

## **NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION: AN EXAMINATION OF POLICY PROVISIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

**Ezinne Nkeiru Nwamara (PhD)**

[enwmara2@gmail.com](mailto:enwmara2@gmail.com)

+234 8020521682

Dept of English and Communication Art

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State

And

**Nwakacha, Chikadibia Innocent**

[innodeoptimist@yahoo.com](mailto:innodeoptimist@yahoo.com)

08061547695

Dept of English

University of Port Harcourt

Rivers State

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the National Policy on Education: an examination of policy provisions and implications. The study adopted the Systems Theory and Implementation Theory. These frameworks provide a conceptual lens for analyzing the formulation, implementation, and implications of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in Nigeria. The study also highlights the role of institutional weaknesses and lack of effective monitoring in impeding the policy's success. Empirical evidence suggests that despite high awareness of the NPE among stakeholders, compliance remains limited due to systemic constraints. Findings reveal that while the NPE is comprehensive, addressing universal basic education, language of instruction, teacher education, and technological integration, significant gaps exist between policy intentions and actual practice. Factors such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructural facilities, fragmented governance structures, and insufficient teacher training contribute to these implementation challenges. Furthermore, the policy's language provisions, which emphasize mother tongue instruction in early education, face resistance due to sociolinguistic dynamics and the dominance of English as a medium of instruction. These findings underscore the need for strengthened institutional capacity, improved resource allocation, and enhanced stakeholder engagement to bridge the gap between policy and practice. Recommendations include increasing education funding, institutionalizing regular policy reviews, expanding teacher professional development, and fostering community involvement in education governance. By addressing these critical areas, Nigeria can better realize the goals of the NPE, thereby advancing equitable access to quality education and contributing to national development.

**Keywords:** National Policy on Education, language policy, language education, implementation

## Introduction

Education is universally acknowledged as a vital instrument for national development, social transformation, and individual empowerment. In recognition of this, the Federal Government of Nigeria formulated the National Policy on Education (NPE) to serve as a comprehensive blueprint for the country's educational system. First published in 1977 and revised multiple times (with the most recent revision in 2013), the NPE outlines the objectives, structure, and content of education at all levels — from early childhood to tertiary education. The policy emphasizes several key provisions, including universal access to education, quality assurance, teacher education, the use of technology in learning, the promotion of indigenous languages, gender equality, and lifelong learning. It also aligns Nigeria's education system with national development goals and global education standards such as Education for All (EFA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Despite its ambitious goals and detailed structure, the NPE has faced persistent challenges in implementation. These include inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, lack of political will, weak monitoring systems, and wide disparities in educational access and quality between rural and urban areas (Eka, 2000). As a result, there is a growing need to critically assess the content of the policy, its implementation mechanisms, and the broader implications for Nigeria's educational and national development (Duze, 2011). Key provisions such as free and compulsory basic education, the integration of vocational and technical training, the promotion of indigenous languages, and teacher training reforms have often remained on paper with limited realization in practice.

Factors contributing to this implementation gap according to Eka, (2000) and Ofoegbu, (2017), include:

- Inadequate and inconsistent funding of the education sector.
- Poor infrastructure, especially in rural and underserved areas.
- Shortages of trained and qualified teachers.
- Weak administrative capacity and lack of accountability mechanisms.
- Political instability and frequent policy shifts without continuity.

Another challenge posed by Nigeria's linguistic diversity is the issue of national unity. Speakers of the same indigenous language often form close bonds, especially outside economic and material contexts, while perceiving others as outsiders within the same country. Furthermore, linguistic groups sometimes develop a sense of superiority over others (Duze, 2011). This perception persists despite the understanding that all natural languages are equal in linguistic value. While Nigeria's vast size contributes to its diversity, the complex language situation can impede cross-cultural integration and unity. Additionally, the limited development of indigenous languages remains a concern. Despite initiatives by the National Institute for Nigerian Languages and the National Educational Research and Development Council, challenges such as inadequate funding and the slow development of orthographies continue to hinder progress (Duze, 2011). These challenges have undermined the policy's ability to achieve its core objectives, such as improving access to quality education, reducing inequality, fostering national unity, and contributing to human capital development (Okoroma, 2006). As such, there is a pressing need to re-examine the policy provisions of the NPE,

assess their implementation status, and evaluate their implications for the present and future of Nigeria's education system.

