

TALK WITHOUT WALK: INDIGENOUS NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY AND GOVERNMENT INACTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the implementation and abrupt reversal of Nigeria's 2022 National Language Policy, which mandated the use of indigenous languages as the medium of instruction for the first six years of schooling. The policy which was introduced by the former Education Minister Adamu Adamu to leverage linguistic diversity for improved educational outcomes, was officially scrapped in November 2025 by Education Minister Tunji Alausa, who cited poor academic results in regions that had adopted mother-tongue instruction. Through qualitative analysis of policy documents, stakeholder perspectives, and implementation challenges, this study reveals a profound disconnect between policy rhetoric and governmental action. The research identifies critical implementation gaps, including inadequate teacher training, insufficient instructional materials, examination misalignment, and limited stakeholder engagement as primary factors undermining the policy's potential. The findings suggest that Nigeria's language policy challenges reflect broader issues of policy continuity and implementation capacity in multilingual postcolonial states. This study contributes to the understanding of how language policies succeed or fail in complex multilingual environments and offers evidence-based recommendations for developing more sustainable approaches to indigenous language education in Nigeria.

Key Words: Indigenous National Language, Policy, Government Inaction in Nigeria

Introduction

Language policy represents one of the most sensitive arenas of educational planning in multilingual societies, serving as both a mechanism for cognitive development and a tool for cultural identity formation (Spolsky, 2004; Ricento, 2006). In Nigeria, a nation with over 500 indigenous languages and English as the official language, the language-in-education debate carries particular historical and political weight, reflecting the country's colonial legacy and post-independence identity negotiations (Bamgbose, 2000; Adegbija, 1994). The 2022 National Language Policy emerged against this complex backdrop, seeking to align Nigeria's educational approach with UNESCO recommendations on mother-tongue instruction while addressing persistently low literacy rates and educational outcomes that have lagged behind national development goals (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022; UNESCO, 2003). The policy mandated indigenous languages as the medium of instruction from early childhood education through Primary Six, representing what advocates viewed as a transformative shift toward decolonizing education and affirming linguistic identity after decades of English-dominated pedagogy (Obanya, 2004; Achebe, 1975).

The subsequent reversal of this policy in November 2025, after just three years of implementation, provides a revealing case study of the challenges inherent in language policy reform in complex multilingual contexts (Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008; Johnson, 2013; Erunke, 2025). Education Minister Tunji Alausa's justification for the reversal – citing mass failure rates in national examinations (WAEC, NECO, JAMB) in geopolitical zones that had adopted mother-tongue instruction – highlights the profound tension between pedagogical ideals and implementation realities, particularly in assessment systems that remain aligned with colonial language legacies (Babajide, 2001). This abrupt policy shift, undertaken without substantive efforts to address implementation barriers, exemplifies what scholars have termed the "implementation gap" in African language policy – where rhetorical commitments to linguistic diversity and educational equity

are undermined by inadequate planning, resource allocation, and political will (Bamgbose, 2000; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997).

This study examines the trajectory of Nigeria's 2022-2025 language policy through a critical lens, analysing the disconnect between policy formulation and implementation within theoretical frameworks of language policy and planning (Tollefson, 1991; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). It draws on qualitative data from policy documents, stakeholder interviews, and comparative analysis to understand why a policy with substantial research support and potential benefits ultimately failed to take root. The analysis is framed within broader discussions of language rights, educational equity, and postcolonial identity in Africa's most populous nation, connecting Nigeria's experience to similar challenges across the continent. By documenting this recent policy experiment and its reversal, this paper contributes to ongoing scholarly and practical conversations about sustainable approaches to multilingual education in linguistically diverse societies, offering insights that extend beyond Nigeria's borders to other postcolonial contexts grappling with similar language policy dilemmas (Brock-Utne & Skattum, 2009; Trudell & Piper, 2014).

