Language Planning and Policy Implementation in Nigerian: Challenges and the Way Forward

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Abstract

This research explores the challenges and effects of implementing Nigeria's language policy, focusing on its influence on societal structures, education and cultural identity. Despite the original intent to foster linguistic diversity and safeguard indigenous languages, Nigeria's language policy has faced significant barriers in its execution. The data for this study are gathered through interviews with language experts, offering critical insights into the shortcomings of the policy. A descriptive analysis of the data reveals that the predominance of English, coupled with inconsistent policy enforcement and political opposition, has led to the marginalisation of native languages, cultural decline and negative educational consequences. Political issues such as ethnic competition and lack of political commitment have hindered the policy's success. The study, therefore, suggests a more substantial governmental commitment, better allocation of resources, incorporation of indigenous languages in the school curriculum at higher levels of education, active community participation, and campaigns to raise public awareness to improve language policy implementation in Nigeria. A phased and adaptable approach to language policy, which prioritises regional languages is also recommended to manage Nigeria's complex linguistic polity. This study

highlights the pressing need for a comprehensive, coordinated approach to language planning that can effectively protect and promote Nigeria's linguistic and cultural heritage.

Keywords: Language, language planning, language policy, implementation, indigenous languages

1. Introduction

Language is a communication system consisting of sounds and written symbols that people of a particular country or region use for talking or writing. It is an essential and indispensable tool available to man for the facilitation of his day-to-day activities. Whatever language we speak helps to define us as humans and identify the community we belong to. Wolfram (1991) opines that language is one of the most powerful emblems of social behaviour, and it is often surprising to realise how extensively we may judge a person's background, character and intentions based simply upon the person's language and in some instances, the person's choice of words. Consequently, societies are identified and differentiated through the language they speak. The above is the preoccupation of sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics is an area of linguistics that is concerned with the relationship between language and society. It explains why people speak differently in different social contexts. It is the study that investigates the relationship between language and society with the goal of a better understanding of the structure of language and how languages function in communication (Wardhaugh, 1986).

On the other hand, language planning is also an area of interest to sociolinguistics. Language planning is a deliberate language change, that is, changes in the system of language code or speaking or both, that are planned by organisations established for such purposes or given the mandate to fulfill such purposes. As such, language planning focuses on problem-solving and is characterised by formulating and evaluating alternatives for solving language problems to find the best (or optimal, most efficient) decision (Rubin & Jernudd, 1971).

According to Cooper (1989), types of language planning include status, corpus and acquisition planning. Status planning is concerned with the allocation of functions

to languages or language varieties within a society. This includes decisions about languages, national languages and language use in government, education, media and other domains. Corpus planning focuses on developing and standardising language forms, including spelling, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. This type of planning aims to create a unified language code, often for languages with multiple dialects or varieties. Acquisition planning deals with the promotion and facilitation of language learning and teaching. This includes language education policies, curriculum design, teacher training and assessment methods.

Language planning, which involves the deliberate efforts to influence the function, structure or acquisition of languages within a community, is closely tied to language policy, as it provides the framework through which such planning is implemented. Language policy refers to the explicit or implicit principles, goals and measures that guide the use of languages in a particular society, institution or domain. Different actors, such as governments, organisations, communities or individuals, can formulate and implement language policy. Language policy can have various effects on the linguistic landscape, diversity and ecology of a region or a group. For example, language policy can promote or suppress certain languages, grant or deny linguistic rights, foster or hinder language learning and maintenance (Spolsky, 2004).

Language planning in Nigeria involves the strategic management of languages by the government and institutions to promote, support and sometimes marginalise different linguistic groups. Historically, the dominance of English established during colonial rule has continued to overshadow indigenous languages, despite post-independence efforts to balance this by promoting local languages. Despite Nigeria's rich linguistic diversity, with over 450 languages spoken across the country, the language planning policy has faced significant criticism. This criticism primarily stems from the policy's tendency to favour a few dominant languages, namely English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, while neglecting the many minority languages. Such favouritism has resulted in several critical issues, one of which has to do with language rights. Speakers of these neglected languages often find themselves at a disadvantage, lacking the same opportunities for education, government participation and social integration as speakers of the dominant languages. This inequality is evident in various spheres including education,

where instruction is predominantly in English or one of the major indigenous languages, leaving minority language speakers behind.

