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NATIONAL LANGUAGE AS MECHANISM FOR ENHANCING SOCIAL INTERACTION IN ABAKALIKI EDUCATION ZONE OF EBONYI STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study, investigated National Language as a Mechanism for Enhancing Social Interaction in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study comprised all the 221 English Language Teachers in Public Secondary Schools in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State. The sample of the study comprised 221 English Language Teachers in Public Secondary Schools in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State. The researcher developed a structured questionnaire titled, 'Questionnaire on National Language as a Mechanism for enhancing Social Interaction (QNLMESI)' which was used as instrument for data collection. Data collected were analyzed using mean (x) and standard deviation to answer the research questions and t-test statistics to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed that: to a high extent national language promote cultural pride in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State, secondly, that national language to high extent foster unity in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State. Based on the findings the study recommended that: Government of Ebonyi State should promote the teaching and learning of national languages in educational institutions to ensure that future generations have a strong connection to their cultural heritage and encourage the use of national languages in official government communications and public services to foster a sense of national unity and inclusivity.

Keywords: National Language, Mechanism, Social Interaction, Secondary Schools, Unity.

Introduction

A national language is a language (or language variant, e.g. dialect) that has some connection de facto or de jure with a nation. There is little consistency in the use of this term. One or more languages spoken as first languages in the territory of a country may be referred to informally or designated in legislation as national languages of the country. National languages are mentioned in over 150 world constitutions. Language is not just a means of communication, but also a reflection of a nation's culture, identity, and heritage. In many countries, the national language plays a crucial role in promoting social interaction and strengthening the sense of unity and belonging within a community or country (Maton, and Moore, 2019).

Language according to Okoro (2020) refers to a system of communication that uses symbols, sounds, gestures, or written symbols to convey meaning. It is a fundamental aspect of human society and

culture, enabling individuals to express thoughts, emotions, and ideas, as well as to interact with others. This language is typically used in government, education, media, and other official settings. Language is a complex and multifaceted one, with various theories and definitions proposed by different authors. Some scholars view language as a tool for communication and expression, while others see it as a reflection of cultural identity and heritage. Linguists study language structure, grammar, syntax, semantics, and phonetics to understand how languages are formed and used by speakers (Ajibola, 2021) and Andrew (2018).

National language, on the other hand, refers to a language that is designated as the official or primary language of a particular country or nation. This paper will explore the importance of the national language as a source of promoting social interaction and its impact on building strong bonds among individuals.

National languages adopted in Nigeria includes: the Igbo Language, the Hausa language and the Yoruba language. A child is expected to be taught any of these languages as a core subject FRN (2014) in the National Policy on Education. Nigeria is a country with more than 500 ethnic groups and each with their different language and dialect. Hence, the need for the national language. The government also recommended the use of language of immediate environment at the lower levels of education to enable learning and connection to ones cultural heritage.

National language plays a crucial role in promoting social interactions by serving as a common ground for communication among individuals belonging to the same community or country. When people share a common language, they are able to effectively express their thoughts, emotions, and ideas, fostering a sense of connection and understanding one another.

Furthermore, the use of a national language in public spaces and events can create a sense of cultural pride and belonging, as individuals feel a sense of identity and unity when they communicate in their native tongue. This shared language serves as a powerful tool for building relationships and forming bonds within a community, as it enables people to connect on a deeper level and develop a sense of solidarity. Celebrating national language holidays and festivals also provides opportunities for individuals to come together and showcase their cultural traditions, further strengthening their connections and fostering a sense of community. These events serve as a platform for people to celebrate their linguistic heritage, promote cultural diversity, and strengthen their bonds as a unified society (Andrew, 2020 and Isu 2021).

National language serves as a source for promoting social interactions by facilitating communication, fostering cultural pride and belonging, as well as providing opportunities for people to come together in other to celebrate their shared heritage. By recognizing the importance of linguistic diversity in shaping society's identity, we can further promote social interactions and create a more inclusive and connected community. The national language serves as a common thread that connects people from different backgrounds and regions within a country. It provides a sense of identity and belonging to individuals, as they share a common means of communication. By promoting the use of the national language

in various aspects of the society, such as education, media, and government, individuals can better connect with their cultural roots and traditio ns.

