

LANGUAGE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTRES IN NSUKKA EDUCATION AREA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

The study investigated the challenges to effective language policy implementation in Early Childhood Education centres as perceived by caregivers and parents in Nsukka Education Area. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised 140 caregivers from 50 ECE centres and 2,705 parents representing the number of children at the ECE centres. A total of 40 caregivers and 400 parents participated in the study. A 20-item questionnaire consisting of 2 clusters was used for data collection. An overall reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha. Mean and standard deviation were to answer the research questions while t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that the multilingual nature of Nigeria, lack of proper monitoring by government officials, dominance of instructional materials written in English language, among others are the challenges against the effective implementation of the language policy. Also, it was revealed that there was no significant difference in the responses of caregivers and parents on the challenges to effective language policy implementation. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that the orthography and instructional materials in Nigerian languages should be developed and produced to ensure smooth and effective implementation of the policy.

Introduction

Language of instruction plays an important role in learning because it is through language that the children make sense of the lessons they receive in the classroom, either from the teacher or text used for learning. It is also through language that children express themselves. However, when the language of instruction is not a language the children are familiar with, it becomes a barrier to learning. To overcome this challenge, government in its wisdom promulgated the language policy. According to Salisu and Dollah (2015) language policy is a systematic attempt to resolve the communication problems of a community by studying the various dialects it uses and developing a viable policy concerning the use of such language varieties. In support, Egwuogu (2017) defined language policy as a set of deliberate activities systematically designed, organized and developed from the language resources of a community in order to enhance the utilization of such resources for learning and development. Language policy by Egwuogu is adopted in this study.

This language policy as stated by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN 2013) stipulates that Government acknowledges the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction, national cohesion, and preserving cultures. Thus, the language of instruction for every child at the Early Childhood Education level should be the language of the immediate environment or the mother tongue. It is however unfortunate that this policy as laudable as it is, is not being fully implemented or diligently executed till date. English language is still being used to teach learners in most Early Childhood Education centres. It is also used to write textbooks, lesson plan and other instructional materials as well as tests and examinations with the exception of those in other languages taught as subjects like French, Igbo, Hausa,

Yoruba and German language, among others (Oluga & Babalola, 2012). This could be likened to throwing a child inside water without teaching him/her how to swim. This assertion is based on the assumption that the mother language is used as a means of communication at home. Hence, ensuring smooth transition from home to school where the policy is implemented.

However, there seems to be little or no adherence to this policy statement. That is why Igbojinwaekwu and Nneji (2012) asserted that despite the policy of using the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment as a medium of instruction in the pre-primary school, no reliable records exist to show that any privately-owned, state-owned or Federal-owned schools are implementing these policy guidelines. There may be reasons for this non-compliance. Dorgu and Igbojinwaekwu (2016) opined that one likely reason is that using the mother tongue or language of the environment to teach is not about knowing how to speak the language but knowing how to apply it in the teaching and learning process. Teachers are often not properly equipped with adequate teaching methodologies and other teaching resources to make the policy implementable. More often than not, textbooks and instructional materials in Nigerian languages are not readily available (Ibiam, 2011). The use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction cannot be effective if appropriate books and other instructional materials in various Nigerian languages are not made available. Also, English language remains the major language used for formal literacy, at other levels of education, for government bureaucracy and administration, the law courts, among others (Danladi, 2013). As such, the teachers feel reluctant implementing this policy. More so, defaulters are not sanctioned, which makes them unwilling to implement the policy.

In essence, the challenges to the effective implementation of this policy include identifying the indigenous language to use in a linguistically mixed classroom (Nyaga & Anthonissen, 2012), scarcity of language teaching materials as well as textbooks militates against the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction (Jones & Barkhuizen, 2011). There is no political will and leadership on the part of government to implement the language policy as defaulters are not sanctioned (Wangia, Furaha & Kikech, 2014). Adegbiya (2004) opines that the indigenous languages largely suffer neglect as the English language is often considered superior to it. In addition, teachers may lack the necessary training required to effectively teach with the language of the immediate environment or mother tongue as well as lack of sufficient trained teachers in the implementation of the language policy may impede its success. Furthermore, Ozoemena, Ngwoke and Nwokolo (2021) mentioned some of these challenges as hindrances to effective language policy implementation. This is in spite of the obvious benefit of this policy to the school children.

