

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MOTHER-TONGUE OR THE LANGUAGE OF THE IMMEDIATE COMMUNITY AT THE PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION LEVEL IN THE NORTHWESTERN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study has as its focal point, The Assessment of the Implementation of mother-tongue or the Language of the Immediate Community at the early childhood/pre-primary level of education. The study adopted a cross-sectional design as well as a quantitative descriptive survey. The multistage stratified random sampling strategy was employed to select 100 teachers/parents as sample populations from four (4) schools in North-Western Nigeria comprising Kaduna, Kano, Katsina and Sokoto.

Questionnaire with an interview schedule was used as an instrument that enabled the construction of the data collection. The instrument was structured in the form of a checklist for easy completion and analysis. Descriptive statistics of frequency and percentages was used to test the hypothesis. The interview schedule was used to collect information from pre-primary/early school teachers/Head teachers, as the implementers of the scheme, who supposedly are equally parents. The findings at the end of the study is that, mother-tongues are used at these levels of education without well-developed language textbooks by the government and, a few language specialists in other languages such as Adara, Atyap, Jju, Aegworok, Ham and Bakulu, to cite but a few; with the exception of Hausa language which has myriad of teaching and learning materials and manpower. It is therefore, recommended that in keeping with the government plans and language policy, the orthographies of the other Nigerian languages be developed, and texts books as well as language teachers are trained for even national development.

**INTRODUCTION**

Sherma (1975) argues that no foreign language can take the place of the indigenous language[s] and no system of education can afford to disregard it without serious detriment to the mental development of the child (35). This postulation underscores the pivotal role and place of the indigenous languages in our educational system, especially at the pre-primary and primary levels of education that invariably is the foundational level of the teaching and learning experience. The mother-tongue of the child or the language of the immediate environment is the language that a child acquires at birth and finds it easy to articulate his feelings, emotions and desires. No other language can best express the child's feelings, emotions and desires like the mother-tongue at that developmental stage of the child; not even the English Language.

To support the above-stated argument, the National Policy on Education stipulates that every child should be “encouraged to learn one of the three major Nigerian languages other than his/her own.” These major languages are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

This, Baldeh (1990) stresses is with a view to consolidating the position of language as a medium of education and a vehicle for the expression of indigenous culture. Especially, in connection with the national languages, the policy continues: “Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary level is initially the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community and, at a larger stage, English.”

Today many languages are disappearing in Nigeria and Africa by extension as a result of the entrenched European policies, general apathy and attitudinal problems. Native speakers of the now allow such languages to be relegated to the background. If urgent actions are not taken to forestall the disappearing of our Mother-Tongues and their non-usage in the pre-primary education level, our mother-tongues’ epilogue will be summarized in the following words:

“One hundred years or slightly more ago, the Native American people were still speaking their own languages. They did not choose to shift to English. Their children were forced to go to government boarding schools where their hair was shaved and they were beaten if they were caught talking in their mother tongue. So, many lost their own language. There was nothing natural or voluntary about it.”

- Tom Eoeddes, Literary Translator, BBC News Magazine, Sept 15, 2010.

It is therefore against the above extrapolations that this study attempts an assessment of the implementation of Mother-Tongue or the Language of the immediate community in the teaching and learning of the Nigerian pupils at the pre-primary education level.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT/JUSTIFICATION**

The NPE document, 2004 section 3 Sub-Section C unequivocally states that the Nigerian government shall ensure that the medium of instruction at the pre-primary level is principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end will develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages and produce textbooks in Nigerian languages. It is worth stating that linguists at the turn of the 21st Century warned that 10% of the 6,000 to 7,000 existing languages will not survive into the 22nd Century if nothing is done to prevent such an outcome. Every language as postulated by UNESCO (FAQ on Endangered languages) reflects a unique world-view with its own value systems, philosophy and particular cultural features. The extinction of a language results in the irrevocable loss of unique cultural knowledge embodied in it for centuries including historical, spiritual and ecological knowledge that may be essential for the survival of not only its speakers, but also countless others. For speaker communities, languages are the creations and vectors of tradition. They support cultural identity and are an essential part of a

