

THE IMPACT OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE EDUCATION ON THE SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study of indigenous languages is crucial for societal transformation, especially in multilingual countries like Nigeria. Education in indigenous languages fosters cultural preservation, enhances cognitive growth, and promotes social cohesiveness, thus contributing to national development. This essay analyses the influence of indigenous language teaching on societal change in Nigeria, emphasising its cultural, educational, and socio-economic aspects. For the study, a total sample of 100 stakeholders within the education system, encompasses educators, learners, and guardians, as well as community leaders and cultural advocates from the three Senatorial Districts of Ekiti State, Nigeria. A stratified random sample technique was employed to select the sample for the study. The study used a descriptive research design of survey type. Three research questions were raised to guide the study, and three hypotheses were developed. The weighted mean and standard deviation were used to provide descriptive answers to the research questions raised to guide the study. The study's hypotheses were tested using the One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The data analysis's findings revealed that indigenous language education has a significant impact on cultural preservation and the reinforcement of national identity in Nigeria. Also, the integration of indigenous languages in education significantly improves social inclusion and fosters stronger community development in Nigeria. Lastly, it was revealed that indigenous language education significantly enhances economic opportunities and reduces socioeconomic inequalities in Nigeria. The study concluded that the education of Indigenous languages catalyses societal reform in Nigeria. The study recommended that government should develop and execute policies that emphasise the utilisation of Indigenous languages as the medium of instruction in primary and secondary education.

Keywords: Indigenous Language, Education, Societal Transformation, Cultural Preservation, Social Cohesion.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, possessing more than 500 indigenous languages, ranks among the most linguistically varied nations globally. Notwithstanding this extensive linguistic heritage, the prevalence of English as the primary medium of instruction in educational institutions has led to the marginalisation of Indigenous languages. Academics contend that this has significant ramifications for cultural identification, cognitive advancement, and societal evolution (Bamgbose, 2011). Development can manifest as economic, political, educational, technological, and social advancement. These advancements were accomplished through language. Alebiosu (2013) asserted that transformation constitutes a substantial alteration in the core orientation of an individual, an organisation, or a nation. This compels the individual to perceive the world through novel perspectives and to engage in behaviours and outcomes that were previously unattainable before the transformation became a reality.

Studies indicate that instruction in a student's native language improves understanding, analytical skills, and overall academic achievement (UNESCO, 2016). Notwithstanding these

findings, indigenous languages in Nigeria are frequently devalued, with English regarded as the language of social advancement and worldwide significance. This viewpoint has sustained a cycle of linguistic and cultural estrangement, especially among younger generations. Indigenous language education is proposed as a remedy for these obstacles, with the capacity to tackle essential concerns of cultural preservation, social equality, and economic development. According to Adekunle (2019), integrating indigenous languages into the educational system will enable Nigeria to establish a more inclusive framework that embodies its multicultural identity and fosters societal progress. This study aims to investigate the many effects of indigenous language education on Nigeria's socio-cultural and economic development, highlighting its capacity to promote unity and sustainable advancement.

The reduction in the utilisation of Indigenous languages within Nigeria's educational framework has elicited apprehensions regarding its influence on societal change. Indigenous languages are essential for cultural preservation, identity, and community development; nonetheless, their marginalisation in schooling has constrained their capacity to effect societal change. This has created a deficiency in comprehending how indigenous language education may impact cultural cohesiveness, economic empowerment, and social inclusion. There is an urgent necessity to investigate how the incorporation of indigenous languages into formal education might facilitate societal development in Nigeria. The study seeks to answer the following questions and hypotheses;

1. What is the impact of indigenous language education on cultural preservation and identity in Nigeria?
2. How does the use of indigenous languages in education influence social inclusion and community development in Nigeria?
3. What role does indigenous language education play in enhancing economic opportunities and reducing inequalities in Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

- H₀₁:** Indigenous language education has no significant impact on cultural preservation and the reinforcement of national identity in Nigeria.
- H₀₂:** The integration of indigenous languages in education does not significantly improve social inclusion and fosters stronger community development in Nigeria.
- H₀₃:** Indigenous language education does not significantly enhance economic opportunities and reduce socioeconomic inequalities in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of indigenous languages is essential for safeguarding Nigeria's rich cultural legacy. Languages embody history, customs, and perspectives. Research indicates that including indigenous languages in educational curricula enhances students' cultural identity and cultivates pride in their origin (Ezeokoli & Ugwu, 2019). The incorporation of Yoruba in basic school has demonstrated an enhancement in pupils' comprehension of traditional proverbs and

folklore, which are essential to moral education. Studies demonstrate that children acquire knowledge more effectively when instructed in their native language throughout early childhood schooling. UNESCO research (2016) shows that students instructed in indigenous languages surpass their counterparts in literacy and numeracy competencies. Pilot initiatives in Nigeria utilising Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba as instructional languages have demonstrated enhanced student involvement and comprehension (Ugwu, 2021). These findings indicate that indigenous language instruction can mitigate educational gaps and improve academic performance.