It is evident that children who learn in their mother tongue enjoy school more and learn faster because they are more familiar with the language of instruction than those taught in foreign languages. This is evident in Fafunwa's Ife 6-year project which proved that children taught with the mother tongue had improved educational outcomes than their counterparts taught with the English language (Fafunwa as cited in Philip, 2023). Kathryn, Bertanu and Gebre (2006) also opined that when children are made to learn in foreign language, they will not only learn to read and write in that language but will also learn the language itself. This will overburden the children with learning two incredibly complex concepts at the same time, thus resulting in a much slower rate of learning. It is therefore quite sad to observe that most teachers in the Early Childhood Education centres still use English Language as a medium of instruction (Ezema, 2004). As the child has his/her language (mother tongue) supposedly used for communication at home, to begin to teach the child with language that is alien to him/her as soon as he enters school will bring a lot of confusion to the child. The child may not understand the language of instruction of the teacher in addition to the fact that the environment

is strange to the child as the child just transited from home to school. With this situation, no matter the preparedness of the teacher with appropriate teaching materials and methods, nothing of worth will be achieved. It is worthy of note that the greatest potentials of the children are identified, fostered, and sustained during the early years. As such, the use of appropriate language of instruction is necessary.

In the area of study, Early Childhood Education centres in public primary schools generally do not implement the language policy. This is evident in the study by Chineke (2014). Therefore, these challenges to effective implementation of the language policy which has defied solutions, as the problem still persists prompted the researcher to find out the challenges as well as strategies to effective implementation of the language policy as perceived by caregivers and parents in Nsukka Education Area.

The following research questions were posed for the study.

1. What are the challenges to effective language implementation in Early Childhood Education Centres in Nsukka Education Area?
2. What are the strategies adopted in response to the challenges in Early Childhood Education Centres in Nsukka Education Area?

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of caregivers and parents on the challenges to effective language implementation in Early Childhood Education Centres.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of caregivers and parents on the strategies adopted in response to the challenges to effective language implementation.

Methods

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey research design, according to Nworgu (2015) aims to collect data on and describe in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population. This study was carried out in Nsukka Local Government Education Area of Enugu State with a population of 2,705 learners representing the parents comprising of ECE 1 = 1,006, ECE 2 = 912 and ECE 3 = 787 and 140 caregivers made up of 60 in ECE 1, 40 in ECE 2 and 40 in ECE3, all in 50 public Early Childhood Education centres. Since ECE 3 was used for the study, all 40 caregivers served as respondents. The sample comprised of 400 parents representing about 50% of the population in ECE 3. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to draw the sample for parents. At the first stage, a simple random sampling technique was employed to select 20 public primary schools in the area of study with Early Childhood Education centres. A purposive sampling technique was used to sample all the ECE 3 children in the selected schools. All the selected ECE 3 children represented their parents who served as respondents for the study. All the ECE 3 caregivers in the 50 schools served as respondents for the study. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers titled “Challenges to Effective Implementation of Language Policy Questionnaire (CEILPQ)”. The CEILPQ is a 20-items questionnaire which is also sub- divided into 2 clusters of 10 items each. The 2 clusters of the questionnaire are on challenges to effective language policy implementation and strategies adopted in response to the identified challenges, with a four- point likert of Strongly Agree (SA) =4, Agree (A) =3, Disagree (D) =2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) =1. The instrument was subjected to face validation by three experts. Using Cronbach-Alpha method, a reliability

coefficient of 0.74, and 0.81 were obtained for clusters A, and B respectively while 0.79 was obtained as the overall reliability index. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions while t-test was used to answer the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research question 1: What are the challenges to effective language implementation in Early Childhood Education Centres in Nsukka Education Area?

