

Title of Paper: **ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION: CHALLENGES TO NIGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

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Abstract: This study explores the challenges of using English as a medium of instruction in both public and private primary schools in Gusau local government area of Zamfara state, Nigeria. Nigeria is a multi-lingual nation with over 400 local or indigenous languages, and English has been adopted as the second language as well as the language of instruction in the country's education system. This study was carried out in order to ascertain the pattern of using English as medium of instruction, and the challenges as well as the effects of using it as medium of instruction. Three research questions guided the study. The methodology involved descriptive survey design. The area of the study consists of 206 primary schools, 152 public (government owned) and 54 private. Purposive and proportionate stratified random sampling was used to select 220 teachers from 13 public and 8 private primary schools that were sampled for the study. Results indicate non-effective implementation of English as medium of instruction in the primary schools which is contrary to the provision in the National Education Policy of Nigerian Federal Government. The teachers and pupils also have various challenges associated with using English as medium of instruction, especially due to local languages or mother tongue influences. However, some of these challenges can be overcome by implementing the recommendations that arise from the findings of this study.

Keywords: English as second language, English as medium of instruction, EMI, indigenous languages, mother tongue, Hausa

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Introduction

English is an international medium of communication that is being used as the second language (L2) in Nigeria. The status of English as L2 in Nigeria dates back to the colonial period during British rule. After independence in 1960, Nigeria like other colonized countries was left to adopt English as its official language. The adoption of English was necessary because Nigeria is a country that consists of different ethnic groups. Each of the ethnic groups wants its local language to be given national recognition. Hence, Nigeria was not able to choose a lingua franca or adopt one indigenous language as a national language. The number of languages spoken in the country is not certain; Greenberg puts it as 248, Tiffen estimates over 150, while Bamgbose asserts that the indigenous languages in Nigeria are about 400 (Uche, 1999). What is certain, however, is that there are three major Nigerian languages – Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba – which are given national recognition.

The multi-lingual nature of Nigeria has resulted in a policy that adopted English language as the medium of instruction (MOI) for the education system in the whole country. At the primary education level (primary classes 1-6), the National Policy on Education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2014:11) states that the school curriculum shall include four languages: language of the immediate environment, English, French, and Arabic. This policy also states that the MOI in the primary school shall be the language of the environment for the first three years (primary 1-3 classes). During this period English shall be taught as a subject. The policy further states that, from the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as an MOI, and the language of the immediate environment shall be taught as a subject. However, Ndukwe (2015) posits that this policy lacks effective implementation mechanisms. This is due to non-availability of quality teaching staff, lack of materials in the appropriate language, inadequate supervision for proper implementation and coordination for facilitating the use of the MOI.

English as medium of instruction (EMI) was defined by Dearden (2014, p. 4) as “the use of English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English.” In Nigeria English is used as the enabling communication tool in the teaching and learning process. As such without effective use of EMI, the basic skills and knowledge of subject contents will not be imparted in a meaningful way (Namuchwa, 2007). In any teaching and learning situation the language of instruction plays a very vital role in facilitating learning of subject contents. So it is necessary for the teachers and learners to use the language of instruction appropriately for enhancing effective teaching and learning. In other words, when there is conflict regarding the MOI that is used at early learning stage, the situation may have negative effect on the subsequent educational level of the learners.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria as a multi-lingual nation adopted English language as the L2. Hence, the federal government of Nigeria provided a policy for using EMI. However the educational policy stated that one of the three major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba) or the language of immediate environment should be used as the MOI at lower primary school level (classes 1-3),

while EMI is to be used at upper primary school level (classes 4-6). However, observations by researchers of this study during teaching practice supervision have shown that the language of instruction in some primary schools in Zamfara state lacks proper coordination and guided implementation. Although the language policy for instruction at primary school level is clearly stated in Nigeria's National Policy on Education, there has been no attempt made to explore the challenges of using EMI at the primary education level in Zamfara state. Hence, it is worthwhile to explore the current challenges of using EMI at the primary school level in Gusau local government area of Zamfara, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to explore the challenges associated with using EMI in primary schools in Gusau local Government area of Zamfara state, Nigeria.

