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Contents

Students' Preference for and Readability of Secondary School History Textbooks.	
- I. Olu Osokoya	1
Visual Mnemonics and Secondary School Students' Retention of Some Abstract Geographic Concepts	
- A. Mansaray and Elizabeth B. Gbodi	13
Effects of Two Assessment Methods on Learning Outcomes of Pupils in Social Studies: A Case Study of University of Ibadan Staff School	
- Okwilagwe, E. A.	21
The Interaction Effects Of Ability And Home Enviroment on Secondary School Students' Achievement In Geography	
- F. V. Falaye	35
An Analysis of Research Methodologies Used by Library and Information Science Researchers in Africa.	
- Iyabo Mabawonku	41
Exploring Hands-on-Investigation: Procedure and Paradigm from Wave and Optics	
- T. O. Iroegbu	51
Problem-solving Technique and Students' Performance in Mole Concept and Chemical Equilibrium	
- Francis A. Adesoji and Raphael O. Yewande	57
Using Instruction to Change Attitude Towards Genetics: A Comparison of Framing and Rehearsal Strategies	
- A. Abimbade, and A. F. Orukotan	67
An Analysis of Nigerian High School Students' Understanding of the Nature of Science and their Achievement in Biology	
- J. B. Bilesanmi-Awoderu	85
Some Teachers' Characteristics and Pupils' Performance in Primary Science.	
- Olusegun Akinbote and Okoruwa T.-O.	

Study of some Nigerian Primary School Teachers
Attitude to Mathematics

F. O. Adetunji

93

Teachers' Perception of Communication and Language Skill in
Mathematic Situations

M. K. Akinsola

100

Attitudes to the Major Nigerian Languages among the
Minorities in Selected Secondary Schools in Lagos State

Ayorinde Dada and Solomon Olanrewaju Makinde

115

Proficiency in English, Intelligence, Aptitude and Affective
Factors as Predictors of Success in the Learning of French

Yetunde Ajibade

127

Trends in Students' Performance in WAEC English
Language Paper I

Kolawole C. Olusegun. O.; Adepoju A. and Adelore, Omobolanle O.

138

Effect of Acculturation Programme on the Attitude of
Learners of Second Nigerian Languages

Olayode H. Oguntade

145

Functional Reproductive Health Education in the Nigerian
School Systems: The Development of Counselling for Health
Promotion Model

Charles B. U. Uwakwe

152

Assessing Vocational Preference Realism Among Nigerian School-
Leaving Adolescents: A discriminant Analysis of Personological
Factors

S. O. Salami

168

Effects of Vocational Interest-Referenced Feedback on Career
Self-Efficacy of Secondary School Students

Dr. D. A. Adeyemo

180

The Philosophical Foundation of Teaching Methodologies

Kola Babarinde

189

Significance of Labour and the Nigerian School Curriculum

A. Owan Enoh

197

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Attitudes to the Major Nigerian Languages Among the Minorities in Selected Secondary Schools in Lagos State

Ayorinde Dada and Solomon Olanrewaju Makinde

Abstract

This study sought to investigate the attitudes of minorities towards the major Nigerian languages in selected secondary schools in Lagos State. The sample consisted of 112 students (44 males 68 females) drawn from nine secondary schools in Lagos State. The students belong to 10 minority groups in Nigeria. A researcher-designed questionnaire, 'Minorities Attitudinal Inventory Toward The Major Nigerian Languages', (MAAITMNIL) was used to obtain data for the study. Six research questions were raised and some of the findings reveal that most of the subjects were satisfied with the National Language provisions in the NPE (1998), but then many of them saw the policy as an imposition. Majority of them would prefer English as the future lingua-franca for Nigeria. The findings were discussed and recommendations were made.

Introduction

There is a very strong relationship between language and the cognitive organisation of its speakers. That is to say, language is, the embodiment of a people's world-view. In other words it is the window through which a linguistic community perceives reality. The mother tongue or a man's indigenous language is that which appeals to his conscience, emotion, and in fact, his whole being (Alilonu and Nkangwung, 1998). Without language, it is hardly possible to establish a communal life because it is through language that the cultural heritage and the achievement of a people is recorded and transferred to another (Awosolu, 1998).

