

NIGERIAN NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY: PECULIARITIES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

In Nigeria, several attempts had been made in the past to arrive at a National Language Policy document but there was no single policy document that exclusively contained stipulations or provisions on language and language development except the National Policy on Education (NPE). However, the Nigerian Government in 2022 released the National Language Policy (NLP) document. The NLP is a deliberate effort and documentation by the government to regulate the coexistence, development and utilization of all Nigerian languages for national development. This paper explicates the peculiarities and challenges of implementing the provisions stipulated in the NLP. It identifies peculiarities such as the uniqueness of the NLP as the first comprehensive edition of national language use in every facet of the country, assignment of roles to both indigenous languages and the English language as well as putting in place structures that can help in the implementation of the policy. Based on the literature reviewed, the paper observes that most of the provisions stipulated in the NLP are yet to be implemented, though the NLP is still in its infancy. The paper further reveals that some of the challenges of implementing the NLP include: lack of resourceful materials that will bring the language to scholars such as textbooks, inadequate language teachers, and lack of monitoring mechanism to implement the formulated policy. This paper therefore, recommends among others that the Federal Government should create massive awareness about the emergence of the NLP, provide adequate funding for the implementation of the stipulations in the NLP at all levels, and develop more educational resources and orthographies of the indigenous languages while allowing itself to be committed to the necessary political will that will aid the implementation of the NLP.

Keywords: National Language Policy, Indigenous Languages, Peculiarities, Challenges, Implementation

Introduction

Nigeria is a country with diverse people with diverse languages. It is a country with over 200 million people consisting of diverse ethnic groups living in their own territories. Each of these groups has its own linguistic, traditional, socio-political structure, cultural traits and histories. Nigeria, according to Ogunmodimu (2015) is a multilingual, pluralistic and heterogeneous African state with a history of British colonization.

According to the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (2022), five

hundred and forty (540) languages are spoken in Nigeria. With this multiplicity of languages in Nigeria, therefore, it is not unexpected that it will be difficult to produce a national language. Ibrahim (2021) asserts that Nigeria has language problems to be solved. This is due to the fact that each of the languages has its own culture and philosophy of life, its traditional values and beliefs - in short its ways of life which it strives to perpetuate. Since language remains a medium of communicating and transmitting these ways from generations to generations, it translates then, that to want to

consciously cede one's language to another is tantamount to encouraging the death of a group of people's ways to take up those of others. This is one of the major difficulties in arriving at a national language policy in a multilinguistic setting, as we have in Nigeria.

With the advent of colonization, English language emerged as the official language of the country which becomes almost the only language that cuts across the country, though Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo languages have emerged as the dominant major languages recognized in Nigeria, English language is the declared official language and the lingua franca of the country which is used in almost every aspect of the country's lives. It is the language of trade, government, mass media, judiciary, education, commerce, etc. It is in realization of this fact and the need to protect and preserve the indigenous languages that attention was drawn towards the articulation of a Nigerian National Language Policy that will chart the way for the regulation, use and development of all the languages in the country, especially vis-a-vis the English language. According to Ibrahim (2021), a policy is a government or non-governmental statement of intent of a particular program directed for implementation.

Language policy therefore is a body of ideas, laws, regulations and practices intended to achieve planned language change in societies. It is an officially mandated set of rules for language use and form in a nation-state. Ojetunde (2012) defines language policy as the plan of course of action of a dynamic program in directing language affairs as needed by government. In essence, language policy is a deliberate action by government through legislation for regulating the use, development and promotion of all languages in order to

meet defined national needs, aspirations and priorities (NERDC 2022).

Several attempts had been made in the past to arrive at a national language policy document but there was no single policy document in Nigeria that exclusively contained stipulations or provisions on language and language development before the 2022 Nigerian language policy as a result of the multilingual, multi-ethnicity, pluralistic and heterogeneous nature of the nation. What existed before it was the National Policy on Education (revised in 2013) which contains the national guidelines for effective administration, management, implementation and achievement of educational goals in Nigeria, stipulates language use at all levels of the Nigerian education - basic education, post-basic education and career development, mass and nomadic education, tertiary education, open and distance education as well as special needs education.