Again, the cultural preservation of these minority languages is at risk. As these languages receive less official support and recognition, their use diminishes, and the rich cultural heritage they represent faces potential extinction. This loss affects the speakers of these languages and diminishes Nigeria's overall cultural diversity. Consequently, the policy's effectiveness in achieving its stated goals, promoting national unity, enhancing language education and fostering economic development is highly questionable. National unity is challenged by the feelings of exclusion and marginalisation among minority language speakers. In terms of language education, the focus on a few languages limits the development of comprehensive educational programmes that can cater for the diverse linguistic landscapes of the country.

This study, therefore, focuses on language planning and policy in Nigeria, exploring their impact on promoting, maintaining and marginalising indigenous languages. It delves into the implementation and challenges of language policies, particularly the dominance of English since colonial rule. It seeks to appraise how these policies influence linguistic diversity and societal development, offering insights for more inclusive and effective language planning. By examining the language planning policy in Nigeria, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of how language policy can be used to promote linguistic diversity, social justice and national unity. This study also seeks to identify the current policy's challenges, gaps, and contradictions and explore strategies for addressing them. Through a detailed descriptive analysis of the language planning policy in Nigeria, as well as interview reports of four language policy experts, this study hopes to contribute to the development of a more inclusive, effective and sustainable language policy that promotes linguistics diversity, language equality and multilingualism, as well as support the country's social, economic and political development.

2. Review of related studies

Several studies have been conducted on language planning and policy, particularly in multilingual contexts. These studies focus on the formulation,

implementation and implications of language policies in such settings. The body of research includes works by Bamgbose (2000), Adegbija (2004), Igboanusi and Lothar (2005), Emenanjo (1990) and others. These studies are critical to understanding Nigeria's language planning and policy challenges and dynamics. Below are some of such relevant studies:

Emenanjo (1990) conducted a qualitative analysis of the role of language planning in modernisation and cultural preservation. He assessed how policies support development while maintaining cultural identity by examining policy documents and linguistic practices. His findings highlighted the duality of Nigeria's language policies, which promote English for development purposes but often fail to preserve indigenous languages sufficiently. He advocated for a balanced approach that harmonises these goals to sustain cultural heritage and socio-economic progress.

Bamgbose (2000) utilised a qualitative approach to investigate the execution of language policies in Nigeria, mainly focusing on the National Policy on Education (NPE). He examined documents and conducted a deep analysis of policy implementation. His findings revealed a significant gap between policy formulation and execution. Despite the recommendation of indigenous languages in primary education, the absence of trained teachers and adequate learning resources hindered its success. He concluded that the dominance of English perpetuates linguistic inequalities and marginalises indigenous languages, creating challenges for effective policy implementation.

Adegbija (2004) employed surveys and interviews to explore the implications of Nigeria's language policy for national unity. He analysed data from minority communities to assess perceptions of language policy and its effects. The findings showed that prioritising the three significant languages; Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, marginalised minority languages, fosters dissatisfaction and weakens national cohesion. Adegbija's study further highlighted the importance of inclusive language planning in addressing the needs of all linguistic groups and promoting unity in Nigeria's multilingual society.

Agbedo (2004) employed a qualitative methodology to examine Nigeria's socio-political and economic implications of language planning. By analysing policy impacts on indigenous languages and national development, he found that prioritising English over local languages hinders their growth and marginalises linguistic diversity. This neglect undermines national development, as it fails to leverage indigenous languages' cultural and linguistic potential. Agbedo emphasised the need for balanced policies that address these disparities to promote inclusive national progress.

Igboanusi and Lothar (2005) combined socio-economic data analysis and linguistic evaluation to examine the dominance of English in Nigeria's socio-economic landscape. The researchers explored how English is linked to socio-economic mobility and its impact on linguistic diversity. Their findings indicated that English is a marker of higher social status, creating disparities between English speakers and non-speakers. This dominance undermines the development of indigenous languages and perpetuates inequality, demonstrating the need for language policies that balance linguistic and socio-economic equity.

These empirical studies highlight the intricate nature of language planning and policy in Nigeria, shedding light on issues such as limited resources, societal biases and structural inequalities. Building on the perspectives of these scholars, the present study offers a detailed analysis of the implementation gaps in Nigeria's language policies and their impact on linguistic diversity and socio-economic progress, following a descriptive approach.

