

**LANGUAGE RIGHTS IN NIGERIAN LAW:
AN EXPLORATION OF LANGUAGE
POLICY AND PRACTICE**

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Abstract

Despite Nigeria's rich linguistic heritage, the country's legal framework and language policies have not effectively safeguarded the linguistic rights of its citizens. This study explored the intersection of language rights, policy, and practice within the framework of Nigerian law. It further investigated the implications of the dominance of English as the official language, often at the expense of indigenous languages, on cultural preservation and social inclusion. The aim is to provide a comprehensive analysis of language

rights in Nigerian law, focusing on the legal, sociopolitical, and educational dimensions of language policy and practice. The theoretical framework that guided this study is anchored on the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) by Halliday. As a descriptive and qualitative study, it relied on secondary data to critically examine legal frameworks, policy implementation, and practical challenges in language rights enforcement. Through a critical examination of Nigeria's constitutional provisions, policy documents, and practical implementations, the study revealed significant gaps between policy formulation and execution, particularly in promoting multilingualism and safeguarding the linguistic rights of minority groups. The study also highlighted the insufficient integration of indigenous languages into education and governance, limiting opportunities for linguistic justice and national cohesion. It concludes that the effective promotion of multilingualism and language rights are vital for achieving national unity and inclusive development in Nigeria. It recommends revising existing language policies to prioritise the equitable inclusion of indigenous languages, strengthening the implementation of mothertongue education, and fostering public awareness of the benefits of linguistic diversity.

Keywords: Language rights, Language policy and practice, Multilingualism, Linguistic diversity, Inclusivity, and Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria is a country renowned for its rich linguistic diversity with over 500 indigenous languages spoken across its regions. Despite its rich linguistic diversity, Nigeria faces the challenge of fostering national unity while preserving its multilingual heritage. Thus; this study focuses on the country's language policy and its practical implications for governance, education, and cultural preservation. Language rights, as a fundamental component of human rights, are integral to fostering inclusivity and promoting cultural diversity in multilingual societies. On human rights, Nwebo (2020) asserts that, "There is no controversy regarding the need for human rights, their protection or enforcement" (p. 18). According to (Blench, 2019, p. 12), "... the need for an effective language policy that ensures the protection and promotion of linguistic rights remains critical." Despite constitutional provisions recognising the significance of indigenous languages, there is often disconnect between policy formulation and implementation. This study also explores the dynamics of language rights within Nigerian law, focusing on language policy and practice to understand their implications for national cohesion and individual identity.

Fortunately, the Nigerian Constitution (1999), underscores the importance of multilingualism, stating that the government shall "protect and promote the use of indigenous languages" (Section 55). According to Malemi (2021), "The 1999

Constitution has been operational since May 29th 1999” (p.35). However, the practicality of this mandate is often limited by socio-political and economic factors. Scholars like Bamgbose (2000) argue that, “... language policies in Nigeria tend to prioritize English due to its perceived status as a unifying and developmental tool, relegating indigenous languages to secondary positions” (p. 78). This has led to concerns over the marginalisation of linguistic minorities and the erosion of cultural heritage.

Incidentally, language rights in Nigeria also intersect with broader societal issues, such as access to education and justice. Nnabue (2016) notes that, “If justice were determined by popular vote or by the decrees of princes or the decisions of judges, then it would be just to commit highway robbery or adultery or to forge wills, if such things were approved by popular vote” (p. 38). The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) emphasises the right of individuals to use their native languages in all spheres of life (United Nations, 2007, Article 13). However, in practice, many Nigerians, especially those from linguistically marginalised communities, face barriers to exercising these rights. For instance, “... the dominance of English in official and educational domains often excludes non-English speakers, limiting their opportunities for socio-economic advancement” (Eze, 2022, p. 45).