The new National Language Policy (NLP) is a welcomed and commendable development. It is a collaborative innovative idea of the former president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. President Muhammadu Buhari, the Honourable Minister of Education, Malam Adamu Adamu and the Minister of State for Education, Honourable Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba. According to AdamuAdamu, the then Minister of Education," the articulation of a NLP will chart the way for the regulation, use and development of all the languages in Nigeria ; the absence of which had over the years deprived Nigeria of all the beneficial values associated with the development and utilization of such a policy". Hence, the Federal Ministry of Education, in conjunction with the NERDC, formulated a NLP to establish the utility and superiority of using the mother tongue in instruction at the

basic level of education over the use of a learned tongue. This led to the establishment of a language policy blueprint that cuts across all sectors of the Nigerian administrative and socio-economic sectors which took into cognizance the nation's multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural contexts.

Prof. Ismail Junaidu, Executive Secretary NERDC (2022) in his "Preface" to the National Language Policy document stated that earlier efforts at formulating a language policy for the country which had emphasized the adoption of an indigenous lingua franca were not expansive enough to sufficiently promote the effective use of the Nigerian languages in all spheres of the nation's socio-economic activities but the NLP reckons with the pragmatic position that all Nigerian languages are equal. The NLP finds it necessary to embolden all Nigerian languages through innovative contemporary transformation process that enable the users to retain their cultural identity, while expressing their creative and innovative capabilities for making contributions to the national and global knowledge resources.

The NLP document which is the first edition, is a deliberate effort by the government to regulate the coexistence, development and utilization of all Nigerian languages for national development. It comprises eight chapters which ensures a comprehensive coverage of the language issues in Nigeria. As this is a new policy, it necessitates providing answers to some questions: What are the peculiarities of the NLP? What are the resources stipulated in the NLP that could really help its implementation? What institutions are fundamentally stated that could help the implementation of the policy? and What challenges are impeding its

implementation?. These concerns are the rationale for this paper.

It is against this backdrop that the paper attempts to expound the NLP by bringing out its peculiarities, the resources stipulated for the implementation of its provisions, the agencies stated to effect the implementation, the challenges of the implementation and the extent of the successes of the NLP in relation to the implementation.

The National Language Policy and its Peculiarities

Nigeria, as a nation, operates a three-tier government structure, namely: Federal, State and Local with three distinct arms of government, the Executive, Legislature and the Judiciary and the government requires a definite language policy use to be able to achieve quality and optimum functioning at these levels in the midst of multiplicity of languages. From observation, several of the Nigerian languages are at different levels of endangerment and every attempt needs to be made to stem the tide. The endangerment of the languages is traceable to the interaction of other languages like English, French, Arabic and Pidgin English with the Nigerian languages like Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba that are spoken by a large number of Nigerians. English language which was considered as the official and administrative language in Nigeria dominated Nigeria languages like Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba.

Despite the NLP's assertion that "all Nigerian languages are national assets and treasures and must be preserved and transferred to the subsequent generations", most of our indigenous languages appear to be going into extinction. For example, Yoruba language which is one of the major Nigerian languages is considered by most Yorubas as "Vernacular" and

many parents do not want their children to speak the language. According to the NLP, languages are tied to culture and serve as marks of identity and repositories of the traditions, norms and values of the different peoples of Nigeria but when majority of Nigerians are now ashamed of speaking their indigenous languages and would rather prefer they speak the English language which they believe is the language of the elite and the educated, we can begin to guess what will happen to our culture and supposedly national assets and treasures that must be preserved.

Ferguson (2022) suggests a series of societal language choice questions which language policy in a developing multilingual country may address: what language(s) shall be the official medium of the government to be used in laws, administration and the armed forces?, What language(s) shall be used as medium of instruction at the various levels of the educational system?, What language(s) will be accepted for use on the radio, in publishing and as school subjects?. Documented answers to such questions which will necessarily constitute input into the country's language policy have been answered in the NLP.