3.1 The effects of Nigeria's language policy implementation on the society

Nigeria's language policy implementation has been profound, yet its effects on society have been limited for various reasons. Some of the effects are discussed as follows:

3.1.1 Relegation of indigenous languages

Nigeria's language policy elevates English as the lingua franca, depriving all the indigenous languages of the privilege of serving that function. In the words of Virginus Aruah [Oral interview, 2024], "Nigeria being a multilingual nation with hundreds of indigenous languages, has failed to promote even the three major

languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, as well as numerous minority languages". Instead, English was chosen as the official language, becoming the medium of instruction in schools, the language of governance and the standard for official communication. This decision elevated English above all indigenous languages and, in so doing, marginalised them. Over time, this has led to a language shift where the younger generation prefers English to their native tongue.

Furthermore, language policy vagueness has perpetuated the relegation of our native languages, according to Ndubuisi Ahamefuna [Oral interview, 2024]. Ahamefuna faulted the National Policy on Education (NPE) for its lack of concrete implementation strategies. Although the policy recommends that children be taught in the language of their immediate environment, it includes a clause that this should occur only "when adequate arrangements are made." This vague wording has become an excuse for inaction, as adequate arrangements are rarely made. Similarly, while the Nigerian Language policy mentions promoting indigenous languages, no substantial steps have been taken to actualise this provision. Ahamefuna argued that these shortcomings have allowed English to dominate in every sphere of life, relegating indigenous languages to informal settings or even rendering them obsolete in some cases, emphasising that this dominance of English has not only undermined the relevance of indigenous languages but also contributed to the loss of cultural identity and societal cohesion.

The above highlights the detrimental impact of Nigeria's language policy on the status and usage of indigenous languages, revealing that the policy's design and implementation have systematically elevated English, reducing the functional domains of native languages. Aruah's observation that the policy neglected the three major languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) and countless minority languages underscores the systemic marginalisation embedded in the choice of English as the official language. By prioritising English, the policy inadvertently suppressed the growth and usage of native languages. This suppression is further exacerbated by the societal shift, particularly among younger generations, toward favouring English over their mother tongues. Ahamefuna's critique sheds light on the structural loopholes within the policy. The vague clause in the National Policy

on Education (NPE), which mandates teaching in indigenous languages, has allowed policymakers and institutions to sideline indigenous languages.

The policy's provision for promoting indigenous languages remains unfulfilled due to inadequate execution frameworks. These systemic issues not only diminish the use of indigenous languages but also erode their cultural significance, as language serves as a vital conduit for preserving heritage and identity. Nigeria's language policy has, therefore, relegated indigenous languages by failing to provide robust mechanisms for their promotion and use. The policy's shortcomings highlight the urgent need for deliberate and effective strategies to revitalise and sustain indigenous languages within Nigeria's multilingual framework.

3.1.2 Dominance of English

The dominance of English and the relegation of indigenous languages in Nigeria are two sides of the same coin. The dominance of the English language has been facilitated by the failure to implement the country's language policy effectively, which has resulted in the marginalisation of indigenous languages. Johnson Okonkwo [Oral interview, 2024] bemoaned how Nigeria's language policy has led to the overwhelming dominance of English across various sectors of society. Despite Nigeria's linguistic diversity, the policy prioritised English as the official language, effectively sidelining indigenous languages. Okonkwo noted that English is not only the language of government and education but has also infiltrated Nigerian homes, with many families now using English as the primary language of communication. This shift occurred due to the policy's focus on English as the language of instruction and official discourse, marginalising indigenous languages in formal and informal settings. As a result, younger generations increasingly lose the ability to speak their mother tongues. Okonkwo emphasised that this dominance of English has resulted in a generation not fully grounded in their cultural heritage, as language is deeply connected to one's identity and traditions.