Sadly, Nigeria's linguistic landscape, with over 500 indigenous languages, reflects its cultural diversity but also underscores the complexities of managing such diversity in a multilingual nation. Despite constitutional provisions for language rights, linguistic minorities in Nigeria face significant challenges stemming from the dominance of English and the preferential treatment of the three major indigenous languages which are Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. The marginalisation of linguistic minorities arises from a historical and systemic prioritisation of dominant languages. During the colonial era, "English became entrenched as the language of governance and education, a legacy that persists today" (Bangbose, 2000, p. 71).

Consequently, smaller language communities often lack representation in national discourse, limiting their access to political and economic resources. Adegbija (2004) highlights that, "... policies favoring dominant languages result in the social exclusion of minority groups, eroding their cultural identities and limiting their participation in public life" (p. 112). The dominance of Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba in official and educational contexts exacerbates this marginalisation. While these languages are recognised as national languages, the exclusion of smaller languages from such status effectively relegates them to the periphery. "This imbalance creates a hierarchy of languages that mirrors existing social inequalities, perpetuating the marginalisation of smaller linguistic

communities” (Emenanjo, 1990, p. 208). Therefore, this study critically examines Nigeria’s language policy framework, assessing its effectiveness in safeguarding linguistic rights and promoting national unity.

Objective

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of language rights in Nigerian law, focusing on the legal, sociopolitical, and educational dimensions of language policy and practice. Specifically, the study will:

1. Examine the legal framework governing language rights in Nigeria, including constitutional provisions, legislative acts, and international treaties ratified by Nigeria that pertain to linguistic diversity and rights.
2. Analyse the implementation of language policies in key sectors such as education, governance, media, and the judiciary to determine their effectiveness in promoting linguistic inclusivity and national unity.
3. Investigate the protection of minority languages in Nigeria, assessing whether language policies adequately safeguard indigenous languages from marginalisation and extinction.
4. Evaluate the role of language in access to justice, education, and political participation, exploring whether language barriers impact

fundamental rights such as fair trials, quality education, and democratic engagement.

5. Identify gaps and inconsistencies in language policy enforcement, highlighting areas where legal provisions fail to translate into practical implementation.

6. Assess public perception and awareness of language rights, examining how citizens, educators, policymakers, and linguistic communities perceive and engage with language policies.

7. Propose policy recommendations and legal reforms to strengthen language rights in Nigeria, ensuring equitable language representation, effective multilingual education, and greater inclusion of indigenous languages in official and informal domains.

Statement of Problem

Despite Nigeria's rich linguistic heritage, the country's legal framework and language policies have not effectively safeguarded the linguistic rights of its citizens. The Nigerian Constitution designates English as the official language, with Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba recognised as national languages in some contexts, but it does not provide clear legal protections or enforceable rights for indigenous language speakers. This has led to several socio-political and educational challenges, including linguistic marginalisation, limited access

to justice, and ineffective language policies in governance and education. While Nigeria's Constitution mentions language use, it does not explicitly define or protect language rights, particularly for speakers of minority languages. There is no national law that guarantees linguistic equity or mandates the use of indigenous languages in public institutions, leading to the dominance of English and the neglect of indigenous languages. Existing legal and policy documents, such as the National Policy on Education (NPE) and the National Language Policy (NLP), lack enforceability and are inconsistently implemented across regions.

The use of English as the official language creates a significant barrier for millions of Nigerians who are not proficient in English, limiting their ability to participate in governance, political discourse, and public decision-making. Many official government documents, including policies, laws, and electoral materials, are written exclusively in English, preventing non-English speakers from fully understanding or engaging with them. Indigenous languages are rarely used in legislative processes, despite Nigeria's multilingual composition, which alienates many citizens from national and local governance structures. The National Policy on Education (NPE) advocates for mothertongue education in early childhood learning, but this is rarely implemented due to a lack of qualified teachers, instructional materials, and government commitment. Many students

struggle with English as the medium of instruction, leading to poor comprehension, low literacy levels, and high dropout rates, particularly in rural communities. The failure to integrate indigenous languages into higher education has limited their development as academic and scientific languages, reinforcing the perception that they are inferior to English.