The NLP which was part of the government's Ministerial Strategic Plan, Education for Change (2015-2018) and revised 2018-2022 makes provisions for the use of language in several domains namely; education, the media, information, communication and technology, legislature, judiciary, governance, administration and politics, entertainment industry, town and regional planning. Others are trading activities, banking, science and technology, health, environment and agricultural extension services as well as security.

The NLP, as a policy document contains such peculiarities as it's

declaring equal status for both foreign and the indigenous languages where all languages can be used for education, judiciary, media, entertainment and almost every aspect of human endeavor in the country. The policy sets out to promote the use of the mother tongues in order to stem the tide of endangerment of the indigenous languages. According to Jangkam et al, (2024), this will help promote peaceful and mutual interface of all languages used in the country.

The National Language Policy: Content, Implementation Strategies and Challenges

(a) The National Language Policy and Education

The objectives of the language policy on education include promotion of effective teaching and learning of Nigerian and foreign languages at all levels of the education system, preservation of Nigerian languages among others. The NLP, in Chapter four, provides that the mother tongue or the Language of the Immediate Community (LIC) shall be used as a medium of instruction from early childhood career and development education to the six years of primary education while English language shall be the medium of instruction at the Junior Secondary education just like the post-basic education levels while encouraging a combined use of English language and the mother tongues or language of immediate community at designated levels of education while English language shall be taught as a school subject. At the tertiary level, bilingualism in which every student is to learn one Nigerian language other than the mother tongue shall be encouraged and government shall encourage the establishment of universities whose medium of instruction shall be any of the Nigerian languages while online education shall

have English or the language widely spoken by the target audience as the language of instruction.

However, from observation, what operates in reality is that the language of instruction from early childhood career and development education up to the six years of primary education is primarily English language where majority of the students cannot even speak their mother tongue or language of the immediate environment while other indigenous languages like Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Efiketc are taught as separate subjects only in some schools, mostly public schools and those who attend them are almost seen as inferior students. We cannot take away the importance of private schools in the education of the Nigerian student where it is just fashionable to attend private schools. No conscious effort is taken by government to implement this aspect of the NLP. Almost every primary school is left to decide what language(s) to teach to their pupils; every private school right from the Basic education level uses English language as medium of instruction while the public schools employ a mixture of English and the language of the immediate environment and such schools are predominantly attended by children of the supposedly common man - all the elites and other parents and guardians who can afford the expenses of private schools (even when they themselves are not literate) send their children to private schools.

The NLP states that efforts shall be made to develop and produce educational materials in the various Nigerian languages while registers in the various school subjects shall be developed (Chapter 4:25). It appears appropriate measures are yet to be put in place towards the realization of the stated goals even after two years of the statement in the NLP; government is

still making efforts to develop and produce materials in the various Nigerian languages and when produced, how useful will they be in a multilingual class? For example, going by the three acknowledged indigenous languages in Nigeria ----Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, it can be assumed that the regions are monolingual but in reality most of the students are from different linguistics backgrounds. For instance, primary schools in Ekiti State might have pupils from Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Urhobo and other linguistic backgrounds. In this type of situation, only the English language will cut across and teaching them in Yoruba which is the language of the immediate environment becomes counterproductive.

Furthermore, the policy states in Chapter 4:21,22 that Federal, State and Local Governments shall ensure effective supervision of teaching and learning of Nigerian languages with regular review of curricula for teaching and learning of all Nigerian languages; the reverse is however the case in Nigeria schools where there seems to be no adequate action taken towards the implementation. It seems there is no regular curriculum review in Nigeria , most curriculum planners themselves are not experts in educational matters thus supervising the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages that they are not conversant with may be a problem. The development of the orthographies and Meta languages for the teaching and learning of all Nigerian languages was stipulated in the National Language Policy but this is not adequately being implemented. According to Biale (2019), most Nigerian languages are without orthographies and there are no textbooks in most minority languages. From observation, it can be concluded that most Nigerian languages are not in written form and there is lack of enough

language teachers to teach them, more so that most students and Nigerians as a whole prefer to read books written in English language since the medium of instruction in most public schools is English language and not the mother tongue as contained in the NLP.