community's heritage. The present study derives relevance from the above explication; the preservation of the minority languages in Nigeria by ensuring that the NPE policy document on the aforementioned is fully implemented, hence teaching the child in his/her mother-tongue will enhance the preservation of his/her folklore and culture; which are an integral part of his/her child's folk literature. The implementation of this policy will further enhance the development of the child's Language Acquisition Device (LAD) and his/her ability to learn other languages very fast, especially the English language. This study is geared towards the revitalization and preservation of the minority languages in Nigeria for effective national development in line with the government's effort in relating education to the overall community needs (NPE, 3). This is consequent upon the fact that we are a product of European hegemony and imperialism; so if our mother-tongues die, then our orature dies with the languages. That means, virtually everything about the people's culture, myth, legends and world-view, especially the childlore will be lost. Therefore, an urgent pragmatic and sustainable action should be taken to revitalize, document and preserve our mother-tongues.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The thrust of this study is to assess the implementation of the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community at the early childhood pre-primary educational level of education in some selected schools in North-West Nigeria. In specific terms, the study will focus on realizing the understated objectives:

1. To ascertain the language of communication in the child's immediate environment in the nursery and early primary stages of education.
2. To ascertain the existence or otherwise of pre-primary/early primary sections in the areas of the study.
3. To examine the government's commitment to the developing of the orthographies of many Nigerian languages
4. To find out the number of textbooks in Nigerian languages produced by the Nigerian government
5. To assess the effectiveness of the implementation of this policy as contained in the National Policy of Education at the pre-primary education level.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Conceptual Explications/Theoretical Frame Work**

The National Policy on Education was influenced by the Rome declaration of 1930 on the position of the vernacular in national education. The resolution, which was at the instance of the international institute of African Languages and Cultures (Benzies, 1940), succinctly intones that:

“It is a universally acknowledged principle in modern education that a child should receive instruction both in and through his mother tongue, and this privilege should not be withheld from the African child. The child should learn to love and respect the mental heritage of his own people and

the natural and necessary expression of this heritage is the language. Neglect of the vernacular involves the danger of crippling and destroying the pupil's production powers by forcing him to express himself in a language foreign both to himself and to the genius of his race. As a general rule, therefore, during the first three years of school education, instruction should be carried out exclusively in a native language and we understand that there is a considerable body of educational experience which supports us in this opinion. We consider that no European language should be taught during that time and that it should be followed by a period during which the pupil begins to learn a European language while other instruction is continued in the vernacular (4).”

It was this resolution made by the Rome declaration of 1930 on the position of vernacular in national education that prompted the formulations of language policies across the African continent since 1930. Baldeh posits that, it has been necessary to look at mother tongue education for the following educational and social reasons:

“It is generally believed that instruction in the mother tongue greatly helps instruction in the second language. The more languages one knows the easier one finds it to learn other languages, as the case of Schliemann starkly illustrates.

It is immorally and unethical to plunge the six-year-old child into the bewilderment of a foreign language and culture on the very first day at a school, making it difficult for him to grasp the subject matter of teaching (48).”

Fafunwa (1975) buttresses the above argument by stating that a child taught in a language that he is not familiar with can develop skills with trauma. He believes that Mother- Tongue is a base for learning subsequent languages and it also facilitates understanding, internalization of concepts and continuity in thinking. Giving credence to this postulation also, Opoola (2002:12) noted that: [t]he proper development of the child is closely bound with the continued use of the language he has from birth, the language of his parents, brothers, sisters, friends and people he is used to; which is the language he has acquired in his first experience of life (142). Fasold (1997) reported that data obtained so far have strongly convinced project leaders that the African child will learn better and develop his talents faster if he is taught in his mother- tongue. Researchers have also shown that children who begin their education using their mother tongue are more confident and learn better than those who are made to learn in a second language in their early years (Apaupa, Lawal 2009 and Wikipedia, 2009). This is true because the teaching of the mother- tongue becomes the sure foundation to a successful brighter education.

