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# LANGUAGE AS A UNIFYING TOOL FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** This study examines the role of language as a unifying tool for national development in Nigeria, with particular attention to the tension between English and indigenous languages. The objectives of the paper include: examining the role of language in national development, challenges in the selection of national language for nation building and proffering solution to the selection of national language in Nigeria. Adopting a qualitative design and theoretical approach, the paper draws insights from sociolinguistic, functionalist, and language policy frameworks to assess how language choice influences unity, cultural preservation, and national progress. The study reveals that English, though a colonial legacy, functions as a neutral medium for governance, education, and inter-ethnic communication, yet deepens socio-economic inequality and endangers indigenous languages. Indigenous languages, while embodying Nigeria's cultural identity, face challenges of limited institutional recognition and ethnolinguistic rivalry. The paper contends that true national development requires a balanced multilingual policy that preserves indigenous linguistic heritage while utilizing English for accessibility and global relevance. It concludes that a democratic, inclusive language framework remains the most viable strategy for unity and sustainable development in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** English language, indigenous languages, multilingualism, national development, Nigeria, language policy, discourse analysis



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## INTRODUCTION

National development encompasses two major components: the physical infrastructure of development and the non-physical dimensions ideas, values, and requisite attitudes that promote unity, peace, and progress toward national goals and objectives (Ofuegbu, 2025). Every nation functions effectively with language at its core. Indeed, it is universally acknowledged that language serves as an essential instrument of development, being the primary vehicle through which societies transmit knowledge, negotiate meaning, and build collective identity (Bamgbose, 1991).

In a multi-ethnic and multilingual nation such as Nigeria, where numerous tribes and ethnic groups coexist, the question of a unifying language for development becomes both urgent and consequential.

Scholars estimate that Nigeria's linguistic landscape comprises over five hundred distinct languages spoken across more than 250 ethnic groups (Eberhard et al., 2022). While this linguistic diversity represents a rich cultural heritage, it also presents significant challenges to national integration, effective communication, and developmental planning. The multiplicity of languages in Nigeria and its implications can be likened to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, where the absence of a common language hindered collective progress. Similarly, the question posed in the Book of Amos 3:3 "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" this question underscores the importance of unity in purpose and communication.

The emerging lingua franca in Nigeria is the English language, introduced and arguably imposed through colonialism. Over time, English has been institutionalized as the official language of government, commerce, education, law, and international relations. It provides a relatively neutral linguistic platform for inter-ethnic communication, given the strong ethnic loyalties attached to indigenous languages (Adegbite, 2003). However, the dominance of English in a multilingual society like Nigeria remains contentious. Critics maintain that it perpetuates socio-economic inequality, marginalizes rural populations with limited access to formal education, and threatens the survival of indigenous languages (Omoniyi, 2004; Ogunmodimu, 2015).

Nevertheless, national development is a multifaceted process requiring inclusive participation, cultural preservation, and effective communication. Hence, the role of English as Nigeria's unifying language must be critically examined against the principles of inclusivity, accessibility, and sustainability. This paper, therefore, seeks to (i) evaluate the role of language in national development, (ii) examine the challenges inherent in selecting a national language for nation-building, and (iii) propose viable solutions to the question of national language policy in Nigeria.

The central question driving this discourse is: Can English given its colonial origins and elitist accessibility serve as an effective tool for national development in Nigeria? Alternatively, should a single indigenous language, or a bilingual/multilingual model, be adopted to promote unity and inclusiveness? These questions aim to explore how language choice can function as a unifying factor for national development.

Anchored in Sociolinguistic Theories of Language and Identity, Functionalist Perspectives on Language and Development, and the Language Policy and Planning (LPP) Model, this study adopts a qualitative research design. It draws on data from policy documents such as the National Policy on Education (NPE) and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (language provisions), as well as reports and guidelines from UNESCO and related agencies on language development. Furthermore, it engages with the works of sociolinguists and language policy scholars who have critically examined the relationship between language and national development in multilingual contexts. Through document analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study identifies major challenges and recommends pathways toward achieving an inclusive, linguistically balanced, and unified Nigeria through language.