Promoting cultural pride through embracing and celebrating the national language, individuals can develop a sense of pride in their cultural heritage. Language is often intertwined with customs, traditions, and values that have been passed down through generations. By preserving and promoting the use of the national language, individuals can maintain a connection to their cultural roots and traditions, fostering a stronger sense of pride and belonging within a nation. The national language plays a significant role in promoting social interaction and building strong bonds among individuals.

Social interaction refers to the ways individuals connect with one another in various social settings (Okafor 2022). It involves the exchange of ideas, information, emotions, and behaviour among people, leading to the formation of relationships and group dynamics. According to scholars like Goffman (2018) and McPherson (2020), social interactions play a crucial role in shaping individual identity, social norms, and collective behaviour within a society. These interactions can be verbal or nonverbal, intentional or unintentional, and can occur in both formal and informal settings.When people share a common language, they are able to communicate more effectively and understand each other on a deeper level. This facilitates collaboration, cooperation, and mutual understanding among individuals, leading to a more inclusive and harmonious society.

According to Okoro (2021) language is seen as a source of social interaction fostering unity among the people in the communities. Language has the power to unite people and create a sense of unity within a community or country. When individuals speak the same language, they are able to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences more easily, fostering a sense of connection and solidarity. By promoting the use of the national language, societies can strengthen their social fabric and promote a sense of unity and belonging among their citizens. Unfortunately teachers most often adopt the use of English neglecting the national language which seems to lead to disconnection from one's cultural heritage. The focus of this paper is to investigate if National language is a mechanism for enhancing social interaction.

Statement of the problem

Problems abound in the use of national language for effective communication in our society and outside our community. It is the issue of parental upbringing. Most parents because of their poor academic background directly force their children to be colonised with second language, and this has affected the used of national language. Secondly, the issue of dominance of a single official language in a multicultural society marginalizes the use of national in Nigeria and his hinder their ability to fully explore their languages and finds it difficult to use it to participate in social, economic, and political opportunities. This l eads to feelings of exclusion and inequality among different ethnic activities. The FRN (2014) in the NPE stipulated the study of National las well as languages of immediate environment, unfortunately, the society, teachers and schools prefer the use of only the English language while negating local

languages. Another problem is the lack of resources and support for the preservation and promotion of national languages, especially in the face of globalization and the increasing influence of dominant languages such as English. This results in the erosion of linguistic diversity and the loss of cultural heritage, weakening the bonds that connect individuals to their communities and identity.

This lack of support is contrary, the Federal Government (2014) promises in the National Policy on Education to provide resources, both material and human resources. Furthermore, the unequal distribution of linguistic power and privilege perpetuate social inequalities and reinforce hierarchies based on language proficiency which create barriers to effective communication and collaboration among diverse groups, limiting the potential for mutual understanding and cooperation. In addition, the lack of recognition and respect for national languages contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes and discrimination against other languages. Further, it exacerbate social tensions and divisions among the people. The focus of this paper therefore is to investigate the extent to which National Language would enhance social interaction in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate National Language as a mechanism for enhancing Social Interaction in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Ascertain the extent to which national languages enhance cultural pride among the students;
2. Determine the extent to which national languages fosters unity in among the students

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. To what extent does national languages enhance cultural pride among the students?
2. To what extent does national language foster unity among the students?

Hypothesis

A null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance to further guide the study.

Ho_1: There was no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female teachers on the extent to which national language enhances cultural pride among students

Review of Related Literature

Language refers to a system of communication that uses symbols, sounds, gestures, or written symbols to convey meaning. It is a fundamental aspect of human society and culture, enabling individuals to express thoughts, emotions, and ideas, as well as to interact with others. National language, on the other hand, refers to a language that is designated as the official or primary language of a particular country or nation. This language is typically used in government, education, media, and other official settings. The concept of language is a complex and multifaceted one, with various theories and definitions proposed by different authors. Some scholars view language as a tool for communication and expression, while others see it as a reflection of cultural identity and heritage. Linguists study language structure, grammar, syntax, semantics, and phonetics

to understand how languages are formed and used by speakers (Ajibola, 2021).

