

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE IMPLEMENTATION AND NATION BUILDING: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This paper dwells on the use of indigenous languages in the Nigerian education sector. The Nigerian Government at various times has proposed various forms of language policies to encourage and stimulate the growth and development of her over 400 indigenous languages, in order to free its citizens from the yoke of an imperial language, i.e., English. The National Policy on Education did well to cover education levels ranging from the early childhood/pre-primary, to the primary and up to the secondary school levels. It even emphasized the use of mother tongue at the kindergarten and nursery school levels, yet our educators at the kindergarten and nursery school merely pay lip-service to it. Despite the fact that the language policy on education emphasized the use of mother tongue at these levels as a medium of instruction, the English language continues to dominate our indigenous languages because it has been adopted at the kindergarten and nursery school levels. The paper therefore submits that, as a way to protect Nigeria's indigenous languages, there is need for proper implementation of the indigenous language policy in the kindergarten and nursery schools, not just being hypocritical about it. Consequently, a standard curriculum should be developed as well as utilized for this level and must be properly supervised by government agencies to ensure compliance and quality control. The paper concludes that implementing the policy on indigenous language teaching and use in the early child education stages can enhance nation building.

Key words: *Indigenous languages, policy implementation, nation building, kindergarten, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Olu Obafemi maintains that a people cannot talk of national growth and development without language at the fore front.

If you imagine today the power of language as a sole vehicle of ethnic identity, in a multi-lingual country like Nigeria, it will become obvious that language is central to national growth and development. The question continues to linger as to which language to adopt to propel our nationhood and motivate our citizenship towards development. (Obafemi 8)

Therefore, in a bid to build our nation, we have not only assimilated the English language but have allowed it to gradually eclipse our indigenous languages, starting from the minor to the so called major indigenous languages. Because of this, Harrison Adeniyi, using Matthias Brenzinger's theory of "Language Contact and Language Displacement", cries out that:

The overbearing influence of English in Nigeria is so prevalent and pervasive that it has caused the death of some minority languages and is also threatening the so-called majority languages. (1)

As a result of this influence, Adeniyi advocates the effective implementation of language policies that would positively affect the growth and development of the indigenous languages. Notably, the language of a people is a definite way of identifying

such people apart from their culture. Put in another way, language is the identity card a people travels with for proper identification. When one loses one's identity card, it becomes an uphill task to locate such person's root/family in case of any eventuality.

A Yoruba man can say something in his language and when asked to interpret it, will tell you, "If I say it in English, it will not mean the same thing as in Yoruba." On the same vein, how does the Igbo person interpret "*Ụmụ Ọkpụ*" or "*Nwadiana*" to a non Igbo person? This illustrates that there are some expressions one can give in one's language, which may be hard to convey in a foreign language, even after they have been translated and/or transliterated. This is the man's identity. No wonder theologians will say that the old King James Version of the Bible is the only rendering that is very close to the original Greek/Hebrew writings of the Bible. Most words are not accurately represented semantically when translated from one language to the other. Some may argue that since some meanings are lost while translating from an indigenous language to a foreign language for expression, why use the indigenous language in the first place? One's language is their identity; that someone showed you his/her identity card does not make you a bona fide owner of the identity card. Therefore, one learns other languages in order to have access to the habits of thought of the owners of the languages. This leads us to the notion of bi/multilingualism. According to Ile, "bilingualism or even multilingualism is not a vice, but a virtue." (64) Ayakoroma citing Ikara submits that:

A genetic classification of African languages in terms of their origin and development from earlier languages shows that out of the four major language families, three are present in Nigeria.

This clearly shows the multilingual diversity of the Nigerian society. The large number of languages and ethnic groups and the absence of clear and coherent national language policy are some of the main factors for this. Nevertheless, the three major languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, are recognised constitutionally as national languages and are taught (along with a few other languages) at primary and secondary school levels. The official language is English, though in recognition of the fact that the country is surrounded by French-speaking countries, the learning of French has also been encouraged. (11).

