

Evaluating the Implementation of National Language Policy on Indigenous Language Usage in Secondary Schools in Abakaliki Metropolis

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Abstract

The goal of the National Language Policy (NLP) is to promote indigenous languages in Nigeria. This study seeks to determine the extent to which the provisions of NLP on indigenous languages are implemented in secondary schools, as in eight selected secondary schools in Abakaliki Metropolis. Questionnaires are administered to 480 randomly selected teachers and students of the schools. Besides, observation and secondary data from library and internet print sources are also relied on. Survey design, mixed method, 4-scale coding, t-test, frequency counts, percentage, and analysis of variance are employed. The results prove the extent of the implementation of the provisions to be currently very low. Teachers' and students' perspectives on the implementation tally extensively. The study concludes that while the provisions of the NLP on indigenous languages are not implemented, those promoting foreign languages (English, Arabic and French) are implemented significantly. Language policy review, legislations ordering wide use of indigenous languages in secondary schools, reorientation, wide awareness creation, increased formal and informal language education and meaningful stakeholder engagement are the panacea.

Keywords: Implementation, Extent, National language policy, Indigenous language use, Secondary schools

Introduction

The goal of the National Language Policy (NLP) is to promote indigenous languages in Nigeria. Language policies are rules on how languages should be used in a given society. The very ground rules of language use are knotted with social concerns (Emeka-Nwobia, 2015). Thus, social concerns characterise policies on indigenous languages. This study seeks to ascertain the extent to which social concerns are attended to by the National Language Policy (NLP) in Nigeria. Mbah (2023) points out that in discussing the status of indigenous languages in Nigeria in relation to that of the English language, language engineering comes into play as part of and to ensure language planning. This means that language engineering is needed to address some of the social concerns about indigenous languages in Nigeria and elsewhere.

As Fiset et al. (2024) point out, global trends, demographic, and technological factors influence the preference as well as use of language in the contemporary workplace. These factors also apply to social settings like schools. Similarly, Case (2023) reveals that policies and various frameworks influence individuals' choices of how, when and where to study. By implication, language policies influence the extent to which learners use indigenous languages in certain education environments. This assertion is affirmed by Okonkwo (2013). To that end, this study seeks to assess the implementation extent of NLP provisions on indigenous language use in Abakaliki Metropolitan secondary schools. The assessment is aimed at determining the extent to which this policy is being implemented in practice across secondary schools in Nigeria, drawing insights what obtains in these schools.

Aim and Objectives

This study aims at determining the extent to which the provisions of the National Language Policy (NLP) are implemented in secondary schools, as in eight selected secondary schools in Abakaliki Metropolis. The specific objectives are to:

- (i) Examine the extent to which indigenous languages are used in Abakaliki Metropolitan Secondary Schools.
- (ii) Ascertain the challenges to the implementation of the NLP provisions on indigenous language use in Abakaliki Metropolitan Secondary Schools.

Research Questions

The following questions are designed to guide the study:

- (i) To what extent is the policy provisions on indigenous languages implemented in Abakaliki Metropolitan Secondary Schools?
- (ii) To what extent are indigenous languages used in Abakaliki Metropolitan Secondary Schools?
- (iii) What are the challenges to the implementation of the National Language Policy provisions on indigenous language use in Abakaliki Metropolitan Secondary Schools?

Review of the Related Studies

The study by Chukwuokoro et al. (2024) makes a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the statutory silencing of the indigenous languages in the National Language Policy of Nigeria. It argues that the status of indigenous languages in the National Language Policy in Nigeria is silenced statutorily by the national document. It blames the policy-makers for putting foreign languages above or over the indigenous ones. According to the study, by according linguistic and national recognition and relevance to foreign languages (English, French and Arabic), the policy silences the status of the indigenous languages; emphasising that it is inappropriate to do so. The statutory provisions are largely not implemented.

Nwode et al. (2024) identify the following issues of the implementation of national language policy in Nigeria: “official language preference and exaltation, educational challenges, inconsistent policies, the absence of political will, corruption and bad governance, multilingualism, social factors like negative attitude and perception, resource constraints, cultural identity, ethnicity and religiosity, and migration and urbanization” (p. 1). This quotation makes it obvious that foreign languages are more preferred, and promoted much more than the indigenous languages in the NLP. In their attempts to proffer lasting solutions to the issues at stake, Nwode et al. (2024) propose the leveraging of AI techniques for solutions to the implementation issues. They argue that artificial intelligence (AI) can be leveraged to address issues of language policy implementation in contemporary Nigeria. It means that leveraging AI techniques for the enactment of language policies can help address a lot of the associated issues. This is because a lot of issues, which humans cannot address sufficiently, can be tackled adequately by AI machines. The National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence Bangladesh (2020) states that AI exhibits the capacity of machines performing basic leadership roles, and run psychological errands such as reasoning, indentifying problems and solutions, learning, and critical thinking. Similarly, Mungoli (2023) and Ro (2018) are of the view that AI can be leveraged for various purposes in the fields of education, healthcare, agriculture, smart mobility and technology, smart cities, and societal issues. While subscribing to the view, Nwode et al. (2024) emphasise that AI is also of great benefit to policymaking, governance and linguistics, as it can be leveraged for such purposes too.

