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ASSESSING THE FEASIBILITY AND CONSEQUENCES OF NIGERIA'S NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION: A FOCUS ON FRENCH AND ARABIC

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Abstract. Nigeria's revised National Language Policy of 2022 reaffirms the importance of indigenous languages in education while retaining English, French, and Arabic as strategic languages for national cohesion, regional diplomacy, and global engagement. This paper critically examines the feasibility and consequences of implementing the policy, with particular attention to its implications for the teaching and learning of French and Arabic in Nigerian schools. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study draws on policy documents, historical accounts, educational reports, and relevant scholarly literature to assess the institutional, pedagogical, and sociolinguistic realities shaping policy implementation. Findings reveal a significant gap between the multilingual aspirations of the policy and the operational realities of Nigeria's educational system. Key challenges include inadequate institutional and infrastructural capacity, severe shortages of qualified and professionally prepared teachers, fragmented and outdated curricula, limited instructional resources, and sociolinguistic attitudes that privilege English over other languages. The study further shows that while French retains strategic value for regional integration and diplomacy within West Africa, Arabic remains largely confined to religious and cultural domains, limiting its broader educational and socioeconomic relevance. Despite these constraints, the policy's multilingual vision offers opportunities for cultural inclusivity, national integration, and international cooperation. The paper argues that the success of the policy depends on sustained investment in teacher education, curriculum renewal, monitoring mechanisms, and public awareness of multilingualism as a development strategy. It concludes with strategic recommendations for aligning Nigeria's linguistic diversity with the goals of global competence, educational equity, and sustainable national development.

Keywords: Nigeria, National Language Policy, French, Arabic, foreign language education, multilingualism.

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ОЦЕНКА ЦЕЛЕСООБРАЗНОСТИ И ПОСЛЕДСТВИЙ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ ЯЗЫКОВОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ НИГЕРИИ ПРИМЕНИТЕЛЬНО К ОБУЧЕНИЮ ИНОСТРАННЫМ ЯЗЫКАМ: АКЦЕНТ НА ФРАНЦУЗСКИЙ И АРАБСКИЙ ЯЗЫКИ

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Аннотация. Новая Национальная языковая политика Нигерии (НЯП, 2022) подтверждает роль коренных языков в образовании, сохраняя при этом английский, французский и арабский языки в качестве ключевых иностранных языков для обеспечения сплоченности народа, региональной дипломатии и межнационального взаимодействия. В данной статье критически оцениваются целесообразность и последствия внедрения НЯП, особенно в сферах преподавания и изучения французского и арабского языков в нигерийских школах. На основе качественного анализа политических документов, исторических источников, отчетов о педагогической деятельности и соответствующей научной литературы исследование выявляет структурные, педагогические и социолингвистические ограничения, влияющие на реализацию языковой политики. Результаты свидетельствуют о значительном разрыве между мультилингвальными амбициями НЯП и возможностями нигерийской образовательной системы. К числу ключевых проблем относятся недостаточный институциональный и инфраструктурный потенциал, острая нехватка квалифицированных педагогических кадров, фрагментированные и устаревшие учебные программы, ограниченность учебно-методических ресурсов, а также социолингвистические установки, отдающие приоритет английскому языку перед другими языками. Исследование также показывает, что, хотя французский язык сохраняет стратегическую ценность для региональной интеграции и дипломатии в пределах Западной Африки, арабский язык остается в значительной степени ограничен религиозной и культурной сферами, что сужает его образовательный и социально-экономический потенциал. Несмотря на указанные ограничения, мультилингвальная направленность НЯП способствует культурной инклюзивности, национальной интеграции и международного сотрудничества. В работе обосновывается, что успех политики зависит от последовательных инвестиций в подготовку педагогических кадров, обновление учебных программ, механизмы мониторинга и повышение осведомленности общества о многоязычии как стратегии развития. В заключение предлагаются стратегические рекомендации по гармонизации языкового разнообразия Нигерии с целями глобальной компетентности, образовательного равенства и устойчивого национального развития.

