

Challenges and Initiatives in Radio Language Policy Implementation: A Case Study of Two Nigerian Radio Stations

Kenneth Obiorah, University of Lagos

Abstract

In response to the Nigerian legal framework's prioritization of languages spoken within its respective communities, this study examines the language policies of Nigerian radio stations, focusing on Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria. It analyzes the legislative frameworks guiding language use in broadcasting, including the 1999 Constitution, Nigerian Broadcasting Code, National Language Policy, and Freedom of Information Act. Primary data were gathered through survey, informal interviews, and observation, while secondary data was collected through a review of documents and literature. The study reveals diverse language policies among radio stations, including monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual approaches. Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria's multilingual policies promote linguistic diversity, preserve indigenous languages, and cater to diverse audiences. The stations' language choices reflect the provisions of the 1999 Constitution, Nigerian Broadcasting Code, National Language Policy, and Freedom of Information Act. The study highlights challenges and proposes initiatives to support language development and policy implementation, which includes the scarcity of qualified staff and the need for language development initiatives. The study recommends the need to develop standardized curricula for broadcasting in indigenous languages, provide training programs for broadcasters to learn multiple languages and collaboration and partnerships between broadcast stations, language education institutions, and language experts.

Keywords: *language policy, Nigerian radio stations, Nigerian legal framework, multilingualism*

1 Introduction

This study is an exploration into the key legislative frameworks and the practice of the Nigeria radio stations. After carefully reading and understanding some of the document that guide the using of language in broadcasting, it become imperative to investigate the practice in a few radio stations and look at the challenges facing the implementation of the policy in a Federal government of Nigerian owned-radio. Nigeria is home to approximately 540 indigenous languages, with English serving as the official language. This complex linguistic landscape is reflected in these legislations governing language use in the media. Key legislative frameworks influencing language use in Nigerian media include the 1999 Constitution of the Federal



Republic of Nigeria (as amended), the Nigerian Broadcasting Code (2014), the National Language Policy (2023), and the Freedom of Information Act (2011). This study shall focus mainly on the perceived radio language policy of Radio Nigeria and Bond FM Lagos as a case study.

2 Literature Review

Language policy encompasses the language practices, beliefs, and management decisions within a community or polity (Bernard, 2004). It can be applied across various domains. According to Bernard (2004), language policy involves the systematic and habitual selection of language varieties from a nation's linguistic repertoire. Furthermore, language policy reflects a set of beliefs about language usage, accompanied by intentional efforts to shape language practices through strategic planning, management, and implementation.

All legal documents in Nigerian originate from the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and any legal document that is variance with the document is declared null and void. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees freedom of expression in Section 39(1), stating: 'Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference. Furthermore, the Constitution recognizes English, Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba as official languages, while also acknowledging the existence of other Nigerian languages. Additionally, the Freedom of Information Act 2011 grants Nigerian citizens the right to access information in any Nigerian language. However, the Act remains silent on the modalities and timelines for implementing this provision. The Nigerian Broadcasting Code (2014) is a document that focused on the broadcasting community. It stipulates that community broadcast services must prioritize languages spoken within their respective communities. This implies that broadcasting should be conducted in English and Nigerian languages, particularly those prevalent in the immediate environment. However, this provision does not necessarily impose a language obligation on public and private broadcasting stations, allowing them to choose languages they deem suitable for their audience. This document complements the Nigerian National Language Policy (2023): a key initiative of the Federal Government of Nigeria, which provides guidelines for the official use of various languages in Nigeria.

The policy's provisions on media, specifically radio broadcasting, emphasize the need for concerted efforts to promote the effective use of Nigerian languages in conventional broadcasting. Article 8 of the policy stipulates that broadcast media organizations must ensure that at least 60% of their programs are broadcast in Nigerian languages commonly spoken in the communities they serve. While these national laws provide for the use of Nigerian languages, especially those spoken in the immediate environment of media stations, they do not specify the number of languages that must be used in broadcast stations.