However, Nigeria's multilingual environment also has advantages, fostering competition in education, social interactions, and economic activities. The need to address these linguistic challenges played a key role in the development of the National Policy on Education (NPE)

### **Evolution of Nigeria's National Language Policy**

The search for a national language policy was part of broader efforts to develop a national education framework. In 1969, a National Curriculum Conference was held, leading to the publication of *A Philosophy of Nigerian Education (1970–1974)* (Eka, 2000). The conference, attended by voluntary agencies and external organisations, deliberated on a national education policy suitable for an independent Nigeria. The outcome was a draft document that, after incorporating recommendations, became the National Policy on Education, first published in 1977 and later revised in 1981, 1998, 2004, and 2013 to align with societal and global changes (FRN, 2004).

Each edition of the NPE has introduced modifications to Nigeria's language policy:

**1977 Edition:** Advocated for mother-tongue instruction at the primary level while using English for secondary and tertiary education.

**1981 Edition:** Introduced the "language of the environment" policy, promoting the use of local languages in schools and encouraging the development of indigenous literature.

**1998 Edition:** Stressed the role of language in national unity and development, promoting the use of Nigerian languages in primary education.

**2004 Edition:** Allowed schools to select English, Nigerian languages, or a combination of both as mediums of instruction while emphasizing cultural and national identity.

**2013 Edition:** Reinforced the significance of mother-tongue instruction in early childhood education and supported multilingual education to reflect Nigeria's linguistic diversity.

These revisions reflect the evolving approach to language policy in Nigeria, aiming to balance the use of English, indigenous languages, and other foreign languages for national cohesion, cultural preservation, and effective communication. While the 1977 and 1981 editions broadly addressed national language concerns, the 1998 edition focused more on the challenges faced by smaller ethnic groups and minority languages. This ongoing discussion underscores the longstanding interest of government bodies, linguists, and policymakers in addressing language-related issues (Duze, 2011; Eka, 2000).

Following the formulation of the NPE, the government established a National Education Policy Implementation Committee to develop practical guidelines for executing the policy. The committee was tasked with overseeing its implementation and establishing a monitoring system to track progress (FRN, cited in Tsumba, 2004). Given these measures, one would expect seamless implementation of the mother-tongue component of the NPE. However, the search for effective solutions continues.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on two complementary theories: Systems Theory and Implementation Theory. These frameworks provide a conceptual lens for analyzing the formulation, implementation, and implications of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in Nigeria.

Systems Theory, originally proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the 1950s, views an organization or process as a set of interrelated and interdependent components working together to achieve a common goal (Bertalanffy, 1968). When applied to education, the theory posits that the educational system functions as a whole, made up of subsystems such as curriculum development, teacher education, policy, administration, infrastructure, and funding. A change or malfunction in one subsystem can affect the performance of the entire system.

The relevance of Systems Theory to this study lies in its holistic approach to understanding the dynamics within Nigeria's education sector. The National Policy on Education represents a systemic initiative aimed at guiding and harmonizing these subsystems to achieve national development. However, the persistent implementation gaps suggest a breakdown in the interaction among these components. For example, policy provisions may be sound, but their translation into action may be hindered by weak institutional capacities, inadequate funding, or lack of political will. Systems Theory thus enables a comprehensive examination of how different elements within the Nigerian educational system support or obstruct policy implementation.

In addition, Implementation Theory, particularly as articulated by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), offers another critical perspective. According to this theory, the success of a policy depends not only on its content but also on the clarity of its objectives, the adequacy of resources, the capacity of implementing agencies, and the broader socio-political environment. Pressman and Wildavsky emphasize that policies often fail because of the "complex web of interactions" among multiple actors and institutions responsible for carrying them out. Implementation Theory is particularly pertinent to this study because it addresses the common disjuncture between policy formulation and execution — a core issue identified in the Nigerian context. Despite repeated revisions of the NPE and its alignment with international frameworks such as the Education for All (EFA) initiative and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the intended outcomes have often been undermined by poor implementation practices. These include insufficient monitoring, inadequate teacher training, poor resource allocation, and limited stakeholder engagement.