Indigenous Language and its Impact on Cultural Preservation, Social Inclusion, and Community Development

The significance of indigenous languages in cultural preservation has been thoroughly examined in scholarly literature. Academics contend that language is an essential conduit of a community's heritage, values, and identity (Adekunle, 2019). In Nigeria, the existence of over 500 Indigenous languages is jeopardised by the prioritisation of English, which endangers the preservation of local cultures and identities (Bamgbose, 1991). Research conducted by Adegbija (2004) and Ogunmodimu (2015) underscores the detrimental impact of language extinction on the degradation of traditional knowledge, oral histories, and communal behaviours. Implementing indigenous language instruction is regarded as a crucial measure for conserving Nigeria's rich cultural legacy, cultivating pride in local identities, and combating cultural homogenisation.

The incorporation of indigenous languages within the educational framework has been associated with enhanced social inclusion and communal advancement. Kwesi (2012) asserts that studying in one's native language improves understanding, engagement, and cognitive development in pupils, particularly in multilingual contexts. Ugwu (2021) observes that indigenous language education in Nigeria fosters inclusion by facilitating the effective participation of marginalised communities in national development.

The National Policy on Education in Nigeria underscores the significance of instruction in the home tongue during the initial phases of education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004), however, its execution has been irregular. Fafunwa (1974) posits that education in local languages enhances individuals' connection to their community, hence promoting trust, collaboration, and active citizenship.

Economic Empowerment and Socioeconomic Equity

The education of indigenous languages also influences economic empowerment and the mitigation of disparities. Studies indicate that learning in one's native language might enhance literacy rates, which are closely associated with employability and income prospects (World Bank, 2005). In Nigeria, English frequently acts as a barrier to economic prospects, disproportionately disadvantaging those who do not speak the language. Research by Obanya (2010) and Bamgbose (2004) underscores that indigenous languages can function as mediums for vocational education, entrepreneurship, and the transmission of knowledge, especially in rural regions. Moreover, indigenous language education can facilitate the bridging of the urban-

rural gap by enabling residents in remote communities to access information, technology, and resources in a comprehensible language.

The implementation of indigenous language education in Nigeria encounters several obstacles, despite its potential advantages. Bamgbose (1991) and Adegbija (2004) highlight challenges that include inadequate funding, scarcity of teaching resources, and the diminished status of local languages relative to English. Parents and policymakers exhibit reluctance, viewing English as the language of social advancement and globalisation (Igboanusi & Lothar, 2005). The richness of Nigeria's linguistic diversity presents logistical issues in prioritising languages within educational systems. Overcoming these obstacles necessitates extensive language policies, investment in educator training, and public awareness initiatives to transform cultural perceptions of Indigenous languages.

Theoretical Perspectives

The pivotal function of indigenous language education can be examined through multiple theoretical frameworks. Critical pedagogy, articulated by Paulo Freire (1970), underscores the transformative potential of education when it resonates with the actual experiences of learners. Instructing in Indigenous languages transforms education into an instrument of emancipation, empowering communities to confront social injustices and assert their rights. Sociolinguistic theories emphasise the significance of linguistic diversity in promoting social cohesiveness and cultural resilience (Fishman, 1991). These frameworks bolster the assertion that indigenous language education can stimulate societal transformation in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed a survey-based descriptive design. The research concentrated on stakeholders within the education system, encompassing educators, learners, and guardians. Supplementary participants comprise community leaders and cultural advocates from the three Senatorial Districts of Ekiti State, Nigeria. A purposive sample method was utilised to pick persons and institutions that utilise Indigenous languages in education. A stratified random sample technique was employed to assure representation across several senatorial districts, linguistic groupings (e.g., Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, and minority languages), and educational levels (primary, secondary, and university). A total of 100 respondents were chosen for the study from various stakeholders in the education sector and cultural custodians within the communities.

