

GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF HAUSA LANGUAGE STUDIES

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Abstract

This research was conducted to identify the efforts made or being made by the government to promote the study of the Hausa language in Nigeria. Data was gathered from a review of books, journals, and articles relevant to the topic. Based on the findings, it was understood that both civilian and military governments have played significant roles in the development of Nigerian languages, particularly Hausa. However, the extent of implementation of these policies often falls short of their written intentions. Consequently, the paper concludes with recommendations to ensure the implementation of the outlined policies: establishing a special committee to monitor progress, adequately funding Nigerian Language Research Centers, and urgently reviewing policies that prioritize foreign languages over indigenous ones among others.

Keywords: Hausa language, government policies, language development, Nigeria, education

Introduction

Before delving into the details of this paper, it is essential to define the key terms that form its foundation:

Policy: In brief, it refers to the objectives or plans of an authority, particularly the government, laid out as laws for implementation in a country. Such laws often serve as guidelines for leaders in governance.

Government Authorities: The government can be military or civilian. Government authorities refer to the departments or agencies established by the government to implement its policies, such as the Language Board or Language Development Agency.

Military Government: A form of governance led by the military.

Civilian Government: A system of governance led by civilians.

Study: This refers to the examination of a subject, whether language, literature, or any other field, to understand its strengths or weaknesses. Hausa literature, for instance, encompasses the wisdom, artistry, and proverbs embedded in the Hausa language.

Upon clarifying these terms, this paper will discuss the policies formulated by military and civilian governments and their contributions to the study of Hausa literature. Specifically, it will examine the roles played by the aforementioned authorities in achieving the objective

(studying Hausa literature) and provide recommendations based on the findings.

The Hausa language, one of Africa's most widely spoken languages, serves as a lingua franca in West Africa, particularly in Nigeria. Government policies have played a crucial role in shaping its study, standardization, and institutionalization. This paper analyzes how colonial, military, and civilian administrations have contributed to Hausa language studies, focusing on educational policies, linguistic research, and cultural preservation.

The Status of the Hausa Language Locally and Internationally

Hausa is the most widely spoken indigenous language in Nigeria with over 80 million native speakers and millions more using it as second language. It is one of the three major languages (alongside Yoruba and Igbo) recognised in the 1979 and 1999 constitutions. It serves as a medium of instruction because the National Policy on Education mandates mother-tongue instruction in early primary education, leading to Hausa being taught in many Northern schools. Also, several universities like Bayero University Kano, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, among others, offer Hausa studies at degree and postgraduate levels. Hausa is a major language in Nigerian broadcasting media (like NTA Hausa TV, etc), print media (like, Aminiya, Rariya, Mujallar Hausa newspapers, etc) and social media (like facebook, Twitter, X, Youtube, Tiktok, etc) with influencers and

news outlets producing contents exclusively in Hausa today. Hausa also plays an important role in terms of trade and commerce and political mobilization in Nigeria.

Hausa is not only predominantly spoken in the Nigerian Northern region; it is one of the most widely spoken languages in West Africa due to trade, migration and interethnic marriages. It serves as a lingua franca in several West African countries, including Niger Republic (where it is a national language), Ghana, Cameroon, Chad, Benin, and Togo, Sudan and Libya (due to historical trans-Saharan trade routes) and many others. Hausa is sometimes used in African Union (AU) and ECOWAS discussions, particularly in matters concerning West Africa.

The Hausa language has gained recognition in major countries such as the USA, Russia, China, Switzerland, and others. Interestingly, Hausa is studied in universities in these countries, for example, SOAS (University of London, UK), Indiana University (USA), University of Hamburg (Germany), Moscow State University (Russia), Al-Azhar University (Egypt) among others. Similarly, programs in the Hausa language are broadcast on international radio stations like the VOA Hausa (USA), DW Hausa (Germany), BBC Hausa (UK), RFI Hausa (France), CRI Hausa (China), and many others. In terms of Digital and literary expansion, as in the case of online learning in particular, platforms like Duolingo, Memrise, and YouTube offer Hausa language courses too.

This prestige stems from the ease of learning Hausa, its large number of speakers, its role in education, and its extensive written literature. Alongside Yoruba and Igbo, Hausa is one of Nigeria's most prominent languages, spoken by approximately 60-70% of the population, as noted by Grosjean (1982:1). This prominence led to the classification of Nigerian languages into major and minor categories, as observed by Williamson (1990). Furthermore, this linguistic dominance influenced the colonial division of Nigeria into three regions, with Hausa predominant in the North, Igbo in the East, and Yoruba in the South.

