all have lower primary sections which are the focus of this study.

Results and Interpretation

Research Question 1: To what extents do lower primary schools' teachers in Northeast, Nigeria perceive the policy that mother tongue should be the medium of instruction?

Results:

Perceptions of lower primary schools' teachers in Northeast, Nigeria on the mother tongue policy.

	Items	S.A	A	D	SD
1.	Mother tongue policy stipulates that all the subjects at the lower primary schools should be taught in mother tongue	59 (50.8)	47 (40.5)	6 (5.1)	4 (3.4)
2.	Mother tongue policy stipulates that only mother tongue subject (Hausa) should be taught in mother tongue.	2 (1.7)	1 (0.8)	61 (52.5)	52 (44.8)
3.	Mother tongue policy stipulates that mother tongue should be used only when the need arises.	5 (4.3)	4 (3.4)	56 (48.2)	51 (43.9)
4.	Mother tongue policy stipulates that pupils should be taught by combining mother tongue and English language.	4 (3.4)	3 (2.5)	57 (49.1)	50 (43.1)

Note: Percentages are in parentheses. S.A = Strongly Agreed. A = Agreed D = Disagreed SD = Strongly Disagreed.

This table revealed that majority of the lower primary schools' teachers in Northeast, Nigeria understood the statement of the policy on the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools. The teachers' response to the statement of the policy as it is in the policy statement yielded a total of 91.3 % as 50.8 percent of the response yielded "strongly agreed" and 40.5 percent also agreed with the correct statement of the policy. Other question used to test the teachers' understanding of the policy revealed their clear understanding of the policy.

Research Question 2: What are the attitudes of lower primary schools' teachers in Northeast Nigeria toward the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction?

III. Results

Attitudes of Respondents to the mother tongue policy

The policy is not realistic as it is not possible to teach all the subjects in mother tongue	57 (49.1)	54 (46.5)	2 (1.7)	3 (2.5)
The policy is difficult to implement as all the books except Hausa books are written in English language.	43 (37)	52 (44.8)	10 (8.6)	11 (9.4)
The policy cannot be fully implemented as some children speak English language at home.	34 (29.3)	31 (26.7)	21 (18.1)	30 (25.8)
The policy did not take into account the interest of the pupils from other geographical areas who do not speak language of the environment (Hausa).	61 (52.5)	42 (36.2)	3 (2.5)	10 (8.6)
The policy is time wasting as teachers have to spend time on interpreting the texts written in English language.	58 (50)	51 (43.9)	1 (0.8)	5 (4.3)

This table revealed that the lower primary schools' teachers in Northeast, Nigeria have negative attitudes toward the policy on mother tongue. The teachers agreed that the policy is not realistic because all the subjects cannot be taught in mother tongue. 49.1% and 46.5% percent of teachers strongly and agreed with this statement which represents 95.7 leaving a paltry 4.3% strongly and disagreeing with the statement. On the difficulty of the policy due to unavailability of books to teach all the subjects, majority of the teachers agreed with this. A total of 95 respondents agreed and strongly agreed with this representing 81.9 percent of the total

respondents. Also on the statement that the policy may not be feasible because some children speak English language at home, respondents agreed with this, the strongly agreed and agreed yielded 29.3 and 26.7 percent respectively, making 56%. The response on the other side however yielded an increase compared to others. Respondents that disagreed and strongly disagreed with this is 44%. This shows that teachers believe that children in considerable number do not speak English language at home. The statement on the difficulty and time wasting nature of the policy whereby teachers have to translate books written in English into Hausa also revealed that the teachers accepted the difficulty in this as 109, representing 94% strongly and agreed with this, leaving just 6% with contrary views.

Research Question 3: To what extents do lower primary schools' teachers in Northeast Nigeria implement the policy that states that mother tongue should be should be the medium of instruction?

Results:

Teachers' Implementation of the Policy

Teachers' Implementation of the Policy

	Items	SA	A	D	SD
1.	I teach my pupils using mother tongue for all the subjects.	19 (16.4)	18 (15.5)	41 (35.3)	38 (32.8)
2.	I teach my pupils using mother tongue to teach Hausa Language only.	28 (24.1)	30 (25.9)	25 (21.6)	33 (28.4)
3.	I teach my pupils using mother tongue policy when the need arises.	34 (29.3)	24 (20.7)	31 (26.7)	27 (23.2)
4.	I teach my pupils by combining mother tongue and English language.	71 (61.2)	43 (37)	1 (0.8)	1 (0.8)

This table reveals that teachers have not been using mother tongue to teach all the subjects as the strongly agreed and agreed response to the question whether teachers have been using mother tongue to teach all the subjects only yielded 31.9 percent, while those that disagreed and strongly disagreed are 68.9% which shows that the teachers were not implementing the policy. It should be noted however that some do implement the policy i.e. 31.9%. The second item in the table on using mother tongue to teach Hausa language only revealed that the teachers practice this differently judging from the result 29.3, 20.7, 26.7 and 23.2 percent response on each of SA, A D and SD. The item four asking whether the teachers teach by combining the mother tongue with English revealed that almost all of them practice this trend of combining the two, which involves interpreting/explaining to the pupils in mother tongue after teaching in English which results to the use of the two. This revelation came to the fore as a total of 114 out of the 116 respondents agreed and strongly agreed amounting to a whole 98.2 percent, leaving a paltry 1.8% on the other sides. This shows that the teachers have been using the two, which though a deviation from the policy, but can be said to be near the policy statement.

