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New Dimensions in Educational Development

A FACULTY OF EDUCATION PUBLICATION
LAGOS STATE UNIVERSITY

NEW DIMENSIONS IN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
A FACULTY OF EDUCATION PUBLICATION LAGOS STATE UNIVERSITY

New Dimensions in Educational Development

NEW DIMENSIONS IN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*A Publication of Faculty of Education
Lagos State University*

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SUBJECT PREFERENCE AMONGST SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LAGOS STATE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHING OF NIGERIAN LANGUAGES IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

By

Makinde, Solomon Olanrewaju

ABSTRACT

This study focused on the subject-preference amongst SS III students in Lagos State schools for the purpose of finding out how Nigerian Language (a core subject i.e one of Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba) is rated. Two hundred and ten students randomly selected from seven schools were involved in the study (108 boys and 102 girls). Instruments used for data collection included a 22 Subject-Preference Scale (SPS) and the Nigerian Languages Attitudes Scale (NILAS). Data collected were analysed by using simple percentage and student's t-test. From the analysis, it was found that most of the students rated Nigerian languages very low, although the attitude of the students toward Nigerian languages were generally positive. It was also discovered that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of the students on gender basis but a significant difference was recorded between the attitudes of students who speak Nigerian languages and non-Nigerian languages at home.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, like other developing (African) countries, has witnessed stunted development and growth in science and technology over the years resulting from the unimpressive performance of learners in the primary and secondary schools. While there is no doubt that such unfavourable achievement of students cannot be divorced totally from such factors as incompetence on the part of the teacher, inappropriate strategies or methods of teaching, nature of the subjects, inadequacy in terms of instructional resources, mention just a few it is unfortunate to note that a major factor is often overlooked. This has to do with the question of the Language of instruction.

The official language or Lingua Franca of Nigeria is English and by implication, it is also the language of instruction in the schools. Language has a significant role to play in the learner's intellectual development. Failures in other subjects and general under-achievement in education have been traced to lack of competence in the English language skills (Qrisawayi, 1985 in Adegboyega 1991:110). This situation is expected because it is practically unprofitable to educate a child (especially at the initial stage) in foreign language

Odunsi (1991:146) has given an unflinching support for a child's mother-tongue as the medium of instruction as a result of abundance of evidence from empirical facts (Fafunwa (1975) Omojuwa (1983), Ojerinde (1983), Olarewaju and Akinwumi (1988) and Olarewaju (1990). To Odunsi, the use of mother-tongue in the teaching of science and mathematics especially at the primary school level:

Could promote resourcefulness creativity in mental and physical skills, functionality, and high level conceptualization which are the cardinal objectives of modern science.

UNESCO (1983) in Odunsi (1999:145) notes that there is no foreign language that can adequately and effectively take the place of the indigenous language and to displace the indigenous language will tantamount to jeopardizing the mental development of the child. Any educational programme that fails to address the practical needs and aspirations of the people for whom it has been designed cannot be seen as being relevant to the community and the individuals within the society. (Akale, 1991:15). It is noted that the government has given serious attention to the language issues in Nigeria. In the national Policy on Education (1977) revised in 1981 and 1998, the stand of the government has been clearly spelt out that the mother-tongue (MT) or the language of a child's immediate community (LIC) should be used as the language of instruction in the first three years

primary education. A Nigerian language (LI) should be taken by the child at the JSS level including another Nigerian language as L2 to be taken from any of Igbo, Hausa, or Yoruba (the three major Nigerian languages) At the Senior Secondary level, the student is expected to take a Nigerian language as (L1)

The stand of the government is hinged on the fact that it realizes the role of indigenous languages in national integration and the promotion and preservation of culture. This is the reason why in Europe, North America, Russia, Japan, China and in other developed countries education of the child is done through the mother tongue for primary, secondary and university education (Fafunwa 1983:20). Those nations recognize the importance of culture in teaching as discussed by UNESCO (1951:11) thus:

It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue: Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful sign that his mind works automatically for expression and understanding. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium.