Peter Ikechukwu [Oral interview, 2024] reechoed a similar concern when he observed that the policy's failure to promote indigenous languages has inadvertently allowed English to dominate public and private life. He highlighted

that the National Policy on Education (NPE) had once envisioned a more inclusive approach, where children would be taught in their local languages. However, the lack of proper implementation and strategic planning was responsible for this provision not to be fully realised. Instead, English became the primary language of instruction, reinforcing its dominance in Nigerian schools. Ikechukwu argued that this has resulted in a disconnection between the language spoken at home and the language used in schools, further entrenching the superiority of English. He also noted that English has become the preferred language in many households, not just for formal communication but also in informal settings, even in our bedroom conversations, reducing opportunities for children to learn and use their native languages. This pervasive use of English, even in contexts where indigenous languages once thrived, is a clear manifestation of the policy's unintended consequences, which have led to the further marginalisation of Nigeria's rich linguistic heritage.

The concern raised by Okonkwo and Ikechukwu above sheds light on the detrimental effects of Nigeria's language policy, particularly about the dominance of English, which has significantly undermined the status and use of indigenous languages. Okonkwo highlights a critical issue in the policy's implementation. The policy's focus on English as the medium of instruction in schools and its integration into all levels of government and public life has created a situation where English is increasingly used, even in private spheres like homes. This widespread use of English, particularly among younger generations, has led to a notable decline in the proficiency and use of indigenous languages. The policy's failure to create a more inclusive framework for promoting local languages has inadvertently resulted in their marginalisation, affecting linguistic diversity and cultural identity. Tangible efforts to implement the provisions of the National Policy on Education (NPE), which initially advocated teaching children in their local languages, are lacking. The absence of a clear, actionable strategy for achieving this goal has left indigenous languages to suffer. English continues to dominate in educational settings, governance, and day-to-day communication, resulting in a contradiction between policy intentions and outcomes.

3.1.3 Cultural erosion and identify loss

The implications of using English in Nigeria, driven mainly by the country's language policy, have significantly contributed to cultural erosion and the loss of cultural identity. Virginus Aruah [Oral interview, 2024] says that the shift towards English has not only led to the loss of fluency in indigenous languages but also diminished the role these languages play in transmitting cultural knowledge. He further stressed that language is not merely a tool for communication but a vital repository of cultural identity. By favouring English over native languages, Nigeria risks the erosion of its cultural diversity. This abandonment of indigenous languages erodes the cultural practices and values they embody, including folklore, traditions and even community structures. The younger generations, who are less fluent in their mother tongues, are increasingly detached from these languages' rich cultural heritage, further weakening the link between language and culture.

Furthermore, Johnson Okonkwo [Oral interview, 2024] emphasised that many Nigerians communicate in English within their households, so indigenous languages are no longer passed down to younger generations. Okonkwo maintained that language is not just a means of communication but a powerful instrument for preserving cultural identity. The loss of proficiency in native languages, he argued, represents a loss of access to cultural knowledge and practices that are deeply embedded in language. Indigenous languages are vehicles for passing on generations of history, values and social norms; their decline threatens the continuity of these cultural practices. For example, storytelling, traditional rituals, and community solidarity often rely on linguistic nuances that are difficult to translate into English. When these languages are abandoned, such practices and cultural heritages risk being lost forever.

This shift towards English has led to a decline in linguistic competence in indigenous languages and undermines cultural transmission. This linguistic situation has facilitated the loss of access to traditional cultural practices typically communicated through these languages. As Okonkwo highlighted, indigenous languages carry a wealth of cultural knowledge, from storytelling to ritual, and the gradual disappearance of these practices accompanies their decline. The younger generation's diminished ability to communicate in their mother tongues

limits their understanding of their cultural heritage, thus contributing to a broader identity crisis. The marginalisation of indigenous languages has significantly eroded Nigeria's cultural fabric, creating a disconnect between the younger generation and their cultural roots. This cultural disconnection leads to a weakened sense of identity, as loss of proficiency in indigenous languages, which were once vital in shaping individual and collective identities, threatens to erase vital aspects of Nigeria's rich cultural heritage.

3.1.4 Educational challenges

The pervasive dominance of English in Nigeria has posed significant educational challenges, particularly in language proficiency and academic performance. According to Ndubuisi Ahamefuna [Oral interview, 2024], "the National Policy on Education (NPE), which recommends that children be taught in their mother tongue was designed to facilitate effective learning, but its implementation has been hindered". Ahamefuna highlighted that this disconnect between the policy's intentions and its execution has had profound implications for students, especially in rural areas where indigenous languages are predominantly spoken. He noted that when children are taught in a language they do not fully understand, such as English, they struggle to grasp key academic contents, making it difficult to keep up with the curriculum. This, in turn, has led to comprehension and conceptual understanding challenges, resulting in educational setbacks for many students.