Adebite (2004) argues that language policies have also been variously formulated and implemented along the lines of the three patterns suggested by scholars namely: Amodal, Unimodal and Multimodal (Whiteley 1871, Verdoodt 1979 and Adegbija 1994). The Amodal policy, which extols one exogenous language such as French or Portuguese and belittles all endogenous (indigenous) languages, is practised in most French and Portuguese ex-colonies such as Mali, Cameroon, Niger,

Senegal, Togo (French) and Angola, Mozambique and Bissau (Portuguese). The identity and assimilation strategy of the French and Portuguese colonialists ensured that the metropolitans' community and African peoples share a common political belief and cultural destiny. The Unimodal policy selects one major endogenous language, such as Swahili in Tanzania, Kirundi in Burundi, Somali in Somalia, Amharic in Ethiopia and Arabic in Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Sudan, as national or official language while other languages serve various other functions. In Tanzania, the smallness of over 100 different ethnolinguistic units assisted the selection of Swahili, a neutral language that has developed through trade inter-communication between people. The multimodal policy type, in which an exogenous language as well as one or more endogenous majority languages are extolled over and above other minority languages, operates especially in former English colonies like Nigeria (English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba), Sierra Leone (English and Creole), Kenya (English and Swahili) and South Africa (English and Afrikaans).

In all of the three policy types above, it is observed that the use of African languages as a resource for development is lacking. Even in the few nations where African languages serve official functions, such languages are mere lingua francas or languages of wider communications (LWCs) but serve limited functions in formal education. In other nations, the dominant use of foreign languages as elaborated codes is glaring, while the indigenous languages are either absent or serve restricted functions. For example, in Ghana and Nigeria, English serves as the official language, while Akan, Moshio-Dangomba and Ewe (Ghana) and Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (Nigeria) serve as LWCs (16-17).

## **Theoretical Frame Work**

This research work finds its relevance within the ambit of Eclectic Approach to Language Teaching which was propounded by Harold Palmer as not a compromise between the two antagonistic schools, but a combination of what is valuable in many systems or methods of teaching. This method as posited by Adeyi, Mike (2013) is basically a compromise between the extremism of Audio-Lingua (A/L) method and the Cognitive Code Learning (CCL) method. In other words, it seeks to moderate what the linguists in the groups believe is the excess of the two methods. Thus, the eclectic method is looked upon as a bridge between the two methods. This method insists that language learning is basically a combination of mental activities and the imitation of adult speech (109-110).

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the language of communication in the child's immediate environment in the nursery and the kindergarten stages of education?
2. How many pre-primary sections did the government established in the study area?
3. How effective is the implementation of the language of immediate community policy in the study area?
4. What is the government's commitment to developing the orthographies of the languages of the immediate communities under study?
5. How many of the textbooks in Nigerian languages are produced by the Nigerian government?

6. How effective if the setting and monitoring of the minimum standard on the early childcare centres in the study area.

## METHODOLOGY

The design strategy for this study is a cross-sectional survey. This is obvious because it was impossible to reach all the target schools or groups, purposive sampling technique was employed to reach a representative of 100 respondents (teachers) from 4 states of the North Western geopolitical zones. The purposive sampling technique was used on the specific targeted tribes within the demographic area of its coverage in all the places that were visited. One questionnaire was used on the teachers and on some of them who are also parents. The interview schedule for the pilot study was tested to determine reliability within a selected school in Jema'a LGA of Kaduna State where the institution is domicile. The instrument was structured in the form of a checklist for easy completion and analysis. Descriptive statistics of frequency and percentages was used to test the hypothesis.

### Data presentation and analysis

The presentation of data is based on the responses got from the questionnaire distributed and collected from teachers, who are the implementers of the government educational policies in the North-West, Nigeria.

Data collected in this chapter were mainly from the questionnaire. The information in this survey should be analysed and interpreted using a simple descriptive percentage (%) method. The questionnaire or items were presented in sentences or statements and the percentage used clearly indicated the formula used, thus:

$$F \times 100 = \%$$

$$N \quad 1$$

Therefore, where F = total frequency distribution

N = number of respondents

All multiplied by hundred (100%)

This was so in order to ease the calculation of the collected data to be used in this research as the tables below will show.