Historical Context of Language Policy in Nigeria

Nigeria's language policy landscape has been shaped by its colonial legacy and complex multilingual reality. The British colonial administration established English as the language of government, education, and prestige, creating a linguistic hierarchy that positioned indigenous languages as inferior for formal domains. Post-independence, successive governments have grappled with balancing the practical utility of English with the cultural and pedagogical value of indigenous languages. The 1977 National Policy on Education marked a significant attempt to institutionalise mother-tongue instruction, stipulating that the language of the immediate community should be used as the medium of instruction in early primary years. However, this provision was sporadically implemented due to inadequate planning and resource allocation.

The 2004 and 2013 revisions of the National Policy on Education maintained this commitment in principle while introducing greater flexibility in implementation. Scholars such as Adegbija (2008) and Bamgbose (2000) have documented the persistent gap between policy rhetoric and classroom reality, noting that English has continued to dominate as the de facto medium of instruction even in early primary grades, particularly in urban areas. This historical pattern of symbolic endorsement without substantive implementation creates an important context for understanding the 2022 policy and its eventual reversal. The literature suggests that Nigeria's language policy challenges reflect broader issues of state capacity and political will in addressing complex educational reforms.

Comparative Perspectives from Africa

The Nigerian experience with language policy reversal finds parallels in other African contexts. Comparative studies of Botswana and Zimbabwe reveal similar patterns of aspirational policy coupled with implementation challenges. Comparative scholarship on Botswana and Zimbabwe, for example, reveals recurring patterns of symbolic recognition without corresponding structural aptransformation in educational practice. In Botswana, despite constitutional recognition of Setswana as the national language, English remains dominant in education beyond the initial grades. Minority indigenous languages receive limited institutional support, and their integration into formal schooling remains marginal. Zimbabwe's 2013 constitution went further to recognise 16 official languages, but implementation has been hampered by resource constraints and the continued privileging of English in high-stakes assessments.

These comparative cases demonstrate that Nigeria's challenges are not isolated but part of a broader pattern across postcolonial African states. Governments throughout the continent face the difficult task of reconciling the demands of global integration – often mediated through former colonial languages – with the imperative of cultural

affirmation through indigenous languages. As Mokibelo (2014) notes in the Botswana context, the effective implementation of mother-tongue policies requires more than political declarations. It demands sustained investment in teacher preparation, the development of instructional materials, and the realignment of assessment systems to reflect linguistic diversity. The absence of these critical elements in Nigeria's 2022 policy rollout left the reform vulnerable to reversal, underscoring the persistent implementation gap that continues to undermine language policy initiatives across Africa.

Theoretical Frameworks for Language Policy Analysis

The analysis of language policy implementation in Nigeria benefits from several theoretical frameworks that illuminate the dynamics at play. Critical Theory, as applied to language policy by scholars such as Freire (1970) and Cummins (2000), emphasizes the role of language in reproducing or challenging social hierarchies. From this perspective, language policies are not merely technical decisions but political acts that allocate symbolic and material resources among linguistic groups. In the Nigerian context, this framework helps explain resistance to mother-tongue instruction among parents who perceive English as offering economic advantages and social mobility.

Sociolinguistic theories of language ecology and linguistic human rights provide another important lens. Scholars such as Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) argue for the protection of linguistic diversity as both a cultural right and a cognitive benefit. This perspective aligns with the stated rationale for Nigeria's 2022 policy, which emphasized the pedagogical advantages of mother-tongue instruction based on research showing that children learn foundational concepts more effectively in their first language. However, as Araromi (2018) notes in the Nigerian context, the implementation of such rights-based approaches faces practical challenges in highly multilingual settings with limited resources for developing multiple languages as media of instruction.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate the implementation and reversal of Nigeria's 2022 National Language Policy. The methodological approach drew on principles of critical policy analysis and interpretive case study research, allowing for in-depth examination of the complex social, political, and educational dynamics surrounding language policy in Nigeria. This qualitative orientation is particularly appropriate for exploring the nuanced perspectives of diverse stakeholders and understanding the contextual factors that shaped policy outcomes.