Ключевые слова: виртуальные среды обучения, изучение иностранных языков, нигерийские университеты, коммуникативный подход к обучению языку, социокультурная теория.

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Introduction

Language policy has remained a crucial component of Nigeria's sociocultural development and educational planning, largely because the nation hosts more than 500 indigenous languages that influence national identity, unity, and communication [1]. The recently introduced National Language Policy of 2022 attempts to harmonize the need to preserve these indigenous languages with the nation's aspiration for global connectivity, mandating that every learner acquire competence in an indigenous language,



English, and at least one major foreign language¹. The policy provides detailed guidelines across basic, post-basic, mass, and nomadic education, emphasizing the mother tongue or language of the immediate community as the primary medium of instruction at early levels while integrating English, French, and Arabic in complementary roles. Historically, English became dominant through colonial administration and has remained the principal language of governance, education, and socioeconomic mobility. Post-independence aspirations, especially the desire for stronger regional integration within West Africa, led to French being designated Nigeria's second official language in 1996, reflecting the country's strategic engagement with its Francophone neighbours [2]. Arabic, however, occupies a unique position due to its centuries-old presence as the language of Islamic scholarship and cultural exchange in northern Nigeria, long before British colonialism. Despite the progressive intentions of the policy, Nigeria faces persistent obstacles such as insufficient teacher preparation, lack of instructional materials, infrastructural deficiencies, and inconsistent policy implementation – issues that cast doubt on the feasibility of achieving sustainable multilingual education nationwide². This paper therefore evaluates the realism of the new policy by examining the pedagogical, cultural, and sociopolitical implications of teaching French and Arabic within Nigeria's multilingual context. It also interrogates how effectively the policy can be implemented across various educational levels and considers how Nigeria's linguistic diversity, if strategically managed, can shift from being a source of fragmentation to becoming a tool for national development, regional cooperation, and meaningful global engagement.

Literature Review and Historical Context

The development of language policy in Nigeria cannot be divorced from the country's complex colonial history, sociolinguistic diversity, and post-independence educational reforms. As Hauwa [3] observed, Nigeria's educational trajectory has consistently reflected the tension between inherited colonial structures and indigenous linguistic realities. The legacy of British colonial education, which privileged English as the sole medium of instruction, laid the foundation for linguistic inequality and the marginalization of both indigenous and foreign languages such as Arabic and French. This historical imbalance continues to shape Nigeria's educational policies and practices today.

Recent studies further demonstrate that colonial linguistic hierarchies remain deeply embedded in Nigeria's educational system. Scholars such as Omoniyi [4] and Bamgbose [5] argue that English continues to dominate institutional domains including governance, higher education, and economic activity, thereby reinforcing unequal linguistic prestige among languages within the country. This dominance has significant implications for the implementation of multilingual education policies.

During the pre-colonial era, education among the diverse Nigerian societies was deeply rooted in local cultural systems and religious traditions. In northern Nigeria, Arabic literacy flourished through Qur'anic schools that transmitted Islamic learning and served as centres of moral and intellectual formation. In contrast, many southern communities maintained indigenous educational systems emphasizing vocational skills, moral instruction, and communal participation. The introduction of Western education by Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century marked a decisive shift, as English quickly became the language of administration and modernization, while Arabic and indigenous languages were relegated to secondary status [3, 7].

Following independence in 1960, successive Nigerian governments attempted to redefine education as a tool for national integration and development. The National Policy on Education of 1977 represented the first deliberate effort to establish a nationally oriented educational framework. It was subsequently revised in 1981, 1998, 2004, and 2013 to respond to Nigeria's evolving sociopolitical and eco-

¹ Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Language Policy Implementation Framework, Federal Government of Nigeria, Abuja, 2023.

² Federal Ministry of Education. National policy on education, 6th ed., Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), Abuja, 2013.



conomic realities³. Across these policy revisions, the principle of multilingual education remained central, reflecting the recognition that Nigeria's linguistic diversity constitutes both a challenge and a national resource.

The National Language Policy⁴ builds upon this foundation by formally recognizing multilingualism as an integral component of educational development and national cohesion. The policy proposes a balanced linguistic framework in which learners acquire competence in an indigenous language, English, and at least one foreign language such as French or Arabic (see Appendix A).