The Nigerian legal system operates primarily in English, making it difficult for non-English speakers to access justice. Many defendants and litigants do not fully understand legal proceedings, court documents, or their rights. While interpreters are sometimes provided in court cases, their availability, accuracy, and professionalism are inconsistent, leading to potential miscarriages of justice. Legal documents, including contracts, court judgments, and public notices, are predominantly in English, excluding non-English speakers from critical legal processes and protections. Language policies in Nigeria favour the three major languages (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba), while hundreds of smaller indigenous languages receive little or no official recognition. Many indigenous languages are facing extinction due to a lack of institutional support, intergenerational transmission, and official usage in education, governance, and media. The cultural and historical knowledge embedded in these languages is gradually being lost, weakening Nigeria's cultural identity and diversity.

Despite the existence of language related policies, there is little political commitment to their enforcement, resulting in poor implementation and widespread neglect of linguistic rights. Funding for language development initiatives, including indigenous language education and research, remains inadequate. Bureaucratic inefficiencies and a lack of coordinated efforts between government agencies, educational institutions, and local communities hinder effective language policy execution. Many Nigerians are unaware of their language rights or the implications of language policies on their education, governance, and access to justice. There is limited advocacy from civil society organizations, media, and linguistic communities to push for stronger language rights protections. Without awareness and advocacy, language policies will continue to be ineffective, and linguistic inequalities will persist. Language discrimination and exclusion contribute to social division, as linguistic communities feel marginalized and disconnected from national development efforts. The dominance of English as the primary language of communication in governance and education exacerbates regional disparities and reinforces socio-economic inequalities. A failure to recognise and accommodate Nigeria's linguistic diversity undermines national unity and sustainable development.

Justification

Addressing these issues is critical to ensuring linguistic justice, promoting inclusive governance, and enhancing the role of indigenous languages in education and public life. This study seeks to fill the gap in understanding the legal, political, and socio-educational implications of Nigeria's language policies. By critically analysing language rights, policy implementation, and practical challenges, the research aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for improving language policy frameworks, promoting multilingual education, and ensuring equitable linguistic rights for all Nigerians.

Significance

The significance of this study is outlined as follows:

1. The study will provide a critical review of Nigeria's legal framework on language rights, identifying strengths and gaps in existing policies. It will offer recommendations for improving legal provisions and policy implementation, ensuring that language laws align with international human rights standards. By evaluating the effectiveness of language laws in practice, the research will guide policymakers in designing inclusive and enforceable language policies.
2. This study will highlight the importance of preserving indigenous languages, many of which

are at risk of extinction due to globalisation and neglect. It will advocate for policies that recognise and protect minority languages, fostering a more inclusive linguistic landscape. The findings can contribute to language revitalisation efforts by providing data on the challenges faced by indigenous language speakers.

3. Language plays a crucial role in education, and this study will assess how Nigeria's language policies impact teaching and learning. By examining the use of indigenous languages in schools, the study will provide insights into the effectiveness of mother tongue education and multilingual instruction. The research findings will help educators and curriculum developers design language policies that enhance students' comprehension and academic performance.

4. Language barriers can hinder access to justice, particularly for individuals who do not speak English fluently. This study will explore how language rights affect fair trials, legal representation, and the administration of justice in Nigeria. Recommendations from this research can inform policies that ensure linguistic minorities receive legal services in their native languages, promoting fairness in the legal system.

5. Effective language policies can contribute to national cohesion by fostering mutual understanding among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups. The study will assess whether existing

policies promote inclusivity or contribute to linguistic marginalisation and social exclusion. By advocating for equitable language representation, the research will encourage policies that strengthen national identity while respecting linguistic diversity.

6. Many Nigerians are unaware of their language rights and how language policies affect their daily lives. This study will raise awareness about linguistic rights and promote public engagement in language policy discussions. Advocacy groups, NGOs, and civil society organisations can use the findings to push for language reforms and increased recognition of indigenous languages. The study will add to the body of knowledge in sociolinguistics, legal studies, and education by providing empirical data on language rights in Nigeria. Researchers and scholars can build upon the findings to further explore language policies, linguistic justice, and multilingual education in Nigeria and other multilingual nations. It will serve as a reference for future studies on language planning, policy development, and language rights in Africa.