Currently, the English language dominates all linguistic community in Nigeria. Nigerian Pidgin is also used in specific radio programs, such as sports, entertainment, and call-in shows. Several studies have examined language policy and planning in African broadcasting contexts. The Federal government of Nigeria who is promulgated this document has been at the forefront of promoting these languages in broadcasting station, consequence the focus on the broadcast stations' language policy of these two radio stations owned by the federal government. Although a few other related studies has been carried out but not with focus to these federal government owned stations. For example Obukadeta (2019) investigated language policy in Kogi State, Nigeria, and found that an implicit media language policy exists, with English allocated more time than major and minor Nigerian languages. Similarly, Mpofu et al. (2019) analyzed the multilingual broadcasting policy in Zimbabwe, revealing implementation challenges. Nwaneri (2014) studied the South African Broadcasting Corporation's handling of eleven official languages, finding that viewers' preferences are influenced by language. Evans (2011) examined viewer attitudes towards language policies in South Africa, highlighting complex attitudes towards language. Effective language policy management is crucial, as seen in the British Broadcasting Corporation's standardization of Received Pronunciation (Schwyter, 2008). In contrast, according to Nwachukwu (2005) and Emenanjo (2005), Nigerian radio stations often lack standardized language policies and competent personnel, language management like the British Broadcasting Corporation's approach to language standardization offers which might be a model for Nigerian broadcast stations. This statement by Nwachukwu (2005) and Emenanjo (2005) was made two decades ago and needs reexamination in Nigeria radio stations, in the light of the provisions of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), the Nigerian Broadcasting Code (2014), the National Language Policy (2023), and the Freedom of Information Act (2011).

3 Methodology

To conduct a comprehensive assessment of Nigeria's broadcast language policy, a survey was conducted on language usage in 13 radio stations across Southern Nigeria between January and December 2022. The surveyed stations included 91.1 FM, Lagos Talks, Nigerian Info, Wazobia FM, Rhythm FM, Faji FM, Top Radio, Lasgidi FM, Splash FM, Radio Lagos, Bond FM, Voice of Nigeria, and Real Power. Informal interviews were held with radio presenters from Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria to gather more insights. Additionally, the researcher observed the stations' operations, with permission from the station authorities, to understand language usage and policy implementation. Secondary data was collected through a review of documents and literature.

4 Different types of Radio Language Policy in (Southern) Nigeria

The Nigeria's radio broadcasting landscape is characterized by diverse language policies. A common practice among radio stations is the adoption of a monolingual language policy, where only one language is used in all programming. Examples of stations that exclusively use English include 91.1 FM, Lagos Talks, Nigerian Info, and Rhythm FM. Notably, no radio station in Nigeria uses an indigenous Nigerian language exclusively, without any English programming. Some stations adopt a bilingual language policy, characterized by asymmetric bilingualism, where two languages are used unevenly. Examples include Faji FM (Yoruba and Pidgin), Top Radio (English and Pidgin, with English dominating airtime), Lasgidi FM (Yoruba and Pidgin), and Splash FM (Yoruba and English). In these bilingual settings, airtime allocation varies, with English sometimes receiving more attention than Nigerian languages or vice versa. Radio Lagos Tiwa-Tiwa prioritizes Yoruba but reads news in English, demonstrating a mixed approach. A multilingual radio language policy is also employed by some stations, dedicating significant airtime to three or more languages. Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria exemplify this approach, allocating substantial time to multiple languages. Other stations, such as Radio 1, ABS Onitsha, and Real Power 100.5, also adopt multilingual approaches, although with varying allocations of airtime to non-English languages. This study focuses on Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria due to their comprehensive multilingual language policies.

5 Language Policy in Bond FM Radio

Bond FM, a subsidiary of Radio Nigeria in Lagos State, was established in 1987 in response to the Director General of FRCN's observation that a significant portion of the population in Lagos, who spoke major Nigerian languages but were not proficient in English, were excluded from radio programs. To address this, the Director General envisioned a station catering to the interests of audiences competent only in indigenous languages. At the time, Radio 1, another FRCN unit, broadcast solely in English. To avoid duplicating content and overcome bureaucratic hurdles, the management sought approval to convert the FM station to an indigenous languages station. President Obasanjo granted approval on September 20, 1987. Bond FM recruited young, fluent speakers of Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa and initially operated from Lagos Island before relocating to Ikeja mainland to be closer to its target audience, earning the nickname "grassroots radio." The station's programming schedule is divided into language segments, with Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba again, each headed by a team leader and staffed by language professionals. Nigeria's language policy recognizes Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba as dominant languages, influencing Bond FM's selection of these languages.

