

Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in Nigeria: A Remote Reality

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Abstract

Over the years, the Nigerian government has made endless promises to develop the orthography of more Nigerian languages for the easy implementation of MTBME. In spite of that, Nigeria is still far from making MTBME a reality. Studies on language policy in Nigeria have focused more on teachers' pedagogical practices but what goes on in teacher-preparation programmes, especially at the colleges of education (COEs) where they are trained is a wide research gap. No language policy can work if teachers are not adequately trained to implement it. Using the UTME syllabus as a source of data, this study investigated the extent to which the Nigerian languages are taught at the COEs and the geographical distribution of the institutions where the languages are taught. The result shows a very poor representation of the indigenous languages in the COEs. Besides, most private-owned COEs do not offer indigenous languages courses. The minority languages are confined to institutions located within their respective speech communities. The implication is that Nigerians teachers are hardly prepared for the MTBME which they are expected to implement.

Keywords: Language Policy, Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education, Minority Languages, Literacy in Nigeria, Medium of Instruction,

Introduction

The challenge of which language to use in education is a major problem in many post-colonial African nations. Yet, choosing the right language is one of the key determinants of whether education will meet its set objectives, that is, making children learn optimally. In education, everything starts with language, continues with language and perhaps, ends with language. The Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa (2019) points to a serious learning crisis in Nigeria. While the language of instruction cannot be said to be solely responsible, it is bound to be one of the major contributors to why children are not learning. This is because there is a strong link between proficiency in the language of instruction (LOI) and the extent to which children will learn in school (Ozowuba 2018). However, UNESCO (2010) reported that in most African countries, (Nigeria inclusive), only 5-15% of pupils know the official international language (which is often the LOI) before they enter school. As a result, there is a serious teaching barrier, serious communication and learning problems because instruction takes place in an unfamiliar language in which both teachers and learners have limited competence. English language is a second language (L2) to most Nigerian children.

Meanwhile, the Nigerian Policy on Education, (NPE) recommends a mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTBME) in the lower primary school. Thus, the children are supposed to be taught in their mother tongue (MT) when they first come to school. *In multilingual education, two or*

more languages are used in school - to deliver instruction and taught as school subjects. This would enable learners to become literate in the selected languages. There are two broad-based approaches to MTBME - the early-exit and the late-exit models. The two are differentiated by the duration of instruction in the MT before changing to the second language (L2). Ball (2010) calls the two 'transitional bi/multilingual education' in the sense that learning starts in one language for a given period of time before transitioning to another as the medium of instruction (MOI). In the early exit model, instruction takes place in the child's MT for about 3 years after which the L2 becomes the MOI. In the late-exit type, instruction continues in the MT for up to six years, or, as Ball (2010) puts it, until the child becomes fully fluent academically in the MT or first language (L1). The major weakness of the early-exit is that children may not be proficient enough in the MT within the short period and thus, may be linguistically unprepared to study in another language. In spite of that, in some countries have successfully used them.

Nigeria is supposed to practice an early-exit model of MTBME. The NPE recommends the use of the child's MT or language of the environment for instruction from primary 1-3, after which English becomes the MOI. Children are also expected to learn another Nigerian language, French, and English (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN 2014). There are however, many obstacles to the implementation of the current Nigerian language policy. In fact, Ugwu (2020b) considers the policy as rather idealistic because it makes enormous psycho-linguistic

demands on learners even as the school system is bereft of the essential elements (human and material resources) that could make the policy implementable.

A collection of evidence on the use of MT in education around the world shows a lot of positive benefits including increased achievement, retention, access, quality and reduced dropout rate (Pinnock & Vijayakumar 2009; Oribabor & Adesina 2013). The MT is said to give learners the foundation required for learning even additional languages (Cummins 1976). These benefits should be expected, in so far as knowing a language used for instruction is a necessity for effective communication between the teacher and the learner, without which learning will become difficult, if not impossible. Moreover, for children who are new to the school system, using the language they are already familiar with will facilitate easy transition from home to school, reduce chances of feeling estranged and enable them fit into the school system and make the most of it (Ugwu 2019).