Table 1: Mean and Standard deviation of the challenges to effective language implementation in Early Childhood Education Centres

S/N	Challenges to effective implementation of language policy	Caregivers			Parents		
		Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Multilingual nature of Nigeria	3.32	0.62	Agreed	2.50	1.15	Agreed
2	Prestigious place given to English language	3.24	0.69	Agreed	2.51	1.08	Agreed
3	Dominance of instructional materials written in English	2.98	0.99	Agreed	2.83	1.02	Agreed
4	Lack of proper monitoring by government agencies	3.24	0.69	Agreed	2.96	0.99	Agreed
5	Parental attitude	2.64	0.77	Agreed	2.72	1.10	Agreed
6	Lack of competence in using mother tongue to teach	2.22	1.05	Disagreed	2.17	1.08	Disagreed
7	Lack of standard orthography in many Nigerian languages	3.24	0.69	Agreed	2.78	1.04	Agreed
8	Lack of the training required to effectively implement language policy	3.02	0.94	Agreed	2.83	1.02	Agreed
9	Insufficient trained teachers in the language policy implementation	2.66	0.77	Agreed	2.78	1.04	Agreed
10	No sanctions for defaulters of the policy	3.22	0.69	Agreed	2.96	0.99	Agreed
CLUSTER MEAN		2.98	0.63		2.70	1.07	

Result of Table 1 shows that items with serial numbers 1 to 5 and 7 to 10 have their various mean values above the criterion mean value of 2.50 and were agreed by caregivers and parents as the challenges to effective language implementation in Early Childhood Education Centres. The challenges are; Multilingual nature of Nigeria, the Prestigious place given to English language, dominance of instructional materials written in English, lack of proper monitoring by government agencies, parental attitude, lack of standard orthography in many Nigerian languages, lack of training required to effectively implement language policy, insufficient trained teachers in the language policy implementation and no sanctions for defaulters of the policy.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean response of caregivers and parents on the challenges to effective language implementation in Early Childhood Education Centres.

Table 2: t-test of the mean responses of caregivers and parents on the challenges to effective language implementation in Early Childhood Education Centres.

Group	N	Mean	SD	df	z-value	Sig.	Alpha value	Decision
Caregivers	40	2.98	0.63	438	1.07	0.23	0.05	Not significant
Parents	400	2.70	1.07					

Data in Table 2 revealed that the mean and standard deviation of caregivers are 2.98 and 0.63 while that of parents are 2.70 and 1.07 respectively. The z-value is 1.07 with a degree of freedom of 438. The hypothesis failed to be rejected because the significant value of 0.23 is greater than the alpha value of 0.05. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the mean response of caregivers and parents on the challenges to effective language implementation in Early Childhood Education Centres.

Research question 2: What are the strategies adopted in response to these challenges in Early Childhood Education Centres in Nsukka Education Area?

Table 3: Mean and Standard deviation of the strategies adopted in response to these challenges in Early Childhood Education Centres.

S/N	Strategies to effective implementation of language policy	CAREGIVERS			PARENTS		
		Mean	Sd	Decision	Mean	Sd	Decision
11	Educate parents on the importance of mother tongue in teaching	2.78	0.81	Agreed	3.80	0.74	Agreed
12	Encouraging children to ask and answer questions in the mother tongue	2.74	0.83	Agreed	3.71	0.90	Agreed
13	Appreciate children who speak the mother tongue	3.00	0.64	Agreed	3.68	0.91	Agreed
14	Proper monitoring by government agencies to ensure compliance	2.78	0.92	Agreed	3.60	1.04	Agreed
15	Improvise instructional materials for teaching in the mother tongue	2.76	0.77	Agreed	3.46	1.04	Agreed
16	Encourage the development of the orthography of many more Nigerian languages	3.02	0.64	Agreed	3.20	1.13	Agreed
17	Launch awareness campaign on the importance of language policy	2.62	0.74	Agreed	3.71	0.90	Agreed
18	Train teachers on the effective implementation of language policy	2.66	0.84	Agreed	3.71	0.90	Agreed
19	Promote communication in the mother tongue in official matters.	2.64	0.84	Agreed	3.20	1.13	Agreed
20	Defaulters of the policy should be sanctioned	3.44	0.99	Agreed	2.96	0.99	Agreed
CLUSTER MEAN		2.84	0.65		3.50	1.17	