The policy document stresses multilingual competence as essential for both national cohesion and global participation. However, several scholars argue that the effectiveness of Nigerian language policy depends largely on the availability of institutional resources and teacher preparation mechanisms. Recent studies by Okedara & Adeyemi [9] and Olagunju [10] indicate that the implementation of multilingual education policies in Nigeria remains constrained by shortages of trained language teachers, inadequate instructional materials, and weak policy monitoring structures.

Scholars have long debated the feasibility of Nigeria's multilingual ambitions. Bamgbose [6] famously argued that Nigerian language policies frequently oscillate between idealism and pragmatism – well articulated at the policy level but inconsistently implemented in practice. More recent research confirms that this implementation gap persists. For example, Omoniyi [4] observes that despite official commitments to multilingual education, English continues to dominate most formal domains of education and governance.

Similarly, Adegbite [8] emphasized that political instability and inconsistent funding have historically hindered the continuity of educational reforms in Nigeria. Contemporary analyses reinforce this perspective. Okedara & Adeyemi [9] note that insufficient funding and administrative coordination remain significant obstacles to the successful implementation of multilingual education initiatives.

The position of French in Nigerian education illustrates both opportunity and complexity. Nigeria's geopolitical location – surrounded by several Francophone countries – makes French strategically important for regional diplomacy and economic cooperation. Its designation as Nigeria's second official language in 1996 was intended to strengthen regional integration within West Africa⁵. Nevertheless, empirical studies suggest that French programmes in Nigerian schools continue to face infrastructural and pedagogical challenges, particularly outside major urban centres [10].

In contrast, Arabic occupies a unique dual status as both a foreign language and a heritage language with deep historical roots in northern Nigeria. Arabic has long functioned as the language of Islamic scholarship, trade, and intellectual exchange in the region. However, the colonial marginalization of Arabic education created parallel educational systems that still exist today [3]. Although the National Language Policy⁶ recognizes the significance of Arabic within Nigeria's linguistic landscape, recent scholarship indicates that institutional integration between Arabic education and mainstream schooling remains limited [11].

From a broader theoretical perspective, Fishman [12] and Kaplan & Baldauf [13] emphasize that successful language planning requires effective coordination between status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning. In the Nigerian context, several scholars argue that acquisition planning remains the weakest component of language policy implementation. Recent studies confirm that shortages of trained teachers, lack of language laboratories, and inconsistent curriculum implementation continue to undermine multilingual education initiatives [4, 9].

³ Federal Republic of Nigeria, National policy on education, Government Printer, Lagos, 1977; Federal Republic of Nigeria, National policy on education, 2nd ed., Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council Press, Lagos, 1981; Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Policy on Education, 3rd ed., NERDC Press, Lagos, 1998; Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Policy on Education, 4th ed., NERDC Press, Lagos, 2004; Federal Ministry of Education. National policy on education, 6th ed., Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), Abuja, 2013.

⁴ National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), National Language Policy, NERDC Press, Abuja, 2022.

⁵ Federal Ministry of Education, Education sector report, Federal Government of Nigeria, Abuja, 2006.

⁶ National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), National Language Policy, NERDC Press, Abuja, 2022.



Sociocultural realities also shape the outcomes of language policy. Persistent underfunding, regional disparities in educational infrastructure, and the high socioeconomic prestige associated with English continue to influence language attitudes in Nigeria. Contemporary sociolinguistic research indicates that many urban families prioritize English education because of its perceived economic advantages, while other languages – including French and Arabic – are sometimes viewed as secondary or context-specific educational options [4, 10].

In summary, Nigeria’s language policy reflects a strong commitment to multilingual education but continues to face significant implementation challenges. While the National Policy on Education⁷ and the National Language Policy⁸ articulate ambitious goals for linguistic diversity and international engagement, recent research demonstrates that the realization of these goals depends heavily on institutional capacity, teacher preparation, and sustained policy coordination [4, 9].