In spite of the language policy statement in the Nigerian NPE, there are strong indications that MTBME has been jettisoned or poorly practiced in many schools (Bilewumo 2008; Ajibade 2014). As a result, the policy is resisted, learning is hampered and the standard of education continues to suffer. Writing on the South African experience of MTBME, Foley (2015) enumerates four practical ways through which African languages could be readied and used in the schools as the MOI: language development, curriculum development, teacher education and school implementation. Education is at the heart of every language development initiative and teachers are the ones who deliver the curriculum. Therefore, the success of MTBME in Nigeria will depend on the quality of teacher training for bi/multilingual education. Since Nigeria has over 500 indigenous languages, preparing teachers for bilingual education would mean that these languages (as many as possible) be taught in the teacher-preparation programmes. The society cannot expect teachers to deliver what they were not equipped with. Teachers can only teach the languages and in them if they study them in schools or at most, take courses in them.

On that note, this paper takes a critical look at the extent to which the Nigerians indigenous languages are represented or available in the Nigerian COEs for would-be teachers' accessibility so that they in turn would be able to deliver a mother tongue-based bi/multilingual education when they enter the teaching profession. To be examined also are the extent to which the schools in which the languages are offered are geographically distributed and the

distribution of language-based courses both of which will determine the ease at which students can access them. The more accessible the indigenous languages are to the would-be teachers, the closer Nigeria would be to delivering MTBME to children.

The State of Literacy in Nigeria

With the absence of broad and current nationally-based data on literacy, it is difficult to determine the real state of literacy in Nigeria. Besides, Nigeria is yet to utilise some internationally-recognised assessment tools, including the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Literacy Assessment Monitoring Programme (LAMP). In spite of this shortcoming, there are few available data that could be relied on to gauge the state of literacy in the country.

Meanwhile, Nigeria's education accessibility rate is said to be just 20.1%, even though 45% of the population are children below 15 years of age (UNICEF 2018). Thus, Nigeria has the world's highest rate of out-of school children (about 10.5 million). The National Literacy Survey carried out by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2010 showed that close to 3 million children, that is, about 8.1% of children aged 6-14 had never attended any school and about a million children aged 6-14 dropped out of school. The situation is not getting better as years go by. For instance, as at 2016, over 30% of the Nigerian children enrolled in primary school do not complete (Federal Ministry of Education, FME 2017).

Furthermore, a survey carried out in 2015 by the National Population Commission (NPC) to measure the level of literacy/education among Nigerian children revealed a very low level of literacy and an unpromising future. This is in spite of the fact that the yardstick used to weigh the level of literacy and numeracy in the survey leaves does not seem to meet international standard. For example, a child who could read just one out of three sentences shown to her/him was deemed literate and one who could correctly answer one of three sentences (questions) was considered as having comprehension ability. Also, a child who could add two single-digit numbers was deemed to have demonstrated numeracy while one who could sum or subtract at least one double-digit figure was considered as possessing advanced numeracy. Meanwhile, the results of that assessment include that: up to 47% (boys) and 45% (girls) could not read, and at the end of primary school, as many as 20% of the children cannot read - neither in English nor one of the 3 national languages. The fact that

primary school children were required to read only in English or in the three national languages (Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba) is surprising, since the NPE requires that they be taught either in their MT or language of environment from primary 1-3 (FRN 2014). The literacy level is worse among children in the rural areas. A whopping 64% of boys and 66% of girls living in the rural area lacked basic literacy. In the cities, it stands at 33% (boys) and 31% (girls), which is still relatively high. Besides, over 60% of children living in the rural areas (aged 5-16) could demonstrate neither literacy nor comprehension ability.

There is also a slight disparity between children in the public and those in the private schools. In the public primary school, 56% of children lacked literacy skill, 78% lacked comprehension skill and 44% could not demonstrate numeracy skill. In contrast, for those in private primary schools: 26% lacked literacy skill, 53% lacked comprehension skill and 16% lacked numeracy skill. Children in the rural settings may have dual disadvantages: school location and poverty may mean they are more likely to attend public schools with poor infrastructures, thus, limiting their chances of learning optimally. Besides, children in the cities may have greater access to English language than those in the rural settings while those in the rural areas are more likely to use their MT more often (Ugwu 2020a). This means that even if those in the rural settings attend private schools, chances are that learning English could still be more difficult for them because English may be spoken only in the school environment. The implication is that the use of the MT or language of environment will dispose them more to learning, especially at the pre-primary and primary schools, if the right things are put in place.

