

TEACHER ATTITUDE AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE IN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE LEARNING IN LAGOS

Harrison Adeniyi
Rachael Bello
Lagos State University

Abstract

When the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1987 introduced the educational policy that required study of one of the three national languages, i.e., Hausa, Igbo and Yorùbá, at the West African School Certificate / General Certificate in Education [WASC / GCE] level, Nigerians and especially advocates for the survival of the indigenous languages embraced the idea with great enthusiasm. The primary aim was to make more Nigerians speak indigenous languages in addition to the language of their immediate environment. However, this purpose was frustrated when students opted for, and indeed registered for, their mother tongues rather than a non-familiar indigenous language. If the policy had been actually followed, the country would have generated citizens, who not only speak their own indigenous languages, but also citizens who have a practical knowledge of all of their country's traditional languages. But this did not happen. In this paper, we look at the attitudes of private school teachers to the teaching of the indigenous languages vis-a-vis the competence and performance of students in these indigenous languages. The study is not only comparative but also correlative. The methodological instruments included a questionnaire, interview, a quasi-test and examination of junior / senior secondary school leaving certificates. Our findings revealed that students' performances, as reflected in their results, do not demonstrate their competence in the indigenous languages in question. Similarly, we observed that both the teachers and the learners are instrumentally and not integratively motivated.

Keywords: attitudes, private schools, indigenous language, performance, Lagos-Nigeria

Abstracto

En 1987 cuando el gobierno federal de Nigeria introdujo una política de educación que requería el estudio de uno de tres idiomas nacionales: hausa, igbo o yoruba para lograr obtener el West African School Certificate o el General Certificate in Education (WASC/GCE), los nigerianos, en particular aquellas personas que abogaban por hacer sobrevivir los idiomas autóctonos, abrazaron la idea con entusiasmo. El enfoque principal de esta reforma era hacer que más nigerianos hablaran las lenguas autóctonas en adición a los idiomas de su ambiente inmediato. Sin embargo, este esfuerzo fue frustrado cuando los estudiantes optaron por sus lenguas maternas en lugar de los idiomas autóctonos. Si la política hubiera sido efectiva, el país hubiera generado

ciudadanos que no sólo hablan su idioma materno, sino también posean conocimiento práctico de otros idiomas tradicionales de su país. En este estudio se observan las actitudes de los maestros de escuelas privadas hacia la enseñanza de los idiomas autóctonos con relación a la competencia y el desempeño de los estudiantes en estas lenguas tradicionales. El estudio es no sólo comparativo, sino también correlativo. La metodología y los instrumentos que se utilizaron incluyen un cuestionario, entrevista, un examen sencillo y una examinación de estudiantes de tercer y cuarto año de escuela superior. Los resultados demuestran que el rendimiento de los estudiantes no refleja un dominio de estas lenguas tradicionales. Asimismo, se observó que los maestros y los estudiantes ni estaban ni motivados ni integrados.

Palabras clave: *Actitudes, escuelas privadas, idiomas autóctonos, desempeño, Lagos-Nigeria*

Dr Harrison Adeniyi is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of African Languages, Literature and Communication Arts, Lagos State University, Nigeria. His main areas of interest are General linguistics with particular emphasis on Phonology, Morphology and their interface, Second language learning, language teaching and language use, working with English, Yorùbá and Edo languages, Communication and the teaching of African Languages.

Dr (Mrs) Rachael Bello is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English, Lagos State University, Nigeria. Her main areas of interest are Sociolinguistics, first and second language teaching and learning and language in education

Introduction

The Federal Government of Nigeria, in order to mitigate the overwhelming burden of providing a quality education for its citizens gave approval for individuals, groups, and corporate bodies to establish and run private schools from nursery to university level. The public school system, which ordinarily, should have enough money to run its various activities, usually runs short of the required funds, despite the Federal

Government strong financial input. Conversely, the private schools are doing relatively well, when compared with their public school counterparts. This is because the proprietors of these various private schools injected the required funds and commitments that keep the schools running and minimized bottlenecks and bureaucracies.

Lagos, the former capital city of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and currently the commercial nerve center of the country, is noted for its diverse and fast growing population, resulting from heavy and ongoing migration to the city from all parts of Nigeria, as well as from neighboring countries. The United Nations predicts that the city's metropolitan area, which had only about 290,000 inhabitants in 1950, will exceed 20 million by 2010, thus making Lagos one of the world's five largest cities. There are about 400 languages spoken in Nigeria, and Lagos is the linguistic melting point of the country, with many of its residents speaking various languages. According to Adéńyì and Bèllò (2007b), only Yorùbá with its dialects such as Awórì, Ijèbú and Ekó are indigenous to the state. Also, Ogù, a major language in the Republic of Benin is spoken in the Badagry area of the state.