Language is one of the major distinguishing factors between one group of people and the other. One of the variables of identification of one ethnic community from

the other(s) is language as, in most cases, linguistic lines determine ethnic divisions. Nigeria can be described as a country of 'nations within a nation' because of the fact that she is a conglomeration of many nations. Indeed, linguistic communities in Nigeria have been estimated to be between 50 and 510. For instance, Bamgbose (1971) and (1977) puts the number at 400, Tomori (1973) gave 200, Banjo (1975) gave 50, Otiite (1990) gave 374 and Alaba (1999) gave 400 while Wante-Lucas in Otiite (1990) gave 610 linguistic groups. In fact, Elugbe (1990) has opined that linguistic diversity is one of the best attributes of Nigeria while Arohumolase (1998) has described the Nigerian linguistic situation as the existence of many basically antagonistic ethnic nationalities trying to form a nation. Out of the multiplicity of languages existing in Nigeria, only three (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) have been regarded as national languages while so many others are referred to as other, or minority languages (Elugbe, 1994). According to Ohia (1998), there does not even exist any language policy in Nigeria but the efforts of government at having a national language policy is implied into two policies viz: the language provisions for education in the National Policy on education (NPE 1977) revised in (1981) and (1998) and the provisions of language for the conduct of the business of the National Assembly in the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN).

In the revised NPE (1998), it is provided that the medium of instruction for primary education shall be the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community (NPE Section 2:11). For Primary education, the medium of instruction shall be language of the environment for the first three years. During this period English will be taught as a subject and from the fourth year English will be the medium of instruction. Also, the language of the immediate environment shall be taught as a subject along with English and French, two official languages, (NPE, Section 1, No 10 and Section 3, Nos. 176, f). For junior secondary education, apart from English and French, a Nigerian language would be taught as L1, that is the language of the immediate community (LIC), while one major Nigerian language apart from that of the environment is to be taught as L2 (section 4, No. 22); while in senior Secondary school, a major Nigerian Language is expected to be offered every Nigerian child alongside English and French languages. The aim of the Government for making this kind of policy is clearly stated in the NPE (1998), thus:

Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures... 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 (p. 9).

As noble as the ideas contained in the policy statement are, it is pertinent to know the policy has been stalemated in many parts of the country as many secondary

schools nationwide have quietly shoved it aside with the Federal Government's blessing (Adebayo 1992 cited in Ohia 1998). Ohia (1998) reports the case of River State (a minority linguistic area) where the Ministry of Education is believed to have protested to the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) on the multilingual nature of the state and the unfairness of imposing a language on children who do not speak any of the major Nigerian languages. It is observed that there has been no effort towards the implementation of the policy in the state. This situation, therefore, necessitates the call for an examination of the attitudes of the minorities toward the major Nigerian Languages.

From the sociolinguistic perspective, language is not only an instrument of communication but also a symbol of social, group or ethnic identity as well as an index of group membership and solidarity (Grosjean 1982). Language is equally accompanied by attitudes and values of its speakers and even the non-speakers. It is pertinent to know that attitudes toward a language cannot be divorced from attitudes toward the speakers of such a language in question. Hence Haugen (1956) observes that wherever languages coexist, one cannot but find certain prevalent attitudes either favourable or unfavourable towards the language involved and that such attitudes can have profound effect on the psychological disposition of the people and on their use of the language. Ellis (1985) describes language attitudes as those sets of beliefs about such factors as the target language culture, their own culture, that of their teacher and the learning tasks they are given (in a classroom learning situation) and these attitudes affect language learning in a number of ways.

Lawal (1988), notes that learning is affected by two factors namely the phenotypic and organismic, and attitude falls under organismic factors which affects behaviour. Abiri (1966) and Kerrs (1992) cited in Lawal (1988) agree that positive attitude facilitates learning while negative attitude hinders learning. The study of language attitudes is, therefore, important because attitudes represent an index of inter-ethnic relations and they play an important role in mediating and determining them (Romaine 1989). Ohia (1998) asserts that any policy on language in education must take into account the attitude of those likely to be affected because any policy which fails to agree to the expressed attitudes of those involved, persuade those who are negatively disposed to its rightness or seek to remove the cause of disagreement will not succeed.

In studying language attitudes it has been discovered that the negative attitudes expressed by speakers of a dominant language against the minority language speakers would seriously affect the minorities to the extent of downgrading themselves, ceasing from learning the language and even speaking it in public (Grosjean 1982). A change in the negative attitudes toward a language can be brought about by the official recognition of such a language by the government (e.g. Guarani in

Paraguay), a nation's attainment of independence (Swahili in Tanzania) increased autonomy (Canadian French in Quebec), civil rights movements and the work of social scientists and linguistics (Grosjean, 1982). It is also pertinent to know that the stigmatization of a minority language might lead to an opposite effect, that is, the reinforcement of the loyalty and solidarity of a group toward their language and people.

