

# **A Survey of Teachers' Experience in Implementing Yoruba Medium of Instruction in the Lower Primary Schools of Ikire Nigeria**

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The paper investigated the local implementation of the National Policy of Education (NPE) on the use of mother tongues or the languages of the immediate community. Using a case study approach of Yoruba medium of instruction in Ikire in the south-western part of Nigeria, data were collected from 50 teachers from both private and public schools. These respondents were selected on being able to satisfy the following conditions: first, they should be able to communicate in Yoruba; second, they should have adequate teaching experience; third, they should have good academic qualifications; and fourth, they should have been teaching, for more than a year, Elementary Science (the particular classroom subject the study examined being taught to the pupils). These conditions ensured the teachers engaged had cognate experience in teaching a science subject that can reveal the level of terminology development within Yoruba as an adequate medium of mother tongue instruction. The result affirmed the advantages of Yoruba medium of instruction over English; however, Yoruba was not exclusively used for the pupils contrary to the expectation in the mother tongue medium of instruction policy. Most of the teachers used in the study preferred to employ a bilingual mode of instruction combining Yoruba with English, claiming that English had better educational resources for the subject they were teaching. This paper, though, based on a local case study, can be used to estimate the expected limitation to be encountered while implementing mother tongue instruction in a similar linguistic domain.

**Keywords:** education policy, mother tongue instruction, teacher awareness, Yoruba, language in education

While the initial experimental implementation of the Nigerian mother tongue instruction policy in a university in South-West Nigeria recorded some success (Fafunwa, 1989), it is expected that comprehensive demographic information on the policy should have been made available for subsequent appraisal. However, such information is not readily available because the assessment of the implementation of the policy has not been quantified nation-wide. This paper seeks to provide a field-based feedback on which appraisal of a local implementation may be based. Due to limitation in resources, this research employed a local community-focused survey method using basic statistical tools to elucidate data to generate a working hypothesis on which a larger research can be based. This study is therefore a pilot study for researches

employing a wider scope.

National language policies on education are not uncommon in many African countries including Nigeria especially when such policies have to specify the language of instruction in schools and colleges (UNESCO, 1953; Bamgbose, 1991; Fafunwa et al., 1989; Fasold, 1997; Awoniyi, 1980; Alo, 1995).

In Nigerian, the (1989) revision of her 1977 National Policy on Education, (henceforth, NPE) stipulates that pre-primary and lower school instruction should be done mainly in the mother tongue (henceforth, MT) or the language of the immediate community (LIC). The policy requires that the chosen language should be taught as a subject and should be used the medium of instruction through which other subjects shall be taught at the lower primary level of education. The

policy was officially put to test in Ife Project<sup>1</sup> of 1970 with an impressive result (Fafunwa, Macualety and Sokoya, 1989).

However, there has not been any strict compliance with this national policy due to different reasons. On the part of the Government, non-implementation is usually thought to affect the minority languages. Some of the mother tongues are minority languages having less than fifty thousand speakers each. The children having a particular mother tongue may not even be in the same vicinity. They can then become inaccessible to the project. Then the training of teachers that will teach the children can also be difficult to come by. Many of these minority languages have not even been reduced to writing. In order to discuss issues adequately in various fields, it is necessary to have broad literature, textbooks, teaching materials and well-developed terminologies in the mother tongues already codified. The present paper will take a different position on the matter by establishing the fact that non-implementation of the NPE affects both the majority and minority languages as evident in the case of Yoruba discussed in this paper.

### The Linguistic situation of Ikire

Ikire is situated at 7.35° North latitude, 4.18° East longitude and 228 metres elevation above the sea level. Ikire, the headquarters town of Irewole Local Government Area in Osun State, has 222,160 inhabitants (Maps-streetview.com, 2011). Yoruba is the language of the immediate community. Although there is a small Hausa community in the Sabo area of the town where Hausa is used strictly among the Hausa-speaking settlers, it is important to note that adults in the Hausa community usually code-mixed between Hausa and Yoruba or sometimes use English pidgin when interacting with their Yoruba neighbors in the town. Currently in Ikire, Yoruba remains dominant, and it is used more than any other language. Although English is the Nigerian official language, it is usually restricted to formal gatherings such as schools and offices. The children generally use Yoruba at home just as expected in any society where English is not the mother tongues of the pupils (García, 2008, p. 189).