Johnson Okonkwo [Oral interview, 2024] further added that most students from rural areas face significant barriers to understanding complex subjects such as science and mathematics. The inability to fully comprehend lessons due to language constraints affects their academic performance and cognitive development. He emphasised that the policy's failure to implement mother tongue instruction has exacerbated this issue, as students are often unable to engage meaningfully with their studies. This leads to disengagement, reduced motivation and poor academic results. Okonkwo also pointed out that the student's proficiency in their indigenous languages diminishes over time as they are forced to adapt to an education system that prioritises English. This linguistic gap contributes to lower academic achievement and hampers the development of critical thinking skills, which are essential for academic and professional success.

Therefore, there are significant educational challenges stemming from the dominance of English in Nigeria's educational system, as influenced by the country's language policy. The linguistic barrier inhibits students' ability to understand and internalise complex academic material, leading to academic setbacks. The dominance of English has created an environment where students, especially students from indigenous language-speaking communities, are unable to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills effectively, as they are not equipped with the linguistic tools needed to engage with academic content and cognitive reasoning.

3.2 Challenges facing language planning policy implementation in Nigeria

The implementation of language planning policy in Nigeria is confronted with numerous challenges. Some of the challenges are discussed as follows:

3.2.1 Political resistance stemming from ethnic rivalry

Implementing Nigeria's language planning policy has faced significant political challenges, primarily ethnic rivalries and resistance. Virginus Aruah [Oral interview, 2024] highlighted political resistance as a substantial obstacle to the implementation of Nigeria's language policy. He explained that Nigeria's ethnic groups, particularly the Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo, have competing interests regarding which language should be recognised as the official language. This rivalry has created a political impasse, with no consensus on a single language that could be adopted as the official language, hindering the policy's effectiveness. Aruah explained that such resistance could lead to conflict, undermining efforts to establish a cohesive national language policy. Even proposals like the "Wazobia" concept, which aimed to blend elements of Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo, have not gained widespread acceptance due to these entrenched ethnic rivalries. As a result, the failure to address these political challenges has impeded formulating a unified and effective language policy. Johnson Okonkwo [Oral interview, 2024] also pointed out that Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups have been unable to agree on which languages should be promoted, making it difficult to reach a national consensus. This lack of agreement, he noted, is compounded by the historical legacy of English as the language of governance and education. This challenge has a significant implication for the policy's success and its ability to promote indigenous languages.

The lack of political consensus stemming from ethnic rivalries between the Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo groups, each vying for their language to be recognised as official, has created a fragmented approach to language planning. This competition for linguistic dominance is not only a matter of language preference but is also tied to political power and cultural identity. The failure to reach an agreement on a single official language has hindered the development of a unified national language policy, leading to political resistance and, as Aruah pointed out, the potential for conflict. The proposal of the "Wazobia" concept, which sought to merge elements of the three major languages, has also been rejected due to the deep-rooted ethnic rivalries, further demonstrating the challenges of overcoming political barriers in language planning. The political landscape in Nigeria, characterised by ethnic competition, has created a challenging environment for a language policy that promotes indigenous languages.

3.2.2 Resource related challenges

The resource-related challenges related to implementing Nigeria's language planning policy are extensive. These challenges primarily revolve around a lack of sufficient resources, including trained personnel, educational materials and infrastructure, all of which hinder the effective promotion and use of indigenous languages in the educational system. Ndubuisi Ahamefuna [Oral interview, 2024] highlighted that the lack of teachers proficient in indigenous languages is one of the most pressing challenges facing implementing Nigeria's language policy. He pointed out a severe shortage of qualified language teachers, particularly those proficient in indigenous languages. This shortage has made it difficult to establish and maintain indigenous language programmes in schools, as teachers are essential for guiding students in language acquisition and ensuring the successful integration of these languages into the curriculum. Moreover, Ahamefuna emphasised the lack of adequate materials for teaching indigenous languages, including textbooks, dictionaries and other learning resources. The absence of these materials makes it virtually impossible for students to effectively learn and practice their native languages, further contributing to their decline.