In spite of government efforts at promoting the indigenous languages in Nigeria, most of the students in the secondary schools appear not interested in learning the languages in view of pursuing a higher degree in their own mother-tongue (a language in which they have the highest linguistic facility for communication).

According to Asonibare and Mordi (1986:117), the choice of a career is influenced by factors such as the individual's aptitude, interest, motivations, previous achievement and ability. Other factors identified by Olayinka (1986:144) include: minimum educational requirement, period of training, general conditions of service in terms of salaries, fringe benefits pension scheme and the social status and prestige attached to such a profession.

In our tertiary institutions today, the number of students admitted to pursue degree programmes in Nigerian languages appear too low compared with those who pursue degree programmes in other languages such as English and French. In the secondary schools, the attitudes of students toward Nigerian languages can also be described as highly discouraging (Awoniyi, 1978 cited in Makinde 1999:170).

The purpose of this study therefore was to find out the subject-preference among the secondary school students in Nigeria and most especially in Lagos State and to discuss

the implications of this for teaching and learning of Nigerian languages. The following research questions therefore served as the anchor for this study.

1. What is the general rating of Nigerian languages amongst secondary school students in this study?
2. What are the general attitudes of the students toward Nigerian languages?
3. Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of male and female students towards Nigerian languages?
4. Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of students who speak Nigerian languages and non-Nigerian languages at home towards Nigerian languages?

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in seven mixed secondary schools in Lagos State. Students in Senior Secondary Class Three (SS3) were the subjects of the study. A total of two hundred and ten (210) randomly sampled subjects were utilized in carrying out the study. Of this 210, 108 were males and 102 were females.

INSTRUMENTATION

Two instruments designed by the researcher were used in collecting data for this study. The first is the subject-preference Scale (SPS). It has two sections. Section A contains six items that sought for information on the student's background. In section B secondary school subjects were listed and numbered from one to twenty-two and a column was provided for respondents to rate the subjects in order of preference. In other words, students were expected to rate the subjects according to their choice if given the free-hand to choose (especially the first nine subjects for their SSCE). The rating of students were classified into high (for those who rate Nigerian languages within 1st-5th) medium (for rating within 6th-9th) and low (for others who rate Nigerian languages from 10th-22nd). The choice of 1st-5th for high reference is based on the fact that the choice of the first five subjects must have been influenced by their targets for the five credit passes required for an admission into the tertiary institutions.

The second instrument is the Nigerian languages Attitude Scale (NILAS). The NILAS also has two sections. In section A respondents were requested to supply information about themselves like the school, tribe, languages spoken at home, sex and other related information. Section B, consists of 15 four point likert type questionnaire items: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4; Agree (A) = 3; Disagree (D) = 2; and Strongly Disagree (SD)

= 1. Meanwhile the number of respondents according to their language groups are displayed in table 1 below:

Table 1: Number of Respondents by Linguistic Background (tribes)

S/N	Linguistic Background (Tribes)	Number of Respondents
1.	Hausa	08 (3.81)
2	Igbo	40 (19.04)
3.	Itshekiri	02 (0.95)
4.	Izon	01 (0.48)
5	Urhobo	01 (0.48)
6.	Yoruba	158 (75.24)
	Total	210 (100%)

VALIDATION OF INSTRUMENTS

Both instruments were given to the three experts in Educational Psychology, Educational Technology and Language Education for validation. Comments of the experts were adhered to in refining the instruments. The NILAS was first administered on a group of (3) subjects typical of the population being studied. Using the Cronbach Alpha statistical formula, the reliability coefficient of the instrument was established at 0.78.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The first two research questions were answered using simple percentage while the other two were tested by computing the respondents' means scores and standard deviations on the NILAS. The differences between pairs of means scores were assessed by using the student's t-test in order to determine whether to reject or not to reject any of the hypothetical questions.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

What is the general rating of Nigerian Languages amongst secondary school students in this study?

