Policy Declaration and Nigerian Indigenous Languages: A Case for Improved Incentives for English Language Teachers

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This paper argues that the lack of commitment to implementing the declarations and language provisions of the National Policy on Education not only has adverse effects on the development of these indigenous languages, but conversely, continues to confer prime status on the place of the English language in the Nigerian education system. Further, it establishes that there is a relationship between the non implementation of policy declaration on indigenous languages and the exposure of Nigerians to the English language which in turn continues to contribute to the global status of English as the language of power and intellectual discourse. By extension therefore, onerous responsibility is placed on the teacher of the English language to properly transmit knowledge to students to equip them to meet social and educational expectations. Hence, the problem of poor performance by students at examinations all of which are written in English can be directly related to the teachers’ competence which in turn can be seen as evidence of non availability of incentives. Consequently, the paper locates the centrality of teacher welfare to increased professional competence, task delivery and productivity. Quantitative data is provided as evidence of the relationship between teacher welfare, task performance and productivity. It is discovered that the absence of these incentives has negatives implications. It concludes by recommending the need for improved English teacher specific incentives to serve as motivation for professional competence and task delivery while enhancing quality student performance and language negotiation on the global platform.

Keywords: policy declaration, language provisions, incentives and language performance.

INTRODUCTION

The Language Provisions of the National Policy on Education (NPE).

The Nigerian National Policy on Education was first issued in 1977. Thereafter, five editions (1981,1998,2004,2007 and 2013) have been published. In all these editions, the languages that feature are Mother Tongue (MT)/ Language of the Immediate Community (LIC); (also referred to as Language of the Environment), Major Language (ML), English, French and Arabic. The primary concern of this paper is the indigenous language provisions and the implications of its non implementation for the English language. The paper particularly investigates the prospects of enhancing the English language teachers’ welfare as prerequisite for students’ improved performance given the status of the English language nationally and globally.

Bamgbose identified three characteristics of language planning in Africa leading to policy declaration without implementation. These are: declaration of a policy which
policy makers are aware cannot be implemented, built in escape clauses to justify non implementation, and, avoidance of specifying implementation procedures (2-3). Applying these deficiencies to the language provisions of the NPE, he observed that, though the language of instruction in pre-primary and primary education is supposed to be MT or LIC, several MTs have neither orthography nor reading materials. Consequently, most pre-primary schools which are in reality operated by private individuals and organizations, use English as the medium of instruction. Equally, NPE does not specify strategies for the development of orthographies, text books, literature and teaching resources in MT and LIC. From the onset of formal education, therefore, the Nigerian child is exposed to the English language for knowledge transmission, authority and intelligence assessment.

At the Junior Secondary School level, LIC is stipulated as a subject and a vocational elective at Senior Secondary School but with the caveat that “it shall be taught as L1 where it has orthography and literature. Where it does not have, it shall be taught with emphasis on oralcy as L2” (NPE 2004, Section 24). This curious caveat begs the question- if LIC would have been used as compulsory medium of instruction at the lower classes of pre-primary and primary education, would it not have developed orthography and literature enough for it to be taught as a subject at the higher level? Even more troubling is the ease with which NPE recommends that a language native to its speakers be taught as L2. Thus, NPE provides an escape for non implementation of the indigenous language provision and unwittingly encouraging recourse to the use of English language.

Finally, all editions of the NPE with the exception of the 2013 edition state that each child is to learn at least one of the major languages (ML) of Nigeria; being Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, in order to facilitate national unity. This cardinal principle is immediately vitiated by the clause “subject to the availability of teachers” in the1981 edition. To say that a subject will only be taught when teachers are available is to say that the subject will not be taught at all, given the shortage of indigenous language teachers and the time frame required to train new teachers, as Bamgbose had noted (7).

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is not to question the pedagogical relevance of the language provisions of the NPE but to use it as springboard to highlight the status its declaration without implementation invariably accords the English language given the daily competition between English and Nigeria’s famed but largely undocumented 400 indigenous languages’. It would appear; therefore, that in this struggle, NPE as referee, has encouraged not only the emergence but the continuing dominance of the status of English language as Nigeria’s global linguistic code.