The above quotation is deliberately long as it brings a holistically more embracing idea of the multilingual diversity of the Nigerian society. From what Ikara is saying, as quoted in Ayakoroma, several languages and ethnic groups exist in Nigeria; yet there is no clear and coherent national language policy to cover its multilingual nature. Emenanjo concurs with Ikara in Ayakoroma as he reiterates that “it is common knowledge that Nigeria does not have a well-articulated and explicit national language policy that can be found in one document.” (1). There cannot be a well implemented policy if there is not first a policy put in place. Now, if only Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba are recognised constitutionally as national languages, what happens to the rest of the languages? Again, these languages are taught or rather implemented to a reasonable extent only at the primary and secondary school levels; what about the early childhood years – kindergarten and nursery school levels?

It is pertinent to know that one can learn as many languages as possible as Vildomec clearly states that:

Multilingualism is a purely socio-linguistic and socio-cultural phenomenon in which more than one language co-exists simultaneously. It is also possible to have multilingual individuals like Harold Williams who is said to have spoken 58 languages, Ziad Farrah who could speak and read well over 50 languages. (qtd. in Anyogo and Odey 85)

Since it has been proven that one can master as many languages as possible, it is suggested that one learns more languages, if one desires to share in the intimacy of the semantic import of those languages. This helps you to enter into their habits of thought.

Looking at the importance of language under paragraph 10(a) of the National Policy on Education, we are told that it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French for smooth interaction with our neighbours. Accordingly, French has become a second official language in Nigeria and has been made compulsory in primary and junior secondary schools but Non-Vocational Elective at the Senior Secondary School. Is it not rather off the wall that the policy encourages the study of the French language and the compulsory mastery of the English language in our school systems, while we gradually send our indigenous languages into extinction?

The argument may therefore arise that in order to build a nation, a national language is imperative. We are not looking at building *just* a nation; what kind of nation are we building? No matter how fluent we speak the English language, we would still be referred to as the non-native speakers of the English language,

the second language learners (L₂) and a multilingual nation. Is it not better then to take pride in our multilingualism by teaching our indigenous languages to our children at the early childhood/pre-primary schools, who are the leaders of tomorrow, instigating the notion of nation building early enough in them, putting a touch of self-esteem to it and making it count all the way?

Quest for National Integration

Olu Obafemi stated that

“if we are talking ... about national integration..., it is because our cultures, especially our languages, endure in spite of the fact that the imperial education system made valiant effort, not only to banish the indigenous cultures and languages, but to erect a ‘standard’ form of the metropolitan languages (be it French, English or Portuguese) as the model.” (27).

Nevertheless, Ayakoroma has noted the fact that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society; he therefore asserts that there is no doubt that there is a near absence of national integration. This lack of national integration, he says, is clearly “manifested in the neglect of our rich cultural values, arts and gradual extinction of our indigenous languages as a result of westernization.” (14). Whitehead argues on behalf of the Economists that “[English] is the language of globalization – of international business, politics . . . it is the language of computers and the Internet . . . it is the dominant international language in communications, service, aviation, entertainment, radio and

diplomacy” (qtd. in Adamu 162). While this may be true, the Graddol report demonstrates that the global spread of English will lead to serious economic and political disadvantages in the future: “A future in which monolingual English graduates face bleak economic prospects as qualified multilingual young people prove to have a competitive advantage in global companies and organizations.” (Adamu 162)

Consequently, Orjime maintains that language and national development are discussed with little or no attention paid to how the use of language can have serious implication on national development or underdevelopment. He argues that when carefully and diplomatically used, language brings about cooperation, while the misuse of it brings about confrontation. (56). According to Orjime, proper use or misuse of language can integrate or disintegrate a nation, respectively. Hence this paper considers the representation of indigenous languages in the Nigerian education sector and how their implementation in the early childhood/pre-primary schools can help foster national integration and nation building.