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of Nigeria’s National Language Policy and its implications for foreign language education can be better understood within the context of Language Planning and Policy (LPP) Theory and Sociolinguistic Functionalism. These frameworks provide analytical lenses for assessing how language policies are conceptualized, implemented, and sustained within multilingual societies. They also offer insight into the sociocultural and institutional dynamics that influence the teaching and learning of French and Arabic in Nigeria.

Language Planning and Policy Theory

The LPP framework, as proposed by Kaplan & Baldauf [13] and further developed by scholars such as Ricento & Hornberger [14], examines how societies deliberately design and manage the functions, forms, and acquisition of languages within their borders. The framework identifies three major dimensions of language planning: status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning.

Status planning involves determining the social, political, or functional roles assigned to particular languages within a country. In Nigeria, this is evident in the hierarchical positioning of English as the official language, French as the second official language, and Arabic as a recognized foreign and religious language [8]. The National Language Policy⁹ also attempts to elevate the status of indigenous languages as mediums of instruction at all levels of education, thereby balancing global relevance with local identity. The policy articulates objectives such as:

- “a. promote the effective teaching and learning of Nigerian and foreign languages at all levels of the education system;
- b. preserve Nigerian languages and save them from extinction through status recognition and inclusion in educational programmes across all levels of the Nigerian education system;
- c. activate Nigerian languages as powerful tools for mass literacy development;
- d. strengthen and promote the equitable utilization of all Nigerian and foreign languages;
- e. promote the effective utilization of sign language;
- f. promote the teaching and learning of Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) and other subjects in Nigerian languages;
- g. promote the development of textual and instructional materials in various Nigerian languages including sign language.”¹⁰

Corpus planning deals with developing and standardizing a language’s structure – orthography, grammar, and vocabulary – to support its use in education and public life. For languages such as Arabic and French, corpus planning is relatively stable since both possess long-established international standards [9]. However, the challenge in Nigeria lies in the adaptation and contextualization of these

⁷ Federal Ministry of Education. National policy on education, 6th ed., Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), Abuja, 2013.

⁸ National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), National Language Policy, NERDC Press, Abuja, 2022.

⁹ National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), National Language Policy, NERDC Press, Abuja, 2022.

¹⁰ Ibid.



languages to suit the local sociolinguistic environment. The preparation of localized teaching materials, the inclusion of Nigerian cultural contexts in textbooks, and the translation of educational terminologies are all aspects of corpus planning that remain underdeveloped [8].

Acquisition planning focuses on the teaching, learning, and dissemination of languages through education and training. This component is arguably the most crucial and the weakest in Nigeria's language policy landscape. The persistent shortage of qualified French and Arabic teachers, lack of language laboratories, and inconsistent curriculum implementation point to systemic weaknesses in acquisition planning. As Bamgbose [6] notes, the success of any language policy ultimately depends on how effectively it is transmitted through educational institutions and sustained by government support.

Applying the LPP framework to Nigeria's National Language Policy thus reveals that while the status goals of the policy are clearly articulated – promoting multilingualism, strengthening regional cooperation, and enhancing global competence – the acquisition mechanisms remain inadequately developed. Without comprehensive teacher education programmes, sufficient funding for instructional resources, and strong administrative continuity, the vision of linguistic diversity risks remaining rhetorical rather than transformative [6, 8].

Sociolinguistic Functionalism

A complementary theoretical lens for understanding Nigeria's language policy is Sociolinguistic Functionalism, grounded in the works of Fishman [12]. This approach interprets language as a social tool whose value depends on the specific functions it serves within a community. Languages are not only systems of communication but also symbols of identity, power, and belonging. From this perspective, language policy reflects a society's attempt to assign appropriate roles to different languages according to their communicative and cultural functions [12].

In Nigeria, this functional differentiation is vividly reflected in the roles played by English, French, Arabic, and indigenous languages. English serves administrative, economic, and educational functions, symbolizing national unity and access to global networks [8]. French fulfills a diplomatic and geopolitical function, facilitating communication with Nigeria's Francophone neighbours and promoting participation in regional organizations such as ECOWAS and the African Union¹¹. Arabic performs cultural and religious functions, serving as a vehicle of Islamic education and heritage, particularly in the northern part of the country [3]. Indigenous languages perform sociocultural and identity functions, preserving local traditions and facilitating grassroots communication [7].