Theoretical Framework:

The theoretical framework for this study is anchored on the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by M.A.K. Halliday (1978). The theory provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the relationships between language,

context, and meaning. As a social semiotic theory, SFL views language not merely as a structural system but as a resource for making meaning in social interactions (Halliday, 1978, p. 2). This theory is particularly relevant to the study of language rights and policy in Nigeria, as it offers tools to explore how language is used to construct social identities, negotiate power dynamics, and foster inclusion or exclusion within a multilingual society. One of the central tenets of SFL is the concept of metafunctions, which highlights the multiple roles language plays in communication. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 83), these metafunctions include;

Ideational Metafunction

This refers to the role of language in representing experiences and conveying information about the world. In the context of Nigerian language policy, the ideational metafunction can be applied to analyse how policy documents articulate the roles of indigenous and official languages in societal development. For example, the prioritisation of English in education and governance reflects a particular worldview that values global connectivity over local linguistic heritage.

Interpersonal Metafunction

This focuses on the role of language in establishing and maintaining social relationships. Language rights policies in Nigeria can be analysed through this metafunction to explore how they mediate

power relations between linguistic groups. As noted by Eggins (2004, p. 110), “language choice in official domains often reflects hierarchical structures, with dominant groups imposing their linguistic preferences on minority populations”.

Textual Metafunction

This pertains to the organisation of language into coherent and meaningful discourse. SFL allows researchers to examine how language policies and legal documents are structured to either promote inclusivity or perpetuate exclusion. For instance, the textual analysis of Nigeria’s 1999 Constitution can reveal implicit biases favoring English over indigenous languages.

The application of SFL in this study enables a detailed exploration of how language policies in Nigeria reflect and reproduce social inequalities. By analysing language as a semiotic resource, this study investigates the discursive practices surrounding language rights, highlighting the implications for linguistic justice and social cohesion.

Furthermore, the SFL framework emphasises the dynamic relationship between language and context, particularly through its concept of register. Halliday (1985, p. 12) defines register as the variation of language according to the field (what is happening), tenor (the participants), and mode (the channel of communication). This perspective is invaluable for examining how Nigeria’s

multilingual context shapes and is shaped by language policies.

Methodology

This study involves the systematic collection, evaluation, and analysis of existing literature, legal documents, policy reports, and academic studies related to language rights, language policy, and linguistic diversity in Nigeria. A qualitative approach will be used to critically examine legal frameworks, policy implementation, and practical challenges in language rights enforcement.

Design

This study is qualitative and descriptive, focusing on textual analysis of legal instruments, policy, documents, academic literature, and other relevant sources. Library research is appropriate for this study because it enables an in-depth exploration of existing knowledge on language rights in Nigeria, without the need for primary data collection.

Data Sources

The study will rely on secondary sources of data, like legal and policy documents, the National Policy on Education (NPE), the National Language Policy, international treaties and agreements, judicial decisions and case laws, academic literature and books, government reports and policy papers, reports from international organisations and NGOs

Data Analysis

Language Rights in Nigeria's Constitution

Language rights are fundamental to fostering inclusivity and protecting cultural heritage in multilingual societies like Nigeria. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) contains provisions aimed at recognising and protecting language rights, including promoting the use of indigenous languages. However, the effectiveness of these provisions remains debatable, given the persistent dominance of English and the marginalisation of smaller linguistic groups. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria acknowledges the multilingual nature of the nation and seeks to accommodate linguistic diversity. Section 55 mandates that the proceedings of the national Assembly may be conducted in English, Hausa, Igbo, or Yoruba, reflecting an effort to promote linguistic inclusion. Similarly, Section 97 provides similar provisions for the State Houses of Assembly. However, “these provisions primarily focus on the three major languages, excluding smaller indigenous languages from official recognition”, (Adegbija, 2004, p. 115).

