

THE STIPULATIONS FOR ENGLISH IN THE NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Lauretta Okwuchukwu Chinyeaka

Department of English Language and Literature

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Email: lo.chinyeaka@unizik.edu.ng

INTRODUCTION

The dominant role played by the English language in Nigeria is undeniably a crucial one. It serves as a general communicative medium in the country because of Nigeria's indigenous languages. Lawani supports this when he noted that "it is a neutral language in view of the ethno-political situation of the country (202). Apart from being the language used by the three tiers of government to pass information to the masses, it serves as the language of inter-ethnic interaction especially among the literate class. In other words, it is a lingua franca. The prominence given the language in both the constitution and the NPE therefore is a well-deserved one. However, this prominence does not correspond to acceptable proficiency level in the use of the language. It is a commonplace to find university graduates who speak and write very bad English (which some today categorize as Nigerian English). We must note that Nigerian English is not what is taught. In other words, something is wrong somewhere. In this paper, that which is wrong is taken to be inadequate stipulations for English in the NPE.

STIPULATIONS FOR ENGLISH IN THE NPE

Nigeria's National Policy on Education (1997) revised in (2004) stipulates:

- Use of English as a medium of instruction at a later stage of primary school
- Teaching of English as a core subject in primary JSS and SSS levels

EXAMINATIONS OF THE STIPULATIONS

The use of English as a medium of instruction at a later stage of primary school implies that it is to be introduced after the stage has been set using the mother tongue. This stipulation negatively affects proficiency level in later use of the language. It is a notable fact that early exposure to the language goes a long way in ensuring a high level of proficiency in the language. The English language, if introduced as a medium of instruction at a later stage of primary school is an impediment to proficiency in the language and low proficiency has negative effect on national development.

This is not to say that early use of the mother tongue as stipulated in the NPE should be discarded rather both should be used side by side at that level. Obanya, while in support of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the early years, however notes that "...At the same time, the L₂ has to be firmly entrenched, to erase the feeling of the likelihood of a bloc to the individual's future development because of lack of competence in English..." (239).

Akande for his part, in cognizance of the need for an early start in English in our school system, advocates 'Straight for English' as a medium of instruction in Nigeria (61). He argues that the clamour for the choice of English as the medium of instruction early in the primary school is based on the belief that "*it is through the early usage of the language that pupils can quickly and effectively gain its mastery for the purpose of primary and higher level of education*" (61). Credence is lent to this view as Akande, citing Lawani, points out that many educationists have

come to believe that the answer to poor academic performance lies in using English as a medium very early, possibly from the inception of a child's education (62). The near indispensable and multiple roles played by English demands that a high-level proficiency be attained in it for national development and so its learning has to start early enough.

Another stipulation for English in the NPE is that it be taught as a core subject in the primary, JSS and SSS levels. Much as this is a laudable one, studies have shown that the implementation of this provision leaves much to be desired. As observed aptly by Bamgbose, a major constraint in language constraint in language Policy is ineffectiveness in implementation. He sadly notes, "*Policies are formulated and well-articulated, but often remain paper policies not intended to be seriously addressed and implemented*" (9). For instance, Chinyeaka (2011) carried out a research to find out the level of implementation of this provision in secondary schools in Anambra state, using the instrument of questionnaire. The research was conducted in the six education zones in the state using a simple size of 52 secondary schools with a sample of 208 English teachers and 240 SSS III students. Results of the research are as noted below:

S/N	Statements	SA		A		U		D		SD		Remark
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
1	Teaching periods are not enough to cover the syllabus for English and for students to master the subject	112	53.85	86	41.35	0	0	0	0	10	04.78	Accept
2	Instructional materials and equipment for teaching some aspects of English such as oral English are not enough or available	98	47.12	93	44.71	1	0.48	9	4.33	7	4.80	Accept
3	The number of English language teachers is not enough	100	48.08	79	37.98	0	0	17	8.17	12	5.77	Accept
4	Classes are too large for the effective teaching of English	89	42.79	79	37.78	2	0.96	22	10.77	16	7.69	Accept
5	Students generally do not possess the recommended texts for English	116	55.77	80	38.46	0	0	6	2.88	6	2.88	Accept

6	Some students find some topics in the textbooks too difficult to comprehend	102	49.03	96	46.15	1	0.48	4	1.92	5	2.40	Accept
7	Enough written and/or speech work is not done to perfect students' English	107	51.44	88	42.31	2	0.96	4	1.92	7	3.37	Accept

Table above showed the degree to which provision for English as a core subject is implemented.

Findings in the table above showed that 53.85% strongly agreed that the teaching period are not enough to cover the syllabus for English and for students to master the subject. 41.35% agreed, while 04.78% strongly disagreed. To the statement in serial number 2, 47.12% strongly agreed that instructional materials and equipment for teaching some aspects of English are not enough or available. 44.71% agreed, 0.48% were undecided, 4.33% disagreed while 4.80% of the respondents strongly agreed that the number of English language teachers is not enough. 37.98% agreed, 8.17% disagreed while 5.77% strongly disagreed. To the statement in the serial number 4, 42.79% of the respondents strongly agreed that classes are too large for the effective teaching of English, 37.77% disagreed while 7.69% strongly disagreed. Also to the statement in serial number 5, 55.77% strongly agreed that the students agreed that students generally do not possess the recommended texts for English, 38.46 agreed, 28.8% disagreed. Again responses to the statement in serial number 6 indicated that 49.03% strongly agreed that some students find some topics in the textbooks too hard to comprehend. 46.15% agreed, 0.48% were undecided, 1.92% disagreed while 2.40% strongly disagreed. Furthermore, to the statement in serial number 7, 51.44% strongly agreed that enough written or speech work is not done to perfect students' English. 42.31% agreed, 0.96 % were undecided, 1.96% disagreed while 33.37% strongly disagreed.

The researcher based on the fact that greater percentage of the respondents agreed to the statements therefore concludes that the implementation of the provision for English as a core subject leaves much to be desired.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above, it is recommended that:

- i. English can be included as a medium of instruction in the first three years of primary education.
- ii. A regulatory body should be set up to oversee, monitor and evaluate the implementation of language policy.
- iii. In implementing the provision for English as a core subject effectively, crucial factors such as adequate qualified teachers, time allocation, instructional material, affordable and quality textbooks should be given serious considerations by the appropriate authority.

WORKS CITED

- Akande, G.B. "Straight for English as a Medium of Education in Nigeria Towards Enhancing Quality and National Development" *Awka Journal of Linguistics and Languages* 4(2008): 60-66
- Bangbose, Ayo, "Language Policy in Nigeria: Challenges, Opportunities and Constraints" Nigerian Millennium Sociolinguistic Conference. University of Lagos, Nigeria, Aug. 2001.
- Lawani, M.T. "Language Use in Nigerian Classrooms and Sustainable Educational Development: A Case study of Yoruba/English Bilinguals: *Journal of Arts and Education (JOLAE)* 1-2 Dec. 2007.
- Obanya, Pai: *The Dilemma of Education in Africa* Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 2004. Federal Government of Nigeria National Policy on Education (Revised) 4th Edition. 2004.