Nigeria's extraordinary linguistic diversity comprising over 500 indigenous languages is both a source of cultural richness and a formidable obstacle to national unity and development. While English, a legacy of colonialism, has become the official language and a neutral medium for inter-ethnic communication, its dominance presents a complex paradox. On one hand, English bridges linguistic divides and facilitates participation in governance, education, and global discourse. On the other hand, it alienates large segments of the population, especially those in rural areas with limited access to formal education, thereby reinforcing socio-economic inequality and threatening the survival of indigenous languages. Attempts to promote any of the three major indigenous languages Hausa, Yoruba, or Igbo as national languages have consistently failed due to ethnic rivalry, political mistrust, and fears of cultural domination. Consequently, Nigeria remains caught between linguistic fragmentation and dependence on a colonial language, both of which hinder the realization of an inclusive national identity. This unresolved dilemma underscores a critical national question: How can Nigeria evolve a truly unifying language policy that promotes national development while safeguarding its rich linguistic and cultural heritage? The problem, therefore, lies in

striking a delicate balance between the need for a common language of unity and progress and the imperative of inclusivity, accessibility, and cultural preservation. Addressing this challenge is essential for achieving genuine national cohesion and sustainable development in Nigeria.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This study reviews some concepts related to the topic, examines some view points of scholars on national language development and the theoretical framework

### 1. Conceptualizing Language and National Development

Language is universally recognized as a central instrument in human interaction and societal progress. It serves as the medium through which knowledge is transmitted, identities are constructed, and collective goals are achieved. According to Bamgbose (1991), language is not merely a tool for communication but a vital element in the social, political, and economic development of nations. Similarly, Adebite (2003) emphasizes that language functions as both a symbol of identity and an instrument of national cohesion, influencing how citizens relate to one another and to the state.

National development, on the other hand, extends beyond economic growth to include social transformation, unity, education, and cultural advancement. Ofuegbu (2025) defines it as encompassing both the tangible aspects of infrastructure and the intangible dimensions of values, attitudes, and ideologies that sustain peace and progress. In this context, language becomes an indispensable unifying force capable of fostering inclusivity and mutual understanding among diverse populations.

### 2. Language Diversity and the Nigerian Context

Nigeria's linguistic landscape is one of the most complex in the world, comprising over 500 indigenous languages spoken across more than 250 ethnic groups (Eberhard et al., 2022). This linguistic richness, while reflecting Nigeria's cultural depth, also presents challenges for national integration and policy formulation. As Bamgbose (2003) notes, the multiplicity of languages often impedes communication across ethnic boundaries, leading to political fragmentation and social distrust.

The failure to establish a single indigenous national language stems from deep-rooted ethnic rivalries and fears of domination. Efforts to elevate Hausa, Yoruba, or Igbo to national language status have been resisted by minority groups who view such attempts as politically motivated (Omoniyi, 2004). Consequently, Nigeria continues to rely on English as the lingua franca and the official language of administration, education, and governance.

### 3. English as a Unifying yet Divisive Force

The adoption of English as Nigeria's official language has produced both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, English provides a neutral linguistic platform for inter-ethnic communication and national governance. It enables access to global knowledge networks and facilitates participation in international discourse. According to Adebite (2003), English has been instrumental in shaping Nigeria's modern identity by promoting administrative efficiency and serving as a unifying medium in a linguistically heterogeneous society.

However, scholars such as Ogunmodimu (2015) and Omoniyi (2004) argue that the dominance of English perpetuates socio-economic inequality, as proficiency in the language is closely tied to access to education and social mobility. Rural populations, particularly those with limited exposure to formal schooling, are consequently marginalized. Furthermore, the continuous prioritization of English threatens the survival of indigenous languages, many of which face extinction due to lack of institutional support and intergenerational transmission.

#### 4. Indigenous Languages and Cultural Preservation

Indigenous languages are the repositories of Nigeria's cultural heritage, traditional wisdom, and worldview. According to Fishman (1999), the loss of a language entails the erosion of unique ways of knowing and being. Scholars such as Bamgbose (2011) and Igboanusi (2018) have therefore advocated for the revitalization of indigenous languages through their inclusion in education, media, and governance. A balanced multilingual policy, they argue, would promote both national unity and cultural preservation.