Table 2: Summary of Students' Ratings of Nigerian Languages

Order of Preference	No of Students		Total	%
	Male	Female		
1 st	03	07	10	4.776
2 nd	06	05	11	5.24
3 rd	07	05	12	5.71
High 4 th	06	09	15	7.14
5 th	08	05	13	6.19
Total	30	31	61	29.04
Medium 6 th	07	03	10	4.76
7 th	10	06	16	7.62
8 th	10	11	21	10.00
9 th	14	08	22	10.48
Total	41	28	69	32.86
Low 10 th - 22 nd	27	43	80	38.10
Total	108	102	210	100%

Table 2 above shows the subject-preference of respondents in percentages. 61 respondents representing 29.04% rated Nigerian Languages high (they have a very high preference for Nigerian Languages as they would like to have it among their first five subjects, 69 of the respondents (32.86%) gave Nigerian Languages a medium rating by rating them between the 6th and the 9th subjects and the others 80 in number representing 38.10% rated Nigerian Languages low indicating very low preference for the languages.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

What is the general attitude of the students toward Nigerian languages?
The statistical analysis is presented in table 3 below:

Table 3: General Attitudes of Subjects toward Nigerian Languages.

NO	STATEMENT	RESPONSES					
		SA/A	%	D/SD	%	TOTAL	%
1.	Nigerian Language is needed for a good Job	106	50.48	104	59.52	210	(100%)
2.	A Nigerian Language is needed to complete one's Education	127	61.08	83	39.92	210	(100%)
3.	Nigerian language is meant for those who can't cope with other subjects	70	33.33	140	66.67	210	(100%)
4.	Most parents want their children to become specialists in any Nigerian language	90	42.86	120	57.14	210	(100%)
5.	Most students want to become specialists in any Nigerian language	101	48.1	109	51.97	210	(100%)
6.	Nigerian language lessons are difficult to learn	88	41.9	122	58.1	210	(100%)
7.	Nigerian language lessons are usually interesting.	157	74.76	53	25.24	210	(100%)
8.	Once you are versed in English and your mother tongue, additional Nigerian language is not necessary	75	35.71	135	64.29	210	(100%)
9.	The society admires fluent speakers of Nigerian languages	126	60	84	40%	210	(100%)
10.	Any serious Nigerian language student would be ridiculed by friends	97	46.19	113	53.81	210	(100%)
11.	Ability to read and write in any of the Nigerian language is a great asset.	151	71.9	59	28.1	210	(100%)

12.	Nigerian languages are wonderful languages	135	64.14	69	32.86	210	(100%)
13.	Most Nigerian languages are difficult because of the tone marks	141	67.14	69	32.86	210	(100%)
14.	Nigerian languages cannot be used for securing jobs	103	49.05	107	50.95	210	(100%)
15.	The use of Nigerian languages is limited to Nigeria	106	50.48	104	49.52	210	(100%)

From table three above, the general attitude of subjects toward Nigerian languages can be considered to be positive. For instance, out of 210 respondents 106 agreed that Nigerian language is needed for a good job, 127 agreed that Nigerian languages is also needed to complete one's education; 157 agreed that the society admires fluent speakers of Nigerian languages; 151 of them believed that the ability to read and write in Nigerian languages is an asset.

However, 120 of the respondents disagreed with the statement that most parents want their children to be specialists in a Nigerian language 109 of them would not want to be specialists in the language. Also 135 of the respondents agreed to it that Nigerian languages are difficult because of tone marks etc.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of male and female students toward Nigerian languages? The hypothetical question is answered as analysed in table 4 below:

Table 4 t-test comparison of means scores of male and female students' attitude toward Nigerian languages.