French language is to be taught as a compulsory school subject from primary four while Arabic language shall be an optional subject from primary one and made compulsory for learners offering Islamic Studies as stated in the National Language Policy but what operates is that French is only being taught as a compulsory subject in some private primary schools and at the junior secondary level in some Nigerian public schools. It was observed that majority of our schools do not offer Arabic language at all may be as a result of inadequate availability of textbooks written in the language and perhaps because the language is identified with a particular religion. The students can hardly speak French language hence they find it difficult to understand the language and consequently lose interest in it. Many of the teachers who teach French language, especially at the basic and post basic levels of education, are themselves hardly literate users of the language. The implementation of this policy which was taken seriously a few years back as a stipulation of the NLP has almost fizzled out probably owing to lack of qualified teachers and inability of the beneficiaries to see any benefits in it.

The policy that provides for the development of registers of science and technology in the various Nigerian languages has not made adequate provision for such to be implementable. There is lack of educational materials and registers in Nigerian languages. Meanwhile, sign language has always been taught to learners who have hearing and speech impairment. This is made possible by the establishment of

Special Schools by the Federal and State governments.

In addition, majority of the online based educational programs are delivered in English language and not in the language widely spoken by the target audience as stated in the NLP. Contrary to the provisions of the NLP that students at the Senior Secondary School (SSS) level shall be made to study one Nigerian language; the reverse is the case in Nigeria Senior Secondary Schools where Nigerian languages are optional subjects and not made compulsory. English language which is the official language of Nigeria, has the upper hand over Nigerian languages which are perceived as “local” and “vernacular”. Majority of students do not want to be associated with their mother tongue or language of their immediate community; they believe that English language is a language of the “elites”, “the social class” and “the sophisticated” to which they want to belong. Lack of teachers to teach the Nigerian languages may be another reason for Nigerian languages not being made compulsory in senior secondary school classes.

In the area of Mass and Nomadic Education, Mother Tongue (MT) or Language of the Immediate Community (LIC) of a student shall be the medium of instruction while English language shall be taught as a subject. This is exactly what operates in Mass and Nomadic schools in Nigeria as such schools are mostly established in the northern part of Nigeria where majority of the populace are cattle rearers and herdsmen thus, English language may not mean much to them; they mostly speak and learn in their mother tongues rather than in the English language, more so that they have local teachers who understand their languages.

At the tertiary education levels, the NLP states that bilingualism (the

use or speaking of two languages) should be encouraged in all Nigeria tertiary institutions. The reality is that majority of the students in our tertiary institutions are not even conversant with their mother tongue; those who can speak their indigenous languages will even be shy to speak it among their mates to avoid being labeled as “rural” or “local”. Furthermore, the use of bilingualism may not succeed at the tertiary levels of education where there is diversity of culture and languages among both lecturers and students. The question of which indigenous language is to be used alongside the English language arises at this level. It is believed that tertiary institution lecturers are supposed to be world class or global personalities who are well versed in the use of the English language even though they will have their own indigenous languages. It can be concluded that the use or speaking of two languages at the tertiary institutions may not be relevant at all. English language has been and will remain the medium of instruction for most courses while Nigerian languages like Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo are equally and will continue to be offered as main courses.

Admission requirements into social science and humanities in tertiary education institutions do not consider a credit in one Nigerian language while General Studies do not include languages of the immediate community of every university despite the stipulations of the National Language Policy. This according to Ofodu (2014), may be due to the fact that many Nigerian languages are believed to lack economic value and they are neither a requirement for employment, admission, education nor mobility.

The NLP provides that projects, thesis and dissertations should have an additional abstract written in the

language of the immediate community or the mother tongue of the student, if it is not the same as the language of the immediate community. Projects, thesis and dissertations are outcomes of researches and such writings are meant for universal audience and not limited to the speakers of the indigenous language who ordinarily may not be interested in such elevated writings. What then is the essence of being able to read an abstract of a major work and not have access to the body of the work?