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the pattern of using English as a medium of instruction?
2. What are the teacher challenges of using English as a medium of instruction?
3. How does using English as a medium of instruction affect pupils' learning process in the classroom?

Literature Review

In 1982 an attempt was made to address the conflict in the use of language of instruction in Nigeria. Thus, the Ife (a town in Southern Nigeria) Six Years Primary Project (SYPP) was conducted to find out the most effective language of instruction between the English language and an indigenous language (Yoruba, which is one of the three major national languages). In this language project it was discovered that pupils taught in their mother tongue did better than those pupils taught through the medium of English. Similarly another research study (Namuchwa, 2007), conducted in Mpigi district of Uganda, found that both teachers and parents had preference for using indigenous language to serve as the MOI at upper primary school level. Makoshy (2001, p. 228) is of the same view, and stated thus, "We are well aware of, or at least made to believe the fact that children learn faster and better in their mother tongue than in another language." This suggests how optimistic people are about using indigenous languages as the MOI at early stages in children's education. Dada (2013) also adopted a descriptive survey design and used structured questionnaire to collect data regarding the use of MOI from 300 individuals across Nigeria. The findings of this researcher support the use of indigenous languages to reduce the over dependence on English language. This is further supported by studies conducted by different researchers such as Dadzie and Awonusi (2009), Lawal (2014), and Ibrahim (2010).

Despite the above conflicting views, other scholars are of the view that English can never be discarded as an MOI in Nigeria. The British Council sponsored a survey which involved 55 countries across the globe and reported that 51% of the respondents are of the opinion that English as Medium of Instruction was thought to be controversial, while 38% express their opinion in favour of using EMI, and 11% did not give an answer (Dearden, 2014). In the case of Nigeria the

survey concluded that “EMI is highly supported by the parents” (Dearden, 2014, p. 21). Parental support for the use of EMI came from Southern Nigeria where private schools have been using EMI before now. This is because a primary school class may have six or more different tribes in the Southern Nigeria. Matemilola (2001) also argues that when Hausa, for example, is used as the MOI in Northern Nigeria, only a fraction of the class will have advantage over others. Matemilola further noted confusion that in the northern part of Nigeria, the MOI in public schools is Hausa from primary classes 1-6, while EMI is used in the private schools. Another study was carried out by Egwuogu (2011) to investigate teachers’ perception of the use of EMI. The study adopted a descriptive survey involving 200 teachers of various subjects in primary schools. The findings reveal that English cannot be discarded now as a language of instruction in Nigerian primary schools. This is because of the inability of the indigenous languages to explain concepts and ideas especially with new innovations of the 21st century.

From the literature cited above, it can be understood that there is conflict between using EMI and using indigenous languages as MOIs in multi-lingual nations like Nigerian. Ogbuehi (2001) argues that the conflicts between English and indigenous languages as MOIs in Nigeria arise due to the nature of the English language itself. This author pointed that the learners of English as a second language encounter problems when English is used as the MOI, especially at early stages of schooling. Some of these problems include:

lack of correlation between spelling and pronunciation, the inconsistent rules in the formation of plurals, the phonological transfer (consonant vowel combination) from indigenous language to the pronunciation of English words, the vowel system of English is more complex than that of indigenous languages. Other major features of English that affect using it as medium of instruction in Nigeria have also been highlighted as follows: direct translations from mother tongue by both teachers and learners, infusion of dialectical words into English structure, adaptations to cultural understanding, semantic adjustment of English words, and phonological interference. (Ogbuehi, 2001, p. 27)

In summary, English is recognized as a second language as well as the official language in Nigeria. It also has great influence as the MOI in Nigeria’s education system. However, EMI has also resulted in consequences which have impacted the teaching and learning process in Nigerian public and private primary schools, due to ineffective implementation of the language of instruction. The focus of this paper, therefore, is on the challenges associated with EMI in both public and private primary schools in Gusau local government area, Zamfara, Nigeria, where Hausa is the dominant indigenous language.