Despite several policy interventions, including the National Policy on Education (NPE), which recommends the use of indigenous languages at the early stages of education, implementation remains inconsistent. This gap between policy and practice continues to undermine linguistic inclusion and equitable participation in national development.

#### 5. The Concept of Unifying Language: a Pivot for National Development

A unifying language is a language adopted by diverse linguistic groups within a polity that enables communication, integration, political administration, education, and cultural exchange. According to Akujobi (2019), in multilingual societies, such a language must be perceived as neutral, accessible, and functional across different ethnic, social, and cultural divides. Without a common tongue, mutual understanding suffers, governance becomes more complex, and national identity may remain fragmented (Acheoah and Olaleye, 2019).

The existence of a unified language as a pivot for national development cannot be overstressed, because language brings about group identity and unity. The functions of language goes beyond only as a means of communication but also as a medium for transmitting cultural values, fostering national consciousness, and mobilizing collective action (Bamgbose, 2011). It is a fact that language is the fulcrum the socio-economic and political development of nations. Nations with a dominant and widely accepted lingua franca often experience greater cohesion and efficiency in governance, education, and socio-economic development (Fishman, 2010).

According to Fishman (1996), language is both a means of communication and a marker of identity, and it is impossible to separate language from the process of nation-building. Bamgbose (1991) emphasizes that sustainable development in Africa cannot be achieved without a clear and functional language policy. Development is not only about economic growth but also about cultural preservation, social inclusion, and national integration, all of which are shaped by language.

But the case of a multilingual country (that I would not refer to as a nation) like Nigeria is different. The only language that can stand the test of unification is English Language, and perhaps the Nigerian variety with indigenous undertone. Scholars have long debated this paradox. While English provides a common ground for communication across Nigeria's over 500 indigenous languages (Eberhard, et.al.2022), it also alienates many from their cultural roots and perpetuates a legacy of colonial domination (Igboanusi & Ohia, 2020).

#### 6. The Multilingual State of Nigeria

Nigeria is globally known as one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with estimates suggesting that between 450 and 500 indigenous languages are spoken across the nation's territory (Eberhard et al., 2022). These languages are unevenly distributed among the country's six geopolitical zones, with the Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo languages constituting the three dominant ones due to their demographic spread, political influence, and historical prestige. Other significant regional languages such as Kanuri, Tiv, Fulfulde, Efik, and Ijaw also maintain strong ethnic and cultural identities.

Nevertheless, this problematic linguistic diversity reflects Nigeria's rich cultural heritage, expressed in oral

traditions, literature, proverbs, and folklore that preserve indigenous worldviews. Agbedo (2019) explained that it enhances artistic creativity, communal identity, and serves as a repository of traditional knowledge. However, it simultaneously presents serious challenges. Communication across ethnic lines is often hindered, necessitating the use of English or Nigerian Pidgin as lingua francas. In education, the multiplicity of languages complicates the implementation of mother-tongue instruction, as outlined in Nigeria's National Policy on Education (Emenanjo, 2005). In governance and administration, the absence of a single indigenous national language often fuels ethnic rivalry and debates about linguistic equity.

Also, many minority languages lack institutional recognition, documentation, and adequate pedagogical resources, which makes them vulnerable to endangerment or extinction. This marginalization raises national concerns not only about cultural loss but also about the erosion of linguistic rights and identity among communities termed minority (Igboanusi and Ohia, 2020). Thus, Nigeria's multilingualism is at once a source of cultural wealth and national complexity, requiring careful policy design to balance unity with diversity.

Finally on this note, One of the greatest obstacles to language policy in Nigeria is ethno-linguistic loyalty. Each ethnic group seeks recognition of its language as the national lingua franca, leading to contestation and resistance against the dominance of any single group (Bamgbose, 1991). This dynamic reflects what sociolinguists describe as language ideology, where language is tied to identity, power, and belonging (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994). Consequently, language planning in Nigeria has been politicized, with successive governments reluctant to enforce strong decisions that could be perceived as marginalizing certain groups.