No university whose medium of instruction is solely one of the Nigerian languages has been established so far by the government despite what was stated in the NLP. Also, there are no special courses in Nigerian languages that are made available to all students as an elective course, irrespective of their area of study in our tertiary institutions of learning. These conditions appear only possible on paper and not in reality. As early as between 1970 and 1983, Prof. BabsFafunwa, the first professor of Education in Nigeria experimented with the Ife 6 years primary school project where some set of students were taught all subjects in their mother tongue from primary one to six, while another set was taught using the English language, all other variables relating to the teaching/learning process remain the same. At the end of the instruction, the pupils were given the same examinations and it was discovered that students who were taught exclusively in their mother tongue performed better and consequent monitoring of these products revealed a lower dropout percentage as they move higher in their educational pursuit. Despite the success of the experiment, it could not be sustained at that level because of political and economic reasons and if it could not be sustained at that level how

can it be sustained at tertiary level of education?

Meanwhile, it is stated in the NLP that teacher education institutions shall be encouraged to conduct teaching practice at the basic education level in the language of the immediate community, provided such students are able to speak the language fluently. It was observed that teaching practice exercise is conducted using the English language. In addition, the Nigerian government is yet to make efforts to develop materials for teaching and learning in Nigerian languages for Technology-biased institutions owing to political consideration, lack of funding, lack of implementation strategy and primacy and comfort which the English language has offered in the teaching learning process of education in Nigeria.

The NLP stresses that the language widely spoken in the area where Innovation Enterprise Institution (IESs) are established for the acquisition of skills and/ or English language should be the medium of instruction, but this is not being implemented.

(b) The National Language Policy, ICT, Mass Media, Culture, Tourism Entertainment and Nationalism

In the area of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), the NLP states that all ICT tools and innovations imported into or developed in Nigeria such as social media applications, computers, mobile phones and digital devices must be a design that is compatible with or easily adaptable to Nigerian languages but we are yet to see the reality of this when what floods our markets are fairly used ICT products – computers, phones, etc which were never adapted for the Nigerian environment. Many broadcasting stations are established in the country, but the establishment of

stations that use only Nigerian languages is yet to be achieved by the government. However, private radio stations which broadcast exclusively in the three recognized indigenous languages now exist – examples are the DCLM Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba radio stations, the Yoruba Radio and TV station and others like them, this though will definitely limit their audience and area of influence.

Language is recognized as the driving force of culture, tourism and entertainment hence effort should be made to ensure the effective use of Nigerian languages in the sector. The NLP stipulates that not less than 40% of film, theatre and music in Nigerian languages shall be mandatory for every production company. While the policy is good, the implementation is going to be problematic because there can't be adequate monitoring of every film producer, musician, etc, as they will first think of the economic benefits to themselves before thinking of the provisions of the NLP. Giving the nature of the country with lethargic citizens and officers, the enforcement of the provisions of the NLP can only be poorly and or superficially implemented.

The National Anthem and National Pledge is to be rendered in Nigerian languages when used at official public functions, the NYSC language orientation programs, public service announcements at airports, train stations, parks etc should be rendered in Nigerian languages in addition to the English version – this is as practiced already. Sporting events and commentaries are expected to be done in English language and Nigerian language of wider communication. However, the language of choice at this level will be a function of the audience and this is likely to remain the English language at all times.

(c) The National Language Policy and Governance

Meanwhile, the NLP stipulates that all tiers of government - Federal, State and Local governments as well as institutions exercising public power of performing public functions shall use English language as the official and administrative language while official documents shall be rendered in identified Nigerian languages of wider communication while oral communication shall be in English language or the preferred language of the target audience with provision to interpret in sign language simultaneously hence Interpreters and translators in Nigerian languages shall be readily available in different government offices. The reality is that this policy is already being implemented as English language is used in government for official purposes especially to write official documents and English remains the major means of oral communication. However, where attempts have been made to use the language of the immediate environment for oral communication, especially where there is an agglomeration of various ethnic nationalities, suspicions often arise. Though the use of the language of the immediate environment has in a way be entrenched among people of same ethnic background operating within their ethnic environment, English language remains in use in wider spectrum when it involves people of other ethnic background within the environment.