Several studies, including Babájídé (2001), Oyètádé (2001), Igboanusi and Peter (2005) have investigated the attitude of Nigerians to English versus the various indigenous languages. It was observed by Babájídé that as a result of the perception of English in Nigeria as a unifying tongue with a great instrumental significance, less emphasis was placed on learning and speaking of the various indigenous languages. Presently, Nigerian languages are often associated with unfavorable attitudes. Typically, the Nigerian elite would prefer that their children speak English. This is because they believe that English is not only associated with prestige and success, but that it is an

important resource for self-enhancement, social and political empowerment, and access to educational and job opportunities.

The language policy at Junior Secondary schools is very clear about the roles that the Federal Government wants indigenous languages to play in the National Policy on Education. Under section 5, No 22b of the Policy, secondary education shall ‘develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world’s cultural heritage’. Apart from this, the Junior Secondary School education provides that a student should compulsorily take the language of his / her environment, which is to be taught as his / her first language (L1). The document went further to say that the language of environment shall be taught as L1 where it has orthography and literature. Where it does not, it shall be taught with an emphasis on the oral version of teaching as L2. It is also compulsory for the student to learn one major Nigerian language other than that of the environment to be taught as L2. These provisions are, in addition to English and French.

Background to the Study

There is a disparity between the competence and performance of our informants in the indigenous languages and their performance in the English language. It is observed that learners’ linguistic competence in the various languages acquired does not equate to their performance or vice-versa. For instance, from the researchers’ teaching experience in both the English and Yorùbá languages, it is clear that learners have distinct experiences of the languages in question. With English language learning activities, for example, while the majority of the learners seem to have a good grasp of the spoken form of the language, not many of them could explain in writing what they actually do with the English language. Consequently, it is common to have students who are eloquent speakers in the debating societies but rather poor their English language writing skills.

Conversely, it is generally observed that a reasonable percentage of indigenous language learners have little command of the English language although the certificates of the various qualifying exams reveal that such learners have a good mastery of the indigenous languages in question. How do we, for instance, justify the credit passes of students who can barely recite the first ten numerals of their indigenous languages? This is not to mention their essay writing skills in these languages.

Scope of the Study

This study examines the correlation between the attitudes of private school teachers to the performance of student in indigenous language and the actual competence. Although there are twenty local governments in the state, we limit the sampling of our informants to only nine of the local governments.

First, we exclude the local governments that are on the outskirts of Lagos because our assumption is that local government at the outskirts of the state having high concentrations of speakers of indigenous languages and may not represent the metropolitan feature associated with Lagos generally. These include Badagry, Epè, Ikòròdú and Ibèjù Lékkí local governments. The local governments that were chosen to be examined are the Sùrúléré, Mainland Sómólu, Mushin, Isolò / Oshòḍi, Agége, Kòsòfé and Ikejà Local Governments.

We limit this research to the examination of the attitudes of private schools' indigenous language teachers to the teaching of the indigenous languages. Our target learners are students of selected junior / senior secondary schools. We consider the Junior Secondary School III (SSS I) class appropriate for this study because this is a formal class and it is believed that learners, at this stage, should have had adequate training in the indigenous languages. The SSS I class is a transition class which further helps the

learners to stabilize. It is important to note that only Yorùbá and Igbo languages are taught in the schools sampled. Our study is limited to students' performance on the two indigenous languages taught in the private schools selected.

Methodology

The methods adopted for the collection of the data are varied. They include participant-observation, a questionnaire interview, a quasi-test and an examination of junior / senior secondary certificates.

The researchers' participant observation of the linguistic situation of the students in question constitutes one of the principal methodologies adopted in the study. Being educators, the researchers had common ground to interact with indigenous language teachers. Thus, we could naturally observe the attitudes of the teachers and also take note of both the passive and active performance of students.

The use of the questionnaire serves as another means of eliciting data. The questionnaire has two sections, one for teachers one for students. These questions set out to elucidate on the attitudes of both the teachers and learners to the teaching and learning experiences respectively, to test the actual performance of the learners and to see how much knowledge the teachers possess regarding the language policy. The analysis of the data is done using both the *analytic* and *deductive* methods.

The interview is another means by which data was collected. This method was helpful in two ways. First, we, gathered valuable information regarding the time and methods of teaching indigenous language from the teachers. Moreover, we discovered the attitudes of the learners to the second language as well as their competence and performance of the indigenous language.