Although Ikire hosts one of the campuses of the Osun State University, the town is still by far less prone to the complex linguistic structure that characterizes a typical Nigerian urban city like Lagos. The rural lifestyle and the simple sociolinguistic structure made Ikire town an ideal location to carry out the research currently reported in this paper.

<sup>1</sup> The mother tongue project of 1970 was carried out by the Institute of Education, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in Ile-Ife Osun-state. The outcome proved that the use of mother tongue instruction makes the child to sustain self-confidence and other psycholinguistic benefits needed for learning and development.

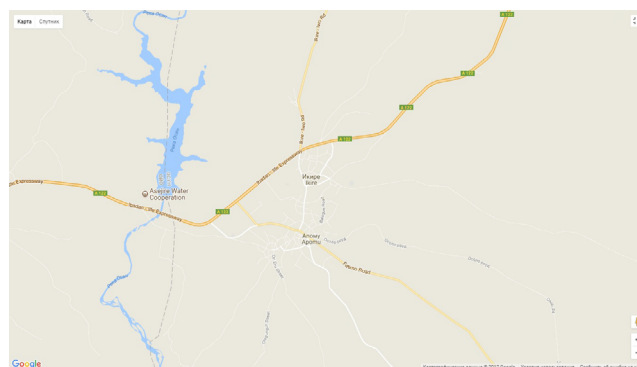


Figure 1. Ikire Map.

Note. Retrieved from <http://www.maps-streetview.com/Nigeria/Ikire/roadmap.php>. © Maps-StreetView.com, 2011.

## Materials and Methods

Using questionnaires, the paper employed a case study approach (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The following questions were asked at the beginning of the research. Are the teachers aware of the national policy on education? Which language is used for instruction at the lower primary school level? How easy is it to teach and relate non-language subjects like the various science subjects in Yoruba? Are there specialist teachers in Nigeria language(s) in these schools? Are the teachers aware of any mechanisms set up by the government to monitor the implementation of early mother tongue instruction at the primary school level? What are the challenges facing the teachers in the course of implementing this language policy on education?

The convergence of the questions above put the teachers at the centre of inquiry. They were not the planners, but they were the link between the planners and the pupils. The success of the policy depends on the level of awareness they have on it along with a corresponding out in the implementation. Considering political interests on the part of the government and the naïve status of the children, the researcher focused on the teachers.

A survey of the schools population was done. Although the researcher could not get accurate number of pupils enrolled in all the schools within the study population, an estimated ratio of 2 to 3 was made for private and public schools because there were more pupils and teachers in the public schools than the private ones. Data collection took two stages. First, a pilot study was undertaken to test 10% of the anticipated 50 teachers used as the sampled population for the main study.

The researcher adopted the stratified sampling technique to select the appropriate population for

the case study (see this in Fig. 2). Five strata were identified. Stratum 1 denotes the entire languages in the nation which can be used as media of instruction. Since not all the languages<sup>2</sup> could be treated within the narrow scope of the research, Yoruba was sampled as a viable candidate<sup>3</sup>. Stratum 2 represents the setting of location where the policy will be implemented. From this stratum, Ikire was sampled because it is one of the Yoruba towns, where Yoruba still functions as the language of immediate community with minimal a multilingual problem. Stratum 3, which ordinarily would have comprised all the primary schools in Nigeria, was also delimited to the schools in Ikire alone. In this stratum, five schools were sampled which consist of three public schools and two private schools. This distribution is necessary because public schools have more pupils than private schools. Stratum 4 is expected to display all the subjects that should be taught with the chosen medium of instruction. However, Elementary Science was sampled being the best candidate that can easily be assessed across the chosen schools. Stratum 5 comprises the entire population, due to the perspective of the paper, only the teacher sub-set was sampled.

Fifty teachers were selected from five schools distributed based on the population of the pupils they were teaching (as shown in Fig. 3). Across the five primary schools, 6 teachers were contacted from each

of the two selected private schools, and 12 teachers were selected in each of the first two public schools; while 14 teachers were contacted in the third public school, because of its has larger classes with more teachers than the other selected public schools. This gives an estimated sample of 50 subjects. The five schools used in the survey portray a representational 3 to 2 public and private school population ratio (3:2)..