Methodology

Design of the Study

The design for this study was descriptive survey. According to Nworgu (2015), descriptive survey is a type of design that is concerned with systematic description of events as they are, because it is aimed at collecting data and describing the characteristics, features or facts about the population

of a given study.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Gusau Local Government area of Zamfara State in North-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. This area consists of 206 primary schools that include 152 public schools (government owned) and 54 private primary schools. The area was chosen because of the need to provide information to educational administrators and policy makers, researchers, teachers, school proprietors and other stakeholders for enhancing the use of EMI as well as implementing the Nigerian language policy within and beyond Zamfara state.

Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques

The population of the study consisted of 1,107 teaching staff in both public and private primary schools in Gusau Local Government area of Zamfara state in North-West Nigeria. The data on the population was obtained from Annual School Census (Zamfara State Government, 2013). Multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for the study. First, the researchers purposively selected Zamfara state as the area of the study, and that was because it is one of the areas with poor performance of students in English language at secondary education level which could be associated with the way English is used as the MOI right from primary school level. At the second stage of the sampling, the researchers purposively selected Gusau local government area to enable them sample schools they could easily reach. Consequently, proportionate stratified random sampling was used to select 220 teachers from 13 public and 8 private primary schools.

Instrumentation, Data Collection and Analysis

The data was obtained using an observation checklist. According to Onyango (2002), an observation checklist is a prepared list of items that provides systematic means of summarising or quantifying the data collected. Therefore, the researchers employed participant observation technique in carrying out the observation. The observation checklist consists of four clusters, namely: a) demographic information; b) pattern of using EMI; c) teacher challenges of using EMI, and d) EMI and pupils' learning process. The instrument was subjected to face validation by three senior colleagues. The Cronbach alpha method was used to determine the validity of the instrument. The researchers went round the sampled schools and carried out the observation between the months of April and June, 2016. The researchers observed the lessons in progress in a friendly atmosphere. The descriptive analysis was used to analyse and summarize the data obtained.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study are presented in accordance with research questions that guided the study. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the sample with regards to their demographic information.

Table 1
Demographic Information

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
School type		
Public	13	61.9
Private	8	38.1
Total	21	100
Sex		
Male	129	58.6
Female	91	41.4
Total	220	100
Classroom Observed		
Primary 1-3	121	55.0
Primary 4-6	99	45.0
Total	220	100

The data used to answer the first research question is presented in Table 2. These results show that out of 220 teachers observed, only 118 (53.6%) used Hausa as the indigenous language for instruction in primary 1-3 classes. However, 51 (23.2%) of the teachers used EMI, and 44 teachers (20%) used code mixing/switching, which is contrary to the National Language Policy of the Federal Government of Nigeria. For primary 4-6 classes, the observation also shows that the majority of the teachers (85 or 38.7%) used Hausa as the MOI, while 61 (27.7%) of them used EMI, and 74 (33.6%) used code mixing/switching, which is also a deviation from the Nigerian language of instruction policy for primary 4-6 classes. It is also evident from the data that the pattern of the MOI used cut across the various subjects taught in the schools involved in this study. These findings, therefore, corroborated the views of Ndukwe (2015) who posits that the policy guidelines for MOIs in Nigerian primary schools lack effective implementation including the use of EMI. The results from Table 2 have also corroborated the views of Matemilola (2001) who has noted that the MOI for primary 1-6 in the northern part of Nigeria is mostly Hausa, particularly in the public schools.

Table 2

Uses of Mediums of Instruction (MOI)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
MOI in use for primary 1-3		
Hausa	118	53.6
Yoruba	7	3.2
Igbo	-	-
English	51	23.2
Code mixing/switching	44	20.0
MOI in use for primary 4-6		
Hausa	85	38.7
Yoruba	-	-
Igbo	-	-
English	61	27.7
Code mixing/switching	74	33.6
Subject taught by the teacher		
English	59	26.8
Mathematics	41	18.7
Basic science	28	12.7
Computer	11	5.0
Social studies	48	21.8
Other	33	15.0

Table 3 shows different statements that address research question 2, exploring teacher challenges of using EMI. These results reveal that the majority of the teachers (55.9 %) have challenges using EMI with regards to pronunciation, while 54.1% have challenges with English vocabulary, and 50.5% have phonological challenges, which are all associated with mother tongue as shown in the table. Other notable areas where the teachers have challenges include use of vocabulary and adaptation to cultural understanding as against the English language standard. The results in Table 3 indicate that teachers' ability to communicate in English while teaching is in question. The findings from Table 3 confirm Ogbuehi's (2001) assertion that due to its nature, English language is in conflict with indigenous languages in Nigeria. Hence, these conflicts constitute problems in using it as an MOI, particularly at primary school level in Nigeria.