Both the quasi-test for the learners and our examination of our informants' secondary school certificates are simply to correlate informants' linguistic competence with their actual performance.

Presentation of the Data

The analyses of the data are in two major parts. Part I is concerned with the analysis of the responses of learners while Part II is concerned with teachers' responses. In each of these sections we perform statistic analysis of the questions, presenting tables where they are necessary.

There are three major sections to the Part I of our presentation. These include the analyses of the closed and open-ended questions. Similarly, in the Part II, we look at the background information as supplied by teachers and their responses to the closed as well as open-ended questions.

It must be noted that although the thrust of the paper is to look at the correlation between the attitudes of the private school teachers in Lagos and students' performance, we will also need to study both the attitudes and performance of the language learners in order to complement our findings.

The data shows that 28% of teachers in this category were male while 72% of them were female. There are approximately three women to every man teaching indigenous languages in Nigeria's secondary schools.

The age distribution was as follows: 16-25 were 8%, 26-35 were 32%, 36-45 were 48% while 45 and above were 12%. Additionally, 24% of teachers have Master of Arts in Education (M.A. Ed) while some have Master of Art only, i.e., (M.A). Sixty percent of the teachers are also certified with Bachelor of Arts only, i.e., (B.A). The holders of the National Certificate of Education (N.C.E) were 16% of the respondents.

Teachers' views on responses to the attitudes of students to the learning activities were also obtained. Sixty-five percent of the teachers commended the attitudes of students while 35% said that student attitudes were not encouraging. Fifty-two percent of the teachers actively participated in extra school lessons while 48% would not.

Data Analyses of Informants Responses to the Closed End Questions

Table 1

Question	A	SA	D	SD	TOTAL
1	28	4	32	36	100
2	8	12	24	56	100
3	56	4	20	20	100
4	56	4	24	16	100
5	24	8	56	12	100
6	32	12	40	16	100
7	44	12	32	12	100
8	52	8	28	12	100
9	4	16	32	48	100
10	52	36	8	4	100
11	68	28	4	-	100
12	48	12	32	8	100
13	44	20	24	12	100

Table 2

Question	A	SA	D	SD
1	28	4	32	36
2	8	12	24	56
3	56	4	20	20
4	56	4	24	16
5	24	8	56	12
6	32	12	40	16
7	44	12	32	12
8	52	8	28	12
9	4	16	32	48
10	52	36	8	4
11	68	28	4	0
12	48	12	32	8
13	44	20	24	12

Table 3: Testing Of Acceptability and Unacceptability of the Questions in Percentage (%)

Question	A+SA	D+SD
1	32	68
2	20	80
3	60	40
4	60	40
5	32	68
6	44	56
7	56	44
8	60	40
9	20	80
10	88	12
11	96	4
12	60	40
13	64	36

Interpretation of Data

Question 1: Indigenous language teachers would prefer to teach other subjects.

Indigenous language teachers have preference for indigenous language over other subjects, with 68% of the respondents rejecting this statement, and 32% accepting it.

Question 2: There is no significant result in the teaching / leaning activities of the indigenous languages.

The use of indigenous language as a means of leaning is significant, with 80% of the respondents agreeing with the proposition and 20% not in agreement.

Question 3: Indigenous language teachers get motivation from colleagues who teach other subjects.

Indigenous language teachers obtain motivation from their colleagues who teach other subjects. The statistics shows that 60% support this statement and 40% reject it.

Question 4: Indigenous language teachers get motivation from school authority.

Motivation comes from the school authorities. Sixty percent accepted this statement, and 40% rejected it.

Question 5: Indigenous language teachers get motivation from parents.

Indigenous language teachers do not receive motivation from parents who are expected to complement their work. The research reveals that 68% rejected this statement, and 32% accepted it.

Question 6: Indigenous language teachers get motivation from students.

Indigenous language teachers get little or no motivation from students, with 44% accepting this statement and 56% rejecting it.

Question 7: Indigenous language teachers get motivation from members of their family.

Indigenous language teachers are motivated by family members with 56% of the respondents saying 'Yes', and 44% 'No'.

Question 8: Students are themselves enthusiastic about learning the indigenous language, other factors notwithstanding.

Students developed interest in learning indigenous languages with 60% of the respondents (teachers) agreeing and 40% disagreeing.

Question 9: There is no need for formal learning of the indigenous language, especially considering students' ability to communicate in the language.

From the data, it is clear that learning indigenous language is considered a waste of time as 80% of the respondents accepted the statement and 20% were of the opinion that learning is preferable.