Sociolinguistic Functionalism helps to explain the unequal implementation of Nigeria's language policy. The dominance of English persists because it serves the most powerful social and economic functions. French and Arabic, though officially recognized, occupy secondary positions since their perceived utility is limited to specific professional or religious domains [6, 8]. This functional hierarchy often influences students' motivation and parents' attitudes toward language learning. Where a language does not yield immediate social or economic benefits, it tends to receive less attention in educational settings.

Furthermore, this framework highlights how linguistic attitudes shape policy outcomes. Many Nigerians view English as a symbol of modernity and social advancement, while Arabic is often perceived through a religious lens and French as a diplomatic necessity rather than a communicative priority [3]. These perceptions create unequal support systems for the three languages and, in turn, affect the feasibility of policy implementation.

Thus, from a sociolinguistic standpoint, Nigeria's multilingual policy can only succeed if it redefines the functional value of each language – linking Arabic and French not only to religious or diplomatic contexts but also to broader educational, cultural, and economic opportunities [12]. Doing so would transform language learning from a symbolic act into a practical instrument of development and identity expression.

¹¹ Federal Ministry of Education, Education sector report, Federal Government of Nigeria, Abuja, 2006.



Integrating the Frameworks

By combining LPP Theory and Sociolinguistic Functionalism, this paper adopts a holistic perspective on language policy analysis. The LPP model clarifies the structural and administrative processes behind policy formulation and implementation [13, 14], while Sociolinguistic Functionalism situates these processes within social realities, attitudes, and cultural meanings [12]. Together, they provide a balanced framework for evaluating the feasibility and consequences of Nigeria's National Language Policy on the teaching and learning of French and Arabic.

These frameworks collectively reveal that successful language policy implementation in Nigeria requires not only technical planning – such as curriculum design, teacher training, and funding – but also social alignment, where public perception and community engagement support multilingual learning. Without this dual alignment, the policy's potential to foster linguistic equity and global competence will remain unrealized¹² [6, 8].

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically a documentary and interpretive analytical approach, to assess the feasibility and consequences of Nigeria's National Language Policy on the teaching and learning of French and Arabic. Qualitative methods are appropriate for this study because language policies are primarily textual, institutional, and interpretive phenomena that require contextual understanding rather than numerical measurement. According to [15], qualitative inquiry enables researchers to capture the meaning of policy actions, institutional intentions, and sociocultural implications embedded within educational frameworks.

The choice of a documentary research design is further justified by the study's reliance on official government publications, academic writings, and historical documents. These sources provide both the policy intent and the implementation realities, allowing for a systematic evaluation of whether the stated goals of multilingual education – particularly the promotion of French and Arabic – are realistic within Nigeria's current educational structure. Documentary analysis is widely used in policy studies because it enables researchers to examine policy intentions alongside interpretations and critiques found in scholarly literature [16].

Sources of Data

The data for this study were drawn from both primary and secondary sources in order to provide a comprehensive and triangulated understanding of Nigeria's language policy environment.

1. Primary Sources

The primary data consisted of official Nigerian policy documents that directly define the country's language education framework:

- **National Policy on Education**¹³ – which outlines the government's commitment to multilingual instruction and recognizes French as Nigeria's second official language.
- **National Language Policy**¹⁴ – which provides updated guidelines on the use of mother tongue, English, and foreign languages (French or Arabic) across educational levels.
- **Educational Policy in Nigeria from the Colonial Era to the Post-Independence Period** [3] – which provides historical insight into the evolution of Nigerian educational policies.

2. Secondary Sources

To complement the policy documents, the study also examined scholarly literature on language policy, multilingual education, and sociolinguistic dynamics in Nigeria and other multilingual societies. These include foundational works [6–8, 12, 13], which provide important theoretical and historical perspectives on language planning and multilingual education.