Self-structured questionnaires were disseminated to respondents to collect quantifiable data regarding their experiences, perceptions, and the influence of indigenous language education on cultural preservation, literacy, and societal participation in Nigeria. Background information about the respondents was gathered in Section A, and the research questions were addressed in Section B. The study relied on the thorough analysis and interpretation of the questionnaire data. The research questions were analyzed using a descriptive analysis of weighted mean and Standard Deviation, while the inferential statistics of One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test the study's hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level, using SPSS version 26.

RESULTS

Question 1: What is the impact of indigenous language education on cultural preservation and identity in Nigeria?

Table 1: Response to the impact of indigenous language education on cultural preservation and identity in Nigeria

S/N	Items	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
1.	Indigenous language education promotes the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions.	3.41	.805	Agreed
2.	Learning in indigenous languages strengthens students' sense of cultural identity.	3.02	.724	Agreed
3.	Indigenous language education enhances the intergenerational transmission of cultural values and practices.	2.85	.624	Agreed
4.	The use of indigenous languages in education fosters pride and unity within local communities.	2.98	.781	Agreed
5.	Educating students in indigenous languages has a positive impact on sustaining endangered languages in Nigeria.	3.11	.887	Agreed
Weighted Mean		15.37		

Total mean = **15.37**

Cluster mean = **3.07**

Table 1 showed that the cluster mean of 3.07 indicated that a greater number of respondents agreed with the impact of indigenous language education on cultural preservation and identity in Nigeria. The cluster mean of 3.07 is greater than the benchmark which is 2.5 (that is, $3.07 > 2.5$). In item 1, a total mean score of 3.41 with a standard deviation of 0.805 was obtained from the analysis of respondents' belief that indigenous language education promotes the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions.

This shows a very significant value of the mean. In item 2, a greater number of respondents agreed that learning indigenous languages strengthens students' sense of cultural identity, and this resulted in a mean score of 3.02, with a standard deviation of 0.724, which shows that it is statistically significant.

Also, in item 3, a greater number of respondents agreed that indigenous language education enhances intergenerational transmission of cultural values and practices, total mean score of 2.85 with a standard deviation of 0.624 obtained from the analysis. Thus a significant mean score.

In item 4, a greater number of the respondents agreed that the use of indigenous languages in education fosters pride and unity within local communities, and these constituted a total mean score of 2.98 and standard deviation of 0.781, while in item 5, a greater number of the respondents agreed that educating students in indigenous languages has a positive impact on sustaining endangered languages in Nigeria, and these constituted a total mean score of 2.99, and standard deviation of 0.810, this shows that it is statistically significant.

Question 2: How does the use of indigenous languages in education influence social inclusion and community development in Nigeria?

Table 2: Response to how the use of Indigenous languages in education influences social inclusion and community development in Nigeria

S/N	Items	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
1.	The use of indigenous languages in education promotes greater understanding and inclusion among diverse social groups in my community.	3.12	.802	Agreed
2.	Incorporating indigenous languages in education enhances participation in community development initiatives.	2.72	.914	Agreed
3.	Indigenous language education helps reduce social inequalities by making education accessible to marginalized groups.	3.27	.637	Agreed
4.	Teaching in indigenous languages fosters stronger connections and collaboration within the community.	3.18	.781	Agreed
5.	The use of indigenous languages in schools encourages local communities to take an active role in decision-making and development processes.	3.14	.768	Agreed
Weighted Mean		15.43		

Total mean = **15.43**

Cluster mean = **3.09**

Table 2 showed that the cluster mean of 3.09 indicated that a greater number of respondents agreed with how the use of Indigenous languages in education influences social inclusion and community development in Nigeria. The cluster mean of 3.09 is greater than the benchmark which is 2.5 (that is, $3.09 > 2.5$). In item 1, a total mean score of 3.12 with a standard deviation of 0.802 was obtained from the analysis of respondents' belief that the use of Indigenous languages in education promotes greater understanding and inclusion among diverse social groups in their communities.

This shows a very significant value of the mean. In item 2, a greater number of respondents agreed that incorporating Indigenous languages in education enhances participation in community development initiatives, and this resulted in a mean score of 2.72, with a standard deviation of 0.914, which shows that it is statistically significant.