One of the major determinants of successful learning is well-trained teachers. There seems to be a recycling of low standard teaching personnel in the Nigerian classrooms because teachers are by-products of the system that trained them. Those who graduate without getting the expected literacy skills are recycled into the teaching profession. According to the Nigerian Education indicator, 28.03% of Primary, 30.3% of Junior Secondary and 29.47% of Senior Secondary School teachers are unqualified (FME 2017). Besides, there is a downward trend in the quality of teachers, which means that change may not be in sight unless a serious intervention is put in place. For instance, in the 2018 assessment of teachers for critical thinking in teaching, Nigeria scored 24.3% (2.5 on a scale of 7), making her rank

131 out of 140 countries. In the 2019 rating, the result was even worse, 23.7% (2.4 on a scale of 7 and 135 out of 141) (Schwab 2018; Schwab 2019). Meanwhile, over 50% of students enrolled in Nigerian schools are not learning due to lack of qualified teachers, limited funding, unequipped and overcrowded classrooms, etc. (World Economic Forum 2017: 20). Language plays an invaluable role in critical thinking. If a teacher or learner is not proficient in the language of instruction (LOI), critical thinking ability could be hampered.

Returning to the 2015 survey, 46% of primary 3 children lacked the basic literacy skill while 71% of them were unable to demonstrate comprehension ability. Primary three is important because it is after it that a switch from the MT to English as the LOI takes place. Their low level of literacy, as shown in this report might be an indication that they are hardly ready for the language change. If at that stage, they are unable to read in the language they have been taught with for three years, how possibly will they be able to cope with the introduction of a new language with is an L2? Such transition without the necessary linguistic foundation may frustrate them and lead to their being pushed out of the school system. According to the same survey, the rate of school dropout in Nigeria is highest at the primary school level (roughly 86% of the total dropout happens between primary 1 - 6, and the mean age for dropping out is 10 (NPC 2015).

Although the factors responsible for the poor literacy and dropout rate in Nigeria are multifaceted, the role of language (that is, the neglect of the indigenous languages, and by extension, children's MT, and over-reliance on English as the LOI) cannot be ruled out. Research evidence (examined below) shows a strong link between using the child's MT and learning, retention and overall achievement. Education may be relevant to learners to the extent that they understand what is taught and are enabled to participate actively in the teaching-learning process. Again, while higher achievement may not be enough to retain children in school, failure and class repetition have the potentials of kicking them out.

Research Evidence on how MT Improves Learning

In Nigeria, elaborate studies on the use of the mother tongue in education are scanty. Usually, the reference point is the Ife 6-years primary school project which took place over 40 years ago (1970 - 1978) in which Yoruba was used to teach the pupils

for 6 years. The programme was a huge success but was unfortunately abandoned. The fact that all the primary school subjects, including Mathematics and sciences were successfully taught in the MT gives credence to the possibility of using it in education. Commenting on the abandoning of that project, Ugwu (2020b) observed that in Nigeria, there's often a lack of continuity which tend to impede the development of the indigenous languages for functional literacy.

In spite of research gap on MTBME in Nigeria, its efficacy in enhancing learning have been established in numerous micro and macro experiments in many African countries with similar linguistic and socio-cultural scenarios as Nigeria. African countries that have recently and successfully experimented with MTBME include South Africa (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech 2014), Ethiopia, Mozambique, Kenya (Seid 2017; Jones 2012; Benson 2000), Botswana (Alimi 2016), Uganda (Heugh & Mulumba 2013) and Niger (Hamidou, Mijinguini, Amani & Salle 2010). Some of the studies are examined below.

In Mozambique, an early-exit model of MTBME called *Projecto de Escolarização Bilinguê em Mocambique (PEBIMO)* was successfully carried out in 1993 (Benson (2000). In that government initiative, Bantu language was used as the LOI, rather than Portuguese. The results included improved learning, classroom participation and self-confidence among students. A similar but more recent project was also carried out in Uganda between 2009 and 2013. It was a 4 years pilot study of an early-exit model of MTBME (Heugh & Mulumba 2013). The study was elaborate as it involved six districts and 240 schools. Children were taught with their MT for three years (primary 1-3) rather than English which was the norm. The study equally recorded success and the results include increased enrolment (over 35% more), significant increase in learning achievement, increased community awareness, acceptance and support of the use of MT in education, and increased adult-literacy programmes and skills. Initial resistance to the use of MT in school was eventually overcome while the weekly joint parent-child classes had dual effects of parents' participating in their children's education while enhancing their own literacy skills in the MT. Another benefit of the programme was language development which must have been intensified by the bid to accommodate new learning concepts in the indigenous languages. This no doubt must have opened employment opportunities to many rural dwellers, including