THE STATUS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY AND EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Since the advent of English language as a colonial linguistic legacy, its status in Nigeria has continued to rise. In Nigeria, English language is the power language; being the official language of the nation. It is the medium of official communication, of political activities and academic discourse. The pervasive dominance of the English language in the education system is such that most scientific, cultural and technical knowledge can only be obtained through the English language (Bamgbose). Still within the education domain, English language enjoys the position of being not only a language of instruction of other subjects, but also an independent subject itself at secondary schools as well as an academic discipline in tertiary institutions. Further, it is recognized by the NPE (2013,
Section 38.1) as a Compulsory Cross Cutting Subject for Post Basic Education and Career Development (PBECED) while the recommended minimum qualification for advancement into any field of study, as stipulated by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB Online) is at least a credit pass in English. The importance of English is further accentuated in Time – Table planning in most secondary schools where the subject is usually scheduled for first and second periods each day as was observed by this writer during volunteer teaching of the subject (3rd term 2014/2015 and 1st term 2015/2016 sessions) at the Junior Secondary School, Wuse Zone 2, FCT - Abuja.

Finally, English language in Nigeria is the language of general administration, legal and legislative discourse. It continues to maintain its dominance which does not show any sign of waning; rather, the era of globalization gives it added impetus as the language for international negotiations. As Adegbija observed, the language has transformed into a strong identity symbol in international politics, economy as well as becoming the language of national cohesion given Nigeria’s linguistic pluralism thus acquiring the added impetus of an international language of superiority.

To reiterate: The failure to implement the policy declarations with respect to the language provisions of the NPE has contributed immensely to early exposure of the Nigerian child to the English language as the language for educational intelligence performance evaluation. As Bamgbose noted, this is what parents send their children to schools and pay handsomely for doing so, expect. It has also been noted that teachers yield readily to the use of English as a medium of instruction as early as the pre – primary level. Given the social status and expected role of the English language within the educational system, it would be logical to conclude that teachers of this subject especially at the secondary school level, are carriers of national aspirations for imparting competent performance on the global platform to their students and in fulfillment of the desires of parents and society at large. In other words, the English language teacher holds the key to successful transmission and achievement of the social expectations and curriculum implementation of the many roles of the English language.

**STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Given that the status of the English language in Nigeria towers over the social regards for indigenous especially in a multilingual country, there exists a tendency to take students performance and adroitness to manipulate the language for granted. This is without analyzing teacher welfare and delivery nexus especially the absence of certain incentives that would motivate and enhance professional competence and task delivery. These indeed are problems because teachers are central knowledge transmission and in turn, directly responsible for students performance. Is there, therefore, a relationship between the English language, teachers welfare and productivity? What type of incentives should be encouraged to enhance teacher welfare in order to engender corresponding student improved performance in the English language as a subject and social negotiation tool?

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to reiterate the central role of the teachers in the implementation of the curriculum as derived from the national Policy on Education. It aims at forcing the need to take the welfare of the teacher into active national engagement mode to ensure that the teachers end product meets with national expectation and global competition. To this end, this study attempts to answer the following questions
Are teachers of English language equipped to deliver on the curriculum expectations?

What incentives can be introduced to motivate teachers to greater performance?

Is there any direct relationship between performance and incentives?

METHODOLOGY

The method of approach to this paper is qualitative. The research design is backed by a corpus of academic, referred opinions relevant to the topic under discussion. Further, the study is to be an application of the concept of incentive to the area of English language teacher productivity and task delivery.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE

A. The Central Role of the Teacher in the Implementation of the Curriculum

Curriculum achievement is the nexus of the wheel of the realization of the purposes of education as spelt out in the policy document of a nation. In order to reach the goals of education as stipulated, the curriculum is the needful spectrum of the total experiences that teachers and students are exposed to in the course of knowledge transmission and acquisition; evidenced by passes, high grades, certificates or other forms of academic awards (Wheeler 11). Seeing that a curriculum is the sum total of educational experiences available to a learner in a school setting, someone must be responsible for activating the various courses served on the menu as well as precipitating the learning process for the learner. This implies that no curriculum, no matter how well written, planned or scheduled, delivers itself. Rather, a curriculum needs developers to breathe life into it. These developers must be equipped with relevant skills, knowledge and attitudes in tune with the needs and expectations of the society that is the enabler of the policy that guides the curriculum as well as being the beneficiary of the end products of the education system who, in turn, are expected to be wholesome citizens actively contributing to society's development. Herein lies the teacher’s centrality to the realization of the goals of the NPE through curriculum achievement.

Ajayi asserts that while education unlocks the door to modernization, the teacher holds the key to that door. He stated that teachers have a role to play in the development of a nation especially in bringing up leaders and intellectuals of tomorrow who will sustain the nation. Therefore, given the burden of responsibility the English language transacts in Nigeria, it would seem, as observed by Banjo (16) that teachers of the subject are right in the eye of the storm when students’ performances deteriorate as has been observed and commented upon in opinion pages of newspapers, by Chief Examiners reports of externally moderated examinations. Several reasons adduced for student’s poor performance range from ineffective home stimulation to lack of relevant technical support in form of books, library, language laboratory, defects in the education system.

