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## **A Study of the Teachers and Parents' Perceptions of the Use of English as the Sole Medium of Instruction in Nigerian Nursery and Primary Schools**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The current trend in many homes in Nigeria, particularly, the elites is that parents try to communicate with their children in English rather than in the various indigenous languages of the environment. Hence, the Nursery and Primary schools around have started using English language as the sole medium of instruction against what the National Policy on Education stipulates. The objective of this study therefore is to find out what is the view of both parents and the teachers in the Nursery and primary schools on this trend and its implication on the emotional and intellectual development of the children. The research was carried out in five major cities in the south-western part of Nigeria with five hundred teachers and five hundred parents as respondents. The parents include both the educated and uneducated ones. The instruments for gathering data included structured interview and self-prepared questionnaire. The responses were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The major findings include: that many parents are ignorant of the implications of the trend on the emotional and intellectual development of the children in terms of creativity; that the Nursery and Primary schools involved in this practice are mainly private schools whose proprietors want to gain cheap popularity for high patronage; that it is due to the fact that the government pays lip service to the importance of language policy. We therefore conclude that the use of English as medium of instruction in early childhood classes in multilingual Nigeria is indeed a threat to the indigenous languages as well as the creative ability of Nigerian Child.

*Keywords:* Medium, instruction, Language, Nigerian, policy

### **Introduction**

Language is a key factor in realizing development in the educational sector of any nation. The language that is used as medium of instruction in schools, especially in the early childhood classes is a key factor in determining the child's learnability and creative ability. Nigeria schools had been using English Language as medium of instruction in schools since the dawn of formal education in around 1840. The missionaries who brought formal education made efforts to train Africans to serve as clerks and catechists in order to achieve their mission. According to Kanana (2013) As African states approached their independence in the mid-20th Century; the former colonial languages had become positioned as languages of economic success, higher education and prestige (Babatunde 2002). Thus, Africa and Nigeria in particular became exposed to English Language and today, English Language is used as official language, Language of Business and Commerce and the medium of instruction in schools, not minding the numerous indigenous languages in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, the various policies of education in Nigeria have given roles to all the languages including English Language, in education. According to Olofin (2012) the federal

government demonstrates appreciation for the use of the indigenous languages as a language of education through the provisions of the (1981) National policy on education, particularly under the section: 'The National Language Policy'. This section states that: "Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and at a later stage, English". The National Policy on Education (NPE) indicates that the Language of instruction in pre-primary and first three years of primary education shall be the child's mother-tongue or Language of immediate environment of the child. Despite this provision of NPE for the use of indigenous languages in the nursery and primary schools in Nigeria, it seems the policy is still awaiting reality as the trend now is that most nursery and primary schools in Nigeria, especially privately-owned schools use English Language as the sole medium of instruction. In the homes of many educated Nigerians, the order is that their children must not acquire nor learn any other Language than English Language. 'English is the passport to success and upward social mobility' and 'English is the key to national progress' are some common clichés that are interspersed in the formal discourse of official planning and policy meetings; more importantly, these clichés reflect the perception of many people – both rich and poor – in discussing future life chances for their children (Shamim 2011).

Despite the fact that renown scholars and linguists in Nigeria such as Obayan(1991), Bamgbose (1968) and Akindele and Adegbite (1999) had vehemently condemned the use of English in the early childhood education, the proprietors and teachers in our private schools still make pupils to serve punishment or pay fine when they speak indigenous languages. This trend is now viewed by average Nigerians as the elites'; a class that everyone loves to belong to. Thus, any child that is unable to speak English at the early childhood is regarded as a duller or not brilliant.

The concern of this study therefore, is to find out the perception of the parents and teachers of these children in nursery and primary schools on the use of English Language as the sole medium of instruction in the nursery and primary schools.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study was set out to get the perceptions of the teachers and parents on the Use of English as a medium of instruction in most Nursery and Primary Schools in Nigeria as against what is given in the NPE. The study is designed to find out from the perspective of the teachers and parents:

- 1) Why the Use of English as sole medium of instruction in early childhood classes?
- 2) What are the benefits and the disadvantages of this trend to both the child and the Nigerian nation?

### **Research Questions**

The Study will answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the perceptions of teachers and parents on the reasons for the use of English language as the medium of instruction in Nursery and Primary schools in Nigeria?
- 2) What are the perceptions of the teachers and parents as the likely problem that the use of English as medium of instruction may pose to the child's creative ability and the national development?

- 3) What are the scholars' views of the use of the use of English as medium of instruction in early childhood classes?