#### 7. The Headache of a Proposed Unifying Indigenous Language

Many debated that one of the indigenous languages should be lawfully made the national language with the hope that many will learn it and be perfect in a few years time, and thereby setting the pace for national development. As easy as this sounds, giving the state and level of political unrest and tribal war plaguing the nation it might lead to a catastrophic end. Furthermore, scholars argue that elevating any of these languages as the national lingua franca would provoke ethnic tension, given Nigeria's fragile socio-political balance (Adegbija, 2004; Omoniyi, 2015). This difficulty is what Bourdieu in 1991 says reflects the sociolinguistic reality that "language is also power," and communities are reluctant to surrender such symbolic and practical influence.

Bamgbose,(2003) also contested it stating that no tribe will give up the recognition of their language for another to take the national stage. Simply because language is also power; who then wants to be passive in the wake of an active national language? Ethnolinguistic rivalry has consistently hindered consensus on language policy in Nigeria. Attempts to promote one indigenous language over others have historically met with resistance and accusations of cultural domination (Agbedo, 2019).

However the argument goes, it is undeniable that a unifying Language will do the nation good. Hence, it is required that the policy of unifying Language be formed soon enough when we can still access the language in its standard variety. Some of the Master of Arts students of English at Ignatius Ajuru University, opined that; it is also not out of place to consider the idea of selecting or picking one of the indigenous languages as a national language but the method is what will determine if there would be an unrest of any form. A government that is always scared of the people's opposition might never get anything done. A democratic approach was suggested as an amicable way of dealing with this lingering seemingly unresolved matter.

#### 8. A Democratic Approach to National Language Selection

In line with the view of Elugbe and Omamor,( 1991), given Nigeria's history of ethnic contestation, a

neutral, democratic process could provide legitimacy in the selection of a national language. A referendum-style vote, involving citizens across regions, may help minimize accusations of bias. The process could begin by shortlisting the most widely spoken indigenous languages, alongside Nigerian Pidgin, which already functions as a lingua franca across social classes and ethnic divides. Citizens would then cast votes, and the language with the highest nationwide support would be adopted as the national language.

This approach aligns with participatory language planning, where communities are directly involved in decision-making, ensuring greater transparency and reducing resistance (Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997). While opposition may remain, democratic legitimacy would enhance acceptance and provide a foundation for long-term language policy stability.

#### 9. The Role of English as Unifying Language in Nigeria and Its Faults

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, English has continued to serve as the official language. Scholars argue that its neutrality makes it an ideal choice for bridging ethnic divides (Adegbite, 2003). English is the language of governance, education, media, and law, thus providing a common ground for interaction among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups (Bamgbose, 2000). Furthermore, English connects Nigeria to the global economy, facilitates international trade, and enhances access to global knowledge and technology (Akinbode, 2016).

English has acquired significant instrumental value in development domains. As a global lingua franca, it lowers transaction costs in international trade and higher education, enables access to scientific literature, and facilitates mobility. Coleman's work for the British Council synthesizes evidence on the policy, pedagogy, and global dimensions of English in development contexts. The Council's reports also document how governments and employers perceive English as part of skills strategies, while cautioning against assuming automatic benefits without strong systems. For Nigeria, this instrumental value is not primarily ideological. It reflects the fact that English is already the language of federal lawmaking, interregional communication, and many sectors of the economy, and that it is neutral among major ethnolinguistic groups. The argument in the literature is not to abandon English. It is to embed English within an additive bilingual model that protects learning and widens participation.

The scholarship also considers risks and critiques. Critics of linguistic imperialism warn that overreliance on English can reinforce inequalities. Nigerian scholars have provided nuanced responses, arguing that local agency matters and that English can be appropriated without cultural loss when policy safeguards multilingual repertoires. The World Englishes tradition and postcolonial English studies show that localized varieties such as Nigerian English are legitimate and systematic, which suggests that policy and pedagogy should recognize these norms rather than insist on unattainable imported standards. In practical terms, this recognition reduces gatekeeping in assessments and professional communication, provided intelligibility and clarity which remains the goals.