Data were collected using questionnaires. The content of the questionnaire was divided into three sections; first, questions eliciting demographic information such as; age, sex, marital status, work experience and educational background; second, questions that focus on the main goal of the research (close-ended questions); third, questions that expressed the subject's opinion (open-ended questions).

The pilot study conducted actually brought about the validity of the instrument. Out of the 50 questionnaires administered to the contacted teachers, forty (40) were returned. The retrieved questionnaires still displayed a fair representation of the estimated population for analysis. The completed questionnaires were collected and analysed. Data were presented according to research questions using Basic Statistics functions executing the mean, frequency and percentage of the distribution in the value accorded the teachers' views.

| sn | Strata      | Sampled unit(s) of a stratum | condition for sampling  |
|----|-------------|------------------------------|---|
| 1  | medium      | Yoruba                       | a language of immediate community, already codified, having literatures |
| 2  | location    | Ikire                        | linguistic situation  |
| 3  | schools     | 3 public + 2 private schools | population ratio between representative                                 |
| 4  | subjects    | Elementary Science           | easily assessed representative  |
| 5  | respondents | teachers                     | qualified and experienced candidates                                    |

Figure 2. Sampling method.

| Schools   | no. of questionnaires |
|---|-----------------------|
| Holy Cross Catholic Primary School [school 1](public school)    | 12                    |
| Baptist Day School [school 3] (public school)                   | 12                    |
| Answarudeen Primary School, Atila (public school)               | 14                    |
| Amazing Grace Private Academy, Onibembe, Ìkirè (private school) | 6                     |
| Labimson Nursery and Primary School Ìkirè (private school)      | 6                     |
| Total   | 50                    |

Figure 3. Distribution of the teachers' population across the five schools.

<sup>2</sup> This is not to say other major Nigerian languages (i.e. Hausa and Igbo) cannot qualify too.

<sup>3</sup> The choice of Yoruba can be justified with the various linguistic merits it has over other languages yet to be codified, standardized and enriched

with literatures and texts. But we consider Hausa, Igbo and other developed Nigerian languages as possible candidates, it is important to make it clear here that the choice was based on the fact that this research took place in Yoruba community; hence, Yoruba became the most viable candidate to be used in the study.

## Results

This section shows the result of the study. The first part shows the analysis of the competence of the teachers used in the survey. The second part shows the analysis of positive remarks on the use of Yoruba medium of instruction. The third part shows areas where majority of the respondents gave negative responses towards the NPE. It should be noted however, that there is no clear-cut polarity between the two positions. The teachers were favorably disposed to the policy at a point; they also showed disapproval of the same policy at another point.

### Analysis of the teachers' competence

About 65 percent of the teachers studied are relatively experienced having spent no less than ten years in the profession. Their age spanned from 21 to 50 years as shown in Fig. 4. Their gender distribution is 72.5% female to 27.5% male. This is just the natural expectation of gender ratio of teachers in Nigeria as documented by World Bank Statistics in Trading Economics (2010).

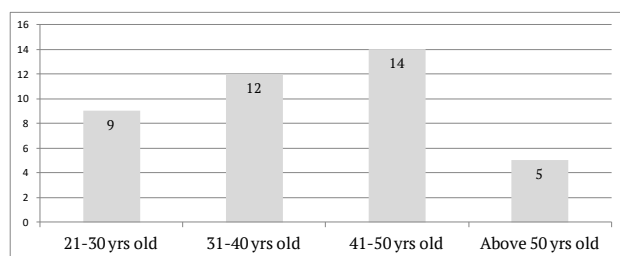


Figure 4. Age distribution of the sampled teachers.

In Fig. 4, only 12.5% of the respondents are above the age of 50. The remaining 87.5%, (35) could be categorized as youth and active minded teachers who can still be highly energetic in discharging their duty.

The respondents also displayed the best expected qualifications. Fig. 5 shows that 97.5% of them have qualification certificates higher than the expected minimum Nigerian Grade II Certificate of Education. Grade II certificate used to be awarded in Teacher Training Colleges before Colleges of Education were established in Nigeria. The National Certificate of Education (NCE) certificates are awarded in Colleges of Education. The Ordinary National Diploma (OND) certificates are awarded to graduates of the first two years programs in the Polytechnics. The Higher National Diploma (HND) certificates, on the other

hand, are awarded to graduates in the Polytechnics who have completed additional two years of higher study subsequent to obtaining the award of initial OND certificate. Nigerian First degree certificates are usually awarded as Bachelor degrees from the universities or other degree-awarding institutions approved by the Nigerian University Commission (NUC).