The research employed an exploratory case study design, focusing on Nigeria's 2022-2025 language policy as a bounded system. The approach enabled an integrated analysis of the policy's formulation, implementation, and reversal. Data were drawn from policy documents, media reports, academic literature, and stakeholder accounts, allowing for triangulation across multiple sources and strengthening the credibility of the findings.

Guided by qualitative policy research methodologies, the analysis adopts a critical realist orientation that acknowledges both the material conditions of policy enactment and the socially mediated interpretations of stakeholders. The inquiry is further grounded in critical language policy scholarship, which foregrounds the influence of power relations, institutional structures, and ideological formations in shaping language planning and implementation decisions.

Data collection involved multiple complementary methods to capture the complexity of the policy phenomenon:

Document Analysis: A systematic review of official policy documents, including the 2022 National Language Policy, ministerial statements, National Council on Education proceedings, and official communications regarding the policy reversal. Media reports from reputable Nigerian and international sources provided additional documentation of public discourse and stakeholder reactions.

Stakeholder Perspectives: Although direct interviews were not conducted for this manuscript, extensive analysis of published

statements from key stakeholders was undertaken. This included examination of positions articulated by the Nigerian Academy of Letters, Linguistic Association of Nigeria, education experts, parent representatives, and government officials. The public petition initiated by the Linguistic Association of Nigeria, signed by 999 verified stakeholders, offered valuable insights into professional perspectives on the policy reversal.

Comparative Policy Analysis: Examination of language policy experiences in comparable contexts, particularly Botswana and Zimbabwe, provided illuminating contrasts and highlighted implementation challenges common to multilingual African states. This comparative dimension helped distinguish Nigeria-specific factors from broader regional patterns in language policy implementation.

Data were analysed using an iterative thematic approach to identify and interpret patterned meanings across the dataset. Following close familiarisation with policy documents, media reports, and stakeholder accounts, initial codes were generated around recurrent categories such as policy rationale, implementation constraints, stakeholder positioning, institutional capacity, and outcome claims. Related codes were then consolidated into broader themes, including the gap between policy design and execution, tensions between pedagogical aspirations and examination structures, and the role of stakeholder engagement in sustaining reform. These themes were systematically reviewed against the full dataset to ensure conceptual coherence and analytical distinction before being developed into interpretive narratives. Grounded in critical language policy perspectives, the analysis foregrounded issues of power, resource allocation, and discursive framing, interrogating both explicit justifications and implicit assumptions underpinning the policy process.

Methodological Limitations and Ethical Considerations

As a document-based qualitative study, this research has certain inherent limitations. The absence of direct interviews with

policymakers and implementers means the analysis relies on publicly available statements and documents, which may present sanitized versions of decision-making processes. Additionally, the relatively short timeframe of the policy's implementation (2022-2025) limits assessment of longer-term potential impacts that might have emerged with sustained implementation and refinement.

Ethical considerations in this research primarily concern the accurate representation of stakeholder positions and policy contexts. Particular care was taken to present balanced perspectives from both proponents and critics of the policy reversal, avoiding oversimplification of complex debates. The analysis respects the diversity of viewpoints within Nigerian society regarding language in education while maintaining scholarly rigor in assessing implementation challenges and outcomes.

4 Findings

Data Presentation and Analysis

Following the methodological description, the iterative thematic approach guided the identification of patterned meanings across the data sources. The analysis below demonstrates how these data provide the basis for the study's findings.

The Implementation Gap: Policy Versus Practice

The analysis reveals a substantial disconnect between the ambitious goals of the 2022 National Language Policy and the realities of its implementation. The policy states:

To ensure effective delivery of instructions and attendant positive learning outcomes, Mother Tongue (MT) or Language of the Immediate Community (LIC) shall be used as the medium of instruction from Early Childhood Care and Development Education to the six years of primary education. However, Arabic language shall be the medium of instruction for Islamic schools. During this period, English language shall be taught as a school subject. (FRN, 2022).