According to Nwode et al. (2024), “AI techniques having the highest to capacities” to impact on the national language policy for effective implementation are “Natural Language Processing (NLP), Machine Learning (ML), Deep Learning (DL), Internet of Things, and Reinforcement Learning” (p. 4). These AI techniques, they argue, “undoubtedly have the potentials to cause effective, functional and sustainable decisions on the implementation of Nigerian indigenous languages” (Nwode et al., 2024, p. 4). The implication is that AI has the potentials for addressing pressing policy inadequacies, such as those of the language implementation lapses in relation to NLP. Obviously, optimising policy-making on language and education is dependent on choice and the will of policy-makers, who are in the realm of national politics.

Political will and decisiveness are crucial factors in the adoption of AI for any purposes. The absence of these two either decreases the adoption or causes lack of adoption. It follows that policy-makers in Nigeria are indecisive on the review of language policies in Nigeria. Chukwuokoro (2024) and Hassan (2014) rightly observe that Nigerian government lacks the ability or willingness to be proactive and decisive on critical national matters. There seems to be no willingness to review the status of indigenous languages in the National Language Policy. The reviews made every ten years do not reflect the yearnings of the masses on the need to upgrade the status of Nigerian languages. According to Peter et al. (2023), incompetent leadership is a serious threat to the well-being of any nation. It means that Nigeria is currently characterised by incompetent leadership.

Osuchukwu and Robert (2024) argue that beyond the sociolinguistic engagement with language use is the pragmatics of language use. They emphasise that critical discourse analysis (CDA) is one of the frameworks of

the pragmatics of language use, which offers valuable insights into the linguistic situations such as those under study. The structural imbalance between indigenous and alien languages can be understood through the lens of CDA, a multifaceted approach to language use and studies. CDA criticises power imbalances in society, faulting the processes and systems of producing and maintaining inequalities. Power and politics in society create, legitimate and institutionalise various structural imbalances and inequalities (Osuchukwu & Robert, 2024). These obtain significantly in the National Language Policy. The imbalances are made manifest in the implementation of the Policy's provisions on indigenous language use in Abakaliki and beyond. That is why English and French languages are accorded more prominence in practice across Nigerian schools.

Okonkwo (2016) examines the languages of education and the extent of their implementation in 133 Local Government Areas of Ebonyi state. Employing descriptive survey design and quantitative method, involving 555 questionnaire respondents, and using stratified sampling, the study proves the implementation of languages in education and the materials for their implementation to be of low extent, particularly in rural areas. The study concludes that there is currently low extent of language policy implementation. It charges teachers to embrace language policies, and stakeholders to provide the needed resources for teachers and also re/train them for the attainment of effectiveness. The present study upholds its conclusion and recommendations and goes on ascertain whether or not the extent to which the National Language Policy provisions are implemented in metropolitan Ebonyi state.

The importance of language pedagogy and curriculum implementation is echoed by Wheeler (1978), Nicholls and Nicholls (1981) and Offorma (2009), who share the viewpoint that if the method of delivery of the subject matter is faulty, objectives, content, instructional and evaluation procedures would be adversely affected and the policy ultimately not achieved. That is what obtains in Nigeria overtime. The adopted language pedagogy and curriculum implementation in Nigeria are faulty. The method of delivering the objectives of the NLP, content of language curriculum, and instructional and evaluation procedures are not achieved because of the associated faults.

The English language imported into Nigeria was a template from the Dame schools, which focussed mainly on reading and writing. It was the deliberate excision of the 1642 ordinance from the template imported into Nigeria, which stipulated that any child who was not going to school should be apprenticed to a trade that has disfigured the nature of the Nigerian educational system and the wrong value attached to the grammar oriented and economically and technological infertile curriculum by Nigerians. In recent times, there seems to be a reawakening the imperative of having practical subjects in secondary curriculum.