Williamson (1977) identified four different attitudes of speakers who have a common language as their second language (L2):

- (a) **Extremely Favourable Attitude:** those who use the L2 whenever it is possible, regarding it as being more prestigious than their's thereby neglecting their own language.
- (b) **Favourable Attitude:** these regard the L2 as a useful language which helps them to relate and communicate with the larger community, but at the same time, are intimately and emotionally committed to their local language
- (c) **Indifferent Attitude:** these regard the L2 as a neutral language which is purely the best option as a medium of expression in a multilingual environment.
- (d) **Hostile Attitude:** those who regard the L2 as an imposition which is aimed at robbing them of their ethnic identity.

Other factors found to be affecting language attitudes include; age, socio-economic status and sex (Anisfeld and Lambert 1964), administrative, cultural, political and religious factors (Mackey 1968). Based on the problem given above, this study is concerned with the attitudes of students who are minorities toward the major Nigerian Languages in selected Lagos State secondary schools. As a result, the following research questions were formulated for this study:

- 1) What is the attitude of the students who are speakers of the minority languages toward the national language policy?
- 2) What is the attitude of the students who are speakers of the minority languages toward the three major Nigerian languages?
- 3) What is the attitude of the minorities (students) toward their own languages?
- 4) Which of these languages (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, students' local language) do the students prefer?
- 5) Is there any significant difference in the attitude of male and female speakers of minority languages toward the three major Nigerian languages?
- 6) Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of southern and northern minorities toward the major Nigerian languages?

Methodology

Sample

The sample consisted of 112 students who are speakers of minority languages drawn from nine secondary schools in Lagos State (44 males and 68 females). The subjects belong to 10 minority groups in Nigeria and they are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Speakers of Minority Languages in Lagos State Secondary Schools.

SN	Tribe	Number	%
1	Ebira	04	3.57
2	Efik	08	7.14
3	Egun	38	33.93
4	Ibibio	08	7.14
5	Idoma	08	7.14
6	Ijaw	20	17.86
7	Isoko	11	9.82
8	Isekiri	06	5.36
9	Tiv	01	0.89
10	Urhobo	08	7.14
	Total	112	100%

Research Instrument/Procedure

A researcher designed questionnaire 'Minorities Attitudinal Inventory Toward the major Nigerian Languages' (MAAITTMNIL) was used to obtain data for the study. The MAITTMANIL has three sections, A, B and C. Section A contains 10 items, which are related to the demographic information on the respondents. Section B contains 22.4 point likert format items (SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1) on Nigerian languages, while section C, contains four items which are related to the language preference of the students under study. Using the Crombach Alpha statistical formula, the Reliability co-efficient was established at 0.94.

The research instrument was administered on the subjects with the assistance of teachers in the schools especially the Nigerian language teachers. Most of the schools are dominated by the Yoruba, Igbo and some Hausa students. The minorities were no doubt fewer.

Data Analysis

Two levels of analysis were carried out. First, the data obtained were analysed using frequency count and simple percentage. The first four research questions relied on this level of descriptive analysis. Next, the students' t-test was used to analyse the last two research questions. The alpha level used is .05.

Findings and Discussions**Research Question 1:**

What is the attitude of the students who are speakers of the minority languages toward the national language policy?

Table 2: Attitudes of Minorities Toward Major Nigerian Languages.

Item	Statement	SA/A	%	D/SD	%	Total
1	I am satisfied with the government policy that requires every student to learn one of the three major Nigerian languages apart from his/her own mother tongue at the JSS level and a major Nigerian language at the SS level	73	65.18	39	34.82	112 (100)
2	The language provisions as mentioned in 1 above should be removed from the national policy on education	43	38.39	69	61.61	112 (100)
3	Knowledge of one or more of the three major Nigerian Languages will not be useful to me	51	45.54	61	54.46	112 (100)
4	I don't need any of the major Nigerian Languages to achieve my life's ambition.	55	49.11	57	50.89	112 (100)
5	I need one of the major Nigerian languages to complete my education	65	58.04	47	41.96	112 (100)
6	I am a fluent speaker of one or more of the major Nigerian Languages and as a result, I like the government's policy	65	58.04	47	41.98	112 (100)
7	The policy of three major Nigerian Languages is an imposition upon the minority groups	55	49.11	57	50.89	112 (100)
8	The policy of the government as stated in 1 above will enhance National unity and integration	57	50.89	55	49.11	112 (100)
9	The speakers of the three major Nigerian languages see themselves as being superior to the minority groups.	39	34.82	73	65.18	112 (100)
10	Apart from the flair I have for one or more of the Nigerian Languages, I have also been interested in other aspects of their culture	43	38.39	69	61.61	112 (100)
11	I hate using any of the three major Nigerian languages because I feel that they will dominate my own language	62	55.36	50	44.64	112 (100)
12	I like the speakers of the three major Nigerian languages but I dislike their languages	54	48.21	58	51.79	112 (100)

