

# Revisiting the Nigerian Language Policy on Education: Challenges, Opportunities, and Future Directions

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***Abstract:** With an emphasis on the difficulties, possibilities, and potential paths for enhancing the place of indigenous languages in the educational system, this article revisits Nigeria's Language Policy on Education. English has dominated education at all levels, despite the policy's recognition of mother tongue instruction in primary schools and uneven implementation. The success of the existing program is critically examined in this report, which also identifies important obstacles such as a shortage of skilled teachers, societal attitudes that favour English, the difficulties presented by Nigeria's linguistic diversity, and inadequate resources. It examines reform options, such as creating a framework for multilingual education, funding teacher preparation, and utilizing digital tools to support indigenous languages, by drawing on case studies from multilingual nations. In order to guarantee the fair and long-term incorporation of indigenous languages in Nigeria's educational system, the article ends with evidence-based suggestions for policy modification, increased legislative support, and public awareness campaigns. In the end, it promotes a more academically successful, culturally aware, and inclusive language policy that can enhance social cohesion, protect cultural heritage, and raise educational standards nationwide.*

***Keywords:** Language Policy, Education, Teacher, School.*

## Introduction

National cohesion, cultural preservation, and cognitive growth all depend on language education. The educational system and the larger social fabric are significantly shaped by language policy in a nation with as much linguistic diversity as Nigeria. The Nigerian Language Policy on Education has not yet been fully implemented, and the use of indigenous languages in Nigerian classrooms has been fraught with difficulties despite decades of policy discussions and revisions. This article looks at the policy's current status, highlights its main issues, and considers potential reforms to better meet the language demands of Nigerians. This study seeks to contribute to a more inclusive, efficient, and sustainable language policy for all by critically evaluating the policy's effects and offering practical suggestions.

## Background

With more than 500 indigenous languages spoken by its many ethnic groupings, Nigeria is one of the most linguistically varied nations in the world Sule (2021). Mother language instruction is important, especially in the early years of schooling, according to the National Policy on Education (NPE), which was first adopted in 1977 and has since undergone revisions. Prior to switching to English as the medium of instruction in higher education, the policy places a strong emphasis on

using indigenous languages as a medium of instruction at the elementary level. English still predominates in the educational system at all levels, but, due to uneven implementation of this official objective Adegbija (2004) and Ubah (2017).

Concerns have been made over how English's dominance may affect indigenous language preservation and the standard of education in underserved and rural areas. According to critics, the educational system's over-reliance on English exacerbates educational inequality and undercuts the potential advantages of mother tongue instruction Owu-Ewie (2018). Therefore, in order to resolve these issues, a thorough assessment of the current language policy and its application is essential ensuring that indigenous languages are better integrated into the education system.

### **Objectives**

This essay aims to:

1. **Assess the present Language Policy's Effectiveness:** Examine how the present language policy is being implemented and how it affects Nigerian primary, secondary, and postsecondary education.
2. **Determine the Main Obstacles:** Examine how societal views, teacher preparation, and resource limitations affect the effective incorporation of indigenous languages into the formal educational system.
3. **Examine Potential Areas for Development:** Analyze successful case studies and creative approaches from other multilingual nations, with an emphasis on models that could guide Nigeria's future language policy changes.
4. **Make Policy Reform Suggestions:** Provide evidence-based suggestions for bolstering Nigeria's language policy in order to improve the function of native tongues in the classroom.

### **The Role of Language in Education**

A key component of education is language. It influences how pupils learn, comprehend the world, and communicate their thoughts. Since children learn better when taught in a language they are acquainted with, a number of studies have demonstrated that mother tongue education throughout the early years of schooling improves academic achievements Cummins (2000) and UNESCO (2003). The use of native languages in the classroom is essential in Nigeria for a number of reasons.

1. **Cognitive and Educational Benefits:** Studies have shown that teaching children in their mother tongue enhances their cognitive capacities, such as their capacity for abstract thought and problem-solving Owu-Ewie (2018).
2. **Cultural Preservation:** A key component of cultural identity is language. Cultural heritage is preserved when indigenous languages are promoted in the classroom, and strengthens students' ties to their communities and traditions Sule (2021).
3. **Social Cohesion:** By facilitating communication and understanding between students from different linguistic backgrounds, multilingual education promotes social integration Nwachukwu (2013).