parents who served as teachers. In spite of the programme's success, problems were encountered, including shortage of human and material resources. This is a reminder that while MT is a possible option in multilingual nations like Nigeria, there has to be a strong political will to support it so that it can be adequately financed. It is also important to plan well before embarking on it.

Another study was carried out in Ethiopia (Seid 2017) to determine the effect of learning in the MT (before transiting to English as the MOI) on students' achievement. The result showed that children taught first in their MT before transitioning to English were better off in terms of achievement in Mathematics. However, the programme was more favourable to children in the rural areas than those in the urban areas. As stated earlier, children in the rural areas are more likely to be using their MT at home and in their environment than those in the cities. Thus, this advantage should be expected.

In South Africa, a study by Desai (2012) equally reports higher achievement for pupils taught through the medium of their MT (Xhosa) in an early-exit model of MTBME. However, it was discovered that their level of reading proficiency dropped as they moved to higher classes (that is, after transitioning to English as the MOI). This could be an indication that they were not linguistically ready for a switch to another language (English) at Grade 4. This negative effect points to a deficiency in the early-exit model of MTBME. Another study on the use of MT in instruction was that of Taylor & von Fintel (2016). They found that the use of the MT at the early grade led to significant increase in children's learning of English language when they entered the upper primary level.

A more recent study in MTBME is that of Piper, Zuilkowski & Ong'ele (2020) which took place in Kenya. It examined the effect of instruction in the MT on pupils' achievement in mathematics and reading. Children taught in their MT outperformed their colleagues taught in an L2. However, problems were encountered, including parents' resistance to the use of the MT and cases were teachers spoke a different language other than that of the children. Besides, environments with more heterogeneous languages were difficult to handle.

Short-term studies on the use of MT in the teaching learning process in Nigeria reported higher achievement for children taught through their MT than for those taught in an L2 (Awopetu 2016; Oribabor & Adesina 2013). Besides, using English to teach sometimes limits students' understanding and

contribute to poor quality teaching and learning at the JSS level (Dikwa & Dikwa 2016).

In spite of the numerous benefits of using the MT in education, it has often met with resistance in Nigeria, especially by parents (Ezeokoli & Ugwu 2019; Bilewumo 2008). Besides, there seems to be a lack of well-trained multilingual teachers in Nigeria. If teachers are not well-prepared for the programmed, MTBME is bound to meet with challenges, and eventually, resistance. As it stands, the early-exit model proposed in the NPE is hardly or poorly practiced in many Nigerian schools (Adeyemi & Ajibade 2014; Baba 2016). Some studies in Nigeria have also shown a preference for bilingual education in which English and the MT play complementarity roles (Ezeokoli 1999; Igboanus 2008).

The central role of teachers in making MTBME successful is not debatable. According to Ball (2010), successful implementation of MTBME will depend on a number of factors, including effective pedagogy, parents and community support, teacher training on bilingual education and availability of trained teachers of the target language/s. Since it is at the colleges of education that Nigerian teachers ought to be professionally prepared to deliver instruction in the MT, the extent to which the Nigerian government is making effort to make MTBME feasible will largely depend on how far the indigenous languages are open for study in the numerous COEs.

Research questions

1. To what extent are the indigenous languages taught at the Nigerian Colleges of Education?
2. How evenly distributed are the Nigerian indigenous languages at the Federal, States and Private-owned Colleges of Education?

Theoretical Framework

This study has its root on the social learning theory of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky (1978) emphasises the role of environment and language in the learning process. Learning is a social phenomenon while language is an aspect of culture. Thus, the environment in which a child grows greatly affects the learning process. This means that there has to be a connection between what goes on in the school and at home. If that is the case, then the language a child speaks at home, more than any other, should be ideal for the teaching-learning process.