Question 10: Indigenous language teachers can teach other subject other than the indigenous languages.

Statistics show that most of indigenous language teachers can teach other subjects as well as indigenous languages. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents confirmed this, while 12% disagreed.

Question 11: Indigenous language teachers are always happy teaching the indigenous language students.

This study has shown that indigenous language teachers are happy to teach indigenous languages. Ninety-six percent of the respondents affirmed the position while 4% of the respondents rejected this view.

Question 12: Indigenous language teachers are always putting on traditional attires.

Sixty percent of language teachers would like to put on traditional attires as 60% of the respondents accepted this statement while 40% rejected it.

Question 13: Indigenous language teachers always plan to acquire degrees in other disciplines.

The analysis has shown that some indigenous language teachers would like to acquire other degree(s). Sixty-four percent of the respondents were of the opinion that is better for the indigenous language teachers to stay where they are.

Analysis of Teachers' Responses

The comments given by the respondents (teachers) who teach indigenous languages support the importance of indigenous languages in Nigeria schools both in primary schools and secondary schools. However, many indigenous language teachers do not really understand what National Policy on Education (NPE) states on indigenous language and the purpose of the policy. Also, among those who know National Policy on Education, most were of the opinion that the policy is just paper work, without proper implementation and follow-up. The few, who have knowledge of what the language policy says, are of the belief that the policy is not implemented. According to the responses, teachers are not only willing but also ready to teach subjects in which they do not specialize. Teachers also often teach indigenous languages as L1 instead of as L2.

In summary, the analyses of the data reveals the following: 28% of the respondents were male while 72% of them were female. The numbers of respondents that fall within the age range of 16-25 were 8%, 26-35 were 32%, 36-45 were 48% while 45 and above were 12%. In addition to this, the research shows that 24% of the respondents have Master of Arts in Education (M.A. Ed) while some have Master of Art only, that is, (M.A). 60% of the respondents also certified with Bachelor of Arts only, that is, (B.A). Holders of National Certificate of Education (N.C.E) were 16% of the respondents. The responses to the attitudes of students to the learning activities showed that 65% of respondents commended the attitudes of students while 35% said the attitudes were not encouraging. Half of the respondents actively participate in extra school lessons while the remaining half would not.

Analysis of Learners' Responses

The informants in this category are of two groups. Group one is comprised of Junior Secondary Schools (JSS 3) informants who constitute intermediate class. The other group of informants, who were used as a control group, is comprised of Senior Secondary Schools (SSS 1) informants. The two groups' responses to the closed questions are presented in a tabular form. However, their responses to the section three of the questionnaire are analyzed together since both groups of informants have identical information.

Analyses of Learners' Responses to Questions in Section Three

There are two parts to this section. The first requires informants to mention four of their role models in indigenous languages while the other asked that the informants write in their indigenous language about the food that they like best. The responses in either case do not only show the informants' ignorance in the indigenous languages but also show their attitudes to the learning of the language. From the analyses, barely 5% of the informants have renowned Yorùbá scholars or writers or artists as their role models. Most have as their role models, comedians and actors who really may not contribute effectively to their language learning or cultural identity.

Less than 10% of the learners could write a meaningful essay on the food they like best using their indigenous languages. Errors found in the extract range from spelling, grammar, to structure. For instance, the word 'hó' (to boil) in Yorùba is spelled by some of the informants as 'oo'. Some of the informants also consistently used the clause 'oma' (we will) in Yorùbá instead of 'a oò ge sí wéwé' or 'a má a gé e sí wéwé' (we will cut it

into pieces). In some case, Yorùbá lexis is simply replaced by their English equivalent.

Such is the case with frying pan and rice.

Findings

- Teachers are not only willing but also eager to teach subjects in which they do not specialize.
- The learners are taught indigenous languages as L1 instead of as L2. Ordinarily, the learners, most of them having acquired the English language as their L1, have little or no knowledge of their indigenous languages. Nevertheless, it is expected that the teaching of the indigenous languages be done as if learners were acquiring their L1. However, listening and speaking skills, the first of L1 acquisition processes are usually less emphasized if at taught all.
- Findings suggest that learners appreciate indigenous languages. However, discouragement sets in because their peers make fun of them. Additionally, the overriding assumption is that it would be not be economically viable to study Nigerian indigenous languages at the university.
- Learners' collectively agree that students look forward to their next indigenous classes, and that learning and writing in the indigenous languages does not present a problem for them. However, this does not correspond to the results of the essays that they were asked to write.
- The category of role models mentioned by learners does not suggest that the informants appreciate indigenous books or authors. However, it could also be that there are not enough textbooks in the Yorùbá and Igbò languages. It is worth

noting that learners are sometimes not even exposed to the few Yorùbá books that exist. Perhaps this indicates a lack of interest.