The History of Hausa Studies

Hausa was first studied in Europe by colonial scholars in the 18th century. Initially, their focus was on documenting folktales, proverbs, and cultural practices, which they translated into English, French, or German (Yahaya 1988:79). Over time, European scholars deepened their study of Hausa, particularly in areas like linguistic geography, grammar, phonetics, phonology, lexicography, poetry, literature, and folklore, as detailed by Yahaya (1988:82).

In Nigeria, after the colonial takeover, the colonial government introduced Western education and laid the groundwork for Hausa studies in schools. They established "vernacular" schools. For instance, Hanns Vinscher opened "Makarantar Danhausa" in Kano where Hausa was the language of instruction and English was studied as a subject. The Makarantar Dan Hausa was established in 1909. It began as a vocational school set

up by Swiss educator Hanns Fischer in his residence. Because he spoke and wrote Hausa fluently, locals nicknamed him "Dan Hausa" (son of Hausa), and the school took that name.

Vinscher's initiative started with 30 pupils in 1909, and by 1913, enrollment had grown to 209 students, drawn from the eleven Northern Provinces at the time. Efforts were made to develop Nigerian languages like Igbo, Yoruba, Nupe, and Hausa, and standardized writing systems were created for Hausa and other languages. In essence, the colonial government pioneered Hausa studies and shaped its literary analysis methods. Initially, folktales, stories, and proverbs were taught, followed by the adoption of English literary analysis techniques, as Hausa lacked such frameworks until 1900. Examinations like the GCE were conducted in English at both lower and higher levels.

The national language was given prominence in education, leading to the establishment of Abdullahi Bayero College in Kano as a center for Islamic Studies and Arts (FAIS). The School of Arabic Studies (SAS) was also opened in Kano, headed by Hisket, a scholar passionate about Hausa literature. Abdullahi Bayero College became the foundation for Hausa literary studies.

In 1962, Ahmadu Bello University was established, and a department for teaching languages was introduced. Initially, Hausa was taught in English, but by 1972, a degree program exclusively in Hausa was created, alongside the establishment of the Department of

Nigerian Languages and the Centre for Nigerian Language Studies. Efforts were made to translate literary terms, with Professor Dalhatu presenting a paper titled "A Vocabulary of Literary Terms in Hausa." This marked the beginning of specialized studies in Hausa and its components.

Key scholars emerged as leaders in various fields:

Language Studies: M.K.M Galadanci

Literature: Dalhatu Muhammad

Culture: Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya

Overall, the colonial government standardized education and established institutions like the Translation Board, the Writing Board, NORLA, Gaskiya Corporation, and NNPC, paving the way for continued progress.

Review of Government Policies on Language

Beyond these efforts, the colonial government emphasized the importance of studying Nigerian languages in schools. This led to the enactment of education laws in 1882, 1908, and 1916, as well as additional laws in 1888, 1911, and 1926, as noted by Emananjo (1991).

These colonial education laws outlined the role of Nigerian languages in education:

(a) Nigeria was recognized as multilingual, but two or more languages were to be emphasized in education, particularly in regions where Efik, Igbo, and Yoruba

were widely spoken. Section 71 of the 1926 Education Law stated:

"No child shall be taught in any language other than the national language and English without the Director's permission."

(b) The 1926 Education Law further clarified the role of national languages in education:

(i) National languages were to be used for teaching young children to facilitate understanding and avoid confusion caused by foreign languages. Thus, the national language was the medium of instruction in the first two years of primary school.

(ii) English would replace the national language as the medium of instruction from the third year of primary school.

(iii) English would remain the medium of instruction from the fourth to the sixth year and beyond.

These laws affirmed the use of national languages in education before the end of colonial rule.

After independence, the "Cultural Policy for Nigeria" was enacted, addressing culture and language. A language center and NERDC were established, and major national languages were selected for use in schools. Each language was to have a national association. The "Hausa Metalanguage" was developed to standardize linguistic terms. The first conference was held at Bagauda Hotel, where leaders like Professor

Dalhatu (Chairman), Professor I.Y Yahaya (Deputy), and Professor Salim (Secretary) were appointed. Committees for language, literature, and culture were subsequently formed.

The literature committee, led by Professor Dalhatu and Professor Dangambo divided Hausa literature into poetry, prose, and drama. The Association of Hausa Scholars and Writers was established in Argungu, and numerous conferences were held there, with the government collaborating with the Traditional Culture Board to present papers. Officially, the government made efforts, but the associations often failed to perform adequately.

Policies of Civilian and Military Governments on Language

Each government formulates policies based on its objectives. Directly, language policies are often framed under the umbrella of education and governance.

