



# **Journal of Nigerian Languages and Culture**



**Volume 11, No 1 March, 2009**

**ISSN 1595-4730**

**Published by  
Association for promoting  
Nigerian Languages and Culture**

Thus, the Nigerian educational system rightly promotes bilingualism, which obtains in the society. This according to Omojuwa (1991) has the advantage of making pupils efficient readers in both English and their mother tongue.

There has been some argument in support of this policy:

- Philosophically, mother tongue of children is the language that they already have acquired competence. The children have internalized the grammatical rules of their first language. At the age of six, they can already speak the language, conduct activities in the language; they also have a “world view” of the language. The cognitive growth of the children will be enhanced because they are learning a new thing in their native language. (Arua, 2002; Soneye 2002)
- Linguistically, the children are not totally alienated from their mother tongue because they are being taught in the native language. They are therefore able to relate linguistically to what they are doing. (Cooper, 2000; Okebukola, 2008)
- Politically, it has been argued that most of the countries that have problems in language education are countries that were hitherto subjected to imperialism in particular. Despite independence, those countries are still tied to the colonialist’s languages; hence they are still linguistically enslaved. In such situations, if mother tongue education policy is implemented, it will be possible for them to discard colonial language and shed off every vestige of colonialism. (Emenyi 2001; Odey 2002; Soneye, 2002)
- Sociologically, since children use their mother tongue for socialization – playing with peers, interacting with parents, siblings at home, interacting with other younger and older members of the society, adults in the society etc, the transmission from home to school will be made easier and smoother if they are made to learn and use the language they are already used to in socializing. Socializing in a new language will constitute an impediment to their linguistic competence. (Cooper, 2000)
- Psychologically, mother tongue is the best medium to use in teaching the young children because they feel at home with the language; their emotions are better handled; they are better able to cope with changes in their psychological and emotional state. (Bamgbose, 1991; Ogenyi, 1989)

In spite of copious evidence in support of the use of mother tongue in early literacy and the fact of its being the thrust of our educational policy, English retains its dominant position in the early literacy delivery system in some states of the federation.

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## Methodology

### Sample

The sample consisted of 60 primary IV pupils (the stage at which English becomes the medium of instruction (NPE 2004) randomly selected from 6 schools in Lagos and Ekiti States. All the schools in both states are public.

### Instrumentation

Two reading passages were used for data collection; one was in English and the other Yoruba.

### Procedure

The pupils were allowed to read the English comprehension passage silently after which the researcher gave model reading. Two students read the passage one after the other. Students read the passage silently again and answered the comprehension questions in writing. The same procedure was followed with the Yoruba reading passage.

### Data Analysis and Findings

The hypotheses of the study were tested by comparing the reading achievement of children in experimental and control groups using T – test. There was significant difference in the performance of pupils in Lagos and Ekiti States on English comprehension in favour of Lagos pupils while Ekiti state pupils recorded significant difference in their performance in Yoruba as revealed in Tables 1.0 and 2.0

**Table 1.0**

Groups	No of Subject	Mean Score	SD	T-Value Calculated	T-Value Observed	DF
Lagos (English)	30	9.87	2.00	11.215		
Ekiti (English)	30	4.60	1.77		1.6749	58

Table 1.0. shows that the T-value calculated (11.215) is greater than T-value observed (1.6749) hence the null hypothesis was rejected. This signifies a significant difference in the achievement of pupils in Lagos and Ekiti states in English reading comprehension in favour of Lagos.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LANGUAGE POLICY: BEYOND RHETORIC TO EMPIRICISM

By

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### Abstract

*This study appraises the extent to which the policy statement on the adoption of mother tongue as the medium of instruction at the lower primary level of education in Nigeria has been achieved and the extent of its influence on pupils' reading achievement in both English and the Nigerian Languages. An experimental-control group design was employed on 60 primary IV pupils randomly selected from 6 public schools in Lagos and Ekiti States. Two reading passages were used for data collection; one was in English and the other Yoruba. The hypotheses of the study were tested by comparing the reading achievement of children in experimental and control groups using T-test. Findings revealed that there was significant difference in the performance of pupils in Lagos and Ekiti States on English comprehension in favour of Lagos pupils while Ekiti State pupils recorded significant difference in their performance in Yoruba. Implementations of findings for language teaching were discussed.*