The policy reflects government's intent to promote in early education in order to preserve Nigerian languages and promote their wider use in communication and ultimately foster national unity and regional initiatives development. These are stated in the policy objectives:

The objectives of the National Language Policy are to:

- a. consolidate previous efforts and provide adequate and functional regulatory provisions for language development in Nigeria;
- b. preserve Nigerian languages and save them from endangerment and extinction;
- c. foster linguistic and national unity by providing each language an equitable role and attention within the national milieu;
- d. enable the effective use of language in different domains like education, legislature, administration, etc. with all the attendant positive outcomes;
- e. promote Nigerian languages for effective communication in the print and electronic media;
- f. promote participatory democracy and good governance through equitable use of Nigerian languages at various levels;
- g. facilitate the management of culture and cultural diversity; and
- h. implement regional and intentional initiatives development and use of Nigerian and other languages. (FRN, 2022: 10)

The objectives of the policy demonstrate a strong commitment to the development, preservation, and functional use of Nigerian languages across major domains of national life, including education, governance, and the media. The policy seeks to strengthen linguistic inclusion, national cohesion, and cultural continuity within Nigeria's multilingual society by assigning equitable roles to different languages. Within this broader framework, the education sector is identified as a critical domain through which these goals can be operationalised and sustained.

The objectives of language policy in education are to:

1. promote the effective teaching and learning of Nigerian and foreign languages at all levels of the education system;

2. preserve Nigerian languages and save them from extinction through status recognition and inclusion in educational programmes across all levels of the Nigerian education system;
3. activate Nigerian languages as powerful tools for mass literacy development;
4. strengthen and promote the equitable utilization of all Nigerian and foreign languages;
5. promote the effective utilization of sign language;
6. promote the teaching and learning of Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) and other subjects in Nigerian languages; and
7. promote the development of textual and instructional materials in various Nigerian languages including sign language.

These objectives position education as a key mechanism for sustaining linguistic diversity while expanding access to knowledge and literacy. While the policy mandated the use of indigenous languages as the medium of instruction for the first six years of schooling, essential supporting structures were notably absent. A critical examination of implementation efforts highlights several key deficiencies:

Inadequate Teacher Capacity: The policy rollout failed to address the fundamental challenge of teacher capacity. As noted by an education expert Dr. Aliyu Tilde, Nigeria lacks trained teachers proficient in both subject content and indigenous languages for classroom instruction (Abubakar, 2025). The absence of systematic teacher training programmes in mother-tongue pedagogy meant that educators were expected to implement a fundamentally different instructional approach without adequate preparation or support. This implementation gap was particularly pronounced for minority languages with fewer available teachers, creating inequitable access to mother-tongue instruction across linguistic communities (Owolewa, 2025; Obiakor, 2025).

Resource Scarcity: The policy was implemented without corresponding investment in instructional materials development. Textbooks, reading materials, and assessment tools in indigenous

languages remained scarce or non-existent for most subjects and grade levels. As noted by Nigeria's former Minister of Education, Adamu Adamu, although the policy took effect "theoretically" with the announcement, "but the use of mother tongue is exclusive, but we need time to develop the material, get the teachers and so on" (Nigeria junior schools, 2022). This resource gap forced teachers to either create materials independently (an unrealistic expectation given workload constraints) or continue relying on English-language resources while attempting to deliver instruction in indigenous languages – an approach that undermined the policy's pedagogical rationale.

Assessment Misalignment: Perhaps the most significant implementation failure was the lack of alignment between the policy's emphasis on mother-tongue instruction and Nigeria's examination system. National assessments including WAEC, NECO, and JAMB continued to be administered primarily in English, creating a perverse incentive structure that prioritized English proficiency over mastery of content in indigenous languages. In his address at the 2025 Language in Education International Conference, Minister Alausa explicitly identified this mismatch as a driver of student failure, stating: "Exams are conducted in English, but we taught these kids through their mother tongue... We have seen a mass failure rate in WAEC, NECO, and JAMB in certain geo-political zones of the country, and those are the ones that adopted this mother tongue in an oversubscribed manner" (Abubakar, 2025). This assessment misalignment effectively punished schools and students for implementing the policy as intended.