13	I like the speakers of the three major Nigerian languages and I like their languages	38	33.93	74	66.07	112 (100)
14	I dislike the speakers of the major Nigerian languages and I also dislike their languages	55	49.11	57	50.89	112 (100)
15	I prefer speaking my local language to any of the major Nigerian languages	63	56.25	49	43.75	112 (100)
16	I don't like speaking my own language whenever I see speakers of other languages around	57	50.89	55	49.11	112 (100)
17	I like speaking my own language anywhere and any time.	47	41.96	65	58.04	112 (100)
18	I would have loved to speak and write in my local tongue if it had been developed	59	52.68	53	47.32	112 (100)
19	I have problem speaking and writing in my local tongue because I was not brought up in my locality.	67	59.82	45	40.18	112 (100)
20	I would like to recommend the three major Nigerian Languages to all Nigerians because it is the answer to national integration.	51	45.54	61	54.46	112 (100)
21	I would never support the idea of choosing a Nigerian language as the lingual franca in Nigeria	56	50	56	50	112 (100)
22	Choosing one of the major Nigerian languages as a lingual franca is an excellent idea.	40	35.71	72	64.29	112 (100)

Items 1, 2, 7, 8, as displayed in table 1 are relevant in answering research question one. 73 respondents, representing 65.18% expressed their satisfaction with the government policy on Nigerian languages while 39 (34.82%) were dissatisfied with the language provisions. To the statement that the language provisions should be removed from the National policy on Education, 69 students (61.6%) disagreed while only 43 (38.39%) agreed. For item seven, 49.11% of the respondents agreed that the policy of three major Nigerian languages is an imposition upon the minority groups, while 50.89% disagreed. that the policy will enhance national integration, 55 of the students disagreed while 57 agreed (item 8).

Based on the subjects' responses to items 1, 2 and 7, it can be said that they have positive attitudes toward the national language policy but the policy may not achieve the objective of national integration as indicated by the students' response to item 8 where 55 of them (49.11%) disagreed with the statement that the national language policy will enhance national integration'. This presupposes the fact that there must be some other factors other than language that must be addressed for national integration to be realised.

Research Question-2

What is the attitude of the students who are speakers of the minority languages toward the three major Nigerian languages?

In the table 2 above, it is significant to note that 51 respondents agreed that the knowledge of one or more of the major Nigerian languages would not be useful to

them (item 3) while 61 disagreed with the statement. In the same vein in (item 4), 55 agreed that they do not need any of the Nigerian languages to achieve their ambitions while 57 disagreed. For (item 5), 65 respondents acknowledged their need for one of the Nigerian languages in order to complete their education. 73 of the students in (item 9) are opposed to the view that speakers of the major languages see themselves as being superior to the minorities while only 39 disagreed. This no doubt agrees with the favourable attitude of L2 speakers who are still emotionally committed to their local languages as identified by Williamson (1977). This is possible in an atmosphere of tolerance.

Responses to item 13 indicated that 74 students expressed their hatred for the speakers of the three major languages and their languages while only 38 liked them. This could mean that the likeness they have for the languages might have been influenced by their unavoidable desire to satisfy their educational requirements. Therefore, it can be concluded that most of the students see the language policy that elevates the three major languages above others as an imposition.

Research Question 3

What is the attitude of the minorities (students) toward their own languages? Answers to the research questions are already displayed in table 1 above. Responding to (item 11), 62 respondents expressed their hatred for the use of the major Nigerian language. They felt the major language would dominate theirs. Also, for (item 15), 63 students agreed that they preferred speaking their local languages to any of the major Nigerian languages. These responses go to show that the speakers of minority languages are intimately and emotionally committed to their local languages (Williamson 1977).