Adamu proposes that all languages are a work in progress but the globalization of English is a process the world has never seen before, a change whose effects we can only imagine. To this extent therefore, Ostler asserts that “English has emerged as a preeminent world language and being ‘indicted’ by linguists for the loss of several indigenous languages It qualifies to be characterized, therefore, as the ‘killer language’ per excellence.” (qtd. in Adamu 163) The knowledge of the fact that one is appreciated and included in society gives one a sense of belonging. If we say because English is a world language and therefore should be our national language, we have not only succeeded in wiping out our indigenous languages but also built our nation on a foreign

culture. Albert Gerard, quoted in Ile, noted that language is “a set of symbols which embody, beyond their plain literal meaning, all the customs, feelings, beliefs of the group [people].” Ile therefore reiterates that “all forms of development will revolve around the values, beliefs, customs/culture and orientation of the people.” (65 – 6) As a result, whatsoever becomes of our character, personality and thought pattern would be given as credit to the English language. Are we therefore building an English nation? An adage in Igbo says “*O bu nani osisi ka a ga-agwa na a ga-egbutu ya, o kwuru ebe okwu*” (meaning, it is only the tree that is told that it would be cut down and it still remains stationary). How then would Nigerians fold their hands and watch their indigenous asset being “assassinated”? Would it be as a result of our ethnic and dialectal differences?

Ethnicity and Dialectal Differences

Nationhood is a phenomenon that is achieved with much work. Most often, the different ethnicity that make up a nation struggle and compete for prominence. The issue is further compounded if the supposed nation in question is one that has been colonized for a very long period with culturally as well as linguistically diversified neighbouring countries roundabout it. Linguistic diversity tends to lead to a low level of communicative integration, making modernization a long and difficult process in these countries. This is as a result of the potential conflict between loyalty to one’s ethnic community and loyalty to the wider national community.

Nigeria is one of such multiethnic countries in West Africa. Consider the case of state creation, where up to fifty (50) ethnic groups are foisted together, with each ethnicity vying for

prominence. Envy, wrath, dissension, rage, conflict, clashes, battles, killings and bloodshed become prevalent in such areas. But Anyogo and Odey disagree with this. Having conducted a research on Benue State as a case study, they conclude that when people co-exist, speaking several languages together, there is bound to be greater unity. The unity is brought about by the mutual intelligibility they enjoy of the several languages that exist in the community. This also could be said of Nigeria as a nation state if Nigerians, in addition to their mother tongue, learn to speak two of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. This will further enhance a collective loyalty to the wider national community. It is worthy to note that implementation of policies that support this quest will facilitate the actualization of Nigeria as, not just a country but, a nation.

The Policy

The National Policy on Education documented the following in Section 2:

- (11) Early childhood/pre-primary education as referred to in this document is the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten.
- (12) The responsibilities of government for pre-primary education shall be to promote the training of qualified pre-primary school teachers in adequate number, contribute to the development of suitable curriculum, supervise and control the quality of such

institutions and establish pre-primary sections in existing public schools.

(14) **Government shall:**

(a) establish pre-primary sections in existing public schools and encourage both community/private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education.

(b) make provision in teacher education programmes for specialization in early childhood education;

(c) ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end will:

(i) develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages, and

(ii) produce textbooks in Nigerian languages;

(d) ensure that the main method of teaching at this level shall be through play and that curriculum of teacher education is oriented to achieve this; regulate and control the operation of pre-primary education. To this end the teacher-pupil ratio shall be 1:25;

(e) set and monitor minimum standard for early childcare centres in the country; and

- (f) ensure full participation of government, communities and teachers associations in the running and maintenance of Early childhood education facilities. (NPE 6 – 7)

The policy has helped to give light to the concept of kindergarten on paragraph (11) in Section 2 and has gone further to explain the responsibilities of government for the pre-primary education, otherwise known in this paper as the kindergarten and nursery school. It should be noted here that although government has started establishing pre-primary sections in existing public schools, it is far from being achieved. There are more private owned pre-primary schools than there are government owned. The private owned pre-primary schools have adopted the Montessori kind of teaching instead of what is provided in the NPE.