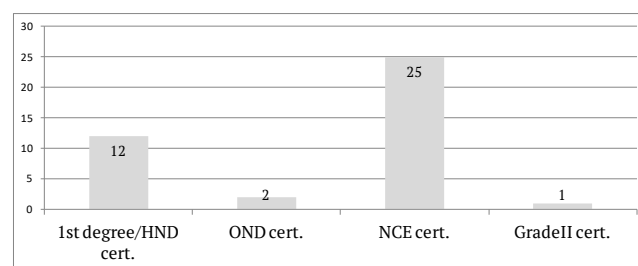


Figure 5. Qualifications of the teachers.

Fig. 5 also shows that most of the respondents were NCE holder with 62.5%; this implies that most of the respondents were trained as teachers and should be well-informed on educational policies.

As shown in Fig. 6, we can see that 52.5%, half of the respondents, had been teaching for more than ten years, 12.5% of which have been in the profession between 7-10 years. This indicates that the respondents are experienced teachers who should be knowledgeable in the subject matter of the research.

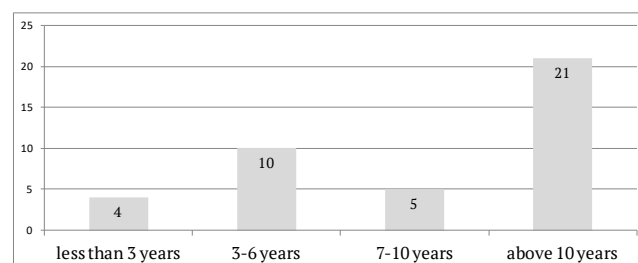


Figure 6. Teachers' years of experience in teaching profession.

### Analysis of the positive remarks of the teachers on the medium of instruction policy

Almost all the respondents were aware of the national policy on education, at least 95% did. This is represented in Fig. 7. Majority of the respondents 92.5% (37) were able to identify the objectives of NPE. This result agreed with the ideal level of teachers' awareness (Ellis, 2012).

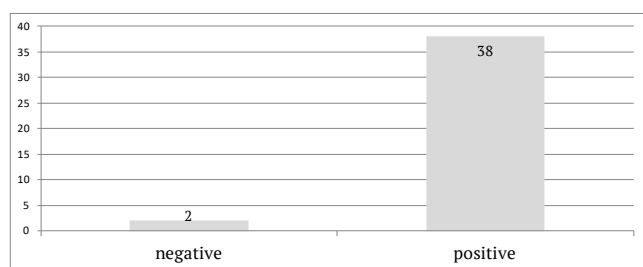


Figure 7. Teachers' awareness on the National Policy of Education (NPE).

Fig. 8 shows that 90% of the teachers 90%, were aware of the national policy on education and were fully detailed with the provisions of the policy on the language of instruction.

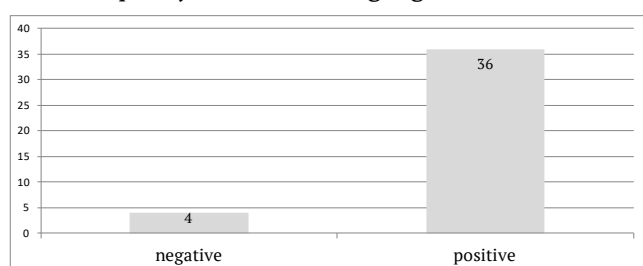


Figure 8. Teachers' awareness of the NPE's condition on the use of the language of immediate environment as the medium of instruction in primary 1-3.

Projecting from their experience, 77.5% of the respondents claim that pupil performs better when instructed in (Yoruba) the language of the immediate environment as shown in Fig 9. It was also observed by 80% (32) of the respondents that pupils understand and perform better when the medium of instruction is in their mother tongue as displayed in Fig. 10.