Research Question 4: What are the observed effects of the policy on mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools in Northeast Nigeria?

Results

Effects of the Policy

	Item	SA	A	D	SD
1.	Pupils understand better when instructed in mother tongue.	61 (52.5)	21 (18.1)	15 (12.9)	19 (16.3)
2.	Pupils find it difficult to understand English language at a later stage (Upper primary classes).	21 (18.1)	34 (29.3)	30 (25.8)	31 (26.7)
3.	Pupils' class participation improved when using mother tongue to teach them.	63 (54.3)	37 (31.8)	10 (8.6)	6 (5.1)
4.	Pupils' interests are aroused when using mother tongue to teach them.	71 (61.2)	29 (2.5)	12 (10.3)	3 (2.5)
5.	Using mother tongue makes pupils not to see any subject as abstract.	69 (59.4)	31 (26.7)	6 (5.1)	10 (8.6)
6.	Using mother tongue make pupils and teacher interaction improve.	73 (62.9)	30 (25.8)	5 (4.3)	8 (6.8)

The responses of teachers so far also indicate few of them have been indirectly involved in the usage of the two systems of either teaching in mother tongue directly or not which may offer some practical experience on this aspect. In response to item 1, teachers supported the proposition that pupils understand better when instructed in the mother tongue. 70.6 % of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, which indicates that majority of the respondents accepted that pupils understand better when taught in their mother tongue. However, some respondents disagreed that pupils may find it difficult to understand English language at a later stage. The item on this reveals that 47.4 % agreed that using the mother tongue as stated in the policy poses danger of pupils finding English language difficult when introduced at a later stage. Though the rest 52.6 % discard this notion. 63.7 % of the respondents agreed that using of mother tongue arouse the interest

of the pupils, leaving just 36.3 contending otherwise. Majority of the teachers also contend that the use of mother tongue will make students not to see any subject as abstract as 86.1% of the respondents agreed with this premise. Likewise, they also accepted that the use of mother tongue will increase pupil-teacher interaction to a considerable level, 88.7% of the respondents support this premise.

IV. Findings

- Lower primary schools' teachers in Northeast, Nigeria understood the policy on mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools.
- The attitude of lower primary schools' teachers in Northeast, Nigeria toward the policy on mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools reveal that they believed the programme is difficult to implement due to lack of textbooks writing all the subjects in mother tongue.
- They also believed that children who do not speak mother tongue at home will be at a disadvantage if the policy is implemented.
- They also contend that pupils from other geographical zone will be at a disadvantage if the policy is implemented.
- The findings on the implementation of the policy revealed that the policy was not appropriately implemented.
- The implementation of the policy was moderated by the teachers by teaching in both English language and Hausa and interpret texts in English into Hausa.
- On the effect of the policy on the learners, teachers believed the use of mother tongue makes students understand better.
- They also contend that the use of mother tongue will not make pupils to see any topic/subject as abstract.
- The teachers also contend that pupils/teachers interaction increased with the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction.
- Majority of the teachers believed that the use of mother tongue will not affect the pupils' comprehension of English when introduced later while some believe that there may be difficulties in grasping the English language later.

V. Conclusion

This study which investigated the teachers' perception, attitudes, implementation and observed effects of the policy on the use of mother-tongue as an instructional medium in lower primary schools in Northeast, Nigeria found out that though the policy were well understood by the teachers, but lots of constraints militated against the successful implementation of the policy.

VI. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were offered:

- Primary schools, ministries, and States Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) should organize workshops and conferences on the sensitization of the benefits of the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction.
- Research institutes like National Educational Research Development Council (NERDC) should as a matter of urgency start the production of textbooks written in indigenous languages for all the subjects so as to facilitate the proper implementation of the policy on mother tongue as teachers can do little or nothing without the availability of textbooks.
- In addition to the provision of textbooks, appropriate teaching materials that can facilitate the teaching in mother tongue should be provided.
- There should be the provision of alternative classes for children of other geographical backgrounds and those whose mother tongue is not relevant in the area or those whose mother tongue are not spoken at home by the time the policy is implemented.

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