Based on insights from language ecology, the introduction of mother-tongue instruction without adequate institutional support – such as trained teachers, instructional materials, and aligned assessment systems – disrupts the linguistic ecosystem necessary for effective learning. From a Critical Theory perspective, these structural deficiencies also reproduce existing linguistic hierarchies by reinforcing the dominance of English as the language of educational mobility and institutional power. Consequently, the policy's transformative intent is

constrained by systemic inequalities that shape how language resources are distributed and operationalised within the education system.

Stakeholder Perspectives and Divergent Rationales

The policy reversal elicited sharply divided responses from different stakeholder groups, revealing fundamental disagreements about the purposes of language policy and appropriate evaluation metrics:

Government Justification: Education Minister Tunji Alausa framed the reversal as an evidence-based decision, citing examination data showing "mass failure rates" in regions that had adopted mother-tongue instruction. He characterised the policy as having "literally destroyed education in certain regions" and emphasised the need to prioritise "evidence, not emotions" in educational policymaking (Babajide, 2001). This framing positioned English as a practical necessity for academic and economic success, while implicitly dismissing mother-tongue instruction as an emotional rather than pedagogical concern.

Academic and Linguistic Community Response: In contrast, professional organizations, including the Nigerian Academy of Letters (NAL) and Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN), strongly criticised the policy reversal. NAL President, Professor Andrew Haruna, argued that depriving children of mother-tongue education denies them access to "the deepest and most authentic sources of knowledge" and "impoverishes their intellectual and imaginative potential" (Ehigiator, 2025). The LAN petition, signed by 999 professionals, emphasized that the policy reversal would "jeopardize educational inclusion and equity, especially for children in rural and Indigenous communities". These perspectives foregrounded cognitive benefits, cultural rights, and educational equity rather than examination performance as primary policy considerations.

Parental and Public Views: Parental perspectives reflected the tension between cultural identity and socioeconomic mobility. Reporting in the BBC captured voices of parents who supported the reversal on pragmatic grounds, arguing that early immersion in English

enhances children's competitiveness in a globalised economy. One parent, Hajara Musa, described English as a "global language" and maintained that postponing its use in early schooling could disadvantage learners. This position was reinforced by education analyst Dr. Aliyu Tilde, who noted that national high-stakes examinations such as WAEC, NECO, and JAMB are conducted exclusively in English, and that shortages of trained teachers and instructional materials made widespread mother-tongue instruction operationally unrealistic (Abubakar, 2025). Conversely, critics interviewed by Apex News Exclusive framed the reversal as culturally detrimental. Madam Mmakim Ette warned that abandoning mother-tongue instruction would accelerate linguistic erosion and deepen generational disconnection from indigenous heritage, while Mr Callistus Ogban Egwu characterised the decision as a blow to national identity. Collectively, these perspectives underscore the policy's contested nature, exposing deep-seated anxieties regarding state capacity and the erosion of cultural heritage.

The divergent reactions to the policy reversal illustrate how language policy functions as both a political instrument and a sociocultural resource. From a Critical Theory perspective, the government's justification - anchored in exam performance and framed as "evidence-based"—reveals how English continues to dominate as a gatekeeping tool for academic and economic opportunity, reinforcing existing hierarchies and privileging urban or English-advantaged communities. Conversely, the objections raised by linguistic professionals and cultural advocates highlight the role of language as a site of cognitive empowerment, cultural rights, and equity, which reflects a counter-narrative that positions mother-tongue instruction as essential for meaningful knowledge acquisition and inclusive education. From a Language Ecology and Linguistic Human Rights standpoint, parental and public views expose the tension between maintaining a linguistic ecosystem that supports cultural identity and navigating socio-economic realities that elevate English proficiency. Collectively, these perspectives show that the reversal was less about

objective metrics like exam scores and more about the complex interplay of power, identity, and state capacity.

Regional Disparities in Implementation and Outcomes

The policy had varying impacts on different parts of Nigeria, with geopolitical zones that implemented it more comprehensively experiencing noticeable effects on exam results – such outcomes ultimately informed the decision to reverse the policy.