Moreover, the Constitution emphasises the importance of mothertongue education in primary schools, aligning with the National Policy on Education (1977), which advocates for “the use of indigenous languages as the medium of instruction”, (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1977, p.

16). While these provisions are progressive in theory, their implementation has faced significant challenges, including inadequate resources and political will. These challenges in implementation are;

Dominance of English

English remains the de facto language of governance, education, and judiciary in Nigeria. “Despite constitutional provisions, the practical reliance on English marginalises speakers of indigenous languages, particularly in official domains”, (Bamgbose, 2000, p. 81). For instance, court proceedings and legal documentation are predominantly in English, limiting access to justice for non-English speakers.

Limited Recognition of Minority Languages: The Constitution’s focus on Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba perpetuates the exclusion of smaller linguistic groups. This selective recognition reinforces a hierarchy of languages, “undermining the constitutional commitment to equitable representation”, (Emenanjo, 1990, p. 210).

Resource Constraints

The lack of funding and infrastructure for implementing language rights, such as training interpreters and producing educational materials in indigenous languages has hindered progress. “Many schools lack the capacity to deliver mothertongue instruction effectively, leaving

children from minority language backgrounds disadvantaged” (Blench, 2019, p. 34).

Weak Enforcement Mechanisms: The absence of robust enforcement mechanisms for constitutional language provisions further limits their impact. Without legal accountability, language rights often remain aspirational rather than actionable.

Recommendations for Improvement

The following recommendations are presented in this study as pertaining language rights in Nigeria’s constitution;

- (a) Amend constitutional provisions to include more indigenous languages, ensuring equitable representation for all linguistic groups.
- (b) Establish specific laws to operationalise constitutional language provisions, with clear guidelines for implementation and accountability.
- (c) Allocate resources for the development of educational materials, teacher training, and interpretation services to support indigenous languages.
- (d) Promote awareness of language rights and their importance for cultural preservation and social cohesion.
- (e) Develop mechanisms to regularly assess the implementation of language policies, ensuring alignment with constitutional goals.

Language Rights in Nigerian Law

Language rights in Nigeria are shaped by constitutional provisions, educational policies, legal safeguards, and media regulations. These rights reflect Nigeria's linguistic diversity and aim to ensure equitable access to governance, education, justice, and communication. Therefore, language rights in Nigerian law would be looked under the following sub headings;

Constitutional Provisions on Language Rights

The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended) serves as the primary legal foundation for language rights. Section 55 states that the National Assembly shall conduct its business in English and, when feasible, in Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, p. 28). This provision establishes English as the primary official language while granting limited recognition to the three major indigenous languages. At the state level, Section 97 permits state Houses of Assembly to use English or any indigenous language spoken in their respective states (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, p. 55). This provision theoretically supports linguistic diversity in governance but is rarely implemented, as English remains the dominant language in official proceedings.

Language Rights in Education

The National Policy on Education (NPE) acknowledges the importance of indigenous

languages in early education. It mandates that the first three years of primary education should be conducted in the child's mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment, while English is introduced gradually (Federal Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 7). This policy aligns with research emphasizing the cognitive and cultural benefits of mother-tongue-based instruction. However, implementation is inconsistent, as most schools prioritise English from the early stages due to societal perceptions of its prestige and global utility (Bamgbose, 2000, p. 106). Consequently, many students struggle with literacy in both their native languages and English, affecting overall learning outcomes.

Language Rights in Legal Proceedings

Language rights are crucial in the legal system to ensure fair trials and access to justice. Section 36(6) of the 1999 Constitution guarantees the right of an accused person to; (a) be informed of charges in a language they understand. (b) have access to an interpreter when necessary (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, p. 42). Despite this constitutional guarantee, English remains the dominant language in Nigerian courts, often disadvantaging individuals with limited proficiency. Studies indicate that inadequate interpretation services lead to misunderstandings, wrongful convictions, and delays in justice (Ogunmodimu, 2015, p. 82). Strengthening interpreter training and ensuring

linguistic accessibility in legal proceedings remain critical challenges.