Comparative policy examples show multiple viable configurations of a "unified" language within multilingual systems. Tanzania institutionalized Kiswahili as the national language of administration and primary education while using English in postprimary schooling, and East African regional institutions have raised the status of Kiswahili as a working language. At the continental level, the African Union's recognition of Kiswahili as a working language illustrates how a shared indigenous lingua franca can carry integration functions. West Africa presents a different pattern, with ECOWAS operating in English, French, and Portuguese. These examples do not prescribe a single path for Nigeria. They show that the idea of unity can be achieved either through an indigenous lingua franca or through a colonial lingua franca, but in every case success depends on investment in materials, teacher training, and public buy-in.

Despite its advantages, the dominance of English in Nigeria has significant drawbacks. Studies reveal that a large proportion of Nigerians, particularly in rural areas, have low proficiency in English, thereby excluding

them from socio-political participation (Ogunmodimu, 2015). This exclusion undermines democratic governance and equitable development. In addition, scholars such as Omoniyi (2004) argue that the marginalization of indigenous languages erodes cultural identity, alienates communities, and weakens grassroots development. Let us examine the following:

1. Colonial legacy and cultural alienation: English is a foreign language in Nigeria. Some argue it perpetuates dependency on colonial structures, and may be less connected to indigenous culture and identity. Indigenous languages may lose prestige or usage.
2. Accessibility and inequality: Many Nigerians, especially in rural or under-resourced areas, may have poor proficiency in English, which limits their ability to participate fully in education, public discourse, or access services. This can reinforce social and economic inequalities.
3. Loss or neglect of indigenous languages: With emphasis on English in formal sectors, indigenous languages often receive less institutional support, less use in education beyond early years, and less media presence. Over time, this might lead to attrition or extinction of minority languages.
4. Imperfect unification: Even with English as official/common language, linguistic, ethnic, and regional divisions persist language is only one dimension of unity, and English alone cannot fully resolve conflicts rooted in politics, resources, identity, and inequality. Mutual intelligibility of English may still be hampered by variation in dialect, schooling, and exposure.

English has become a marker of class distinction in Nigeria. Those proficient in English are perceived as educated, modern, and employable, while those who are not are often stigmatized as backward (Akinbode, 2016). This linguistic elitism entrenches inequality and creates tension between urban elites and rural populations.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Language, identity, and development are deeply interconnected phenomena, and the Nigerian linguistic situation requires a multidimensional theoretical lens to be fully understood. This study draws on three major frameworks: Sociolinguistic Theories of Language and Identity, Functionalist Perspectives on Language and Development, and the Language Policy and Planning (LPP) Model to explain the role of English and indigenous languages in Nigeria's national development project.

### **1. Sociolinguistic Theories of Language and Identity**

Sociolinguistics highlights the role of language not merely as a communicative tool but also as a key marker of identity, social status, and symbolic power. Fishman (1996) asserts that language and identity are inseparable in nation-building processes, as linguistic choices often reflect broader struggles of inclusion, exclusion, and recognition. Similarly, Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital emphasizes that languages function within a symbolic marketplace, where some linguistic varieties carry greater prestige and access to resources than others.

In the Nigerian context, English represents a form of linguistic capital, granting access to education, political participation, and employment opportunities. However, this capital is unevenly distributed, privileging urban elites with formal education while marginalizing rural populations with limited exposure to English (Ogunmodimu, 2015). Indigenous languages, by contrast, embody local identities and cultural continuity but lack the institutional legitimacy to function as instruments of power at the national level (Igboanusi & Ohia, 2020). This tension reflects Bourdieu's observation that language practices reproduce social inequalities while simultaneously serving as a resource for group solidarity.

### **2. Functionalist Perspectives on Language and Development**

From a functionalist standpoint, language is a critical infrastructure for development because it enables knowledge transmission, governance, and social mobilization (Bamgbose, 1991; Fishman, 2010). Nations with a strong, unified linguistic framework often demonstrate higher levels of cohesion and smoother pathways to socio-economic development. Bamgbose (2000, 2003) argues that Africa's underdevelopment is partly linked to inconsistent and exclusionary language policies that privilege ex-colonial languages over indigenous ones, thereby alienating large populations from participating fully in governance and development.