However, it is the teacher factor which covers shortage of competent and qualified teachers, the nonchalant attitude of qualified teachers as well as a preponderance of unmotivated teachers that this paper addresses. Some of the issues it will seek answers to include: why English language teachers are unmotivated and how they can be motivated to strive towards higher productivity evidenced by improved student performance in order to achieve national expectations. To seek to proffer answers, the paper will anchor teachers’ improved productivity on factors that motivate and drive high performance in any bureaucratic organization of which the school is an example.
B. The Concept of Incentives and Motivation.

Incentives are external measures designed and established to influence motivation and behavior of individuals, groups or organizations. The UNDP recognized an incentive as an act or promise or stimulus for greater performance. It is an additional re-numeration or benefit to an employee in addition to salary or wages, in recognition of achievement or excellent work. Hence, incentives are secondary benefits given for the purpose of motivating zeal for better performance and improved productivity.

Incentive measures as secondary benefits include intangible rewards like praise, promotion, on-the-job training and recognition for outstanding on-the-job performance often result in improved productivity (Fajana). Consequently, an organization’s or employer’s inability to articulate, design and implement a reward and award system leads to absenteeism, high staff turn-over, negative job attitudes as well as general de-motivation, according to Maduabum (2006). Therefore, incentive systems are an imperative part of organizational motivation and are revealed by the need for many people not only to join the organization but be retained in the organization’s workforce to ensure that set tasks are performed, institutional aims and objectives achieved. A good incentive system necessarily encourages employees to be productive, creative and innovative. To this effect, incentives are crucial factors in creating conducive work environment, assuring organizational success and guaranteeing the organization’s continuing social relevance.

Ozigi identified two categories of incentives used to motivate employees. These are the monetary and non-monetary incentives. Monetary incentives on the one hand, use money in the form of salary or pay, to satisfy employees’ needs by providing rewards in the form of cash. Non-monetary incentives on the other hand, are non-financial rewards and include a broad spectrum of variants ranging from promotion, job security, employee insurance scheme, to medical packages, disability clauses, as well as pleasure and recreation program. He concluded that the absence of these or the delay in implementing any of them, lowers staff morale, resulting in frustration, resignation and premature disengagement from the organization.

Vroom (1964) in his expectancy model asserts that the strength of reward impact on workers’ motivation and effort is the function of three factors. Firstly is the Expectancy factor which is the workers’ perception of the strength of the link between effort and performance. Paraphrased, Expectancy asks- “If I work hard and put myself out, will that translate into enhanced task performance?” The second is the Instrumentality factor which is the worker’s perception of the link between performance and reward. In other words, “if my performance is strong, will I receive commensurate reward?” Finally, the Valence factor which is the value a worker places on an expected reward, ponders: “Will the reward I receive be the things I really care about?”

C. Improved Incentives in the School System with Specific Emphasis on the English Language – Some Recommendations

As Ozigi has highlighted above, the absence of an incentive program has a very negative impact on workers’ motivation and leads to low achievement of organizational mission and vision. Relating this to the situation in the Nigerian secondary school system, there are very many reasons that account for the general de-motivation and low performance associated with the teaching profession. Primary among these is the outright non-payment of salaries as at when due to teachers, often leading to the closure of
schools especially those owned by government. Abah (8) has noted that teachers in Benue State were owed their basic salaries for about two years, leading to the complete closure of schools while students roamed the streets. Clearly, the non-availability of such incentive as salary would most certainly de-motivate teachers and could account for poor interest in task delivery and curriculum implementation. Willingness to teach and strive at contributing to realization of national educational expectations of the role of English language in manipulating negotiations on the global stage would depend on how school proprietors (Government and Private), integrate the interests and needs of teachers in order to signpost leadership, commitment and value performance resulting in students’ quality output.

Other de-motivational acts that teachers are subjected to include disparity in starting salaries in comparison to equivalents in Public Service, denial of perks and privileges enjoyed by service wide officers such as nomination for Long Service Award as well as poor and sometimes unhealthy work environment; according to Bojuwole (85). On the need for improved work environment incentives, Urebvu opined that the provision of well appointed teachers’ offices, teaching aids, well equipped library, students’ desks, seats and chalk board would create proper learning environment as without these, teachers would well be compared to doctors going into the theater for surgery without appropriate equipment. Lending support to this, Mezieobi (164 - 176) argued that uncongenial work climate, poorly equipped laboratories and workshops, overcrowded and poorly ventilated classroom buildings, inadequate instructional materials and resources are factors that lead to teachers’ absenteeism, lackluster performance and constant labour attrition and strikes.