Despite these benefits, the reality in Nigerian classrooms frequently deviates from the policy's objectives. Even though English is the primary language of instruction in the majority of schools, many students, particularly those in rural areas, speak it as a second or third language, which leads

to educational disparities and restricts students' ability to fully engage with the curriculum Akinbote and Akinmoladun (2013).

### **Key Challenges**

The Nigerian Language Policy on Education faces several challenges, which hinder its effective implementation:

1. **Inadequate Resources:** According to Adegbija (2004), many schools lack the textbooks, qualified teachers, and instructional tools required to teach in indigenous languages. The situation is significantly worse in rural areas where indigenous languages are spoken more often.
2. **Teacher Training:** Particularly in formal school settings, there is a dearth of certified educators who speak indigenous languages well. Many teachers are ill-prepared to teach in local languages since teacher preparation programs frequently favour English over indigenous languages Ubah (2017).
3. **Social Attitudes:** English is frequently seen as the language of success and prestige, even if indigenous languages are officially recognized. Local languages are being devalued since many parents and educators believe that English is necessary for upward mobility Nwachukwu (2013). The marginalization of indigenous languages in education is a result of society's preference for English.
4. **Linguistic Diversity:** Standardizing the usage of native languages in schools is difficult due to Nigeria's linguistic diversity. Since there are numerous ethnic groups in the nation, it is nearly hard to enforce a single mother tongue policy for all students. As a result, the policy is frequently applied in a manner that gives preference to certain languages over others Sule (2021).

### **Possibilities for Improvement**

Nigeria's language policy can benefit from a number of creative approaches and effective case studies from other nations. Multilingual education policies have been effectively adopted in nations like South Africa, Canada, and India, where national or global languages are employed alongside indigenous languages. These nations have created frameworks that allow for multilingual instruction without compromising

1. **Creating a Clear Framework for Multilingual Education:** Standardizing procedures and advancing the teaching of indigenous languages throughout Nigeria can be achieved by putting in place a multilingual education policy that recognizes the country's linguistic diversity.
2. **Growing Teacher Training Programs:** It is essential to fund teacher training initiatives that emphasize teaching indigenous languages. To effectively teach in the mother tongue, teachers must be fluent in both the local language and pedagogical approaches Adegbija (2004).
3. **Making Use of Technology:** Promoting indigenous language instruction can be greatly aided by digital platforms. Digital textbooks, e-learning platforms, and mobile apps can all aid in closing the resource gap and provide access to educational resources in native tongues Owu-Ewie (2018).
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## Policy Recommendations

To enhance the role of indigenous languages in the Nigerian education system, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Policy Reform and Legislative Support: To provide more precise standards for the use of indigenous languages, especially in early education, the Nigerian government should amend the National Policy on Education. This involves supporting the creation of language resources and allocating funds to schools in linguistic minority areas Sule (2021).
2. Promoting Local Language Use: The government can establish incentives, such as funds for community engagement initiatives, teacher training, and language resources, for schools that employ indigenous languages as a medium of teaching.
3. Public Awareness Campaigns: To inform communities, educators, and parents about the cultural, social, and cognitive advantages of mother language instruction, a nationwide awareness campaign ought to be started Nwachukwu (2013).
4. Cooperation with Linguists and Cultural Experts: According to Akinbote and Akinmoladun (2013), cooperation with linguists and cultural experts is crucial for the creation of curricula, instructional resources, and teacher training programs in indigenous languages

## Conclusion

By encouraging the use of indigenous languages, the Nigerian Language Policy on Education has the potential to greatly enhance the nation's educational system. However, there are a number of issues with the policy that need to be resolved by thorough reform. Nigeria may develop a more inclusive, egalitarian, and successful educational system by implementing a multilingual education framework, enhancing teacher preparation, and encouraging societal support for indigenous languages. In addition to protecting Nigeria's rich cultural legacy, putting an emphasis on the integration of indigenous languages will improve social cohesion and academic achievement nationwide.

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