Applying this framework to Nigeria highlights the paradox of English as both a unifying and divisive force. On one hand, English reduces the risk of ethnolinguistic rivalry by providing a neutral communicative medium. On the other, its dominance perpetuates elitism and limits access to opportunities, especially for communities excluded from English-medium education (Akinbode, 2016). The functionalist perspective suggests that true development must balance efficiency with inclusivity, ensuring that both English and indigenous languages contribute to the national development agenda.

### 3. Language Policy and Planning (LPP) Model

The third theoretical lens is provided by the Language Policy and Planning (LPP) model, particularly as conceptualized by Kaplan and Baldauf (1997). LPP identifies three interrelated dimensions of language management:

- a) Status planning: deciding which languages should hold official recognition and be used in governance, education, and law.
- b) Corpus planning: developing the structure of a language (orthography, vocabulary, standardization) to make it functional for wider use.
- c) Acquisition planning: promoting language learning through educational systems and societal institutions.

Nigeria's current policy framework prioritizes English in all three domains of planning: it has official status, its corpus is globally standardized, and its acquisition is enforced through formal education. By contrast, indigenous languages receive limited support, often confined to mother-tongue instruction in the early years of schooling (Emenanjo, 2005; Igboanusi & Peter, 2005). This imbalance has resulted in widespread dependence on English and the marginalization of indigenous languages.

The LPP model underscores the need for a more balanced approach that recognizes the symbolic and practical value of Nigeria's multilingualism. Adegbija (2004) argues that sustainable development requires a layered policy: English for global integration, and indigenous languages for grassroots mobilization and cultural preservation. Examples from countries such as Tanzania, which successfully elevated Kiswahili as both a national and official language, demonstrate the feasibility of such integrative models (Mazrui and Mazrui, 1998).

Taken together, these frameworks explain the contradictions of Nigeria's linguistic landscape. The sociolinguistic theory shows how English functions as a form of symbolic capital, privileging elites while marginalizing others. The functionalist perspective highlights the instrumental value of language in national cohesion and development, but warns against exclusionary practices. The LPP model demonstrates how institutional choices regarding status, corpus, and acquisition shape linguistic hierarchies and developmental outcomes.

Thus, the theoretical foundation of this study emphasizes that Nigeria's language question is not merely a linguistic issue but a socio-political and developmental dilemma. Sustainable solutions must therefore embrace multilingualism as a resource rather than a barrier, while carefully managing the interplay between English and indigenous languages in policy and practice.

## METHODOLOGY

The paper adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was chosen because it allows the researcher to gather data from a large population and describe the role of language as a unifying tool for national development in Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 2000 which include, civil servants, teachers and students, traders and business owners, community leaders. A simple random sampling technique was used to ensure equal opportunity for all respondents to participate. In some cases, stratified sampling was applied to ensure representation from different linguistic and ethnic groups. However, the sample size for study is 300. The primary instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire used a Likert scale format: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by experts in linguistics and social sciences to ensure clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the research items. The reliability of the instrument was tested using a pilot study. Responses were analyzed using the test-retest method to ensure consistency of results. The researcher personally distributed and collected the questionnaires to ensure a high response rate. In some cases, digital copies were shared through online platforms. The data collected were analyzed using frequency tables and percentages.

## DATA PRESENTATION

This section of the study provides the analysis and results of the data collected. It includes the interpretation and presentation of findings aimed at addressing the research questions. The data related to the research questions were analyzed using simple percentages and frequency counts. All results are presented in tabular form. However, 300 questionnaires were distributed but 298 were retrieved as a working document.

Age	Number	Percentage (%)
15-25	122	41%
26-35	89	30%
36-45	45	15%
46 and above	36	14%
Total	298	100%

The above table shows age group, number and percentage of questionnaire distribution.

English as Nigeria’s official language in promoting national unity.

S/N		SA	A	SD	D	FX	MEAN
1	English serves as a common means of communication among different ethnic groups in Nigeria.	89	115	60	34	885	2.8
2	The use of English reduces ethnic tension in Nigeria.	95	105	70	28	863	2.8
3	English promotes peaceful coexistence	74	119	72	33	830	2.7

	among Nigerians						
4	English enhances political participation and national integration.	69	131	58	40	828	2.7
5	The dominance of English threatens indigenous languages in Nigeria.	90	110	53	45	841	2.8

The above table with the mean scores of 2.8, 2.8, 2.7, 2.7, 2.8 shows that English serves as a common means of communication among different ethnic groups in Nigeria. It also The use of English reduces ethnic tension and the dominance of English threatens indigenous languages in Nigeria.