#### **Language policy in Nigerian Education**

Nigeria is a multiethnic and multilingual nation with over 400 indigenous Languages (Adegbija 2004). This situation has given English Language the opportunity to thrive due to the inability of the different ethnic groups to communicate among them. English Language becomes the neutral Language that all and sundry can use. Hence, English Language is now the official Language.

Right from the colonial time, English Language had been given the pride of place as the Language of education. Apart from its usage as the medium of instruction from secondary to tertiary level of education, English Language is also taught as a special subject in schools. The Language has been integrated into the educational system of Nigeria to the extent that a credit pass in English is required from any secondary students who will proceed to any tertiary institution in the country. Of all the indigenous Languages, only three – Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo have a place in the school curriculum and they are mostly restricted to their domains or regions of use (Adegbija, 2004).

#### **Literature Review**

Dearden (2014) gives a report of the study that was conducted by EMI Oxford (The Centre for Research and Development in English Medium Instruction), a centre based in the University of Oxford's Department of Education. The research group included Professor Ernesto Macaro, Dr Catherine Walter, Julie Dearden and Ting Zhao. The study was supported of the British Council. The broad aim was to map the size, shape and future trends of English Language as medium of Instruction (EMI) worldwide. The study was conducted from October 2013 to March 2014 and investigated the current situation of EMI in terms of country particularities, subjects being taught through EMI and important variables.

Methodology of the study was to ask British Council staff in 60 countries to act as 'informed respondents' for the countries in which they were resident. Open-ended questionnaires were sent to these respondents and they were asked to provide information on the current state of English as medium of Instruction (EMI) under a number of headings. Responses were later gathered from 55 countries including Nigeria and the data were collected between October 2013 and March 2014

The study found out among other things that there is more EMI in private than public education and that EMI is more likely to be sanctioned or 'officially allowed' in the private sector than the public sector.

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### **Language Policy in National Policy on Education (NPE)**

Nigeria as a country does not really have what we can refer to as Language policy but some fragments of the National Policy on education gives provisions for the role of Language in the National development and national integration. The National Policy on Education (1977, 1981, 2004) is a document that contains the government's policy regarding education in Nigeria. The National Policy on Education (1977, 1981 and as revised in 2004) states that government appreciates the importance of Language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion and preservation of cultures. It further states that in the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child be required to learn one of the three Nigerian Languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. However, the practice in most schools in Nigeria now (especially private schools) is that Nigerian Languages are not even taught at all despite the recommendation of the NPE as stated above.

Section 2 (14) (c) of the NPE stipulates that the government shall ensure that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother-tongue or the Language of the immediate community. During this period, English shall be taught as a subject. According to Akindele and Adegbite (1999p.111) 'The position for the medium of instruction for pre-primary education is clear from the policy. Just as the policy provides, the mother tongues ought to be the medium of instruction of children who are still on their mother's laps'. They went further to state that using the mother tongue at nursery school will complement children's acquisition of the Language at home and thus help them to further learn about their environment and social norms through it. But the practice in most homes in Nigeria now is that the parents communicate with their children in English. Most children are flogged by their parents when they try to speak the indigenous languages which they refer to as vernacular.

Hence, what is stated in the NPE is contrary to what operates in reality (Akindele and Adegbite 1999). English is now the medium of instruction in all Nursery and Primary schools. Though in public schools, they use the indigenous Languages as media of instruction while from the mid-primary English becomes the medium. In Nursery and Primary schools privately owned, they use English Language as the sole medium of instruction at all levels. Hence, parents prefer the privately-owned schools to public schools with the belief that proficiency in English Language is the symbol of being highly educated.

### **Methodology**

The objective of this study is to find out what is the view of both parents and the teachers in Nursery and Primary schools on the implications of using English Language as the medium of instruction in Nursery and Primary schools. This is a descriptive survey research which is not based on any theoretical framework. The study was carried out in five major cities in the South-western part of Nigeria – Ado-Ekiti, Akure, Ibadan, Osogbo and Lagos. The respondents were 500 teachers teaching in Nursery and Primary schools and 500 parents of pupils in Nursery and Primary schools. The parents include both the educated and the uneducated ones. The instruments used for gathering information from the respondents were structured interview and

self-prepared open-ended questionnaire. Their responses were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively to give answers to the research questions as shown below.

### Data Analysis and Findings

The responses of the respondents are presented quantitatively here, in simple percentage terms where applicable.

**RQ:** What are the perceptions of teachers and parents on the reasons for the use of English language as the medium of instruction in Nursery and Primary schools in Nigeria?