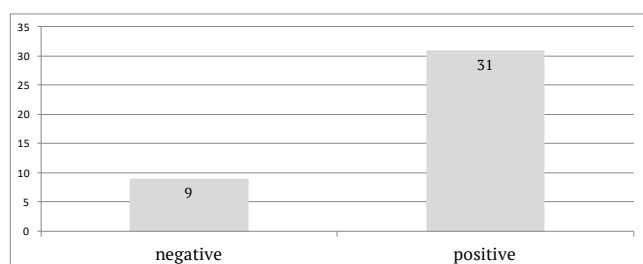


Figure 9. Opinion on Yoruba as a medium of instruction giving the pupils better performance.

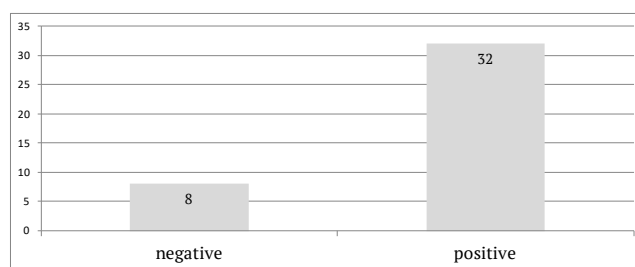


Figure 10. Teachers expecting better performance from pupils taught in Yoruba.

### Analysis of the negative remarks of the teachers on the medium of instruction policy

There are aspects of the policy where the teachers' responses are not favorably disposed to the policy. While the previous section of the paper reveals that majority of them appreciated the policy, they expressed apparent difficulties in practicing it. More than half of the respondents claimed that they code-switch using English and Yoruba as media of instruction in their classrooms. The teachers deliberately use both languages rather than keeping to Yoruba as required in the NPE policy.

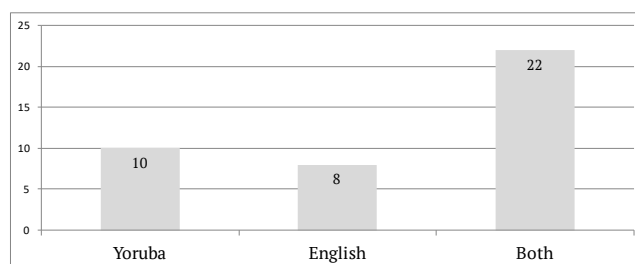


Figure 11. The preferred language of instruction by the teachers in the classroom.

Similarly, Fig. 12 shows that the language situation of most of the classrooms requires the use of both languages by the pupils. A replica of the result in Fig. 7 is also given here in Fig. 8 where 55% of the respondents disclosed that the pupils communicate with one another in English and Yoruba. This is followed by 25% who showed that the pupils communicate in their mother tongue (Yoruba only), while 20% said their pupils communicate solely in English. This is probably due to the teachers' choice of language of instruction. The teachers' adopted language of instruction automatically determines the pupils language of interaction in the classroom.

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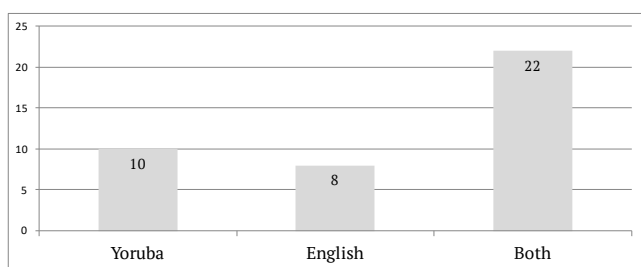


Figure 12. Language used by the pupils in the classroom.

Determining how easy is it to teach pupils elementary science in Yoruba, majority of the respondents 87.5% (35) confessed that the use of Yoruba as a medium of instruction is not easy for them as shown in Tables 13 and 14 below respectively. The teachers linked this to the fact that the available texts in the subject were produced in English (Ogunbiyi, 2013).

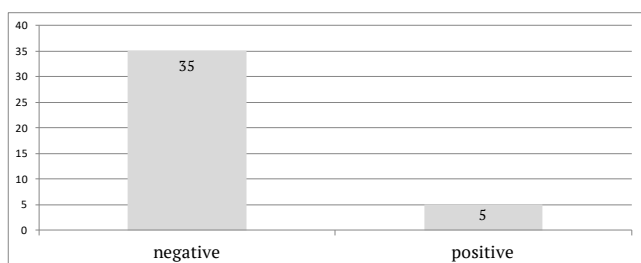


Figure 13. Teachers' awareness of Yoruba metalanguage dealing with the needed scientific terms.