How major indigenous languages such as Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo contribute to social cohesion and cultural integration?

S/N		SA	A	SD	D	FX	MEAN
6	Indigenous languages strengthen unity within ethnic communities.	68	132	55	44	822	2.7
7	Speaking a common indigenous language promotes trust among community members.	73	122	65	38	822	2.7
8	Indigenous languages help preserve cultural values and traditions	89	109	60	40	843	2.8
9	Indigenous languages help preserve cultural values and traditions	90	111	59	38	849	2.8
10	Indigenous languages should be given more official recognition in Nigeria.	87	116	40	55	816	2.7

The above table has the mean scores of 2.7, 2.7, 2.8, 2.8 and 2.7 respectively shows that major indigenous languages such as Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo contribute to social cohesion and cultural integration. The people is of the view that while English serves as Nigeria’s official language, major indigenous languages like Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo play an equally important role in promoting grassroots unity, cultural continuity, and social integration. Together, they help balance national unity with cultural diversity—an essential foundation for long-term stability in Nigeria.

The impact of language policy formulated by the Federal Government of Nigeria on national development

S/N		SA	A	SD	D	FX	MEAN
11	Indigenous languages are adequately recognized in Nigeria’s language policy.	88	127	33	50	849	2.8

12	Language policy implementation is inconsistent across states.	55	117	70	56	822	2.5
13	English proficiency enhances employment opportunities in Nigeria.	89	109	60	40	843	2.8
14	The use of mother tongue in early education improves learning outcomes.	87	119	51	41	839	2.8
15	There are enough trained teachers to implement the language policy effectively.	36	66	100	97	639	2.1

The above table shows the mean scores of 2.8, 2.5, 2.8, 2.8 and 2.1 respectively opines that Language policy formulated by the Federal Government of Nigeria plays a crucial role in shaping national development. When effectively implemented, it fosters unity, educational progress, economic growth, and cultural sustainability. However, meaningful national development requires not only well-designed policies but also strong commitment to their practical execution. To achieve, there should be enough trained teachers to implement the language policy effectively.

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The findings of the analysis are summarized as follow:

1. English serves as Nigeria’s primary unifying language due to its neutrality and colonial legacy.
2. Indigenous languages are acknowledged in policy but underutilized in practice, limiting their unifying potential.
3. Policy discourse reflects a hierarchy of languages, with English at the top, major Nigerian languages in the middle, and minority languages at the margins.
4. UNESCO’s multilingual advocacy contrasts with Nigeria’s pragmatic approach, revealing gaps between international ideals and national implementation.
5. Language in Nigeria is both an integrative and divisive force, depending on how policies are executed and perceived by different groups.

**DISCUSSION Of FINDINGS/RESULT (WAY FORWARD )**

The findings of this study reveal the intricate balance between linguistic diversity, national identity, and developmental aspirations in Nigeria. Through document analysis, group discussion and discourse review, four major themes emerged: (1) the impracticality of adopting an indigenous language as the national language, (2) the neutrality and utility of English as a unifying medium, and (3) the necessity of attitudinal change and acceptance for language policy to achieve national development.

1. The impracticality of adopting an indigenous language as the national language

Nigeria’s linguistic plurality, with over 500 indigenous languages, presents a significant obstacle to selecting a single local language as the national lingua franca. While Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo have wider reach, none commands universal acceptance across ethnic boundaries. Past debates on elevating one of these languages to national status have often generated political tension and suspicions of ethnic domination (Bamgbose, 2018). The evidence suggests that adopting an indigenous language as the sole national language is not feasible in a context as diverse and politically sensitive as Nigeria.