Implications of the Study

The findings of the study suggest the following:

- Some teachers, who do not possess the relevant educational qualifications, may lack ability for effective teaching in general and effective teaching of the indigenous languages, in particular.
- Similarly, teachers' willingness to succumb to their employers demands to teach any subject, even against their will, may suggest that they do not fully understand the importance of indigenous language teaching.
- A reasonable number of informants agreed that indigenous language teachers could teach subjects other than indigenous languages. This could imply that: (1) indigenous language teachers are not specialists in their field of study; (2) they lack commitment, and /or (3) indigenous language teaching is not their vocation.
- Indigenous language teachers' lack of knowledge of what the language policy states may be an indicator of the importance that teachers place on the survival and maintenance of indigenous languages.
- Learners, by not speaking indigenous languages may lose their identity. By extension, the English language may overrun the various indigenous languages.

Recommendations

It is clear from the foregoing that the promotion and appreciation of the various indigenous languages go beyond highlighting some goals in the language policy.

Following this we recommend that:

- Teachers who have actually been trained in the indigenous languages should be teaching indigenous languages.
- All learners should be made to have at least a credit pass in the indigenous languages to proceed to a next level of educational study.
- Learners of the indigenous languages should be made to undergo oral exams to qualify to move up the educational ladder.
- School authorities should be more committed to achieving the goals as stated in the language policy.
- Indigenous language teachers should be more focused, dedicated and must believe in the teaching / learning activities.
- Parents need to be educated on the advantages that their children stand to gain when they become bilingual. The assumption is that learners will, by their having knowledge of two languages, be competent within and outside their linguistic environment.
- There should be more intensive monitoring of the various private schools to ensure strict compliance to the goals of the language policy similarly, the government should better motivate both the teachers and the learners.

Conclusion

Private school teachers see indigenous languages as just another subject. This is also the case among students, who consider this area of study merely as a subject to be passed, but not as their own mother tongue or their own language. Teachers do not see indigenous languages as languages that should be spoken by students but rather as a course that should be passed. They often believe that indigenous languages will affect students' accent in English. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of the private schools examined in Ikeja Local Government do not have indigenous language teachers, and indigenous languages are not included in the curriculum. This may not be unconnected with the fact that Ikeja is the heart of the state. Ikeja is a city in which the elite reside. It is the seat of highly rated private schools, with foreign teachers in some instances. Such schools use the British policy instead of the Nigerian National policy on education. Very few students in these schools are able to speak their indigenous languages because they are usually not allowed to speak the indigenous language at home or at school.

References

- Adégbìjà, E.E. (1994). *Language attitudes in Sub-Saharan Africa: A sociolinguistic overview*. Clevedon, UK Multilingual Matters.
- Adégbìjà, E.E (2001) Language and attitude change: A case study of Africa. *Review of Applied Linguistics 133-134*, 271-301.
- Adéníyì, H., & Bèllò, R. (2007b). Urban linguistics in Nigeria: A case of language use in Lagos metropolis. *Iranian Journal of Language Studies, 2*, 53-63. Available at: <http://ijols.znu.ac.ir/>
- Babájídé, A. O. (2001). Language attitude patterns of Nigerians. In H. Igboanusi (Ed.), *Language attitude and language conflict in West Africa* (pp.1-13). Ibadàn. Enicrownfit
- Baker, C. (1992) *Attitude and language*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Crystal, D. (1997). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of language*. Cambridge, UK. University of Cambridge.
- Emenanjo, N., & Bleambo, P. K. (Eds.). (1999). *Language endangerment and language empowerment in Nigeria: Theory and reality*. (Vol.1). Abá. National Institute for Nigeria Languages.
- Fasold, R. (1984). *The Sociolinguistics of society*. Cambridge, UK. Blackwell.
- Igboanusi, H., & Peter, S. (2005). *Languages in competition: The struggle for supremacy among Nigeria's major languages, English and Pidgin*. Berlin, Germany: Peter Lang.

- Oyètádé, S.O. (2001). Attitude to foreign languages and indigenous language use in Nigeria. In H. Igboanusi (Ed.), *Language attitude and language conflict in West Africa* (pp. 14-29). Ibadàn. Enicrownfit
- Tabouret-Keller, A. (2000). Language and identity. In F. Coulmans (Ed.), *The handbook of sociolinguistics* (pp. 315-326). Oxford, UK: P Blackwell Publishers Ltd.