This study is also supported by the linguistic interdependence and threshold level hypothesis of James Cummins. The linguistic interdependence sheds light on the possible connection between bilingual children's level of competence in the L1 and the L2. It suggests that their level of competence in the L1 prior to contact with the L2 had a strong influence on their ease of learning of the L2 (Cummins 1976). However, reaping the cognitive benefits of bilingualism would depend on the children's threshold level of competence in the L1. According to Cummins (1979: 19), a bilingual child must attain a certain level of competence in the L1 in order to avoid cognitive deficits and reap cognitive benefits of bilingualism. A lower level of attainment would prevent negative cognitive effect while a higher level would lead to enhanced cognitive growth.

As a follow up to Cummins' theory, many studies have shown that proficiency in the L1 could enhance the learning of L2 and that continued teaching of the L1 while learning the L2 helps to improve learners' proficiency in both languages (Popa 2016). The cognitive benefits of proficiency in the L1 extends to different aspects of language learning (Gottardo 2002; de la Fuente & Goldenber 2020; Canbay 2011). The implication of the above is that the Nigerian child needs a solid background in their L1 in order to cope with learning in English (that is, L2). In other words, the MT has to be thoroughly taught in school. Since the NPE supports an early-exit MTBME, teachers need to be adequately prepared for bilingual education as this will enhance their practice and enable children to reach the desired threshold level of linguistic competence before transitioning to English as the MOI.

Research Instrument and Method of Data Analysis

The main sources of data for this study were the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) eBrochure and eSyllabus (2020 editions). The syllabi contain all the approved Nigerian tertiary institutions, including the colleges of education (COEs), all the courses available for study in each institution, the location of the institution and their ownership status (that is, whether Federal, State or private-owned). The distribution of languages in Nigeria was taken from Eberhard, Gary & Charles (2020) which contains the names and current status of identified languages in Nigeria. Frequency count and simple percentage were used to analyse the data.

Presentation of Results

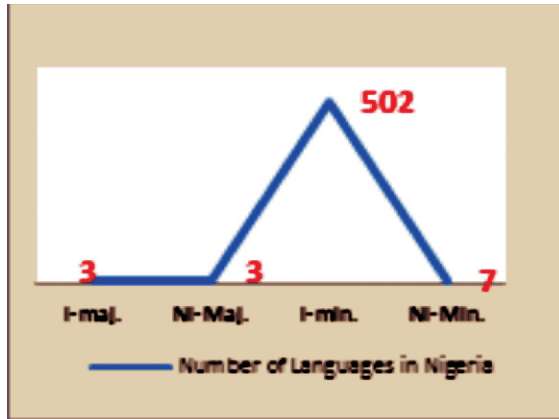


Fig. 1: Distribution of Languages in Nigeria (Indigenous and Non-indigenous)

Fig. 1 presents the distribution of the languages by indigenous/non-indigenous and minority/majority categories. There are 510 established living languages in Nigeria - 505 indigenous and 10 non-indigenous (Eberhard, Gary & Charles 2020). Out of the indigenous languages, three (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) are national/majority languages (I-Maj.) while 502 a minority (I-Min). Of the 10 non-indigenous, three (English, French and Arabic) are majority (NI-Maj.) while three are minority (NI-Min). The distribution shows that the minority

indigenous languages are by far, more than the rest put together. It is expected that if Nigeria is on the road to making MTBME a reality, a reasonable number of the I-Min would feature prominently in the COEs for adequate preparation of teachers for the bi/multilingual education.

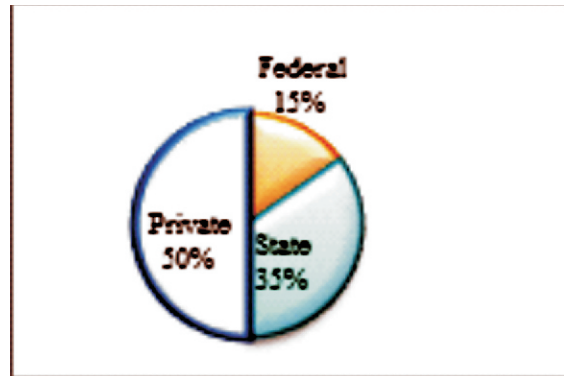


Fig. 2: Distribution of Nigerian COEs according to ownership Status

Fig.2 shows that 50% of all the COEs in Nigerian are private, 35% are State and 15% are Federal government-owned. Since most schools are owned by the private sector, their offering of indigenous languages would go a long way in offering would-be teachers opportunities to study them and in turn, be able to teach them at the primary schools.