The national language policy prioritizes the language of the immediate environment, resulting in Yoruba receiving more airtime than Igbo and Hausa on Bond FM. In compliance with the National Broadcasting Code, Bond FM emphasizes Yoruba, aligning with the policy. This study concurs with Igbokhare (2011) that using Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa in one station meets the language needs of approximately 90% of Nigerians. Bond FM's use of these languages benefits non-native Yoruba speakers in Lagos, providing an opportunity for language learning. Research by Okudo and Ifeagwazi (2014) demonstrates that Igbo language programming on Bond FM enhances Igbo language knowledge among Lagos secondary school students. Although the impact on Hausa speakers is unexplored, it is assumed to be positive, as the station promotes cultural preservation through indigenous languages. The station's director emphasizes the importance of mother tongue education, particularly in a cosmopolitan city like Lagos, where the choice of major Nigerian languages reflects the city's linguistic reality. With experienced broadcasters and a legacy spanning over thirty years, Bond FM serves as a training ground for future Nigerian language broadcasters. The use of Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa in Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria reinforces their significance in the Nigerian context.

6 Language Policy in Voice of Nigeria

Established in 1960, Voice of Nigeria is an international radio station under the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, aiming to broadcast authentic information about Nigeria and Africa globally. Its primary objective is to provide public service in Nigeria's interest by offering global radio broadcast services in multiple languages to Nigerians and non-Nigerians. Initially based in Ikorodu, Lagos State, the station's headquarters has been relocated to Abuja, with an additional station in Lagos. As an international broadcaster, Voice of Nigeria transmits programs beyond Nigeria's borders, initially limited to two hours of daily transmission in French and English for West Africa. The station now reaches a global audience through its digital platform, broadcasting in eight languages: English, Igbo, French, Arabic, Kiswahili, Yoruba, Fulfulde, and Hausa. Programs are transmitted from either Abuja or Lagos stations, with Hausa and English broadcast from Abuja and other languages from either station.

Voice of Nigeria broadcasts news and programs in four indigenous Nigerian languages - Igbo, Yoruba, Fulfulde, and Hausa - alongside four other languages, to wit English, French, Arabic, and Kiswahili. While English dominates airtime, the other languages share equal time, with most languages broadcasting programs twice or thrice daily. Arabic is primarily used in religious contexts and schools, while French is taught in schools nationwide. Kiswahili, spoken outside Nigeria, is also part of the station's language repertoire. This multilingual approach demonstrates a deliberate language policy. By embracing both major and minority languages, this policy has the potential to contribute to language preservation and revitalization in Nigeria.

7 Discussions on language policy in Bond FM and Radio Nigeria

Both Bond FM and Radio Nigeria practiced a multilingual language policy that attempts to mirror the provisions of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), the Nigerian Broadcasting Code (2014), the National Language Policy (2023), and the Freedom of Information Act (2011). There are similarities and difference in the language policy practiced in these two station despite the fact that they are both owned by the Federal government that strive to promote the multilingual space of Nigeria. This can be seen in their use and projection of the languages according the documents guiding their operation. For examples, Bond FM's language policy seeks to preserve Nigerian culture, unite diverse populations, and foster a sense

of belonging among speakers of major languages. In contrast, Voice of Nigeria's language policy is driven by internal and external factors, prioritizing information dissemination. While Bond FM focuses on promoting indigenous languages, Voice of Nigeria's policy does not aim to broadcast only in Nigeria languages. That is why non indigenous Nigerian languages such as Kiswahili, Arabic, and French are used for broadcasting. Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria's language choices share similarities in the sense that they prioritizing major languages such as Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa. This focus on major languages indicates a bias towards languages with larger audiences, neglecting minority languages prevalent in Nigeria. Both stations allocate more time to languages are politically considered as powerful and major, reflecting a similar policy approach. Voice of Nigeria allocated more time to English more than other languages. Obukadeta (2019) reported similar pattern. According to Obukadeta (2019), a significant imbalance exists in the allocation of airtime, with English receiving substantially more time than other languages in a broadcast station in Kogi state. This disparity stems from English being an official language in Nigeria, having been fully integrated into the country's linguistic landscape. In contrast, foreign languages like French, German, Russian, and Chinese, which are offered as degree courses in Nigerian universities, are largely absent from Nigerian radio probably because of shortage of competent speakers and a limited audience especially. Major Nigerian languages, including Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, and Fulfulde, are commonly used in state-owned radio stations, particularly in regions where these languages are predominant.