In addition, Ahamefuna added the challenges associated with translating official documents, textbooks and educational resources into indigenous languages. Translating official and educational materials into multiple indigenous languages

would require considerable time, effort and resources, which the government has not adequately allocated. This gap in resource allocation has severely impeded the implementation of the language policy, leaving indigenous languages without sufficient support for policy implementation. Johnson Okonkwo [Oral interview, 2024] further highlighted the lack of appropriate learning materials and resources to support teaching indigenous languages. Okonkwo pointed out that the absence of educational resources, such as language-specific textbooks, teaching guides and audio-visual materials in Nigerian languages, has made it difficult for teachers and students to engage effectively with indigenous languages.

Therefore, the shortage of proficient teachers affects the quality of language instruction and limits the availability of educators who can effectively teach students in their native languages. Okonkwo further underscored that the lack of qualified teachers, particularly in rural and indigenous communities, exacerbates the difficulty in fostering language development at an early stage of education. Without adequate teacher training and professional development, students are left without proper guidance in learning, as well as learning in their indigenous languages, which directly impacts their linguistic and cognitive growth. Also among the challenges is the lack of educational materials in these indigenous languages. This shortage of materials means that students have few tools with which to engage meaningfully in language learning. Additionally, the challenge of translating official documents, educational resources and textbooks into indigenous languages adds an extra layer of difficulty, as this process requires both financial investment and a well-coordinated effort from the government.

3.2.3 Social challenges

The implementation of Nigeria's language planning policy is significantly hindered by deep-seated societal challenges, which shape attitudes and behaviours toward indigenous languages and English. Johnson Okonkwo [Oral interview, 2024] highlighted how social perceptions of English as the language of opportunity and advancement have deeply influenced language use and policy implementation. Since the colonial era, English has been associated with progress, education and global integration, making it the preferred language in professional settings. This social prioritisation of English relegates indigenous languages to informal, non-prestigious domains, further diminishing their relevance and

creating a hierarchy that undermines the value of indigenous languages. This perception has led to a widespread belief that native languages are impractical or outdated, making their inclusion in formal education, media and governance less of a priority. The colonial legacy of using English as a unifying tool has perpetuated this mindset, creating a cultural shift where linguistic diversity is seen more as a challenge than an asset. This societal bias has weakened grassroots support for language policies aimed at revitalising indigenous languages, as many people view them as irrelevant in a modern, globalised world.

Peter Ikechukwu [Oral interview, 2024] explained that the societal preference for English is driven by its perceived practicality and role in securing economic and social mobility. This preference is evident in various aspects of Nigerian society, from the growing popularity of English in schools to the increasing use of English in cultural and social gatherings. Indigenous languages are often seen as less helpful in achieving modern aspirations, discouraging their use even in contexts where they would naturally thrive.

Social challenges in the implementation of Nigeria's language planning policy highlight deeply rooted attitudes and perceptions that hinder the promotion of indigenous languages. One of the core issues is the societal perception of English as superior, a view deeply ingrained due to Nigeria's colonial history and dominance of English as an international lingua franca. English is widely seen as the language of progress, modernity, and global relevance, and its status has been elevated above that of indigenous languages. This perception drives the preference for English as the medium of communication in formal, social and educational settings, leaving indigenous languages largely confined to informal domains. Families, particularly in urban areas, increasingly use English at home, prioritising it over native languages to prepare their children for perceived opportunities in education and employment. This shift disrupts the transmission of indigenous languages across generations, leading to a negative perception of indigenous languages as impractical or even obsolete.

3.3 How to improve Nigeria's language planning policy implementation

To improve Nigeria's language planning policy implementation, a multilingual approach should be adopted to recognise and promote the use of multiple

languages, including indigenous languages, in education, government and public services. The various ways to improve Nigeria's language planning policy are discussed as follows:

3.3.1 Government commitment and policy enforcement

Improving Nigeria's language planning policy implementation hinges on enhancing government commitment and enforcing policy frameworks to ensure indigenous languages are preserved, promoted and integrated into various aspects of national life. There is a need for actionable steps to move language policies beyond theoretical constructs to practical realities that address Nigeria's linguistic and cultural diversity. According to Ndubuisi Ahamefuna [Oral interview, 2024], language policies need to transition from theoretical documents to actionable frameworks. He argued that for Nigeria to promote linguistic diversity successfully, the government must allocate resources to support indigenous language education. This includes developing textbooks, teacher training programmes and learning materials in various indigenous languages. Ahamefuna underscores the importance of setting clear guidelines to standardise the teaching of indigenous languages at all educational levels. Drawing inspiration from China, where students can complete their education in their native languages, he suggested that Nigeria adopt a similar model, enabling students to achieve literacy and academic success in their mother tongues. Such an approach would necessitate substantial investment in educational infrastructure, including recruiting and training language teachers and establishing institutions focused on linguistic research and curriculum development.