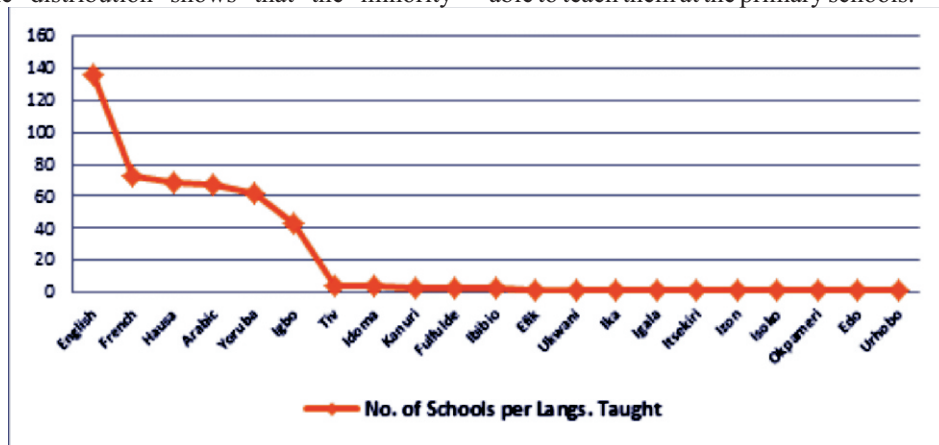


Fig. 3: Distribution of Languages by Number of COEs offering them

Fig. 3 presents the list of all the languages taught in all the Nigerian COEs and the number of COEs offering them. English takes the highest position, being taught in 136 out of the 149 COEs (that is, over 90% of them). This is followed by French, Hausa and Arabic

(over 45% each), Yoruba (42%) and Igbo (28%). Out of the 502 minority languages, only 15 are taught and in few COEs (between 0-6% and 2.6% respectively). No NI-Min. features in the COE.