That there is a policy cannot be doubted; how can this policy be achieved? How do we go about implementing the policy that says it shall ensure that the medium of instruction shall be principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community? The policy solicited for community as well as private effort in the provision of pre-primary education without making due arrangement on how to supervise them, or building adequate curriculum to concretize the plan. Hence, these agencies construct diverse kinds of curriculum, which hoist them to a competitive level where children who speak the best kind of the English language are raised.

Anyogo and Odey suggest that the English language should not continue to enjoy the high status and esteem it does today, since it is alien to us and foisted on us by the colonialists.

Therefore, it follows that something must be done and urgently too to promote our own indigenous languages. They are equally of the strong opinion that a multilingual is a greater asset and that multilingualism is a unifying factor in nation building. They envisage that multilingualism should be a catalyst for language policy formulations in the future. (88) It is worthy to note here that what we have always had is National Policy on Education and not National Language Policy on Education. Nigeria will be saved a lot of stress if we begin the implementation of this policy from the pre-primary school stage.

Why the Kindergarten and Nursery Schools?

Children, they say, are the leaders of tomorrow. This presupposes that a nation with a high birth rate has a future. The nation whose culture is dead is one that does not transfer their cultural heritage down to the younger generation. ABC Duruaku has noted that:

“It is estimated that several hundreds of cultures are dying out and in a few years, many more would join the growing rank of dead languages. Indeed, over four hundred and seventy-three languages are classified in the Ethnologue as nearly extinct. These are languages that ‘only a few elderly speakers are still living.’” (4)

Consequently, an indigenous language can become extinct when the number of old people using it is very few with little or no young persons in possession of it.

Our fathers may have made the mistake; we too may have independently made similar mistake; but do we have to continue doing the same thing and expecting a different result? For this reason, we seek to make it right with our children in the early childhood/pre-primary stage. Some linguists such as Noam Chomsky, David Crystal, Jean Aitchison, and Jean Piaget, posit that the child should be taught their mother tongue or indigenous language from early childhood (between 0 – 6 years), when the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) is at its most functional stage. The National Policy on Education agrees with this when it says in Section 2, paragraph 14(c) concerning the early childhood/pre-primary education that Government shall:

“ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end will: (i) develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages, and (ii) produce textbooks in Nigerian languages.” (NPE, 7)

Therefore, it is pertinent to inculcate our values, cultures, and arts in our children starting from the early childhood stage, using our indigenous languages. The Bible has asked those who are stewards of children in Proverbs 26 verse 6 to “Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” This is equally true of our rich cultural heritage which can be passed down through language. A community that has more elderly people than children will soon be wiped out of the surface of the earth; so also is a language spoken by more elderly people than the young ones.

This paper concentrates on the early childhood for the above reasons. Children speak what they have learnt by imitation mostly from their immediate environment and then among themselves. As they grow, relationships are made stronger in groups that not only understand themselves, but also communicate in the same language and manner. Hence the adage, “birds of a feather conglomerate in the same vicinity”. An Itsekiri child whose immediate environment speaks Yoruba can pick Itsekiri from his home, Yoruba from his immediate environment, and learn Igbo and Hausa from school. By the end of the secondary school, this child can relate with the Itsekiri, Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa. There would therefore be no more fear of intimidation; the child becomes free to express himself anywhere around the country because of the intelligibility of the different languages at his/her disposal. The child will also be free to indulge in an inter-tribal marriage, which will foster a stronger relationship towards nation building.

The issue of nation building is something that has to begin as early in years as possible. Teaching nation building through inculcation of the indigenous languages in the early childhood/pre-primary schools is therefore very appropriate and adequate.