### Introduction

The new Nigerian educational structure known as 9 – 3 – 4 system consists of nine years of compulsory basic education in primary and junior secondary, and three years of senior secondary and four years of higher education (NPE 2004). During the three years of primary education and the two years pre-primary (where applicable) the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community is the prescribed medium of instruction, while English remains a subject in the curriculum. However the languages change roles at the upper primary with English becoming the medium of instruction and the indigenous languages remaining as subjects to be taught like any other in the curriculum. This persists through out the remaining years of formal schooling.

cultural context for science. Godwin Sogolo (The Guardian, May 14, 1991. 13] put the argument this way:

Nigerian languages are not, for the moment, rich enough to accommodate the vast complexity of theoretical formulation in modern science we (Nigerians) lack the intellectual as well as the development of science.

However, the truth is that every language is capable of performing the functions assigned to it by the users. Accordingly, the problem of appropriate metalanguage in Nigerian languages is not insurmountable. However, it will cost money, personnel and time to provide it. There are a lot of technical issues raised by language minorities; they feel that the mother tongue education policy is a political design intended to propagate the major language at the expense of the minor ones. (Adejare, 2003)

This lack of will is at the root of the rejection of the implementation of the mother tongue education scheme. If there were the will, all the problems associated with the implementation would be easy to confront. Teachers can be trained over a period of years, and textbooks can be translated into local languages, beginning with the three major languages and then the minor ones. In this regard, this researcher like others (Alokun, 1991; Bamgbose, 1991; Ogunsiji, 2002; Onyeleonu, 1986; Ugodulunwa, 2001) is strongly convinced that there are enough resources in our tertiary institutions such as the universities, the colleges of education and the polytechnics, to handle the translation of existing textbooks into the local languages and indeed the writing of new ones in the mother tongues.

For as long as the elites of this nation prefer to send their children to elitist nursery and primary schools where English is the sole medium of instruction, so long shall we lack the political will. So long as the various state government refuse to provide necessary resources, both human and materials for the teaching of the mother tongue at the primary and secondary school levels, the implementation of the mother tongue scheme will continue to be a mirage. The fact that Ekiti pupils performed significantly better than Lagos pupils in Yoruba while the case is reversed in the test of reading comprehension in English shows that the use of a familiar language in education results in individual achievement. While most of the Lagos State schools employ the use of English as medium of instruction from pre-primary classes, majority of the pupils also speak English in school and at home. The Ekiti State schools involved in the study make provision for pre-primary classes to boost enrolment in the face of public schools almost becoming ghost lands. Yoruba is used as medium of instruction from inception to cater for the needs of the pupils who are mostly from non-elite homes where the use of Yoruba is predominant. Obviously teaching such children through

According to Ogunsiji (1989), the language policy suffers implementation as a result of the escape clauses built into it. He frowned at the idea of anchoring implementation on the availability of teachers; believing that most states might have ignored the policy because they could claim that teachers were not available. Observations have shown that even where teachers abound, the policy is far from being implemented. It is therefore obvious that the language situation in the Nigerian educational system today calls for greater attention than is being paid to it especially at the level of implementation.

Some educationists believe that the poor performance of students in English is attributable to the flagrant aversion to the implementation of the policy. While it is true that the mastery of a second language to the point that can be used proficiently takes time, Ogunsiji (1989) noted that long periods of English teaching have often not resulted in greater mastery.

This evidence calls for a more serious and objective appraisal of the extent to which the policy statement has been achieved and the extent of the influence of its adoption on pupils' reading achievement in both languages. It is for this reason that this paper takes the matter of the non-implementation of the policy beyond rhetoric to empiricism by comparing the reading achievement of pupils enrolled in public schools in Lagos State who were taught through the medium of English from pre-primary to primary III and Ekiti State public school pupils who were taught in their mother tongue from pre-primary to primary III (as prescribed by the national policy).

### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There will be no significant difference between the reading achievement in English comprehension of pupils taught in English as medium from pre-primary to primary III and those taught using Yoruba (the language of the environment).
2. There will be no significant difference between the Yoruba reading comprehension of pupils taught in English as medium from pre-primary to primary III and those taught using Yoruba.

*Table 2.0*

Groups	No of Subjects	Mean Score	SD	T-Value Calculated	T-Value Observed	DF
Ekiti (Yoruba)	30	9.63	2.03	8.418		
Lagos (Yoruba)	30	3.63	3.05		1.6749	58

Table 2.0 reveals a significant difference in the achievement of Lagos and Ekiti pupils in Yoruba reading comprehension since the T-value calculated (8.418) is greater than the T-value observed (1.6749). The null hypothesis is hereby rejected.

### Discussion

This study confirms the violation of the mother tongue policy in many states of the federation as revealed by different investigations. For instance Omojuwa (1991) found in her survey on the use of Hausa and English as media of instruction in some primary schools in Zaria that some schools start using English as medium of instruction at the beginning of primary 2 or 3 while others use English at the beginning of primary one.

The reasons for the haphazard implementation and the resultant effects are not far fetched. Violations might have been fuelled by the anti-policy crusade of the critics of the mother tongue education policy who have raised technical issues, most of which have to do with the problem of implementation. Perhaps the most fundamental of these is that the assumption of linguistics homogeneity in the classrooms, which underlies the mother tongue education policy, is out of the synchronization with social and educational realities in the urban areas where classrooms are typically linguistically heterogeneous. Consequently, the tendency in urban classrooms is to use English (Omojuwa, 1977). This is true of Lagos as revealed in the study. The Government is of course, aware of this problem that is why the alternative clause on the language of the immediate community was added to mother tongue education policy. Incidentally, in the urban area, this alternative clause is expected to be the norm in practice, however this is not the case.

Another technical issue that has been raised against the mother tongue policy is the problem of meta-language especially in science and mathematics (Guardian. March 4 and May 14, 1990). The fear being expressed is that literacy education might be jeopardized since the local language will not be able to cope with the rigour of scientific enquiry in part because they lack the necessary meta-language and in part because they lack the appropriate



the medium of English would be futile. Going by the result of this study one can not but agree with Williams and Mchazime (1999) that the crucial point for education purposes is not which language is chronologically the first language nor which language the parents speak, but whether the child is sufficiently familiar with the language employed as a medium of spoken or written instruction to be able to understand it.

### Conclusion

This study has substantiated the fact that the mother tongue plays a positive role in the literacy attainment of the Nigerian child if used as medium of instruction in initial literacy in the formal school system. The questions begging for answer therefore is: Must we be concerned about the skepticisms and tribalistic claims of the "Anti-policy crusaders" or should we apply our minds to what makes our children avid and active readers of their own language? You and I are the jury. This study and others before it have clearly presented the evidence. We must therefore decide.

However, there is no success without risk of failure, no reward without hard work, no opportunity without criticism. The policy provides the opportunity and we the people can choose whether to act or not. When we take our eyes off our goal, our values crumble.

### Recommendations

This paper does not assume the position of a griper or an armchair quarterback rather it analyses discusses and proffers solutions through the following suggestions.

- (1) All states of the federation should as a matter of urgency be compelled to fully implement the national policy on education. All who refuse to comply should be sanctioned.
- (2) All public schools should follow the example of St-Stephens primary school Ise-Emure in Ekiti state by establishing pre-primary classes to boost enrolment and to promote the use of the mother tongue as medium of instruction.
- (3) All sparsely populated public schools should be closed down and their teachers laid off for being guilty of economic sabotage.
- (4) Primary school teachers must be compelled to send their own children to public schools where they teach. When a public school teacher sends his own children to a private school he/she sends a bad signal. Any teacher who fails to do this should be asked to seek employment in a private school.

- (5) Teachers of indigenous languages should be recruited to teach in the primary schools. Many of them are wasting away for lack of employment.
- (6) Indigenous language teachers should be encouraged to stay on the job by being paid "policy implementation allowance" to facilitate the literacy delivery programme in the country.

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