There are strategies that aided the sustenance of the multilingual language policy in this station. Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria carefully design their programs and news to cater to the diverse preferences of their audience in their respective languages. This tailored approach enables the stations to effectively engage with their listeners and foster a sense of community. Bond FM, for instance, features a range of popular shows that showcase the richness of Nigerian languages and culture. In Igbo, the station broadcasts shows like Oyorima and Omenilgbo, while in Hausa, it offers Kukan Kurciya. Yoruba-speaking listeners can enjoy programs like Edun Okan, Omo to Omo colour, Adelebere, and many others. Similarly, Voice of Nigeria crafts its programs to attract and retain listeners, leveraging the power of language to connect with diverse audiences. Both stations are committed to promoting Nigerian culture through various initiatives. They play local music, feature oral poets, organize drama and storytelling sessions, and broadcast in their respective languages. These efforts not only entertain but also educate and

enlighten listeners about the country's rich cultural heritage. Bond FM takes audience engagement to the next level through innovative programming. The station conducts on-the-spot interviews, which are later aired, encouraging audience participation and loyalty.

Additionally, Bond FM hosts phone-in programs, incorporating audience suggestions into their shows. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership and belonging among listeners. To reinforce their multilingual policy, both Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria organize cultural events that celebrate native languages and cultures. These events provide a platform for communities to come together, share their traditions, and promote cross-cultural understanding. By doing so, the stations demonstrate their commitment to preserving and promoting Nigeria's linguistic diversity, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and vibrant cultural landscape.

Implementing a radio language policy examined in this study requires broadcast stations to have staffs qualified in multiple languages has highlighted several areas that need attention from stakeholders. The policy must ensure that every broadcast station has a diverse team of staff who can communicate effectively in various languages, particularly those spoken in the immediate environment. However, this poses a challenge due to the scarcity of individuals educated in multiple languages, especially indigenous languages. Many of these languages lack standardized curricula for broadcasting, making it difficult to find qualified personnel.

Currently, most Nigerian broadcasters learn the art of broadcasting in English and then adapt to indigenous languages (Salawu, 2017, Obiorah 2024). This limitation underscores the need for language development initiatives, such as creating standardized curricula for broadcasting in indigenous languages, providing training programs for broadcasters to learn multiple languages, and encouraging language exchange programs to promote linguistic diversity. Furthermore, developing language education policies to support the growth of indigenous languages is crucial. Collaboration and partnerships between broadcast stations, language education institutions, and language experts can facilitate the development of language training programs. Partnerships can also enable the creation of standardized curricula and provide language training, ultimately addressing the challenge of finding qualified staff. By addressing these challenges and implementing these initiatives, Nigeria can promote linguistic diversity, preserve indigenous languages, and ensure that broadcast stations have qualified staff to cater to diverse audiences. This, in turn, can foster a more inclusive and representative broadcasting sector, better equipped to serve the needs of Nigeria's diverse population.

8 Conclusion

This study sheds light on the Nigerian broadcasting language practice, particularly in Nigerian owned radio: Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria, highlighting their ability to broadcast in multiple languages. The success of these stations demonstrates their potential for language engineering and development, which can be leveraged to preserve and revitalize endangered languages in Nigeria. Voice of Nigeria's use of eight languages serves as a prime example of the feasibility of expanding language offerings with proper planning. To build on this success, the broadcast stations must establish and articulate clearly their language policies, drawing inspiration from the BBC's approach. This will inform policy formation, staff recruitment, training, and development, ultimately setting a precedent for other Nigerian radio stations. By examining the broadcast stations language policies of Bond FM and Voice of Nigeria, this study showcases the Federal Government's efforts to align with constitutional specifications, national broadcasting codes, language policies, and freedom of information acts.

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