A Summarized Case Study of Sampled Pre-primary Schools in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State

Based on the study conducted in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria, there are virtually more private and missionary-owned schools, which are established alongside their primary and secondary schools counterparts. The study revealed that out of the 23 (twenty three) pre-primary schools sampled in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, 16 (sixteen) are owned by both private individuals and the missionaries (such as the Anglican church, Roman Catholic church

and Islamic religion), whereas only 7 (seven) of them are public-owned, that is owned by the state government.

Although there are several public primary and secondary schools in this area, the government of the state has not considered the full implementation of the policy that says that “government shall establish pre-primary sections in existing public schools”, but instead has encouraged both missionary and private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education. The issue here now is the fact that the curriculum provided for this level of education has been neglected by these private/missionary institutions and the government has done nothing to supervise the implementation of the curriculum, neither has it established more pre-primary schools to showcase the implementation of the policy on indigenous languages as stipulated in the policy. Hence we face a situation of “*mma nwere isi adighi nko, nke di nko e nweghi isi*” (the knife with handle is blunt and the sharp knife is without handle).

Furthermore, because the environs of Ado-Ekiti is made up of people from different ethnicity and tribe, as it is the capital of Ekiti State and Ekiti is known for its abundant forestry (hence a business enterprise-prone area for wood dealers), most private/missionary schools resort to using the English language, instead of the indigenous language/language of the immediate environment, which is Yoruba, to lure parents into registering their wards in their schools. This however undermines the issue of indigenous language policy implementation in this area.

Challenges of Indigenous Language Policy Implementation in Nigerian Early Childhood/Pre-primary Schools

Nwagwu recognized the following as the challenges in the National Policy on Education: language to study, science and technology, gender equity, professionalization of teaching, free

compulsory UBE, free mass literacy and adult education, financing of education programmes, open and distance learning, special education, educational services provision, private participation, and quality assurance in education. (442 – 4). It may be argued that most of the challenges listed above should have yielded positive results but Nwagwu identified the reasons why this is not so by further highlighting the challenges facing the implementation of the NPE in the education sectors starting from the primary to the tertiary institutions.

Of interest to this paper are challenges prevalent in the early childhood/pre-primary schools such as professionalization of teaching/teacher supply, private participation/proliferation of private schools and supervision.

Professionalization of Teaching/Teacher Supply:

The Teacher Registration Council set up by Decree 31 of 1993 officially and legally recognized teaching as a profession . . . The National Policy on Education (NPE) also specified in Paragraph 72 that “All teachers in educational institutions shall be professionally trained”. This appears a tall order and a challenge that has received little or no attention 30 years after the policy was formulated. (Nwagwu 442 – 3).

Most teachers in the early childhood/pre-primary schools do not take the job as a profession. Some of them are there because of the high unemployment rate, pending when they get a mouth-watering job.

Nwagwu has noted that “the issue of teacher supply and demand in the Nigerian education system is a complex one.” (447) Most trained teachers go into the primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors. This may be partly because the Education departments of our higher institutions hardly provide trainings for students towards the teaching profession in the early childhood/pre-primary schools. Although there is an aspect of education known as Child Education, most trained teachers under this area of specialization choose rather to be in the primary schools than the pre-primary schools. To this extent therefore there are insufficient supply of teachers, unavailability of qualified teachers and unprofessional teachers in both the government-owned/public and the private early childhood/pre-primary schools.

Nwagwu is of the opinion that the:

Teaching profession has not been attracting many youths, especially in terms of high achievers dedicated to teaching as a career. Secondly, it is capital intensive in that it is expensive to recruit, train and retain good teachers through attractive salaries and other conditions of service. Thirdly, states with acute shortage of teachers are reluctant to hire non-indigenes from other states, and when they employ them, the “foreign” teachers are subjected to all kinds of discrimination (FME 2004). (447)

From Nwagwu’s point of view, high achieving youths are not dedicated to teaching as a career. Most

schools recruit 'already-made' teachers to avoid extra expenses; hence we see criteria such as "applicants must have 10 years experience in the position they are applying for from a notable institution/organization", when such schools advertise for teachers. Who are expected to train such teachers that they want to recruit, since they cannot do the training? If this is so prevalent in the "acceptable" areas (primary to tertiary institutions), what then is the fate of the "undesirable" pre-primary schools?