Language Rights in Media and Communication

The Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Code emphasises linguistic inclusion in broadcasting. Section 3.1.2 of the 2020 NBC Code mandates that media houses promote indigenous languages through locally produced content (Nigerian Broadcasting Commission, 2020, p. 15). This policy aims to balance the dominance of English with the representation of Nigeria's diverse languages. However, English remains the primary language in mainstream media, including news broadcasts, political discourse, and entertainment. While some radio and television stations provide content in local languages, indigenous-language programming is often relegated to non-peak hours, limiting its impact. Expanding indigenous language content and enforcing NBC regulations could enhance linguistic diversity in media.

Recommendations for Improvement

Despite existing legal and policy frameworks, language rights in Nigeria face significant enforcement challenges. Bamgbose (2000) describes an “implementation gap”, where language policies exist on paper but lack effective execution (p. 110). Addressing these challenges requires the following;

- (1) Strengthening enforcement mechanisms for language policies
- (2) Expanding mother-tongue-based education and bilingual instruction
- (3) Providing adequate legal interpretation services in courts
- (4) Increasing indigenous language content in media and public communication

Language Policy and National Unity

Language policies in Nigeria have historically aimed to address the country's diverse linguistic landscape. The 1977 National Policy on Education, for instance, emphasises the importance of mother-tongue instruction at the primary school level, recognising the cognitive and cultural benefits of learning in one's first language (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1977, p. 16). However, the implementation of this policy has been inconsistent, largely due to logistical challenges, lack of resources, and the dominance of English as the lingua franca.

English, introduced during colonial rule, has continued to serve as the language of governance, education, and international communication. While its status as an official language promotes national cohesion, it often overshadows indigenous languages, limiting their functionality and leading to concerns over cultural erosion and linguistic inequality (Blench, 2019, p. 29). Bamgbose (2000)

highlights the paradox of Nigeria's language policy, "although multilingualism is acknowledged, the practical dominance of English undermines the equitable development of indigenous languages", (p. 78).

Certainly, effective language policy can serve as a tool for national unity by promoting inclusivity and equal representation. Recognising this, the Nigerian Constitution (1999) mandates the promotion of indigenous languages alongside English (Section 55). Additionally, the inclusion of Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba as the major national languages reflects an attempt to integrate linguistic diversity into national identity (Adegbija, 2004, p. 108). However, this focus on three major languages has marginalised smaller linguistic groups, exacerbating social inequalities and tensions.

Furthermore, language is a critical factor in political and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. Mismanagement of linguistic diversity, such as policies that favor one language group over others, can deepen divisions and fuel discontent. As observed by Emenanjo (1990), language policies that prioritise inclusivity and equitable access to resources are essential for fostering a sense of belonging among all linguistic communities (p. 204).

Recommendations for Improvement: One major challenge in implementing multilingual language

policies is the lack of political will and adequate funding. Developing resources for indigenous languages, such as textbooks and trained teachers, requires substantial investment. Additionally, there is a need for greater public awareness about the benefits of multilingualism, not only for cultural preservation but also for national development (Bamgbose, 2000, p. 112). To address these issues, this study advocates for a more inclusive and participatory approach to language policy development. Policies should reflect the diverse linguistic realities of Nigeria, incorporating the voices of minority language speakers.

Furthermore, efforts should be made to raise the status of indigenous languages by integrating them into all levels of education, media, and governance. Language policy in Nigeria has the potential to promote multilingualism and national unity by fostering inclusivity and preserving linguistic diversity. However, the practical dominance of English and the marginalisation of smaller languages remain significant obstacles. By adopting equitable and inclusive language policies, Nigeria can harness its linguistic diversity as a resource for national cohesion and sustainable development. By addressing the identified challenges and implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can create a more inclusive and equitable society that values its linguistic diversity. This approach will not only protect the rights of linguistic minorities but also strengthen national identity and cohesion,

leveraging language as a resource for sustainable development.