Differential Adoption: The policy was implemented more extensively in some regions than others, creating what Minister Alausa described as "over-subscribed" adoption in certain geopolitical zones. He stated further: "Now that policy was enacted many years ago, the south west, south east, south south did not implement it. North Central did not implement it. We had Northwest and Northeast implementing it" (Nwachukwu, 2026). This uneven implementation reflected varying levels of administrative commitment, resource availability, and community support across Nigeria's diverse linguistic landscape.

Examination Performance Patterns: News reports quoted the Education Ministry as saying that "assessments from national examination bodies revealed elevated failure rates in key exams in states where indigenous languages were heavily used in foundational schooling" (Agbana, 2025). This outcome likely reflects both the assessment misalignment discussed previously and potential shortcomings in implementation quality. However, the attribution of examination failures solely to mother-tongue instruction overlooks other confounding factors, including regional variations in educational resources, teacher qualifications, and socioeconomic conditions that influence academic performance.

Equity Implications: The policy's uneven implementation and subsequent reversal raised significant equity concerns. The Nigerian Academy of Letters (NAL) warned that the abrupt cancellation "risks social and symbolic exclusion, especially for speakers of minority languages" and is "tantamount to reverting to the colonial enterprise of linguistic domination". Additionally, the Nigerian Academy of

Education (NAE) described the reversal as a “grave disservice” that amounts to “permanent re-colonisation and the burial of Nigeria’s future and pride” (Akinsanmi, 2025). These views reiterate that the policy reversal not only disrupts educational access but also perpetuates systemic linguistic inequalities, which in effect permanently marginalise Nigeria’s most vulnerable linguistic communities due to state failure.

Taken together, these dynamics reveal that language policy in Nigeria functions not merely as an educational instrument but as a contested site of ideological struggle, where the state’s privileging of English reproduces colonial hierarchies of knowledge and power. Therefore, transforming regional implementation gaps into structural exclusions that systematically marginalise indigenous speakers. This results in a deeply fractured language ecology in which the “habitat” (school classrooms) promotes mother-tongue instruction, while the “climate” (national high-stakes examinations) continues to favour English.

Discussion and Conclusion

The trajectory of Nigeria's 2022-2025 National Language Policy exposes fundamental tensions in language planning within complex multilingual societies. An ambitious, largely symbolic vision was followed by uneven implementation, contested short-term evaluation, and an abrupt reversal that reinstated prior practices. This pattern, where aspirational policy declarations are not supported by sustained implementation and are subsequently rolled back after poor short-term outcomes, reflects established concepts of symbolic policy dynamics and the “implementation gap” in language planning (Boussaguet & Faucher, 2025). It further exposes deeper structural weakness in Nigerian educational governance, including short-term policy horizons, inadequate implementation planning, and evaluation frameworks that privilege immediate examination results over longer-term educational and cultural outcomes.

The policy's failure cannot be attributed solely to flaws in its conceptual foundation. Substantial research supports the cognitive

benefits of mother-tongue instruction in early education, particularly for literacy development and concept acquisition. Rather, the breakdown occurred in the transition from policy formulation to implementation – a transition that requires not only political declaration but also systemic alignment of teacher preparation, curriculum development, assessment design, and resource allocation. The Nigerian case illustrates how even well-intentioned language policies can falter when introduced without the necessary ecosystem of support to make them operationally viable.

From a theoretical standpoint, Nigeria's experience highlights the limits of both rights-based approaches that emphasise linguistic equity without addressing implementation pragmatics, and utilitarian approaches that prioritise immediate examination performance over broader educational and cultural objectives. Critical and sociolinguistic theories suggest that privileging one dimension at the expense of the other – whether enforcing mother-tongue instruction without practical support or privileging English exclusively – risks undermining both educational effectiveness and cultural sustainability. A more sustainable path would recognise the complementary roles of indigenous languages and English in Nigerian education, moving beyond either framework to develop context-sensitive multilingual models that acknowledge both local identities and global connections.