The result in Table 3 shows that items with serial numbers 11 to 20 have their various mean values above the criterion mean value of 2.50 and were agreed by caregivers and parents as the strategies adopted in response to these challenges in Early Childhood Education Centres in Nsukka Education Area. The strategies adopted are educating parents on the importance of mother tongue in teaching, encouraging children to ask and answer questions in the mother tongue, appreciating children who speak the mother tongue, proper monitoring by government agencies to ensure compliance, improvisation of instructional materials for teaching the mother tongue, encouraging the development of orthography of other Nigerian languages, launching awareness campaign on the importance of language policy, training teachers on the effective implementation of language policy, promoting communication in the mother tongue in official matters and sanctioning of defaulters of the policy.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean response of caregivers and parents on the strategies adopted in response to the challenges to effective language implementation

Table 4: z-test of the mean responses of caregivers and parents on the strategies adopted in response to the challenges to effective language implementation in Early Childhood Education Centres.

Group	N	Mean	SD	df	z-value	Sig.	Alpha level	Decision
Caregivers	40	2.84	0.65					
Parents	400	3.50	1.17	438	5.50	0.00	0.05	Significant

Data on Table 4 revealed that the mean and standard deviation of caregivers are 2.84 and 0.65 while that of parents are 3.50 and 1.17 respectively. The z-value is 5.50 with a degree of freedom of 438. The hypothesis is rejected because the significant value of 0.00 is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the mean response of caregivers and parents on the strategies adopted in response to these challenges to effective language implementation

Discussion of Findings

The findings showed the views of caregivers and parents on the challenges to effective implementation of the language policy in Early Childhood Education centres. The two groups of respondents agree that all the items are challenges to the effective implementation of the language policy in Early Childhood Education centres except lack of competence in using mother tongue to teach. Furthermore, findings showed that there is no significant difference in the mean response of caregivers and parents on the challenges to effective language policy implementation in Early Childhood Education Centres. The findings of this study agreed with the findings of Ozoemena, Ngwoke and Nwokolo (2021) who found that there are challenges to the implementation of mother tongue in schools. Some of the challenges listed are similar to those found in the current study. This finding could be attributed to the academic nature of the area of study as well as the status symbol attached to the use of English Language at home and school.

The findings of the study also showed that all the respondents (caregivers and parents) agreed that all the items listed are strategies for overcoming the challenges to effective implementation of the language policy in Early Childhood Education centres. In addition, findings revealed that there is a significant difference in the mean response of caregivers and parents on the strategies adopted in response to the challenges to effective language implementation. This finding have validated the study conducted by Mantilla (2022) which found that when teachers are confronted with some of these challenges, they see it as a way to achieve positive learning outcomes among learners. This implies that they see these challenges as a way of improving their teaching for better results.

Conclusion

The study examined the challenges to effective implementation of the language policy in Early Childhood Education centres in Nsukka Education Area. Based on the findings, it was concluded that there were challenges militating against the implementation of the language policy and that most of the challenges were beyond the control of caregivers and parents. As language of the immediate environment or the mother tongue will help to boost learning, it should be used in the teaching and learning process as a medium of instruction. It was also concluded that the strategies suggested were practicable to both caregivers and parents who are stakeholders in the education sector.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

1. Government and its agencies should sensitize parents/guardians and teachers on the importance of the language policy to ensure implementation.
2. Government and its agencies should develop and produce orthography and instructional materials in Nigerian languages to ensure smooth and effective implementation of the policy.
3. Government should ensure proper monitoring of Early Childhood Education centres for effective implementation of the language policy in schools to ensure adherence.

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