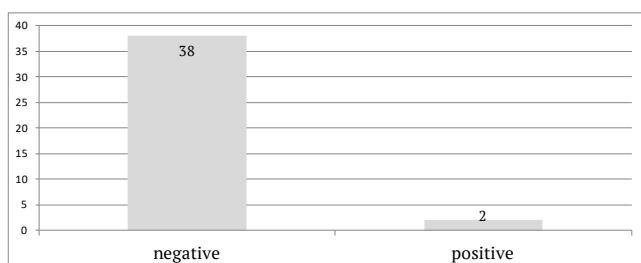


Figure 14. Teachers' remarks on availability of instructional material in Yoruba medium of instruction.

In Fig. 13, it is glaring that using Yoruba to teach science subject is not easy, and almost all the respondents 95% (38) said that science materials and textbooks they used were produced in English only, contrary to the statement of the N.P.E, that study materials will be produced in the language of the immediate community in order to facilitate (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981).

On the teachers' awareness of any governmental effort to monitor the implementation of the language of instruction policy at the primary school level, it was discovered that more than half of the respondents 60%

(24) claimed ignorance of such.

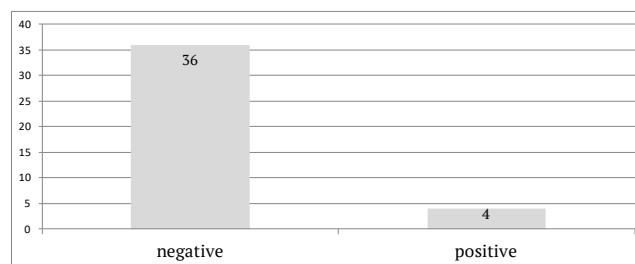


Figure 15. Teachers' remarks on the ease of using Yoruba as a language of instruction.

However, they acknowledge the routine inspections of educational supervisors from both local educational development office and state government ministry of education to assess the general duties rather than to ensure the implementation of the mother tongue (Fig. 16).

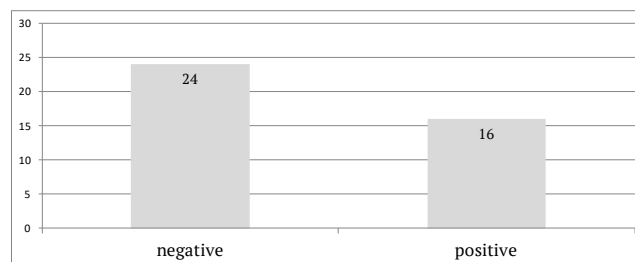


Figure 16. Teachers' awareness on the implementation of the mother tongue policy in Nigeria.

## Discussion

The findings show a number of things to be discussed in this section. First, the demographic and academic background of the teachers did not reveal any serious inadequacy that can hinder the positive implementation of the policy. Second, it was discovered that teacher used Yoruba along with English. This implies that the teachers are disposed to the use in class.

While there is on-going terminology development in Yoruba, the teachers did not seem to be aware of such at least in its practical use in implementing the early Mother Tongue instruction. Even when this may not be the only reason for the weak implementation of Mother Tongue instruction policy, this is an indication of the limitation that language development places on education policy. The study also revealed the teachers access to pedagogical texts written in Yoruba. This put more stress on the teachers who have to function as translators as well as teachers. While they read the

textbooks in English, they have to teach the pupils in Yoruba. With the burning desire to use the mother tongue but having limited access to the Yoruba meta-language (i.e., Scientific Yoruba), the teacher resulted into bilingual instruction.

The analysis revealed that the teachers did not respond favorably to some aspects of NPE. They expressed apparent difficulties in implementing the policy. More than half of the respondents claimed that they code-switch using English and Yoruba as media of instruction in their classrooms. The teachers deliberately used both languages rather than keeping to Yoruba as required in NPE. This can easily be traced to the limitation in the teachers' competence in the MT they have to use as a medium of instruction to educate pupils in another subject. The code-switching between English and Yoruba cannot be prevented because the teachers may not readily provide a Yoruba equivalent of every English term used in the classroom.