Also, in item 3, a greater number of respondents agreed that indigenous language education helps reduce social inequalities by making education accessible to marginalized groups. A total mean score of 3.27 with a standard deviation of 0.637 was obtained from the analysis. Thus a significant mean score. In item 4, a greater number of the respondents agreed that teaching in

Indigenous languages fosters stronger connections and collaboration within the community, and these constituted a total mean score of 3.18 and a standard deviation of 0.781, while in item 5, a greater number of the respondents agreed that the use of Indigenous languages in schools encourages local communities to take an active role in decision-making and development processes, and these constituted a total mean score of 3.14 and standard deviation of 0.768, this is statistically significant.

Question 3: What role does indigenous language education play in enhancing economic opportunities and reducing inequalities in Nigeria?

Table 3: Response to the role that indigenous language education plays in enhancing economic opportunities and reducing inequalities in Nigeria

S/N	Items	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
1.	Indigenous language education increases access to better job opportunities for people in rural communities.	2.91	.750	Agreed
2.	The promotion of indigenous languages in education helps reduce economic disparities between urban and rural populations in Nigeria.	3.21	.841	Agreed
3.	Indigenous language education contributes to greater economic empowerment for marginalized groups in Nigeria.	3.30	.877	Agreed
4.	Learning in indigenous languages fosters entrepreneurship and local business development in Nigeria.	3.19	.787	Agree
5.	Indigenous language education reduces educational inequalities by making learning more accessible to students from different socio-economic backgrounds.	2.99	.810	Agree
Weighted Mean		15.60		

Total mean = **15.60**

Cluster mean = **3.12**

Table 3 showed that the cluster mean of 3.12 indicated that a greater number of respondents agreed with the role that indigenous language education plays in enhancing economic opportunities and reducing inequalities in Nigeria. The cluster mean of 3.12 is greater than the benchmark which is 2.5 (that is, $3.12 > 2.5$). In item 1, a total mean score of 2.91 with a standard deviation of 0.750 was obtained from the analysis of respondents' belief that indigenous language education increases access to better job opportunities for people in rural communities.

This shows a very significant value of the mean. In item 2, a greater number of respondents agreed that the promotion of indigenous languages in education helps reduce economic disparities between urban and rural populations in Nigeria, and this resulted in a mean score of 3.21, with a standard deviation of 0.841, which shows that it is statistically significant.

Also, in item 3, a greater number of respondents agreed that indigenous language education contributes to greater economic empowerment for marginalized groups in Nigeria, A total mean score of 3.30 with a standard deviation of 0.877 was obtained from the analysis. Thus a significant mean score.

In item 4, a greater number of the respondents agreed that learning in indigenous languages fosters entrepreneurship and local business development in Nigeria, and these constituted a total mean score of 3.19 and standard deviation of 0.787, while in item 5, a greater number of the respondents agreed that indigenous language education reduces educational inequalities by making learning more accessible to students from different socio-economic backgrounds, and these constituted a total mean score of 2.99, and standard deviation of 0.810, this is statistically significant.

Hypothesis 1: Indigenous language education has no significant impact on cultural preservation and the reinforcement of national identity in Nigeria.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the impact of indigenous language education on cultural preservation and the reinforcement of national identity in Nigeria

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	P
Between Groups	118.133	2	82.067	2.239	0.001
Within Groups	276.417	98	13.048		
Total	394.550	100			

P<0.05

Table 4 shows the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the impact of indigenous language education on cultural preservation and the reinforcement of national identity in Nigeria. It was revealed that $F = 2.239$, $P = 0.001$ which is less than 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is a significant impact of indigenous language education on cultural preservation and the reinforcement of national identity in Nigeria. Hence, the null hypothesis was not upheld.

Hypothesis 2: The integration of indigenous languages in education does not significantly improve social inclusion and fosters stronger community development in Nigeria.

Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of integration of Indigenous languages in education on social inclusion and fosters stronger community development in Nigeria

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	P
Between Group	221.378	2	110.689	2.147	0.000
Within Group	555.400	98	26.652		
Total	576.778	100			

P<0.05

The result in Table 5 shows the one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the integration of Indigenous languages in education on social inclusion and fosters stronger community development in Nigeria. It was revealed that $F = 2.147$, $P = 0.000$ which is less than 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is significant integration of Indigenous languages in education on social inclusion and fosters stronger community development in Nigeria. Hence, the null hypothesis was not upheld.

Hypothesis 3: Indigenous language education does not significantly enhance economic opportunities and reduces socioeconomic inequalities in Nigeria.

