

Balancing Act: The Role of Foreign Languages in Harmonizing Indigenous and National Language Policies in Nigeria

Festus Moses ONIPEDE

Language Unit, General Studies Department
The Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0047-1497>
Email: onipedefestusmos@gmail.com
festus.onipede@federalpolyilaro.edu.ng
Phone Number: +2348166065300

&

Yomi Abel IWOLE

Language Unit, General Studies Department
The Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria
Email: yominedgreat@yahoo.com
Phone Number: +2348034919395

Abstract

This paper examines the language policy of Nigeria with a particular focus on the function of foreign languages in bridging linguistic differences. The research includes qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys of 500 respondents, utilising Bernard Spolsky's Theory of Language Policy (Spolsky, 2004) and Joshua Fishman's Reversing Language Shift (RLS) framework (Fishman, 1991). Recent studies from 2019 to 2024 provide contemporary context. Findings reveal that 54% of people speak their native tongues at home, while 62% speak English at work and in school. 15% of people work in diplomacy and education using French. Higher education is associated with positive attitudes towards English ($r = 0.67, p < 0.01$), while unfavourable attitudes are associated with older age and living in a rural area ($r = -0.45, p < 0.05$). A preference for indigenous languages ($\beta = -0.42, p < 0.01$) predicts unfavourable opinions on language policy, but educational achievement ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.01$) and urban residency ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.05$) predict positive attitudes. The study comes to the conclusion that English and French serve as a bridge between native tongues and the national lingua franca (Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo), hence fostering unity and lowering interethnic tensions. The preservation of indigenous languages is jeopardised by the dominance of English. To encourage all languages and ensure cultural preservation, national cohesion, and global integration, a balanced multilingual education system is advised. In order to preserve cultural heritage and advance unity in Nigeria, the study highlights the necessity of language policies that provide equal priority to all linguistic groups.

Keywords: Nigeria national Language policies, foreign languages, harmonizing indigenous languages