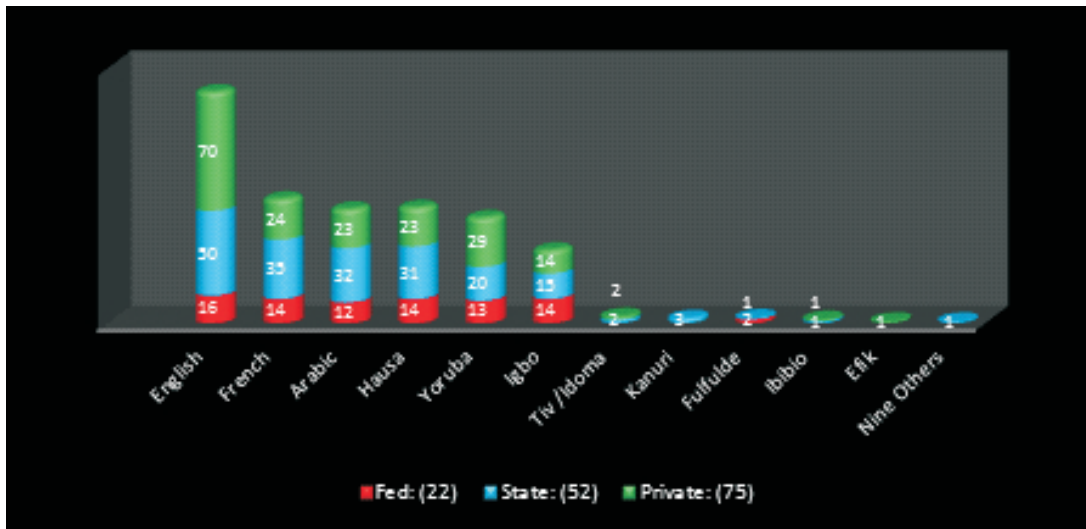


Fig. 4: Distribution of Languages taught by Ownership and Location of the COE

Fig.4 gives further insight into the distribution of the COEs where each language is taught, according to the ownership of the COE (i.e., Federal, State or Private). There are 22 Federal government-owned, 52 State-owned and 75 private-owned COEs. In each category English is leading, being taught in 15 Federal, 50 State and 70 Private COEs. It is followed by the two NI-Maj. (French and Arabic) - at the State COEs. At the Federal COEs, all the majority languages (indigenous and non-indigenous) are relatively represented. However, at the State and private schools, Yoruba and Igbo are not significantly present. Meanwhile, the situation of the I-Min is very poor: just 15 of them are taught, confined to only 18 out of the 149 COEs. None of them is taught in up to 4 COEs. In short, 9 are taught only in one State COE each. The distribution is as follows: Federal COEs (2); State (11) and Private (5). By number of languages taught in each category, the distribution is as follows: Federal COE: (one language only, i.e., Fulfulde); State COEs: (14 languages - Fulfulde, Tiv, Idoma, Ukwani, Ika, Ibibio, Igala, Okpameri, Edo, Kanuri, Itsekiri, Izon, Isoko and Urhobo) and Private COE: (4 languages - Ibibio, Efik, Tiv and Idoma). Moreover, 487 Nigerian languages are yet to be studied as courses in the COEs. This statistics shows a very poor promotion of the minority indigenous languages. The State COEs however, are making more effort than the Federal while the Private-owned schools are performing poorly.

In terms of the geographical distribution of the COEs where the languages can be studied, there is also poor representation. In short, the minority

languages are confined to the schools within their respective speech communities. For example, Tiv is taught only in the COEs within Benue State where it is predominantly spoken, Ukwani, Ika, Itsekiri, Izon, Isoko and Urhobo in two COEs within Delta State, Edo and Okpameri in a COE within Edo State. Similarly, Igala is taught only in Kogi State while Kanuri is taught in COEs in Yobe and Borno States where they are also spoken. This lack of wide distribution can be attributed to the lack of promotion of the language by the Federal and private-owned institutions. It however shows some States' efforts to promote their languages, though a lot more efforts are needed. For instance, of the 10 minority languages listed in Fig4, 9 are from the Niger Delta region (8 in Delta and 2 in Edo States respectively). Other States need to do more.

Discussion of Finding

1. Research Question 1: To what extent are the indigenous languages taught at the Nigerian Colleges of Education

The results show that the level of institutional promotion of the Nigerian indigenous languages is very poor. Although most of the Nigerian languages are on the minority category, they are poorly represented in the colleges of education. There is a stark difference between the presence of the majority non-indigenous and the indigenous languages. English, for example, can be studied in all but few COEs. Although the three national languages (Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba) are relatively available for study in many COEs, they are still far below the NI-

Maj. (English, French and Arabic). Besides, among the three indigenous majority, Igbo is not faring well; Hausa is taking the lead, followed by Yoruba.

It is however, worthy of note that while Hausa is receiving greater attention in the schools, this may be at the expense of other minority languages in the northern part of Nigeria. As shown in Figs. 3 and 4, Fulfude and Kanuri are the only languages in the northern part of Nigeria that are studied in the COEs. Limiting the teacher trainees in the north to only these two languages implies that if they are to implement MTBME, these two languages would become the ones they would use. This trend may endanger the minority languages or lead to their loss. Studies have shown that Hausa is presently threatening the survival of many languages in the north east, north central and north west (Sarvi, 2012; Adewale & Oshodi 2013; Wayar 2017; Haruna, 2017; Agantiem, 2017). In each case, the minority groups are shifting to Hausa and sometimes, to Hausa and English. While economic and religious reasons are among the identified factors for the shifts, political factors cannot be ruled out. Thus, there may be a hidden agenda to assimilate the minority tribes into Hausa and an unbalanced language policy is definitely one of the easy ways.

In a country that claims to be practising MTBME, it is surprising that only 18 out of the 505 Nigerian language and only 15 out of the 502 minority ones are available for study at the COE where primary schools teachers that ought to implement the language policy are trained. It is also worrisome that of the 149 COEs, only 18 of them are presently offering these languages. This stark reality contradicts the age-long promise of the Nigerian government to develop the orthography of more Nigerian languages, produce textbooks and instructional materials in them, train indigenous language teachers and thus, ensure that the MT is the MOI at the lower primary schools (FRN, 2004; 2008; 2014). The government is far from keeping these promises, as shown in the results.