Research Methodology

The survey design is chosen for this study, because it aligns with the mixed method adopted for the study. There are three main methods of research design viz: inductive, quantitative and mixed methods (Saunders et al., 2019). A research design describes the procedures for gathering, reporting, presenting, analysing and interpreting research data (Ubah et al., 2012). A survey design is usually used to illicit information from a data sample, drawn from a target population through self-administered questionnaire or interviews (Osakwe & Umoh, 2012; Ubah et al., 2012; Nwodu, 2006). Afterwards, the gathered data are subjected to statistical analysis, with the aim of answering the research questions. Also, it is used to reduce a vast population to a small one that can be managed easily. That is why a concise population of 480 respondents is designed for the study. From among the many schools in Abakaliki Metropolis, only 8 are selected at random to represent the major areas of the Metropolis. Questionnaires are administered to 480 randomly selected teachers and students of 8 schools in Abakaliki Metropolis. In each of the selected secondary schools, 60 respondents are involved. Among the 60, 30 each are teachers and students of the three senior classes. There is equitable distribution of questionnaire. Upon return, only 399 questionnaires are found to have been duly filled. To complete the 399, one of the inappropriately filled 80 questionnaires is reconsidered and counted. The reason is that it still answers the 3 research questions accordingly. The analytic tools used include 5-scale coding, tables, frequency counts, percentage, interpretive devices, and analysis of variance.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The questionnaire thematic data, which provide answers to the research questions, are presented and analysed in this part of the work. Since the focus is to provide answers to the research question and thereby meet the research objectives, only the data concerning and providing answers to the research questions are taken into consideration, presented and analysed herein.

Table 1: To what extent is the policy provisions on indigenous languages implemented in Abakaliki Metropolitan Secondary Schools?

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very Low Extent	121	30.3	30.3	30.3
Low Extent	180	45.0	45.0	75.3
Very High Extent	45	11.3	11.3	86.5
High Extent	38	9.5	9.5	96.0
Neutral	16	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	400	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors' Field Survey, 2025

As evident in the Table 1, the extent to which the Policy's provisions on indigenous languages are implemented in the case study Abakaliki Metropolitan secondary schools is currently low. Although 121 respondents indicated "Very Low Extent", the responses given by 180 respondents outweigh theirs. Thus, the extent of implementation is adjudged low rather than very low. The responses obtained for "Very High Extent" (45), "High Extent" (38), and "Neutral" (16) are all statistically insignificant compared to other sets of responses.

Table 2: To what extent are indigenous languages used in Abakaliki Metropolitan Secondary Schools?

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very Low Extent	84	21.0	21.0	21.0
Low Extent	167	41.8	41.8	62.7
Very High Extent	68	17.0	17.0	79.8
High Extent	69	17.3	17.3	97.0
Neutral	12	3.0	3.0	100.0
Total	400	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors' Field Survey, 2025

It is found that the use of indigenous languages in the selected secondary schools is currently low. This proof is obtained from 167 respondents. Other sets of responses are less than the 167. Thus, the 167 is the base of the submission that the use of indigenous languages in secondary schools in Abakaliki is low. The low extent shows a negation and poor implementation of the provisions of the National Language Policy, particularly the following:

- (i) Article 5(b): Preserve Nigerian languages and save them from endangerment and extinction
- (ii) Art. 5(h): Implement regional and international initiatives on the development and use of Nigerian and other languages
- (iii) Article 14(c): All Nigerian languages are national treasures and heritage and shall be preserved from endangerment and extinction
- (iv) Art. 14(e): All Nigerian languages shall be assigned equitable functions and roles for communication and intervention within the socio-economic domains of the country.

Table 3: What are the challenges to the implementation of the National Language Policy provisions on indigenous language use in Abakaliki Metropolitan Secondary Schools?

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neo/colonial influences, Negative attitude, Multilingualism & Policy lapses	96	24.0	24.0	91.3
Lack of resources, Government failed responsibility, Inadequate training of teachers, & Lack of motivation	91	22.8	22.8	48.8
Insufficient research and publications, Urban trends or urbanization influences, & technological barriers like digital divide	74	18.5	18.5	67.3
All of the above	104	26.0	26.0	26.0
None of the above	35	8.8	8.8	100.0
Total	400	100.0	100.0	

Source: Authors' Field Survey, 2025

Different challenges are found to account for the low extent of the implementation of NLP's provisions on indigenous languages in the education zone. The three sets of challenges identified by the researchers are affirmed by 104 respondents. Some others (96, 91 and 74) chose set 1, 2 and 3 respectively as the challenges. On the contrary, 35 of the respondents indicated the "none of the above" variable. Based on statistical prominence, the 104 responses take precedence over the other responses. Therefore, all the challenges constrain the implementation of the provisions of the NLP on indigenous languages in the case study education zone, as applicable to the other zones.

Conclusion

The study has evidently demonstrated that the implementation of the provisions of NLP on indigenous languages remains low, as in the case study education zones. Thus, while the alien languages are promoted and developed, the indigenous languages are not. The identified challenges can be addressed through various pragmatic measures, including a review of the NLP in ways that foster compulsory implementation at all levels of education.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- (i) National Language Policy should be reviewed to specify ways of implementation, and penalties for defaulters of implementation provisions and regulations.
- (ii) Legislations ordering wide use of indigenous languages in secondary schools would help foster implementation at all times.
- (iii) Reorientation and creation of high level of awareness among students, teachers and other members of the public would help increase the extent of implementation.
- (iv) Formal and informal language education should be increased across Eastern Nigeria in particular and other regions in general.
- (v) Meaningful stakeholders' engagement is another solution to the issues of low extent of implementation.

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