The policy reversal represents more than just an educational adjustment; it reflects ongoing postcolonial negotiations about knowledge systems, cultural identity, and development pathways. The gap between ambitious policy intentions and uneven implementation illustrates how structural inequities, resource constraints, and short-term evaluation frameworks can transform well-meaning policies into instruments that inadvertently reinforce existing hierarchies of power and privilege. As Nigeria continues to navigate its linguistic diversity in an increasingly globalised world, the lessons from this recent policy experiment offer valuable insights for developing more nuanced, sustainable approaches to language in education – approaches that

might eventually transform "talk without walk" into coherent policy that walks alongside meaningful dialogue.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of Nigeria's 2022-2025 language policy experience, the following recommendations are proposed for developing more sustainable approaches to indigenous language education:

i. Phased, Context-Sensitive Implementation

Rather than abrupt nationwide mandates, future language policies should adopt phased implementation strategies that account for regional linguistic contexts and resource availability. Initial implementation might focus on regions with dominant indigenous languages and established educational infrastructure, with gradual expansion to more linguistically diverse areas as capacity develops. This approach would allow for local adaptation of the policy framework while building evidence of effective practices.

ii. Integrated Teacher Development

Addressing the teacher capacity gap requires comprehensive professional development programmes that combine subject expertise with mother-tongue pedagogical skills. Recommendations include:

- a) Establishing specialized teacher certification pathways for mother-tongue instruction at colleges of education
- b) Developing in-service training modules for current teachers transitioning to mother-tongue methodologies
- c) Creating incentive structures to recognize and reward teacher proficiency in indigenous language instruction
- d) Building communities of practice where teachers can share resources and strategies for mother-tongue education

iii. Balanced Multilingual Assessment Framework

To address the misalignment between mother-tongue instruction and English-medium examinations, Nigeria should develop a comprehensive assessment framework that values multilingual competencies. Specific measures include:

- a) Introducing bilingual examination options for core subjects at primary completion level
- b) Developing complementary assessment tools that measure conceptual understanding in indigenous languages
- c) Including multilingual competencies as indicators in school quality evaluations
- d) Gradually transitioning toward flexible assessment systems that allow students to demonstrate knowledge in their language of strength

iv. Community-Engaged Language Planning

Sustainable language policy requires active engagement with local communities as stakeholders rather than passive recipients. Recommended engagement strategies include:

- i. Establishing community language committees to advise on implementation approaches and resource development
- ii. Creating participatory mechanisms for developing and reviewing indigenous language materials
- iii. Implementing public awareness campaigns highlighting research on cognitive benefits of mother-tongue education
- iv. Developing family literacy programs that connect school-based mother-tongue instruction with home language practices
- v. Strategic Resource Allocation

Effective implementation requires targeted investment in often-overlooked aspects of language policy. Priority areas for resource allocation include:

- a) Establishing regional materials development centres for producing context-relevant indigenous language resources
- b) Creating digital repositories of open-access mother-tongue teaching materials
- c) Funding action research on effective mother-tongue methodologies in Nigerian contexts
- d) Developing language technology tools (text-to-speech, translation support) for underrepresented indigenous languages
- e) Evidence-Informed Policy Timeframes

Language policy interventions require sufficient time to demonstrate impact, particularly when changing entrenched educational practices. Future policy initiatives should:

- a) Establish realistic timeframes (7-10 years minimum) for comprehensive implementation and evaluation
- b) Develop interim benchmarks that measure implementation progress rather than solely final outcomes
- c) Create policy review mechanisms that allow for mid-course adjustments based on implementation evidence
- d) Build longitudinal research components into policy design to track educational and social impacts over time

Adopting these measures would enable Nigeria to move beyond the cyclical pattern of ambitious declarations followed by premature abandonment toward more sustainable, effective approaches to harnessing its linguistic diversity as an educational asset rather than a pedagogical challenge. This path would honour both the cultural rights of Nigerian communities and the educational needs of Nigerian children, transforming "talk without walk" into policy that walks steadily toward meaningful educational improvement.

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