Johnson Okonkwo [Oral interview, 2024] also highlighted the urgent need for policy enforcement to make learning indigenous languages mandatory in schools. He maintained that indigenous languages will continue to lose their relevance without legal frameworks and strict enforcement mechanisms, especially among younger generations. Additionally, the respondent suggested launching public awareness campaigns to elevate the status of indigenous languages and challenge the social perception that English is the only language of opportunity. These campaigns, he explained, could promote the economic, cultural, and social benefits of bilingual or multilingual proficiency, fostering pride in Nigeria's linguistic diversity. Peter Ikechukwu [Oral interview, 2024] proposed a holistic

and phased approach to language policy implementation. He stressed that the government must prioritise major regional languages in the initial stages while planning to include minority languages gradually. This phased strategy would allow policymakers to incrementally address logistical challenges such as resource constraints and workforce shortages.

Furthermore, Ikechukwu recommended that Indigenous languages be used as media of instruction in schools, particularly at the foundational levels, to enhance learning outcomes and cultural integration. Like Okonkwo, he also called for establishing legal mandates requiring the use of indigenous languages in public administration and governance, ensuring that these languages are actively used beyond academic settings.

The above views suggest how Nigeria can improve its language planning policy implementation, focusing on the need for government commitment, effective policy enforcement and resource allocation. Therefore, there is a need for mandatory indigenous language education at all levels because, without a strong legal framework to enforce language education, the status of indigenous languages will continue to decline in favour of English. Using indigenous languages in public administration and government, as well as the medium of instruction in school, helps to ensure that these languages gain visibility and recognition in both official and public spheres.

Another option to explore is a phased and flexible approach to language policy implementation, where the initial focus would be on major regional languages before expanding to include minority languages. Put differently, the Nigerian government must commit to making language policies more than just theoretical frameworks by providing the necessary resources and all that it takes to enforce policies. Through these efforts, Nigeria can create a more inclusive environment where indigenous languages are preserved and promoted in education, governance and public life.

3.3.2 Indigenous language education in schools

Improving indigenous language education in Nigerian schools by making indigenous languages a core aspect of the education system, beginning at the

foundational levels is central to successfully implementing the country's language planning policies. Virginus Aruah [Oral interview, 2024] emphasised that a critical initial measure would be to ensure the practical application of language policies by mandating the teaching of Nigerian languages in primary schools. This approach would establish a strong foundation for children, enabling them to develop proficiency in at least one indigenous language alongside English. Aruah also advocated for continued efforts by committees that promote indigenous language education, noting that the focus should be on executing existing policies effectively rather than drafting new ones. By prioritising the implementation of established policies, stakeholders can address the current gaps in indigenous language education.

This aligns with the position of Ndubuisi Ahamefuna [Oral interview, 2024] when he posited that transforming language policies from theoretical frameworks into actionable and measurable strategies requires clear guidelines and structured curricula for teaching indigenous languages at various educational levels. This would promote linguistic diversity and reinforce the cultural identity and heritage of different ethnic groups in the country. Such a system would demonstrate the intrinsic value of indigenous languages in education and development, elevating their status. He further underscored that aligning indigenous language education with national developmental goals can strengthen the integration of these languages into governance, commerce and other critical areas of society. Ahamefuna emphasised the importance of providing adequate resources and teacher training programmes to support the teaching and learning processes.

It is imperative to say that indigenous language education in Nigerian schools, which target early childhood education, forms the foundation for developing linguistic proficiency. By fostering early exposure, children can internalise their cultural heritage while developing a bilingual capacity in indigenous and English languages. Also, executing existing language policies on education, rather than creating new ones, addresses a critical gap in the Nigerian language policy landscape, where the disconnect between policy formulation and implementation has been a persistent issue. The need for a sustainable foundation to support indigenous language education at all levels has also been highlighted. The comparison with China's education model serves as an aspirational benchmark,

illustrating how integrating indigenous languages into the education system can enhance linguistic pride and national development.