Again, at the legislative level, the NLP stipulates that English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba shall be the languages of deliberation at the National House of Assembly when adequate arrangements have been made while at the State and Local Government levels identified languages of wider communication shall, in addition, to

English, be used in legislative deliberations and shall be recorded, transcribed and translated into English with qualified translators and interpreters employed to coordinate and manage the use of languages in legislative deliberations. Observations show the intensive and predominant use of the English language as the language of deliberations in the Houses of Assemblies and little consideration to the use of the languages indigenous to the nation. Adequate arrangements seems never to have been made and may never be made for the use of any of the three major indigenous languages in the country as stipulated here. "Adequate arrangements" has always been part of the language issue in the country, for example, it was contained in the 1999 Nigeria Constitution. According to Anyadegwu & Nwode, (2023); Olaniyi, (2024), "adequate arrangements" remain vague. What does one expect when many of the members of the Houses are not proficient in their mother tongues? Attempts at using the indigenous languages in the various state assemblies is not new. As far back as 2007, the Lagos State House of Assembly had adopted a local language as its official language in addition to the English language, same has been in states like Ekiti, Oyo and Ogun which adopted Yoruba then Bauchi which adopted Hausa. Other examples abound, however the extent of the use of these adopted languages is another matter.

Similarly, at the judiciary level, the National Language Policy advocates that Nigerian languages should be used alongside the English language which is the official language in use. In other words; justice should be dispensed in a familiar language medium at the State High Courts Magistrate Courts, Customary/Area Courts and Sharia Courts while Law Reports should be

translated and published in Nigerian Languages. While English remains the official language in use at our various courts, provisions are often made for interpreters and the accused and the defendants make use of that language in which they are most at home.

In addition, the Policy covers the Armed Forces, the Police and all other security Agencies in terms of security. It states that English language shall continue to be used in all spheres of our national security while written communication shall be translated into Nigerian Languages from English Language. Oral Communication shall be in English, Nigerian Pidgin or any Nigerian language, accompanied by sign language while interpretation shall be provided for those who do not understand the language used. Security personnel shall be motivated through incentives to learn the languages of the immediate community where they are posted. It is observed that this policy is being effectively implemented in the sense that majority of Nigeria security personnel speak Pidgin language which makes it possible for them to communicate with people in areas outside their own language territory. These personnel are from different linguistic background and only the English language can effectively serve as the means of communication, the pidgin English has also played a major and significant part since it is seen also as no man's language but a language of all – enjoyed by all, even the educated elites.

(d) The National Language Policy, Town Planning, Environment, Health Care and Agricultural Extension Services

The NLP also formulates policies for Town Planning, Environment, Health and Agricultural Extension Services. The Policy states that English language and Nigerian languages should be used in communicating the

essential terms, regulations, concepts, signs and labels associated with town planning, environment, health care and agricultural extension services, Again, signs and labels in all public places (markets, streets, bus stops, motor parks, departmental stores, entertainment centers, the public buildings (hospitals, court buildings, schools) and at monuments shall be in English language and Nigerian languages in the area where such buildings and monuments are located while publicity and enlightenment campaigns in public health, town planning, environment, health care and agricultural extension services, shall be carried out in English language and Nigerian languages. It is observed that this policy is well implemented because English language and Nigerian languages are used by extension service personnel as a medium of communication and to write signs and labels in public places in Nigeria, the audience dictates the language choice as well.

(e) The National Language Policy and Commerce

The NLP provides that English language and Nigerian languages should be used for Commerce, Trade, Banking, Financial and Economic activities. This Policy is implemented in Nigeria because manufacturers are developing manuals/flyers in Nigerian languages and English language likewise business/trade activities, investment and banking services are advertised in Nigerian other languages. However, financial institutions are yet to engage in the printing of some of their materials like tellers and other financial instruments in Nigerian languages, but Automatic Teller Machines (ATM), and the mobile phone help lines have provisions for language choice and the indigenous languages are included.