Table 1

*The parents' perspective of why English Language and not indigenous Languages should be used as medium of instruction in Nursery and Primary schools.*

Opinion	No. of Parent with positive view in the opinion		No. of Parents with negative response	
	No.	%	No.	%
English Language is the Language that the child needs to fit in to the society.	481	96.2	19	3.8
Indigenous Languages are inferior and not useful for the child's development academically.	389	77.8	121	22.2
English Language is the only symbol of being educated.	408	81.6	92	18.4
That is what the School uses and it is good for my child.	452	90.4	48	9.6
It creates a strong foundation for the academic learning of the child.	460	92	40	8
It is not good, but that is what is in vogue	38	7.6	462	91.4
I support it only because I don't want my child to be inferior to other children.	462	91.4	38	7.6

The table above shows the perspectives of the parents across the five cities on the use of English language as the medium of instruction in Nursery and primary schools. Out of 500 parents interviewed, 96.2% see English language as the language that the child needs to fit in to the society while another 77.8% see the indigenous languages as inferior to English and also not useful for the child's development academically. 92% of the parents claims that the use of English language as medium of instruction in early childhood class creates a strong foundation for the academic learning of the child. A very high percentage of 81.6% believes that English language is the only symbol of being educated. Another 91.4% does not see anything bad in using English Language as medium of instruction.

From the analysis of the responses, it is obvious that Nigerian parents do not see anything wrong in the use of English as medium of instruction in early childhood classes in Nigeria as they hold the view that it is the language needed for the child's strong academic foundation as it is seen as the language of the elites.

Table 2

*Teachers' responses on why English Language and not indigenous Languages should be used as medium of instruction in Nursery and Primary Schools.*

Opinion	Positive Response		Negative Response	
	No.	%	No.	%
It promotes learning and create strong foundation for academic development	303	60.6%	197	39.4%
The negative attitude of parents towards the use of indigenous Languages.	472	94.4%	28	5.6%
It will help the child's fluency and competence in the use of English in future.	470	94%	30	6%
It is the desire of the School owner (Proprietor).	493	98.6%	07	1.4%
It is the government's order.	15	3%	485	97%
It promotes the image of the School among other schools.	493	98.6%	07	1.4%
The government does not enforce nor make adequate provision for the use of indigenous Languages.	490	98%	10	2%
Materials are not available for teaching various concepts in indigenous Languages.	500	100%	0	0%
The use of English as medium of instruction is not right in school.	480	96%	20	4%

The table above shows the responses of teachers in Nursery and primary schools on why English language is used as the sole medium of instruction in their schools. A very high percentage of 94.4% of the 500 teachers interviewed gives the parents' negative attitude towards the indigenous languages as the main reason for the use of English language as the medium of instruction. However, 94% of them also hold the view that the use of English as medium of instruction will help the child's fluency and competence in English in the future. 98.6% of them identified the trend as the wish of the school proprietors which cannot be flouted by any teacher even though it is against the government policy.

**RQ 2:** What is the perception of the teachers and parents on the implication of the use of English as Mother-Tongue (MT) in Nursery and Primary schools on the child and the national development?

Table 3

*The perception of the teachers and parents on the implication of the use of English as Medium of instruction in Nursery and Primary schools on the child and the national development.*

Opinion	Parents' Response				Teacher's Response			
	Positive		Negative		Positive		Negative	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Low comprehension of the content subjects	37	74	463	92	280	56	220	44
Difficulties with higher level thinking and skills of analysis.	20	4	480	96	251	50.2	249	49.8
Low creative ability and poor motive skills	10	2	490	98	25	50.2	249	49.8

Indigenous Languages may go into extinction.	310	62	190	38.6	450	90	50	10
Loss of culture as a result of loss of indigenous Languages.	302	60.4	198	39.6	470	94	30	6
No problem posed.	40	82	90	18	251	50.2	249	49.8
The implications are not negative on the National development.	90	18	410	82	480	96	20	4

The result shown on the table above indicates the perception of the parents as well as that of the teachers on the implication of using English language as the medium of instruction in nursery and primary schools. The percentage of parents that agree with the view that the use of English as the medium of instruction will result into low creative ability and poor innovative skill of the children is just 10% while 50.2% of the teachers agree with the view. However, both the teachers and the parents massively support the fact that the continuous use of English language may cause the indigenous languages to go into extinction (62% and 50% respectively) and that the culture may be loss as a result of loss of indigenous languages (60.4% and 94%). But the high percentage of parents (82%) and teachers (50.2%) that claim that the use of English does not pose any problem and that it does not have any negative implication on the national development is a clear indication that most Nigerians place no value on culture.

**RQ 3:** What are the scholars' views of the use of the use of English as medium of instruction in early childhood classes?  
early childhood classes?