Language and national language play a crucial role in shaping individuals and collective identities, promoting social cohesion, and fostering cross-cultural understanding. By recognizing the value of linguistic diversity and respecting different languages, we can enrich our social interactions and promote inclusivity and harmony in our communities (Freeman, 2006). National language plays a crucial role in promoting social interactions by serving as a common ground for communication among individuals belonging to the same community or country. When people share a common language, they are able to effectively express their thoughts, emotions, and ideas, fostering a sense of connection and understanding with one another.

Furthermore, the use of a national language in public spaces and events can create a sense of cultural pride and belonging, as individuals feel a sense of identity and unity when they communicate in their native tongue. This shared language serves as a powerful tool for building relationships and forming bonds within a community, as it enables people to connect on a deeper level and develop a sense of solidarity. Celebrating national language holidays and festivals also provides opportunities for individuals to come together and showcase their cultural traditions, further strengthening their connections and fostering a sense of community (Ibrahim and Mukhtar, 2021). These events serve as a platform for people to celebrate their linguistic heritage, promote cultural diversity, and strengthen their bonds as a unified society. National language serves as a source of promoting social interactions by facilitating communication, fostering cultural pride and belonging, and providing opportunities for people to come together and celebrate their shared heritage. By recognizing the importance of linguistic diversity in shaping society's identity, we can further promote social interactions and create a more inclusive and connected community.

Social Interaction

Social interactions refer to the ways individuals connect with one another in various social settings. It involves the exchange of ideas, information, emotions, and behaviour between people, leading to the formation of relationships and group dynamics. According to scholars like Inya (2019), social interactions play a crucial role in shaping individual identity, social norms, and collective behaviour within a society. These interactions can be verbal or nonverbal, intentional or unintentional, and can occur in both formal and informal settings. Overall, social interactions are essential for human development and well-being, as they provide opportunities for learning, growth, support, and connection with others. By promoting linguistic diversity and recognizing the value of different languages in facilitating communication and cultural exchange, we can enhance the quality of social interactions and strengthen community bonds (Fatiroti, 2015).

Research Method

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Descriptive survey design according to Abonyi, (2011) consist of studies in which data are collected from a small sample of a large population to enable the researcher describe in a systematic manner and interpret the characteristic

features and facts about things that exist. A survey is a descriptive study when it seeks to document and describe what exists or the present status of existence or absence of what is being investigated. The study was carried out in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State. The population of the study comprised all the 221 English language teachers in the 77 public secondary schools in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State (Ebonyi State Secondary Education Board, 2024). The entire population was used as the sample size of the study. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher, titled 'National Language as a mechanism for enhancing Social Interaction Questionnaire (NLMESIQ). To determine the reliability of the instrument, 20 copies of the questionnaire were trial tested in public secondary schools in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State which was outside the study area. The instrument was administered to 20 teachers and the data collected was subjected to the test of internal consistency using Cronbach Alpha procedure with reliability coefficient of 0.86. The data collected for this study were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while the hypothesis was tested using the t- test at 0.05 level of significance. Any item with a mean equal to or greater than 2.50 was accepted, while those below 2.5 were rejected. That is, on a four point scale of (Very High Extent (VHE = 4), High Extent HE = 3), Low Extent (LE = 2), and Very Low Extent (VLE = 1). Where: 4+3+2+1 = 10/4 = 2.50.

Presentation of Results

Research Question One

To what extent does national language enhance cultural pride in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on the perception of teachers on extent to which national language enhance cultural pride

S/N	Items	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1	National language promotes cultural traditions of the community.	216	3.42	0.52	HE
2	National language through music and art serves as a unifying force that brings people together.	216	3.41	0.56	HE
3	National language empowers individuals to connect with their roots and feel a sense of belonging to their community.	216	3.33	0.49	HE
4	National language creates a sense of cultural pride in reinforcing linguistic diversity in shaping the societal identity.	216	3.43	0.53	HE
5	National language festival provides opportunities for people to come together.	216	3.43	0.58	HE
6	National language strengthens community bonds as a unified community.	216	3.47	0.53	HE
7	Embracing the national language in media creates a common platform for people to express themselves and to share their experiences.	216	3.63	0.48	VHE
	Grand Mean		**3.45**		**HE**

Table 1 showed that the respondents agreed to high extent in item 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 with mean score of: 3.42, 3.4, 3.3, 3.43, 3.43, 3.47 and 3.63 respectively. This is an indication that, national language enhances cultural pride in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State with a grand mean score of 3.45.