Although several bilingual education theorists have posited additive bilingualism in the use of mother tongue language education in multilingual communities (Cummins, 1979; Hansegard, 1968; Paulston, 1975; Toukomaa & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1977), it is also important to state that inadequate implementation of multilingualism can result in *semilingualism*, with lack of proficiency in both languages (Hansegard, 1968). The study also reveals other challenges associated with MT education in multilingual environment. These include inadequate linguistic development of the mother-tongue, low investment in its teaching materials and teacher development by the policy maker (Benson, 2014; Kafia, 2014). Unfortunately, policy-based problems can only be solved by the policy makers who have the means and the constitutional power to do so.

## Conclusion

The survey has revealed the importance of teachers' in implementing the NPE's medium of instruction policy. As can be seen in Fig. 11 and 12, the teacher's decision automatically determines the pupils' accessibility to the policy. Therefore, teachers have a vital role to play in determining the success of the policy.

As evident in this paper, the level of awareness of the teachers on NPE implementation is inadequate. The teachers did not seem to be properly informed on how NPE could be implemented. If the policy makers ever had any solution to these problems in the past, it was quite clear that the teachers were not aware of such. Second, it is still difficult to use the MT

(Mother Tongue) medium alone due to limitations associated with the teachers' competence and the teaching materials to be used. When this research was undertaken, the teachers could not have access to enough educational materials in mother tongue investigated comparable to the instruction materials being produced for English medium of instruction; hence, using the MT medium is still a great task for teaching subjects other than the MT itself.

Specifically, the Yoruba case study discussed in this paper has exposed some areas of deficiency in the implementation of NPE such as the inadequate instruction materials and the insufficient sensitization on the policy. This setback requires urgent attention because the teachers' experience of NPE implementation reported in this paper is a local indicator of the major problems the policy may encounter nation-wide unless necessary actions are taken to appraise the policy to make the required amendments.

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## APPENDIX A

## QUESTIONNAIRE

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS, OSUN STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND CULTURE, IKIRE CAMPUS

Dear respondent,

I would appreciate your help in giving answers to the questions below faithfully.

The information you provide is strictly for the purpose of this research and would therefore be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Thanks for your cooperation.

| DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION<br>Tick the appropriate options |                     | Tick! |
|---|---------------------|-------|
| 01. Age   | 21-30               |       |
|   | 31-40               |       |
|   | 41-50               |       |
|   | above 50            |       |
| 02. Sex   | Male                |       |
|   | Female              |       |
| 03. Marital status                                      | Single              |       |
|   | Married             |       |
|   | Divorced            |       |
|   | Widowed             |       |
| 04. Educational Background                              | GradeII             |       |
|   | NCE                 |       |
|   | OND                 |       |
|   | HND/Bachelor Degree |       |
| 05. Work Experience                                     | Less than 3 years   |       |
|   | 4-6 years           |       |
|   | 7-10 years          |       |
|   | above 10 years      |       |

## SECTION A

| (Tick both right option and both language if both are applicable)            | Yoruba | English |
|--|--------|---------|
| 06. What language is the medium of communication amidst the pupil in school? |        |         |

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07. Which language do you prefer using for instruction at pry 1-3 level?

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### SECTION B

(Tick the right option)

True

False

08. Are you aware of the national policy on Education?

09. There are specialist teachers in Nigeria language(s) in primary schools.

10. Specialist teachers teach in their specialized field.

11. Yoruba is the language of the immediate environment (Ikire).

12. Science textbooks and materials used at primary 1-3 level are being produced in the Mother tongue.

13. Scientific terms are well expressed in Yoruba, Equivalent to its English and Actual terms.

14. It is very easy using Yoruba to teach science subject.

15. Using Yoruba as a medium of instruction, pupils perform better.

16. Pupils tend to understand well, when instructed in Yoruba language.

17. There are mechanisms set up by the government to monitor the implementation of mother tongue at the primary school.

18. Examination questions are set in Yoruba language i.e. at the primary 1-3 level.

19. One of the objectives of the N.P.E is to lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking.

20. This provision is according to the N.P.E....The medium of instruction in primary school shall be the language of the immediate environment for the first three years. During this period English shall be taught as a subject.

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### SECTION C

#### MIND EXPRESSION / INTERVIEW

21. What are the challenges you face applying or not applying the N.P.E in Educational System.

.....

.....

22. How do you think the objectives of the N.P.E could be realized?

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23. What would you recommend, concerning the use of Yoruba language of the immediate environment as a medium of instruction in primary 1-3?

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