2. *Research Question 2: How evenly distributed are the Nigerian indigenous languages at the Federal, States and Private-owned Colleges of Educations*

The result equally shows poor representation of the Nigerian languages at the different categories of the COEs. The non-indigenous majority languages still occupy the highest positions in each category. For the Nigerian languages especially the minority ones, the situation

is even worse at the privately-owned institutions as only 5 out of the 75 of the COEs make them available for study. Negative attitude of private schools in Nigeria towards the use and teaching of the indigenous languages has been a recurring phenomenon even at the primary and secondary school levels (Ezenwa-Ohaeto & Akujobi 2013; Igboanusi & Peters 2015). Private schools in Nigeria have been noted to bluntly disregard the language provisions in the NPE by promoting English-only MOI. In a situation where the government is lacking in its commitment to prepare teachers for the MTBME, it is surprising that they hardly sanction the private schools for promoting English-only MOI. Ugwu & Ogunremi (2019: 54) pointed out that due to the indifference of the Nigerian government towards the implementation of the language policy and the inherent weaknesses in the NPE, private school owners who are key players in education have hijacked the language policy for their own economic advantage. This situation at the COEs is worrisome, given that the prevalence and almost domination of the private institutions in the country. If this trend, that is, their neglect of the indigenous languages is not checked, perhaps a time would come when none of the languages would be available for study at the Nigerian colleges of education. This might spell doom for the Nigerian languages, the MTBME and the educational system as a whole. As seen in the state of literacy in the country, while the private schools are leading, it is not all that promising because many children in those schools are still lagging behind in literacy, comprehension and numeracy.

Meanwhile, student teachers who train for the teaching profession without any opportunity to take at least a coursework in any of the Nigerian languages could end up not appreciating the value of using the MT to teach. The most challenging issue is that these teachers are absorbed into the teaching profession (either in public or private primary schools) when they graduate. Without any or adequate background in bilingual education during their training years, how possibly can they implement or promote a MTBME which they have not been prepared for? The unavailability of the indigenous language in many COEs is an indication that teachers who are not literate in the language are expected to teach it or with it. How then can the standard of education increase? Whether proficiency in the MT is a consideration for employing primary teachers is an area that may need to be investigated. However, one can actually guess the answer. Teachers cannot manifest what they were not prepared for during their training programmes.

Implication and Conclusion

Studies in many multilingual African countries have shown that MTBME is not only practicable, in spite of the challenges around it. Nigeria is supposed to practice an early-exit model of MTBME but this is far from the reality. Meanwhile, available data on the state of literacy and numeracy in Nigerian points to a crisis of learning in the primary and secondary schools. Language is at the heart of education and as such, children must be familiar with the language of instruction if they are to learn. The more proficient learners are in the LOI, the more likely they would enjoy, participate and benefit from the teaching-learning process. The colleges of education (COEs) are saddled with the responsibility of training teachers for pre-primary, primary and junior secondary schools. Following the language policy on ground, these teachers are expected to implement the MTBME. For this to happen, their training programme ought to prepare them for bilingual education. Hence, as many Nigerian languages as possible ought to be taught in the COEs so that teacher trainees can either study them as courses or at least take some coursework in them during their training years.

Moreover, given the numerous number of COEs in the country, it is expected that they should be taught so that students can study them as disciplines or at least have the opportunity to take courses in them. Unfortunately, the situation, as shown by the result of this study is that only a handful of these languages are taught in the COEs. This means that students cannot study them. Without opportunities to study or take coursework in the said languages, these teachers are expected on the long run to implement MTBME when they join the teaching profession. Obvious lack of presence of many languages means that teachers will be expected to exhibit what they were not prepared for. Definitely, they would resent it or practice is poorly, leading to inefficiency in the teaching-learning process. Besides, the absence of many indigenous languages in the COEs shows that the Nigerian government is far from doing the needful to make MTBME implementable.

Realising a MTBME requires a long-term and consistent effort. Human and material resources need to be put in place and training of teachers has to be on top of the agenda. Without adequately-trained teachers, MTBME will remain a remote reality in Nigeria. Nigeria needs to learn from the experience of other African nations who have experimented it or are successfully carrying it out. Doing so will help to address the current learning crisis in Nigeria and

give a bright future to the teeming young population. The situation needs an urgent intervention.

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