Research Question Two

To what extent does national language foster unity in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on the perception of teachers on the extent to which national language fosters unity

S/N	Items	N	X	SD	Decision
8	Language promotes understanding among diverse groups within society.	216	3.80	0.40	VHE
9	Embracing the national language creates a sense of belonging and pride among individuals, leading to a more cohesive and unified society	216	3.00	0.49	HE
10	National language empowers individuals to express themselves effectively, communicate their thoughts and ideas.	216	3.41	0.46	HE
11	Encouraging the learning and usage of the national language breaks down stereotypes and promotes acceptance within society.	216	3.36	0.53	HE
12	National language strengthen social bonds	216	3.47	0.53	HE
13	National language fosters a sense of national identity and solidarity among citizens.	216	3.67	0.47	VHE
	Grand Mean	216	**3.45**		**HE**

Table 2 showed that the respondents agreed that to a high extent, national language fosters unity in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State, this was recorded on item, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 which scores a grand mean of 3.45.

Ho_1: There was no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female teachers on the extent to which national language enhance cultural pride in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State.

Table 3: t-test on the difference in the mean ratings of male and female teachers on the extent to which national language enhance cultural pride

Items	Status	N	Mean	SD	t.cal.	Df	P-value	Decision
1	Male	100	3.58	0.53				NS
	Female	116	3.57	0.52	0.12	114	0.98	
2	Male	100	3.51	0.55				NS
	Female	116	3.50	0.56	0.11	114	0.70	
3	Male	100	3.71	0.48				NS
	Female	116	3.68	0.50	0.33	114	0.43	
4	Male	100	3.44	0.52				NS
	Female	116	3.43	0.53	0.31	114	0.68	
5	Male	100	3.44	0.58				NS
	Female	116	3.43	0.59	0.21	114	0.81	
6	Male	100	3.48	0.52				NS
	Female	116	3.46	0.53	0.27	114	0.55	
7	Male	100	3.63	0.48	0.10	114	1.00	NS
	Female	116	3.63	0.48				

Key: NS: Not significant

Result on Table 3 revealed that the mean ratings of male and female teachers on the extent to which national language enhance cultural pride in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State was not significant as the P value of 0.05 ($P < 0.05$) was less than the

calculated values. This means that the sampled male and female teachers were of same opinion on the extent to which national language promotes cultural pride in Abakaliki Education Zone of Ebonyi State.

Discussion

Result of the study as presented in Table 1 showed that the respondents agreed that, National language promotes cultural traditions of the community. National language through music and arts serve as a unifying force that brings people together, National language empowers individual to connect with their roots and feel a sense of belonging to their community, National language creates a sense of culture pride in reinforcing linguistic diversity in shaping the societal identity, National language strengthens community bonds as a unified community. Embracing the national language in media creates a common platform for people to express themselves and to share their experience. The result is in line with the findings of Maton and Moore (2019) who reported that National language promotes cultural traditions of the community and makes life easy for individuals in the society.

The result on table 2 showed that the respondents agreed that Language promotes understanding among diverse groups within society. Embracing the national language creates a sense of belonging and pride among individuals, leading to a more cohesive and unified society, National language empowers individuals to express themselves effectively, communicate their thoughts and ideas. Encouraging the learning and usage of the national language breaks down stereotypes and promotes acceptance within the society. Finally, National language fosters a sense of national identity and solidarity among citizens.. The finding is consistent with the views of Mobegi, Ondigi and Oburu (2010), that national language is leading to a more cohesive and a unified society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, national languages are an essential source of social interaction that play a significant role in shaping individual and collective identities. By promoting the use and appreciation of national languages, we can strengthen social cohesion, foster cross-cultural understanding, and enhance communication among diverse communities. Also, embracing linguistic diversity and respecting different languages can lead to a more inclusive and harmonious society where all individuals feel valued and connected.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Teachers should encourage and embark on implementation of the teaching of National languages as well as adopt the use of language of immediate environment in the lower Basic as stipulated in the NPE based on Federal Government stipulation so that students can develop early enough strong connection with their cultural heritage.
2. The government should fulfill her promises on making available resources that would enhance national language implementation in schools and employ national language teachers, train and retrain the teachers through seminar and workshop.

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