By combining Systems Theory and Implementation Theory, this study is able to investigate not only the internal structure and coherence of the National Policy on Education but also the external factors that influence its practical outcomes. These theoretical perspectives collectively guide the analysis of how the policy is developed, executed, and experienced within Nigeria's complex educational landscape.

## **Language Policy and Education Framework**

The 1977 National Policy on Education (NPE) mandated the use of indigenous languages as the medium of instruction for the initial two years of primary education to promote foundational literacy. To support this, the National Language Centre in Lagos merged with the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Center to develop written systems for numerous Nigerian languages and create instructional materials (Eka, 2000). English was designated as the language of instruction beginning in the third year of primary school. However, in practice, the transition from indigenous

languages to English often occurred gradually, extending beyond primary education into secondary schooling (Eka, 2000). Despite the policy framework, full implementation has remained inconsistent due to systemic challenges.

### **Language Provisions in the National Policy on Education**

Nigeria's education structure transitioned from a 6-3-3-4 system to a 9-3-4 framework (Adiele & Agi, 2011). The earlier model consisted of six years of primary education, three years each at junior and senior secondary levels, and four years of tertiary education. The revised system integrated primary education with junior secondary schooling into a continuous nine-year basic education phase, followed by three years of senior secondary education and four years at the university level. Although pre-primary education is not explicitly included in this structure, it functions as an introductory stage before primary schooling.

The National Policy on Education specifies that the language of instruction during the first three years of primary education should be the language of the immediate environment. According to the policy (FRN, 2014):

- At the pre-primary level, instruction should primarily utilize the mother tongue or the dominant local language (Section 2.14c: i, ii).
- For the first three years of primary education (Basic 1–3), instruction should be conducted in the local language, with English introduced as a subject. From Basic 4–6, English gradually replaces the local language as the primary medium, while the indigenous language continues to be taught as a subject (Section 3.17e, f).
- At the Junior Secondary level (Basic 7–9), English serves as the primary medium of instruction, while a Nigerian language is included in the curriculum. The language taught may be the local language (if written materials and literature are available) or one of the three major Nigerian languages—Hausa, Igbo, or Yoruba—with an emphasis on oral proficiency (Section 4.21: ii).
- In Senior Secondary education, English remains the primary language of instruction, while one of the three major Nigerian languages must be studied (Section 4.23b).

The policy also promotes the retention of the mother tongue beyond early education by recommending the production of textbooks in indigenous languages and the training of specialized educators. However, the level of implementation has remained inconsistent (Kimiebi, 2010). Nigeria's language policy aims to both promote indigenous languages and acknowledge the country's linguistic diversity (Okebukola, 2024). Section 1, Sub-section 8 states that for national integration, students should learn one of the three major Nigerian languages in addition to their mother tongue. Similarly, Section 2, Subsection 11, Paragraph 3 emphasizes that pre-primary education should be conducted in the mother tongue or the dominant local language, while Section 3, Subsection 15, Paragraph 4 requires the use of local languages in early primary education before transitioning to English (FRN, 2013).

At the secondary level, Section 4, Subsection 19, Paragraph 4(b) mandates that students must study a local language in addition to one of the three major Nigerian languages, provided that qualified educators are available (FRN, 2013). In the context of adult and non-formal education, Section 7, Subsection 52, Paragraph 6 directs the National Commission to integrate Nigerian languages, arts, and culture into adult education programs.

To facilitate the effective execution of this policy, key requirements according to Olojede, Olufemi, & Adediran, (2016) include:

- I. Conducting linguistic studies on the phonological and syntactic structures of Nigerian languages.
- II. Establishing functional written systems based on linguistic research.
- III. Producing instructional materials such as primers, readers, and supplementary resources.
- IV. Preparing lesson plans and instructional guides for educators.
- V. Compiling dictionaries and grammar reference materials.
- VI. Developing literary content in indigenous languages.