GROUP	N	EX	X	SD	DF	TC	CRT	P
Male	108	4343	40.21	6.31	208	0.62	1.96	$P > 0.05$
Female	102	4153	40.72	5.58				N.S.
Total	210							

tat = (208) = 0.62; $p > .05$

From table 4 above, the calculated $t = 0.62$ while $t\text{-critical} = 1.96$ at degree of freedom (df) $n-2$ (210) = 208 indicating no significant difference between the attitude of male and female students toward Nigerian languages.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4

Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of students who speak Nigerian languages and Non-Nigerian language(s) at home toward Nigerian languages?

Table 5 below presents the analysis:

Table 5 t-test comparison of mean scores of subjects who speak Nigerian Language and Non-Nigerian Languages.

GROUP	N	EX	X	SD	DF	TC	CRT	P
Nigerian Languages Home Background.	194	7915	40.80	5.78	208	2.31	1.96	< 0.05
Non Nigerian Lang. Home Background	16	594	37.13	6.15				sig
Total	210							

tat = 208 = 2.31; $p < .05$

From table five above, the calculated $t = 2.31$ while the $t\text{-critical} = 1.96$ at df (208). The answer to research question four is that there is a significant difference between the attitudes of subjects who speak Nigerian languages and Non-Nigerian languages at home.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that most senior secondary students do not have high preference for Nigerian languages (see table 2). This finding is similar to a study conducted by Makinde (1996b) where most of the subjects rated Literature in Nigerian languages very low. However, most of the students have positive attitude towards Nigerian languages (see table 3). It could be noted however, that most parents would not want their children to become specialists in any of Nigerian languages. This result could be connected to Okunade (1994) and Viatonu (1998) who found that many parents, especially the elites, are opposed to the use of mother-tongue as a medium of instruction in Nigerian schools. It can also be said that only 10 of the respondents (4.75) would like to pursue a degree course in a Nigerian language as they have rated Nigerian languages as their first subjects.

That there is no significant difference between the attitude of male and female students can be explained. Both sexes are of the same generation and they are part of the society that emphasize specialty in science, technology and business administration above that of Nigerian languages. Despite the fact that the mean scores of female students 40.72 is higher than that of the male 40.21, the difference is not statistically significant. The result of the study further reveals that there is a significant difference between the attitude of subjects who speak Nigerian languages at home and those who speak Non-Nigerian languages (English) at home. As indicated in table 1 all the respondents are Nigerians but 16 of them came from homes where English language is spoken and it is no surprise to see that the mean scores of the 16 (27.13) is lower than that of their counterparts (40.80).

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHING OF NIGERIAN LANGUAGES IN THE NEW MILLIENNIUM

The result of this study should definitely be of interest to Nigerian language teachers, counselors, educational administrators, curriculum planners and the government. Nigerian languages must be prepared to face the challenges of the new millennium by making the languages more attractive to the students through improved methods and strategies of teaching. Contemporary instructional strategies such Programmed Instruction (PI) Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI), Field-Trips (FT) and methods: Audio-Ligual, Contextualization, Eclectic etc should be employed by Nigerian languages teachers in the new millennium.

Educational administrators especially principals should assist teachers and students positively by supporting and assisting them by way of providing for their needs towards enhancing the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages. Obnoxious regulations prohibiting the use of Nigerian languages within the school premises should be annulled. In the same way, the school counselors should give adequate orientation to the students in order to bring the policy of the government on languages in Nigeria and the various employment opportunities both within Nigeria and outside to their awareness.

The curriculum of Nigerian languages should be reviewed in order to upgrade them to meet the challenges of the new millennium. Reducing the minority languages into writing should arrest the attention of linguists in the new millennium. The government should revive the implementation committee on the mother-tongue policy in order to enforce compliance at the affected levels. The government should also de-emphasize the

importance attached to foreign languages (like English and French) at the expense of Nigerian languages.*

The sample size would appear to be a limiting factor. Attempt to generalize the findings beyond the sample should be done with utmost caution.

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