**Table 4.1.1. Policy on the awareness of the use of mother tongue**

S/No.	Responses	Frequency	%
1.	Agree	60	60
2.	Strongly agree	40	40
3.	Disagree	-	-

4.	Strongly disagree	-	-
	Total	100	100

Table 4.1.1 revealed that 60% of the respondents agreed that they are aware of the policy on the use of mother tongue at the Pre-primary/Early Primary Education. While 40% of the respondents strongly agree with this position. Therefore, the majority of the respondents agreed that they are aware of this policy. From the result it is evident that the respondents were all aware of the existence of the use of mother tongue policy.

**Table 4.1.2. Pupils are taught in their mother tongue**

S/No.	Responses	Frequency	%
1.	Agree	100	100
2.	Strongly agree	-	-
3.	Disagree	-	-
4.	Strongly disagree	-	-
	Total	100	100

The result in Table 4.1.2 revealed that 100% of the respondents agreed that pupils are taught in their mother tongue at this level of education. Therefore, all the respondents agreed 100% that pupils at the pre-primary/early primary education level are taught in their mother tongue.

**Table 4.1.3. Implementation of mother-tongue enhances smooth learning**

S/No.	Responses	Frequency	%
1.	Agree	20	20
2.	Strongly agree	80	80
3.	Disagree	-	-
4.	Strongly disagree	-	-
	Total	100	100

In Table 4.1.3 it can be seen that 20% of the respondents agreed that the implementation of mother tongue policy will enhance smooth learning. While 80% of them strongly agreed that the implementation of this policy will enhance smooth learning among the pupils of these education levels.

**Table 4.1.4. Well-trained (MT specialists) at the pre-primary level**

S/No.	Responses	Frequency	%
1.	Agree	40	40
2.	Strongly agree	-	-
3.	Disagree	50	50

4.	Strongly disagree	10	10
	Total	100	100

In Table 4.1.4 it was revealed that 40% of those who responded agreed there are well trained Mother-Tongue (MT) specialists. 50% respondents disagreed to the above assertion. While 10% strongly disagreed that there are no trained MT specialist at this level of education. This indicates that majority of the respondents strongly disagreed that there are well trained MT specialists.

**Table 4.1.5. Standardized language orthography**

S/No.	Responses	Frequency	%
1.	Agree	80	80
2.	Strongly agree	10	10
3.	Disagree	10	10
4.	Strongly disagree	-	-
	Total	100	100

Table 4.1.5 showed that 80% of the respondents agreed that their mother tongue has fully developed orthography. While 10% respondents of the study strongly agreed their language orthography has been fully developed. And another 10% of the respondents disagreed that their language has no standard orthography. This therefore, indicates that the majority agreed that their language has a fully developed or standard orthography.

**Table 4.1.6. Proper implementation of MT**

S/No.	Responses	Frequency	%
1.	Agree	80	80
2.	Strongly agree	10	10
3.	Disagree	10	10
4.	Strongly disagree	-	-
	Total	100	100

Table 4.15 revealed that 80% of the respondents agreed that there has been proper implementation of MT at the Primary or Early Primary Education. While 10% of the respondents strongly agreed that there has been proper implementation of MT at the pre-primary/early primary education. And yet another 10% respondent disagreed with the above assertion. Therefore, the majority agreed that there has been proper implementation of MT at the Pre-primary/Early Primary Education.