Measures, Agencies and Institutions towards the Implementation of the National Language Policy

Towards the effective implementation of the NPL, the government put in place some measures since it would seem an exercise in futility to talk about a national language policy without talking about how to implement it. The NPL provides that the government at federal, state and local levels would make provisions for funding, facilities and manpower, train and motivate Nigerian language teachers and students through the provision of scholarships and special bursary awards as well as equip language research laboratories and clinics in order to encourage the development of Nigerian languages. Are all these measures being put in place after two years of the existence of the NPL? There has never been adequate motivation at all for Nigerian language teachers and no concrete efforts can be seen to change the situation, no regular workshops or seminars for them rather seminars on English language, Mathematics and other science subjects are regularly organized for the teachers. Only few secondary schools have language laboratories.

Almost all our private tertiary institutions have no place for the teaching of Nigerian indigenous languages as courses of study and everyday fewer and fewer applicants are applying for admission into the tertiary institutions to study the indigenous languages because there seems to be no iota of motivation to study it – no recognition, no employment opportunity but rather what awaits them is derision. The NLP further makes a case for the provision of special services in language development which includes the production of specialist teachers in

Nigerian languages for all school subjects, particularly mathematics, sciences and technology, capacity building and training of language personnel. It seems specialist teachers in Nigerian languages are rather reducing as the Nigerian language subjects like Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba are not made compulsory in schools, in fact some are not even taught in schools as a result of lack of teachers for the subjects.

Teaching and learning resources and the training of Nigerian language teachers as well as encouragement of publishers to produce suitable books in the Nigerian languages is another provision of the NPL. The cost of production of textbooks, story books and instructional materials will surely have their toll on the achievement of this lofty idea. Also the poor reading habits of students and Nigerians as a whole most especially works in the indigenous languages is nor an encouragement to produce such reading materials. Nigerian populace as a whole prefer reading books written in the English language.

The policy document is to be made available to the citizens through mass production and dissemination of the NLP through various channels such as print and electronic media, stake holders, consultations, press briefings, social media channels etc. The reality on ground is that how many Nigerians including the elites are aware of the new NLP? As at present most Nigerians are only familiar with the national policy on education (NPE) more awareness should be created about the NLP through its mass production in written and multimedia formats as well as information in the mass media to the citizens.

Reviewing existing regulations to promote broadcasting in Nigerian language is another strategy put in place by government towards

implementation of the NLP. It seems this has been even before the coming into being of the NLP; most media and broadcasting stations are making use of Nigerian languages in some of their broadcasts and we have some print and electronic media whose programs are exclusively rolled out in the indigenous languages. From the foregoing, it is observed that the government has good foresight in the envisaged measures in the implementation of the NLP which is a laudable achievement.

The Government has designed the national language policy extensively such that specific roles are assigned to various agencies and stake holders towards effective actualization of the policy with relevant ministries, departments and agencies at federal, state and the FCT expected to oversee the implementation and funding of the policy.

Education agencies including linguistic and language associations, teachers training institutions, regulatory agencies and departments of linguistics and Languages in tertiary institutions are saddled with the responsibilities of organizing conferences, workshops and seminars, coordinate and promote language research and development activities, develop instructional resources like curricula, books, orthographies, meta-languages, build the capacity of teachers and other personnel's (tour guides, interpreters, translators) in the use of Nigerian language curricula among others. Majority of these responsibilities are neglected probably as a result of lack of funding and man power to implement them. Languages teachers in primary and secondary schools are not exposed to regular seminars and workshops hence they lack the wherewithal to carry out their responsibilities towards the attainable implementation of the NPL. Linguistic and language associations are not as

functional as would be adequate in the training and re-training of teachers of Nigerian languages. Although teacher training agencies and departments of linguistics and languages are organizing frequent conferences, workshops and seminars in terms of writing and publishing of papers on language issues for their students and lecturers, these need to be translated to concrete terms for the benefits to be realizable. Nigeria tertiary institutions as expected must be to facilitate the development and production of ICT facilities, applications of Human Language Technology (HTL), National Language Processing (NLP) and Computational Linguistics (CL) that address Nigeria languages needs to make the NLP a success story.