In Nigeria, education is regarded as a tool for national development. Private organizations, communities, individuals, and the government all play roles in education. This necessitates the government's clear articulation of policies and objectives regarding education.

In 1969, a national conference on education was held to address dissatisfaction with the education system's alignment with national needs. Another expert conference was held in 1973 to discuss the ideal education system for an independent nation. This led to

the formulation of the "National Policy on Education," first published in 1977. An implementation committee was subsequently appointed.

Section 4, Subsection 8 of this policy outlined the status of national languages:

"The government recognizes the social and cultural importance of languages. Therefore, every child shall learn the language of their immediate environment. Additionally, for national unity, every child shall learn one of Nigeria's major languages: Hausa, Igbo, or Yoruba" (FRN 1973:8).

This clearly defined the status of Hausa and emphasized its importance for every citizen. This learning is ensured in schools, alongside everyday communication. Studying Hausa in schools entails mastering its components: language, culture, and literature.

The policy also addressed early childhood education for children aged 3–5 (nursery school), with the following objectives:

- (a) Easing the transition from home to school;
- (b) Preparing children for primary school;
- (c) Providing proper care for children before their parents return from work (or farm, or market).

The government's commitments for nursery education included:

- (a) Ensuring trained and specialized teachers for early childhood education.

- (b) Ensuring instruction in the mother tongue or the dominant language of the school's locality. To this end, the government would develop writing systems for many Nigerian languages and provide reading materials in these languages.

Indeed, the government made efforts to ensure instruction in the mother tongue. Hausa is the mother tongue of millions of Nigerians, and teaching in Hausa naturally includes its literature. The government also developed writing systems and books in Hausa.

Section 3 of the National Policy on Education outlined primary education. Beyond stating the objectives of primary education, the government specified subjects to be taught, including:

Languages:

- (a) National languages
- (b) English
- (c) French

Thus, national languages were prioritized in primary education. Subsection (e) further clarified that in the first three years of primary school, the dominant language of the school's locality would be the medium of instruction. In the northern states (except Borno and Adamawa), Hausa dominates, ensuring its role in education. Hausa literature is also integral to its study.

Subsection (f) stated that from the fourth year, English would become the medium of instruction, while national languages and French would be taught as subjects. This

structure mirrors the colonial education system. However, Hausa is taught alongside its literature.

Hausa is also taught as a subject in junior and senior secondary schools. It is studied at universities, particularly Bayero University Kano, where its literature, language, and culture are examined.

Another notable government effort was the establishment of the National Language Center to implement language policies. This agency, now known as the Language Development Agency under the Educational Research and Development Council, advises the government and formulates language policies.

Government Policies on the Language of Governance (National Language)

In a multilingual country like Nigeria, a national language is essential for unified communication. However, in former colonies, the language of the colonizers often becomes the national language by default. Despite independence, former British colonies like Nigeria retain English as their national language, while former French colonies use French. Cameroon, for instance, has two national languages: French in the East (formerly under French rule) and English in the West (formerly under British rule).

In Nigeria, before 1979, English was the language of governance. The 1979 constitution included Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo as national languages for use in national assemblies, provided adequate arrangements were made (Section 51 of the 1979 Constitution).

Similarly, state assemblies could use English or major national languages if approved (Section 91, as noted by Ikara 1994).

From this, it is evident that the government has formulated policies to promote the study of Hausa and its literature. These policies are embedded in the National Policy on Education and the Constitution, serving as the foundation for Hausa studies from nursery schools to universities. They also support governance, particularly in national and state assemblies, as seen in Ondo and Kano states.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the status of the Hausa language locally and internationally, discussed its study's history, and reviewed government language policies from the colonial era to civilian and military governments. It was found that government policies primarily focus on education and governance. Both colonial, military, and civilian governments have significantly contributed to the development of Hausa studies and its literature in Nigeria. However, the committees established to oversee these efforts often underperform.

Recommendations

There is a call for leaders of these committees and language/literature associations to awaken and vigorously pursue the vital task of promoting Hausa studies and literature as deserved.

The government, on its part, must diligently follow up on its policies to ensure proper implementation. Special committees should be established to monitor progress. The government should also adequately fund Nigerian Language Research Centers for comprehensive research. Additionally, there is an urgent need to review policies that prioritize foreign languages over indigenous ones. Moreso, Nigerian government should push for Hausa's adoption as an official AU language.

In terms of digital promotion, there is need to encourage tech companies to include Hausa in AI, machine translation, and voice recognition tools.

Lastly, the government should add more efforts in expanding Hausa teaching programs in foreign universities and online platforms.

By addressing these issues, Hausa can further solidify its position locally and globally.

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