Language Policy in Education, Cultural Erosion and Identity Loss

Language policies in education disproportionately disadvantage children from minority language backgrounds. The National Policy on Education (1977) advocates for “mother-tongue instruction in primary education”, however, the lack of resources, such as teaching materials and trained educators in minority languages, hinders its implementation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1977, p. 17). Children forced to learn in unfamiliar languages often struggle academically, limiting their prospects for socio-economic advancement. In the legal sphere, the dominance of English as the language of the judiciary poses significant barriers for non-Englishspeaking individuals seeking justice. “Language related barriers, like the lack of interpreters for minority languages, undermine the rights of linguistic minorities and contribute to systemic inequalities”, (Blench, 2019, p. 32).

Incidentally, language is integral to cultural identity, serving as a repository of collective memory and heritage. The marginalisation of linguistic minorities often leads to the erosion of their languages and traditions. Bamgbose (2000) warns that, “without deliberate efforts to promote and preserve minority languages, Nigeria risks losing valuable cultural knowledge and diversity”,

(p.94). Linguistic minorities face the dual pressures of adapting to dominant languages for socio-economic mobility and preserving their native tongues to maintain cultural identity, a struggle that often leads to language shift or extinction.

Policy Recommendations for Improvement

Addressing the marginalisation of linguistic minorities requires a multifaceted approach like the following;

- (1) Reform policy by revising language policies to recognise and protect the rights of all linguistic groups, regardless of their size.
- (2) Develop resources and train educators to implement mother-tongue instruction for minority languages effectively.
- (3) Ensure the availability of interpreters in courts and other public institutions to guarantee fair access to justice for all linguistic groups.
- (4) Involve linguistic minority communities in policy-making processes to ensure their needs and perspectives are adequately represented.
- (5) Promote programs that document and revitalise endangered languages, such as language education programs and digital archives.

Conclusion

This study has explored the intersections of language rights, policy, and practice in Nigeria, emphasising the challenges and implications of its linguistic diversity. Nigeria's constitutional and policy frameworks acknowledge the nation's

multilingual reality, aiming to balance the promotion of indigenous languages with the need for a lingua franca. However, the dominance of English limited inclusion of minority languages, and inconsistencies in policy implementation highlight significant gaps. These shortcomings perpetuate social inequalities, marginalise linguistic minorities, and threaten the cultural heritage embedded in indigenous languages. Language policy in Nigeria is critical not only for preserving its diverse linguistic identities but also for fostering national unity, promoting social equity, and enhancing access to opportunities. Effective language rights practices must bridge the gap between constitutional aspirations and real-world implementation to reflect Nigeria's rich linguistic diversity equitably. The study concludes that Nigeria's language policies, while theoretically inclusive, fail to fully address the needs of its diverse linguistic population. The prioritisation of English as the official language undermines the status of indigenous languages, leading to cultural erosion and social exclusion. This imbalance poses a threat to national unity, as linguistic minorities often feel marginalised in the sociopolitical landscape.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made by this study;

- (1) Revise existing language policies to expand official recognition to include more indigenous

languages, particularly those spoken by minority groups. Develop a more inclusive framework for promoting linguistic diversity in governance, education, and public life.

(2) Strengthen the implementation of mother-tongue instruction at the primary education level, as stipulated in the National Policy on Education. Provide training for educators and develop teaching materials in indigenous languages to ensure effective learning outcomes.

(3) Allocate adequate resources for the development and documentation of indigenous languages, including the production of educational materials, dictionaries, and digital archives. Invest in linguistic research and revitalisation programs to preserve endangered languages.

(4) Establish specific legal frameworks to operationalise constitutional language rights, with clear mechanisms for enforcement and accountability. Provide interpreters and translators in public institutions, including courts, to ensure accessibility for non-English speakers.

(5) Conduct nationwide campaigns to promote the cultural and economic value of multilingualism and the preservation of indigenous languages. Engage stakeholders, including local communities and civil society, in decision-making processes to ensure policies reflect their needs.

(6) Implement regular assessments of language policies and practices to evaluate their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. Establish a dedicated body to oversee and coordinate language policy implementation across sectors.

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