Concerning the issue of hiring non-indigenes from other states, it would require training such individuals to first learn the language of the community since the medium of instruction in the early childhood/pre-primary schools should be the mother tongue or indigenous language of the community. This may not be achievable considering other simpler issues befalling the system.

Private Participation/Proliferation of Private Schools:

According to Nwagwu, "the policy has been welcomed and organizations and entrepreneurs have opened institutions at all levels. But there are concerns of quality and, cost to parents." (444) Most private kindergartens and nursery schools pay high amount of school fees sufficient to cater for two sessions' fees in the higher institutions. This is because the proprietors who are rather businessmen/women than educators are seeking for avenues to enrich their pockets more than providing quality education. It is worthy to note here that a good number of proprietors are not trained teachers. Hence, people who are not passionate about educating these little ones, erect

several kinds of building in the name of *crèche/nursery* schools. Again, we should be reminded that there are now more crèche/nursery schools springing up in the country than before. In Edo and Delta States alone, there are about 90 and 41 public pre-primary schools, respectively (Olubor 168), not to mention the private pre-primary schools and then those in other states. Although the former is to the credit of the government, the latter leaves much to be desired with respect to supervision.

Supervision:

The Federal Government of Nigeria promised through her education bodies to ensure the supervision of both private and public pre-primary schools (Paragraph 12 of NPE) but they are far from achieving any positive result. This is seen in Olubor who maintains that “the inspectors in the Ministry of Education that have been involved in the supervision and inspection of private pre-primary schools ought to have ensured the provision of a basic facility like the curriculum.” (172) Olubor’s finding reveals government continued nonchalant attitude to the education sector. She laments that poor funding has continued to be the bane of public schools and it is quite unfortunate that this is being extended to young ones. (173)

The private pre-primary schools have not been consistent in following the provisions in the National Policy on Education which stipulates that the medium of instruction in the early childhood/pre-primary schools should be the mother tongue/indigenous language of the immediate environment. Moreover, there has not been a further follow up concerning the supervision of these

schools. Most parents who can afford the cost send their wards to these private crèche/nursery schools (otherwise known in this paper as kindergarten/nursery/early childhood/pre-primary schools) in order to learn the 'Queen's English' and not to be taught any indigenous languages. Because of fear of being the least patronized in this competition, other affordable private pre-primary institutions adopt the method of teaching their pupils using the Montessori education pattern. It is a shame that even the teachers who use the English language as a medium for instructing these early childhood/pre-primary school pupils have no mastery of the language of instruction and therefore produce half-baked pupils who suffer from a case of linguistic anomie. These are cases of non-implementation of the already enacted National Policy on Education. Consequently, our indigenous languages nose-dive into extinction and we face the horror of building our nation on a culture and language alien to us.

Conclusion

An indigenous language is defined in the web dictionary as "a language that originated in a specified place and was not brought to that place from elsewhere. It is a language that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous people." (Wikipedia and vocabulary.com) Although Nigeria has well over 400 indigenous languages, most of her indigenous languages are being spoken by very few elders and a handful of younger adults. Because of this, those languages are said to be going into extinction. The language spoken in the stead of our indigenous languages is the English

language, which has become the *de facto* language. We have indeed seen that language can be a tool that fosters nation building.

“Nation building refers to the process of constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state. This process aims at the unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run.” (Wikipedia). For us to build our nation, we do not need a foreign language to do that. We cannot express our numerous rich cultural heritages in the English language and our language is our identity. When we talk about building Nigeria as a nation, we do not need foreigners to do that; we do not need English to build Nigeria. Hence, we fall back to our indigenous languages.