Earlier submission of the linguists across Africa on the implication of using English Language as medium of instruction is briefly presented here to justify our findings in this study. Majority of the scholars strongly hold the view that mother tongue is the best Language to be used and that acceptance of English Language as medium of instruction in the early childhood classes is denying the nation the opportunity of introducing her culture and ways of life to the younger generations. Bamgbose (2011) submits that Ideally, a properly planned mother tongue based multilingual education should make provision for the first language to be used as a medium of instruction at least for the entire duration of basic education, while the imported official language is taught as a subject. The advantage of this model is that children will develop enough confidence in their own languages before they make any transition into another language. They will not lose mastery of their language in trying to transit into another language, rather they will add to what they already have. Hence, they end up having "additive" rather than "subtractive" bilingualism. Fafunwa has also proved this through a research conducted in 1970 at the institute of education, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo university, Ile-Ife) osun state Nigeria. The project was designed to use Yoruba Language as medium of instruction in primary schools for six years. The project was based on the premise that:

1. The child will benefit culturally, socially, linguistically and cognitively.
2. The child's command of English will be improved if he is taught English as an entirely separate subject by specialist teachers through the six year.

The result of the experiment revealed that the experimental group schools performed better than the controlled group schools in all school subjects at end of primary school education.

Babatunde (2002) commenting on this, opines that hearing something in a familiar, one's-own tongue should aid understanding better than learning it in an extraneous somebody else-own tongue.

### **Discussion and Summary**

From the information and analysis done in this Study, it is found out that teachers and parents are of different perceptions on the use of English as a medium of instruction in Pre-primary and Primary Schools in Nigeria. Majority of the parents believe that that English Language is the Language that the child needs for all round development and to fit in to the society. From our study, we found out that many parents do not care if the indigenous languages go to extinction and they show no concern for their cultural heritage which is to be transmitted through the indigenous Languages. An average Nigerian lust for foreign ideas, items and technology; they see English Language as the symbol of civility and academic success. Bamgbose (2011) has observed this trend and explain it as the ideas of the elites "who prefer education in the imported language for their children. Taking their cue from the elites, it is not surprising that parents belonging to lower social groups also want similar education for their children".

The teachers on their parts could perceive the negative implication of the use of English as the medium of instruction in nursery and primary schools. But majority of them have been overwhelmed by the elites' idea that English Language is the only symbol of being educated. However, we have found out that many of the teachers are handicapped to use the indigenous Languages because of the fear of the school owners and the parents. our findings also confirm the submission of Bamgbose (2011) that Patronage of such schools comes not only from well-to-do parents but also from many lowly paid blue-collar workers, who believe that they are making a great sacrifice for their children's future.

From the results of the interview as analysed here, it is evident that the use of English as a medium of instruction in pre-primary and primary schools is taking preeminence as a result of the lip service that the government pays to the issue of Language policy. There was no enforcement of the stipulations of the NPE on schools – especially the private schools. The government leaves the private schools to do whatever they like without proper monitoring. Most private schools in Nigeria teach pre-primary and primary classes using English Language as the medium of instruction without any restriction, caution or sanction from the Ministry of Education. This supports the view of Akindele and Adegbite (1999) that the government finds it difficult to control the Language of instruction at this level since pre-primary schools are privately owned.

From our findings in this study, the National Policy on Education had not been implemented and One of the major causes of failure to implement language policy in NPE is failure to indicate implementation steps and procedures as well as adequate provision of funds and materials, above all the lack of political will on the part of the government (Bamgbose 2011)

We also find out that the nursery and primary schools in Nigeria are privately- owned and profit oriented. So, they teach the pupils in pre-primary and primary schools in English in order to make their Schools attractive to the parents who also prefer English Language to their mother-tongues. This also corroborates the earlier view of scholars on the issue.



### Limitations

This study has once again impacted the field of applied linguistics in the area of language to be used as the medium of instruction. However the study has taken into cognizance some limitations. These include the geographical spread of the subject and source of the data. The study is restricted to the southwestern part of Nigeria which could be regarded as the first point of call of the British colonial masters. This may, to some extent make difference in what may likely be obtainable in the highly islamised northern part of the country.

### Conclusion

Having observed the trends and practices in various homes and privately-owned nursery and primary schools in Nigeria regarding the use of English Language contrary to what is stated in the NPE, this study was set out to find out what is the perception of the parents and teachers on the Use of English as sole medium of instruction in Nigerian privately-owned Nursery and Primary Schools. The ignorance of the parents on the negative implication of this trend is highly noticeable. They see it as symbol of elites. This paper however, joins other scholars, such as Bamgbose (2011) to condemn this practice as it negatively affects the creative ability of the children and maim them emotionally and intellectually.

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