**Table 4.1.7. MT/language of the immediate community in curbing teaching and learning difficulties**

S/No.	Responses	Frequency	%
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1.	Agree	90	90
2.	Strongly agree	10	10
3.	Disagree	-	-
4.	Strongly disagree	-	-
	Total	100	100

Table 4.1.7 showed that 90% respondents agreed that using MT/Language of the immediate community at this level will go a long way curbing teaching and learning difficulties in the country. While 10% respondents strongly agreed that teaching and learning difficulties can be overcome when pupils are taught in their MT/Language of the immediate community. Therefore, the majority agreed that learning difficulties can be taken care of when pupils are taught in their mother tongue

**Table 4.1.8. Attitude of learners towards their mother tongue**

S/No.	Responses	Frequency	%
1.	Agree	50	50
2.	Strongly agree	10	10
3.	Disagree	30	30
4.	Strongly disagree	10	10
	Total	100	100

Table 4.1.8 revealed that 40% respondents agreed that the attitude of the learners towards their mother tongue is positive. While 60% respondents strongly agreed to the above assertion. Therefore, the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that the attitude of learners towards their mother-tongue is not positive.

**Table 4.1.9. Attitude of parents towards language policy**

S/No.	Responses	Frequency	%
1.	Agree	60	60
2.	Strongly agree	-	-
3.	Disagree	30	30
4.	Strongly disagree	10	10
	Total	100	100

Table 4.1.9 showed that 60% respondents agreed that the attitude of parents towards the application of the language policy is positive. And 30% respondents disagreed, while 10% respondents strongly disagreed to the above assertion. Therefore, the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that the attitude of parents towards the application of this language policy is very positive.

**Table 4.1.10. Attitude of teachers towards language policy**

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S/No.	Responses	Frequency	%
1.	Agree	60	60
2.	Strongly agree	10	10
3.	Disagree	30	30
4.	Strongly disagree	-	-
	Total	100	100

The result in Table 4.1.10 revealed that 60 respondents representing 60% agreed that the attitude of teachers towards the application of the language policy is very positive. While 10% responded that they strongly agreed to the above position. Therefore, the majority of the respondents have agreed that teachers' attitudes towards the application of this policy are very positive.

## FINDINGS

The study will help in no small measure to the implications of the UNESCO and the nation's goal on revitalizing and preserving the child's mother tongue and childlore, starting from the pre-primary/early primary level of education. Hence, there are some facilities and some language teachers in some areas with the zeal and determination to teach in their respective mother-tongues, despite the lack of educational materials such as language texts in their mother-tongues.

## CONCLUSION

The researchers have been able to gather that though this is a laudable policy/program yet there are still some bottlenecks in its full implementations. Despite the are positive attitudes exhibited by teachers who incidentally are mostly parents and the policy implementers at this level of education towards the teaching and learning processes done in the various mother-tongues and the languages of the immediate environment. But unfortunately, the government's attitudes in developing orthographies and man-powers in the other languages have overtime not received the needed attention and boosts from the policy and decision makers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. The paper recommends the proper implementation and constant supervision of teachers so that it is implemented to the fullest.
- II. It further recommends that priority should be given to the development of the orthographies of other languages in Nigeria, especially in the North-West Nigeria where apart from Hausa, we have other languages like Adara(Kadara), Atyap (Kataf), Jju (Kaje), Zuru, andKambari etc., by the federal government.
- III. The training of minority languages teachers is highly encouraged in this direction.
- IV. The researchers recommend that the findings will enable educational planners, managers and all stakeholders to have a pragmatic and sustainable action plan towards the revitalization,

documentation and preservation of our mother-tongues in the face of the threatening effects of globalization in Africa and particularly in North-Western Nigeria.

## Questionnaire

**Question 1:** Are you aware of the existence of the policy on the use of mother tongue at the pre-primary/early primary education?

**Question 2:** Are pupils taught in their mother tongue at this level?

**Question 3:** Do you think the implementation of mother-tongue at this level will enhance smooth learning?

**Question 4:** There are well-trained (MT specialists) at the pre-primary/early primary level in this state.

**Question 5:** Has your language orthography been fully developed or of standard?

**Question 6:** There has been proper implementation of MT at the pre-primary/early primary education.

**Question 7:** Using MT/language of the immediate community at this level will go a long way in curbing teaching and learning difficulties in our state/country.

**Question 8:** The attitude of learners towards their mother tongue is positive.

**Question 9:** The attitude of parents towards the application of this language policy is positive.

**Question 10:** The attitude of teachers towards the application of this language policy is very positive.

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