### **Challenges in Implementation**

Despite the comprehensive nature of the NPE, its implementation has faced significant hurdles. Studies have identified poor funding, inadequate infrastructure, lack of political continuity, and insufficient teacher training as key obstacles (Ijaiya, 2014; Olojede, Olufemi, & Adediran, 2016). In many regions, especially in rural Nigeria, schools lack basic teaching and learning materials, and teacher-pupil ratios are far below UNESCO's recommended standard.

Moreover, the decentralization of education governance in Nigeria has led to fragmented execution of policy provisions. The lack of synergy between federal, state, and local governments often results in inconsistent implementation and duplication of efforts (Okoroma, 2006). These issues are exacerbated by corruption and weak monitoring mechanisms, which hinder accountability and transparency in the education sector.

According to Ofoegbu (2017), a major issue is the designation of "three major languages" (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba), implying a hierarchy among Nigeria's languages. Linguistically, languages are classified based on the number of speakers, distinguishing between large-group languages (e.g., Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba) and smaller-group languages (e.g., Ibibio, Tiv, Ijaw, Edo) (Kimiebi, 2010). The policy's wording also lacks firmness, as seen in phrases like "each child should be encouraged to learn," which weakens the policy's enforceability.

At the pre-primary and primary levels, the phrase "language of the immediate community" is vague, leaving room for varied interpretations. Additionally, the transition from indigenous languages to English in primary education is unclear, as the policy ambiguously states that English should be introduced "at a later stage" without specifying when.

At the secondary and adult education levels, the policy states that language learning is "subject to the availability of teachers." This conditionality means that if a school has only one available teacher for Hausa, Igbo, or Yoruba, students may be forced to learn whichever language is taught, regardless of preference. Such uncertainties make the policy ineffective for both educators and students.



## **Implications for Language Users**

The inconsistencies between policy provisions and actual educational practices highlight a lack of commitment from stakeholders, particularly the government (Ozuru & Okoh, 2007). School administrators, responsible for policy execution, often fail to enforce mother-tongue instruction, while parents frequently resist the use of indigenous languages in education (Eka, 2000). As a result, this vital policy component, despite its potential to unify Nigeria's diverse population, remains largely unimplemented.

Using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in early education has significant benefits, including enhancing students' confidence, increasing engagement in learning, and improving second-language acquisition (Adesina, 2005). To preserve these advantages, the policy should be reviewed and fully implemented.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the provisions of the National Policy on Education (NPE) and their implications for Nigeria's educational development. The policy is comprehensive, covering critical areas such as universal basic education, language of instruction, teacher education, and the integration of technology. However, the findings reveal significant gaps between policy formulation and implementation. Challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, inconsistent political support, and weak monitoring mechanisms have impeded the full realization of the policy's goals. Additionally, the mismatch between the policy's language provisions and classroom realities reflects broader socio-cultural and institutional barriers. This research contributes to the body of knowledge on educational policy implementation in developing countries and offers practical insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders invested in the transformation of Nigeria's education.

In conclusion, while the NPE provides a strong framework for educational reform and national development, its success ultimately depends on effective implementation strategies that address systemic weaknesses and promote stakeholder collaboration.

## **Recommendations**

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Increased Funding and Resource Allocation:** The government should prioritize education in the national budget, ensuring adequate and timely funding for infrastructure, teaching materials, and capacity building.
2. **Strengthening Institutional Capacity:** Ministries of Education at all levels need enhanced institutional frameworks for policy monitoring, evaluation, and enforcement to ensure consistent implementation.
3. **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Continuous professional development programs should be expanded to align teacher competencies with policy expectations, especially regarding language use and ICT integration.

4. Community and Stakeholder Engagement: Policy implementation should involve local communities, parents, and educators to foster ownership and contextual adaptation of policy provisions.
5. Policy Review and Adaptation: Regular reviews of the NPE should be institutionalized to incorporate feedback from implementation experiences and respond to emerging educational challenges.

By addressing these areas, Nigeria can enhance the effectiveness of the National Policy on Education and promote equitable, quality education for all.

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