Table 6: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the impact of indigenous language education in enhancing economic opportunities and reducing socioeconomic inequalities in Nigeria

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	P
Between Group	108.113	2	93.061	4.119	0.003
Within Group	286.226	98	31.048		
Total	404.610	100			

P<0.05

The result in Table 6 shows the one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the impact of indigenous language education in enhancing economic opportunities and reducing socioeconomic inequalities in Nigeria.

It was revealed that $F = 4.119$, $P = 0.003$ which is less than 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is a significant impact of indigenous language education in enhancing economic opportunities and reducing socioeconomic inequalities in Nigeria. Hence, the null hypothesis was not upheld.

DISCUSSIONS

The descriptive analysis of the study indicated that indigenous language education facilitates the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions, fortifies students' cultural identity, enhances intergenerational transmission of cultural values and practices, cultivates pride and unity within local communities, and positively influences the sustainability of endangered languages in Nigeria.

The utilization of Indigenous languages in education fosters enhanced comprehension and inclusion among various social groups within communities, increases participation in community development initiatives, mitigates social inequalities by rendering education accessible to marginalised populations, strengthens connections and collaboration within the community, and motivates local communities to engage actively in decision-making and development processes.

The analytical assessment of the study indicated that indigenous language education enhances access to superior employment opportunities for individuals in rural areas, mitigates economic disparities between urban and rural populations in Nigeria, promotes greater economic empowerment for marginalised groups in Nigeria, stimulates entrepreneurship and local business development in Nigeria, and alleviates educational inequalities by facilitating learning accessibility for students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

The inferential analysis of the study revealed that indigenous language instruction significantly influences cultural preservation and the strengthening of national identity in Nigeria. The study's findings support Ogunmodimu's (2015) assertion that the implementation of indigenous language instruction is essential for preserving Nigeria's cultural heritage, fostering pride in local identities, and countering cultural homogenisation. The findings corroborate Kwesi's (2012) assertion that studying in one's native language enhances comprehension, engagement, and cognitive development in students, especially in multilingual environments.

The incorporation of indigenous languages in education markedly enhances social inclusion and promotes robust community development in Nigeria. The findings align with Ugwu's (2021) assertion that indigenous language instruction in Nigeria promotes inclusion by enabling the active engagement of marginalised communities in national development. Ultimately, it was revealed that indigenous language instruction substantially improves economic prospects and mitigates social disparities in Nigeria.

The findings corroborated the assertions of Obanya (2010) and Bamgbose (2004), who emphasise that indigenous languages can serve as vehicles for vocational education, entrepreneurship, and information dissemination, particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, indigenous language education helps bridge the urban-rural divide by allowing inhabitants in isolated regions to access information, technology, and resources in an intelligible language.

CONCLUSION

The education of indigenous languages catalyzes societal reform in Nigeria. By safeguarding cultural legacy, fostering cognitive advancement, and promoting socio-economic growth, it establishes the groundwork for sustainable national development. Nonetheless, attaining these objectives necessitates coordinated efforts to surmount current obstacles. Educators and stakeholders must collaborate to integrate indigenous languages into the educational system, promoting a more inclusive and equitable society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that;

1. The government should develop and execute policies that emphasise the utilisation of Indigenous languages as the medium of instruction in primary and secondary education. This will guarantee the conservation of cultural heritage and foster inclusivity in education, particularly in rural areas.
2. The educational curriculum should incorporate indigenous languages in conjunction with English and other global languages to promote bilingual or multilingual proficiency. This method can augment kids' cognitive growth, enhance educational results, and foster national cohesion.
3. Implement specialised training programs for educators to enhance their expertise in Indigenous languages and pedagogical techniques. Training must concentrate on enabling educators to proficiently utilise Indigenous languages in educational settings, while simultaneously tackling the complexities of multilingual instruction.
4. Stakeholders, such as NGOs, cultural organisations, and community leaders, should implement advocacy efforts to enhance public awareness of the significance of indigenous language teaching. Highlighting its significance in societal evolution, such efforts can elicit popular support and diminish opposition to change.
5. The government and corporate sector should invest in the creation of educational resources, including textbooks, digital content, and instructor aids, in indigenous languages. This will guarantee that students and educators possess sufficient resources for efficient instruction and learning.
6. Involve traditional rulers, cultural custodians, and community leaders in the execution of indigenous language teaching. Their participation will guarantee cultural congruence, community endorsement, and ongoing dedication to the effort.

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