Relationships become stronger when we understand one another. When someone from another ethnicity and with a different language can communicate with another from an entirely different background using a common language, a close kind of relationship is built. This gives way to trust and subsequent friendship. Now, if an Igbo man can speak Hausa very well, he does not struggle with relating with an Hausa man. The same is applicable to a Yoruba man who can speak Igbo. This does not stop the Igbo man or the Yoruba man from being fluent in their indigenous languages. Consequently, the Igbo man as well as the Yoruba man is already a bilingual, free to interact and build strong relationship with each other.

Let us suppose that Nigeria is a nation of three indigenous languages (Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba). The Igbo can learn Hausa and Yoruba; the Hausa learns Yoruba and Igbo, while the Yoruba learns Hausa and Igbo. With this scenario, communication is made easy and relationship, smooth. There is usually peaceful co-existence experienced and a sense of brotherhood and belonging attached to it. No one feels cheated and therefore irritated to the

point of violence. Then we would realize that we must do something to grow from one level to another. Instead of competing with one another for supremacy or prominence, we join hands together to defeat the outside world. This is when our nation takes form and is built.

This can be achieved with a laid down rule which guides all and sundry. This laid down rule can come in the form of a policy, which should be implemented. "Policy implementation is the stage where the government executes an adopted policy and it usually occurs after a bill becomes law. It involves translating the goals and objectives of a policy into action in an on-going program. At the policy implementation stage, the stipulations of that policy must be put into action, administered and enforced to bring about the desired change sought by the policy-makers." (Ask.com Online web definition). DeGroff and Cargo in Berman agree that "in general, policy implementation can be considered the process of carrying out a government decision." (49) That is why such policy as the one mentioned below has been formulated for onward implementation.

- 10(a) Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. 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. (NPE, 5)

The policy here advocates that as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion, every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment in addition to one of the three (3) major Nigerian languages – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba in the interest of national unity. It is good to formulate such policy but it is much better to implement it. If I am Igbo and the language of my immediate environment is Igbo and I learn Igbo in the interest of national unity, how do I communicate with an Urhobo man that knows Urhobo and Yoruba only? After all, both of us have learned one of the 3 major Nigerian languages for the interest of national unity. So, Graddol in Adamu, Anyogo and Odey agree that a multilingual is an asset.

We cannot build a nation by going our separate ways and forming solidarity to our diverse ethnicity. It is rightly said that unity is strength. Let us therefore revisit our National Policy on Education or institute another policy known as the National Language Policy on Education, which makes a provision where a child learns two of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa, in addition to the child's mother tongue and the language of the immediate environment. The one who learns Igbo and Hausa meets the one who learns Yoruba and Hausa and both are able to communicate on the common ground of Hausa and vice versa. Two of the three major languages are learned together with one's own indigenous language to avoid the issue of minority – so that one is represented well anywhere in the country.

Many people, according to Orjime, including our leaders ignore the role of language in all human interaction and as a consequence risk healthy relationships. (64) The knowledge that one can be understood within the country using any of the indigenous languages in one's possession makes it easier to

interact with other indigenous speakers and consequently learn one another's culture.

Following this fact, this paper recommends that a National Language Policy on Education be put in place, vis-a-vis the indigenous language usage stated in the policy. A language policy because this unity is made possible via language; and on education because it is the vehicle through which knowledge is transmitted from one individual to another. It further recommends that wherever a child is from, in addition to learning the mother tongue, the child should learn the language of the environment and any two of the national languages; and that government should endeavour to implement this language policy on education in the early childhood/pre-primary schools as it will help foster an early sense of belonging and national identity.

It suffices here to say that teaching different indigenous languages prevalent in Nigeria would not be out of place if it starts from the early childhood/pre-primary schools. By the time the child is out from the secondary school, s/he must have had a good command of at least three indigenous languages. This can foster inter-marriage; hence a stronger relationship is initiated towards nation building. At this juncture, we begin to relate as one people, with one purpose – to build a nation of different people, with different languages, who are altogether united in diversity.

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