For (item 16), 57 of the respondents agreed that they dislike speaking their languages in the presence of speakers of other languages while 55 disagreed. And for item 17, 65 students would not like to speak their languages anywhere and anytime. Perhaps the reason for this could be that some minorities see their languages as being inferior to the major ones. The observation has been made in Grosjean (1982) that speakers of minority languages downgrade their languages in a situation where they feel stigmatized as being inferior by speakers of the major languages. Looking at item 22, 72 students (64.29%) disagreed with the idea of choosing a major Nigerian language as a lingual franca while only 40 (35.71%) agreed. It could be seen, therefore, that the minorities displayed positive attitudes toward their languages although many of them do not have the courage to use them in public judging from their responses to item 65.

Research Question 4

Which of the languages do the students prefer?
The answer is provided in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Language preference of the Minorities

Item	Statement	English	Hausa	Igbo	Yoruba	My local language	Total
23	The language I prefer most is	55 (49.11%)	08 (7.14%)	12 (10.71%)	10 (8.93%)	27 (24.11%)	112 (100%)
24	My much hated language is	45 (40.18%)	12 (10.71%)	15 (13.39%)	20 (17.86%)	20 (17.86%)	112 (100%)
24	The language I would prefer as a future lingual franca for Nigeria is	56 (50%)	10 (8.93%)	12 (10.71%)	28 (25%)	06 (5.36%)	112 (100%)
26	I like relating with all tribes except	12 (10.71%)	22 (19.64%)	13 (11.62%)	40 (35.71%)	25 (22.32%)	112 (100%)

From Table 3 above, 55 respondents opted for English as their most preferred language while those who preferred Nigerian languages are negligible (Item 23). For (item 24), 45 students see English as their much-hated language. This may be due to the fact that such students are not proficient in the language. Responding to item 25, 56 of them chose English as their language of preference for a future lingual franca for Nigeria. On the question of which tribe the respondents do not like to relate with, 40 did not like relating with the Yoruba people; 25 did not like relating with their own tribes, 22 dislike relationships with the Hausa people; 13 were against the Igbo people while only 12 were against the English people.

The choice of English as the language most preferred by the students must have been the result of the fact that it is used as the medium of instruction in schools and because they are from different geo-political areas where different languages are spoken and it can facilitate easy interaction or communication among the people. Language choice in a multilingual nation like Nigeria is an emotive one. The choice is in agreement with the view of Williamson (1977) who identified people with different attitude towards a second language because they regard it as the best option in a multilingual environment.

Research Question 5

Is there any significant difference in the attitudes of male and female speakers of minority languages toward the three major Nigerian languages?

In order to investigate the possibility of establishing a significant difference in the attitudes of male and female speakers of minority language, the students t-test is used to compute the comparison as follows:

Table 5: T-test Comparison of Attitudes of Male and Female Respondents

Groups	N	X	SD	DF	t Calculated	Critical	Remark
Male	44	57.80	9.19	110	0.42	1.96	Not Significant
Female	68	58.56	9.47				

Table t at df (110) = 1.66; $P > .05$

Findings: The calculated $t <$ the critical which indicates a no significant situation. Result of research question five indicates that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of male and female speakers of minority of languages toward the major Nigerian languages. Although the means score of female exceeds that of the male which agrees with the Anisfeld and Lambert (1964) that sex is a factor in determining attitudes language, but the difference here is not significant.

Research Question 6

Is there any significant difference between the attitudes of southern and northern minorities toward the major Nigerian languages?

The answer to the research question is presented in Table 5 below

Table 6: T-test Comparison of Attitudes of Southern and Northern Minorities

Groups	N	X	SD	DF	t Calculated	Critical	Remark
Southern Minorities	101	58.74	9.34	110	1.66	1.96	Not Significant
Northern Minorities	11	54.27	8.22				

Table t at df (110) = 1.96; t calculated = 0.42; $P > .05$

Findings: The calculated $t <$ critical t . No significant difference. Findings from table 5 reveal that there is no significant difference in the attitudes of southern and northern minorities toward the major Nigerian Languages. The mean score of the southern minorities 58.74 exceeds that of the northern minorities 54.27 but the difference is not significant. The inference that can be drawn from the findings is that the minorities share common views about their languages as well as

Conclusion

Since most of the respondents are favourably disposed to the national language policy, it is evident that the government should do more by way of putting every machinery in motion to ensure that the policy is fully implemented at all levels. The government should conduct research on a wider basis to determine the attitude of most Nigerians towards the language policy. This will help in modifying the policy to make it more acceptable. The researchers are of the opinion that Nigerian children should continue to learn English as a subject while in every local government area, state and region, the language of wider communication should be identified which should also be developed to the status of language of instruction at all levels of education. The idea of learning one of the major languages apart from the child's language should also be promoted conscientiously

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