Table 3
Poor Proficiency Levels of English Language Teachers

Variables	Able	Unable
Pronunciation	97 (44.1%)	123 (55.9%)
Spelling while writing on the chalkboard	220 (100%)	-
Phonological interference of mother tongue	109 (49.5%)	111 (50.5%)
Grammar	187 (85.0%)	33 (15.0%)
Correct use of English vocabulary	173 (78.6%)	47 (21.4%)
Imposition of lexico-syntactic structure (direct translation from mother tongue)	192 (87.2%)	28 (12.8%)
Adaptation to cultural understanding contrary to English language	127 (57.7%)	93 (42.3%)
Vagueness resulting from poor vocabulary of mother tongue.	101 (45.9%)	119 (54.1%)

Table 4 presents results on pupils' encounters with EMI in the learning process in the classroom (research question 3). The data shows that out of the 220 lessons observed, only in 173 (78.6%) of the classes did the pupils have active participation in the learning process. This implied that the participation of some pupils in the learning process was limited due to challenges of EMI. The results also show that in the classes observed, there was use of Hausa indigenous language, use of English language and use of code mixing/switching in the range of 42.3%, 25.9% and 27.2%, respectively. Hence, the pupils' proficiency in English language during the lesson observation was found to be just 46.8% adequate in 103 classes. In other words, in 117 (53.2%) classes observed, the pupils' proficiency in English language was found to be inadequate. The findings from Table 4 corroborated that of Namuchwa (2007), who established through interview and observation techniques that using EMI in upper primary schools in rural Uganda has created a teacher-dominated classroom environment. This is because, at this early stage in education, the pupils cannot express their ideas in a foreign language due to lack of linguistic foundations and solid cultural base for using EMI.

Table 4
English as a Medium of Instruction and Pupils' Learning Process

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Pupils' participation in the lesson		
Active	173	78.6
Inactive	47	21.4
Language use by pupils in the learning process		
Hausa	93	42.3
Yoruba	7	3.2

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Igbo	3	1.4
English	57	25.9
Code Mixing/Code Switching	60	27.2
Pupils' proficiency in English language during lesson evaluation		
Adequate	103	46.8
Inadequate	117	53.2

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study attempted to explore the challenges of using EMI in primary schools in Gusau Local Government area of Zamfara state, Nigeria. Three research questions were used for the study. The study had established some major challenges associated with the use of EMI within an area dominated by Hausa indigenous language. These challenges are:

1. In both categories of classes (primary 1-3 and primary 4-6), there is no effective and appropriate use of language of instruction as stated in Nigeria's national policy on education. This confusion arises due to the fact that Nigeria is a multi-lingual nation with over 400 local or indigenous languages, which makes the choice of language of instruction a very complex task, including the English that was adopted as the second and official language.
2. The majority of teachers lack the ability to use EMI due to influence of local or indigenous languages and the complex nature of some features of English language.
3. Pupils use different languages such as Hausa and English as well as code mixing and code switching during lessons in their classrooms. This situation makes some of the pupils inactive during lessons and consequently has negative effects on their proficiency in English. Thus, their understanding of the subject content taught will be limited.

The recommendations arising from the findings of this study are that the language of instruction, including local or indigenous languages and the English language, should be implemented in accordance with the provision in the National Education Policy in Nigeria. The effective implementation of EMI in this regard is the responsibility of both the Nigerian government and other international communities so that standards can be established and maintained. Any programme for the effective implementation of EMI should give adequate attention to training and retraining of teachers, policy makers and primary school administrators / proprietors. Another recommendation is that both teachers and pupils should be exposed to appropriate and adequate instructional materials for using EMI, particularly in primary 4-6 classes. Teachers should be properly trained on how to cope with English being the MOI as well as being proficient in the language. Finally, it is hoped that this study will be useful in stimulating further discussion and research on how to effectively implement EMI in multi-lingual nations like Nigeria.

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