## 2. The neutrality and utility of English as a unifying medium

Despite being a colonial inheritance, English has served as a neutral and practical medium for communication, governance, and education in Nigeria. Its neutrality stems from the fact that it is not indigenous to any ethnic group, thereby reducing the risk of privileging one group over others. English also connects Nigeria to global networks of commerce, science, and diplomacy, making it indispensable in the 21st century (UNESCO, 2021). However, reliance on English alone entrenches inequality by limiting participation among citizens with low proficiency, particularly in rural areas (Acheoah & Olaleye, 2019). Thus, while English provides functional unity, it must be complemented by policies that preserve and promote indigenous languages.

## 3. The necessity of attitudinal change and acceptance

The findings reveal that policy failure in Nigeria often arises not from the absence of frameworks but from lack of political will, inadequate funding, and poor public buy-in. Attitudinal change is therefore critical. For a language policy to succeed, Nigerians must cultivate acceptance of linguistic diversity as a resource rather than a problem. As Bangbose (2018) argues, language planning without corresponding attitudinal change will remain symbolic and ineffective. Promoting love, tolerance, and mutual respect across linguistic communities is essential for policies to translate into genuine national development.

## 4. The importance of a democratic approach to language policy

Finally, the study finds that any attempt to establish a national language or revise existing policies must adopt a democratic, participatory approach. Top down imposition of language choices risks alienating minority groups and exacerbating divisions. A democratic process through consultations, public debates, and stakeholder inclusion ensures legitimacy and fosters collective ownership of language policies. This aligns with broader principles of democratic governance, where inclusivity and dialogue are necessary for sustaining unity in diversity.

Taken together, these findings highlight the paradox of Nigeria's language situation: English provides necessary unity but undermines linguistic equity, while indigenous languages carry cultural value but lack feasibility as a sole unifying medium. The resolution lies in a pragmatic multilingual policy that leverages English for national and global integration, while systematically developing and supporting indigenous languages through education, media, and governance. Crucially, such policies can only succeed if grounded in democratic principles and supported by attitudinal transformation among citizens and leaders alike.

The study also finds that a rigid English-only approach is insufficient. While English should remain the official language, deliberate efforts must be made to incorporate indigenous languages into education, media, and cultural promotion. A bilingual or multilingual strategy English for governance and global participation, indigenous languages for cultural continuity and local mobilization emerges as the most sustainable pathway (Emenanjo, 2005; Mazrui and Mazrui, 1998). This balance ensures that no group feels culturally alienated, while national communication remains functional. The discussion demonstrates that the dream of adopting an indigenous national language in Nigeria is unrealistic due to entrenched sentiments and adaptability constraints and realistic if the national adopts a democratic approach to the matter.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the central paradox of Nigeria's linguistic landscape: English, while providing a practical medium for national unity and global integration, simultaneously entrenches inequality and marginalizes indigenous languages. It has facilitated inter-ethnic communication, governance, and

international connectivity, yet its dominance has undermined linguistic diversity and hindered inclusive national development. The findings affirm that a sustainable language policy must move beyond the binary of English versus indigenous languages and instead embrace a pragmatic, multilingual approach. Such a strategy should prioritize mother-tongue education at early stages, gradual development of indigenous languages for wider official functions, and continued use of English as a neutral bridge language. Ultimately, the transformation of linguistic diversity into a resource for unity requires not only institutional reforms but also a national orientation grounded in love, acceptance, and collective responsibility toward unity and progress.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen national unity while protecting Nigeria's linguistic diversity:

1. Formalizing a robust language policy: Establish a comprehensive national language framework with clearly defined functional domains for indigenous languages, English, and potentially Nigerian Pidgin, backed by consistent implementation and funding.
2. Recognizing Nigerian Pidgin: Consider adopting Nigerian Pidgin as an officially recognized lingua franca to bridge ethnic and social divides, leveraging its wide acceptance.
3. Strengthening indigenous languages: Use indigenous languages as media of instruction in early education with gradual transition to English; invest in teacher training, orthography development, translations, and publishing.
4. Ensuring equitable resource allocation: Provide rural and marginalized communities with access to education and services in both English and local languages to reduce inequality.
5. Promotion of multilingualism as a cultural value: Foster pride in mother tongues through media, education, and cultural policies, countering perceptions of inferiority.
6. Implement monitoring and evaluation mechanisms: Track literacy outcomes, accessibility of government services, and public perceptions of unity to assess the effectiveness of language policies.

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