While the improved incentives suggested above stand to benefit the entire teaching profession and education system, our focus remains the English Language teacher specific incentives that could serve as motivational mechanism while assuring NPE implementation as well as satisfying societal expectations. Of primary importance is manpower development; manpower in the school system being the teachers who transact the curriculum. The issue of manpower development would address the questions of qualification and competence of the English language teacher, numerical distribution in schools as well as exposure to current trends in methodology, content variation and applicable dynamics associated with language change. Obimbu (55 - 103) has documented the fact of paucity of qualified and competent English language teachers; a situation that has led to make shift arrangements where teachers who are primarily specialists in disparate disciplines such as Government, Marketing or Ibibio are deployed to teach English at Junior Secondary School level, according to Udosen (12 - 18). These caliber of teachers most certainly cannot implement the integrative English studies curriculum stipulated for schools in Nigeria. The problem of insufficient manpower development and deployment, therefore, clearly hinders effective English language curriculum achievement. It is also a key factor of de-motivation particularly when the standard and rating of a school is often students’ performance dependent.

Training and re-training of the English language teacher on short and long term basis is another imperative strategy and needed incentive to ginger teachers’ performance by equipping them with current and updated skills to not only function in the classroom, but more importantly, to communicate with their students and thus, effectively transmit knowledge. The focus of such re-training would necessarily be on the ever evolving dynamics of the language itself; especially given the ever present challenge posed by
social media variants of the English language.

Teachers enter the teaching profession to help young people learn; their most gratifying reward is accomplishing this goal. Fraser and Larry identified two factors that affect teachers’ ability to deliver their tasks effectively. These are the work context factor or the teaching environment and the work content factor which is the teaching itself. Whereas context factors include general working conditions and cover such baseline needs as class size, instructional and psychological incentives such as money and status, they are significant in value not only in clearing the debris to effective teaching (content factor), but in activating motivation for teachers and teaching if they are in good supply. For the English language teacher, the existence of appropriately equipped language laboratory is a prerequisite for language learning for both the teacher and the students in any nation such as Nigeria where English is a second language. Therefore, the availability of an adequately equipped language laboratory as a work context incentive emphasizes the place of proper pronunciation and the enunciation of English words as being of equal value in language learning as grammar and structure. Sadly, this is grossly ignored in classroom teaching; a factor that could be attributed to the dearth of language laboratories in Secondary schools. In the entire Federal Capital Territory (FCT), only the Education Resource Center boasts of a language laboratory which is presently not available to schools but to the general public for a fee. It is also instructive that the Center uses the language laboratory for the teaching of Chinese and French languages to interested paying members of the public.

To reiterate: the ultimate performance of English language teaching in Nigeria is as much as in writing grammatically correct forms as it is in speaking the language fluently. This is the reality that students are confronted with all their lives no matter the career path they choose. Teachers of English language must therefore be motivated to re-orientate students’ perception beyond the “passing English exams and gaining admission to study Medicine” fantasy. Rather, they are duty bound to expose students to the fact that their use of the English language is for a lifetime and would determine their social and professional successes to a certain extent. Consequently, a society that has this expectation must necessarily equip its schools for excellent performance and guided exhibition of positive reception of knowledge. This in turn would shore up teachers’ job delivery appraisal.

Finally, any suggestion of incentives that focus only on non monetary resources without taking recourse to additional financial rewards would be inconsistent with realities. At the risk of starting a new war of attrition, it needs be said that English language teachers deserve a special subject allowance as monetary incentive. Such an allowance is meant to serve as motivation for classroom teachers of the subject. It must be noted, however, that the suggested allowance is distinct from the 10% Teachers Allowance paid to all holders of degrees and diplomas in Education who are duly registered with the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria. Jegede (72) asserted that the backbone of Nigeria’s education is the English language and that students’ inability to comprehend the language would automatically affect the whole education system. It logically follows that those who shoulder the huge responsibility of ensuring the successful interplay of the centrality of students’ manipulation of the language and their future contribution to national development must be recognized, empowered and adequately motivated for this task.
CONCLUSION

This paper has established that the dominant status of the English language in the Nigerian society and the educational system is as much a colonial legacy as it is the result of policy declarations without implementation with respect to indigenous languages. The social expectations of the language in turn place enormous task delivery and assignment performance responsibilities on teachers of the English language. The paper argues that there is need for specialized work context incentives as well as English language teacher customized allowances to further motivate teachers to live up to their professional discharge of duty while contributing to national development. Thus, the paper established that the status enjoyed by the English language and the responsibilities it is called upon to transact in the body polity as grounds enough to consider incentives to motivate the subject teachers. Such incentives are proposed to inspire productivity, job delivery and high students performance not only in passing their examinations, but in their lifetime interface and engagement with the language.

Works Cited


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