Agencies and parastatals under Federal and State Ministries of Information and Culture are expected to oversee the implementation of language policy provisions in the various sub-sectors within their domains. National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) are to regulate, monitor and track activities in the film and entertainment industry to ensure compliance with the provisions of the NLP. The national judicial institute, judicial training agencies and security agencies are to incorporate the provisions of the NLP, write all training programs and policies as well as ensure the training of judges, magistrates and interpreters in the Nigerian languages used within their respective judicial provinces.

Similarly, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Federal Ministry of Finance are expected to ensure the implementation and adherences to the tenets of the policy by all stakeholders in regard to commerce, trade, investments and financial sector of the economy. Also, funding and donor agencies are not left out as they are expected to provide the required funds

in development of Nigerian languages. All the sectors of the nation are expected to be involved in the effective implementation of the NLP. It is expected that if all these agencies will collaborate with the government and faithfully play their parts, (which is doubtful of course) the NLP is capable of being a veritable national policy capable of addressing the national language question in the country, at least theoretically.

Conclusion

This paper expounds the peculiarities and challenges of implementing the provisions stipulated in the 2022 National Language Policy. It was established that the policy is still in its infancy – two years- but it is obvious that good as the policy may seem, it may be very difficult to implement in many areas because of the multiplicity of languages in the country, the religious bigotry in the nation, the endemic and pervasive corruption that is bedeviling the nation, the social-economic and political realities as well as the suspicions that may come from one section of one linguistic community to the other. It can also be very expensive to implement its many provisions. The paper also showed that the Nigerian government’s approach to the implementation of the policy can better be described as halfhearted and ambivalent. The reality of the implementation of the policy is quite different from the dictates of the policy and the government seems incapable of enforcing the provisions as laid down in the policy document. There are obvious and flagrant abuse of the provisions at almost every level, be it in the education sector, the legislative, the ICT world, sports and many more of its parts. These are some of the peculiarities and realities of Nigeria as a nation.

It was therefore concluded that Nigeria will go on groping in this confusion until the country is able to convincingly provide answer to the national language question, an expectation which appears a mirage. The English language will remain the only unifying language and the only neutral language that can effectively bring together the peoples of the country while the indigenous languages will remain at the brink of under-utilization.

Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that:

- ✚ Government should create massive awareness about the emergence of the National Language Policy and it should be made available both in written and multimedia forms.
- ✚ Government should ensure adequate funding of the stipulations in the NLP at all levels of the country.
- ✚ The study of the three major indigenous languages (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba) as major teaching subjects should be made compulsory in the concerned regions where they form the indigenous languages.
- ✚ Concerted efforts should be made to step up the provision and availability of textbooks and instructional materials in the various indigenous languages.
- ✚ The study of the three recognized indigenous languages as programs of study in our tertiary institutions should be encouraged and their products should be guaranteed employment while those who are already qualified should be employed. They should also be motivated and encouraged further through the provision of

scholarships, special awards, and bursary awards.

- ✚ Government should ensure that regular training and retraining services are provided for language teachers in form of seminars, workshops and conferences.
- ✚ Schools and all organizations and agencies involved in manpower training and development of the indigenous languages should be provided with well-equipped language research laboratories, libraries, and clinics in critical sectors of the economy.
- ✚ Government should oversee the implementation of the NLP in all sectors of the country.
- ✚ Intensive and massive orientation should be carried out for all Nigerians from all walks of life to take pride in the speaking and writing of our indigenous languages as well as reading materials written in them. Conscious effort must be made to teach the younger ones the beauty and the pride of our language.
- ✚ Government should be courageous enough to provide the political will so that the NLP will not just remain another document on the shelf, but one that can be implemented.

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