3.3.3 Community and societal engagement

Community and societal engagement play a critical role in improving Nigeria's implementation of language planning policy. In the words of Johnson Okonkwo [Oral interview, 2024], "The role of community involvement is central to preserving Nigeria's diverse linguistic heritage. Platforms that encourage communities to actively participate in language promotion efforts should be created and encouraged". This could include initiatives such as local language workshops, cultural festivals, and community language education programmes. By doing so, the community (through the community leaders, cultural organisations and parents) would become a custodian of its linguistic identity, fostering a sense of ownership and pride. Okonkwo also suggested public campaigns to elevate the status of indigenous languages, targeting societal perceptions that often prioritise English as a language of opportunity. These campaigns can challenge the stigma around local languages, positioning them as valuable cultural and economic development assets.

Peter Ikechukwu [Oral interview, 2024] proposed an approach that integrates local communities into the framework of language policy execution, where communities can contribute to the development of flexible and inclusive policies by providing input on which languages should be prioritised and how best to integrate them into educational and public systems. This participatory model ensures that language planning is aligned with the unique needs of Nigeria's diverse linguistic landscape.

Consequent upon the above views, community and societal engagement can improve Nigeria's language planning policy implementation. A key theme emerging from the respondents' views is the necessity of community involvement in preserving linguistic diversity and fostering the practical adoption of indigenous languages in various domains. The respondents collectively highlighted the importance of empowering local communities to take ownership of language promotion efforts.

3.3.4 Resource allocation and infrastructure

Improving Nigeria's language planning policy implementation requires strategic resource allocation and infrastructural development. For Ndubuisi Ahamefuna [Oral interview, 2024], there is a need to provide essential resources, such as textbooks, teaching materials and technological tools, to support the instruction of indigenous languages at various educational levels. By addressing resource deficits, the policy can shift from being aspirational to executable. Similarly, Johnson Okonkwo [Oral interview, 2024] emphasised the importance of government investment in educational infrastructure to support indigenous language education. This includes building schools equipped with adequate learning environments and ensuring the availability of trained teachers proficient in local languages. Without proper infrastructure and skilled personnel, efforts to institutionalise indigenous languages will likely falter.

Resource allocation and infrastructure, featuring adequate funding and facilities, are pertinent to successfully implement Nigeria's language planning policy. Without sufficient teaching materials, trained educators and institutional support, the goal of integrating indigenous languages into the educational system remains unattainable. There should be government-led initiatives to fund education through targeted investments in educational infrastructure. This includes building and equipping schools with the necessary resources to support indigenous language learning. Resource allocation and infrastructure development are, therefore, foundational to the success of language planning policies. Without these critical investments, implementing indigenous language education would remain a theoretical ambition rather than a tangible reality.

4. Summary and conclusion

This study has examined the implementation of language planning policy in Nigeria, highlighting its intentions, achievements, and shortcomings. Through qualitative data collection, including interviews with experts in language policy and analysis of relevant documents, the research explored the effects of the policy on society, its implementation challenges and potential solutions. Key findings revealed the marginalisation of indigenous languages, the dominance of English, and the resultant cultural and educational implications. The study also identified political, societal, and institutional barriers to policy implementation,

underscoring the need for effective collaborative, well-resourced, and inclusive strategies to address these issues.

Implementing Nigeria's language planning policy is essential for safeguarding its linguistic heritage, promoting national cohesion and addressing the complexities of its multilingual society. Achieving this requires strong governmental dedication, active community participation and practical measures to balance the promotion of major and minority languages. By investing in resources, training educators and integrating indigenous languages into education and everyday life, Nigeria can tackle existing challenges and build a more inclusive and culturally rich society. These unified efforts will help preserve the nation's linguistic diversity and ensure its sustainability for future generations.

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Appendix

S/N	Names	Occupation	Age Last Birthday	Date interviewed
1	Dr. Ahamefula Ndubuisi	Lecturing	54	12th November, 2024
2	Mr. Aruah Virginus	Lecturing	42	12th November, 2024
3	Prof. Johnson Okonkwo	Lecturing	58	13th November, 2024
4	Dr. Peter Ikechukwu	Lecturing	45	13th November, 2024