¹² National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), National Language Policy, NERDC Press, Abuja, 2022.

¹³ Federal Ministry of Education. National policy on education, 6th ed., Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), Abuja, 2013.

¹⁴ National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), National Language Policy, NERDC Press, Abuja, 2022.



In addition, the study incorporates more recent scholarship that examines contemporary developments in Nigerian language policy and multilingual education. These include studies [4, 9–11], which provide updated insights into language policy implementation, sociolinguistic attitudes, teacher preparedness, and institutional challenges affecting foreign language education in Nigeria. By integrating both classical and contemporary studies, the analysis situates Nigeria's National Language Policy within broader theoretical debates as well as current empirical discussions on multilingual education in Africa.

The materials were selected using three criteria:

1. Relevance to language policy or language education in Nigeria
2. Scholarly credibility, including peer-reviewed books, journal articles, and institutional reports
3. Analytical value in explaining policy implementation, sociolinguistic attitudes, teacher preparation, or institutional constraints affecting language education.

Data Collection and Procedure

Following Bowen's model of document analysis [16], the study proceeded through three stages:

1. Skimming

All selected documents were initially reviewed to gain a general understanding of their content and relevance to Nigeria's language policy.

2. Reading and Interpretation

The documents were then read in detail to extract information related to:

- policy objectives concerning foreign language education;
- the institutional roles assigned to French and Arabic;
- mechanisms for implementation, including teacher training and curriculum development;
- reported challenges in language education.

3. Coding and Thematic Analysis

Relevant passages from the documents were coded and grouped into analytical themes. These themes include:

- institutional and infrastructural capacity;
- teacher availability and professional preparation;
- curriculum and pedagogical resources;
- sociocultural attitudes toward language learning;
- governance and policy implementation.

This thematic coding enabled the study to trace how policy goals are translated into educational realities and to identify patterns across different sources.

Analytical Framework

The analysis employed thematic content analysis guided by the dual frameworks of **LPP** and **Sociolinguistic Functionalism**.

Three analytical stages were used:

1. Policy Feasibility Analysis

This stage examined whether Nigeria's educational system possesses the institutional and infrastructural capacity required to implement the teaching of French and Arabic. Evidence from policy documents and educational studies was used to evaluate factors such as teacher supply, instructional materials, and curriculum structures.

2. Consequential Analysis

The second stage examined the broader pedagogical, cultural, and social consequences of implementing multilingual education policies, including their effects on cultural awareness, regional integration, and educational inequality.

3. Comparative Analysis

The final stage compared policy intentions expressed in official documents with observations reported in scholarly literature. This comparison helped reveal discrepancies between policy formulation and policy implementation, a recurring issue identified in Nigerian educational research [3].



Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility and methodological rigor, the study followed the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba [17]: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility was strengthened through **data triangulation**, whereby findings derived from policy documents were compared with interpretations presented in academic studies on Nigerian language education.

Transferability was enhanced by providing detailed descriptions of Nigeria's educational and sociolinguistic context, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other multilingual societies.

Dependability was ensured by maintaining a transparent analytical procedure, including clearly defined document selection criteria and thematic coding stages.

Confirmability was achieved by grounding interpretations in textual evidence drawn directly from policy documents and scholarly sources, thereby minimizing subjective interpretation.

Results

Teacher Availability and Professional Preparedness

Findings from policy documents, educational reports, and existing empirical studies suggest that teacher availability and professional preparedness remain among the most significant barriers to the effective implementation of Nigeria's National Language Policy on foreign language education. This observation aligns with Budd's argument [18] that the success of language education policies often depends less on the policy text itself and more on the realities of classroom implementation and institutional support. Across the reviewed literature, three recurring patterns emerged: inadequate numerical availability of qualified teachers, insufficient pedagogical competence, and uneven geographical distribution of language educators.

First, the shortage of trained French and Arabic teachers remains a persistent challenge in many public primary and secondary schools across Nigeria. Reports from the Federal Ministry of Education and related policy discussions consistently acknowledge difficulties in recruiting and deploying adequately trained foreign language instructors, particularly in rural and underserved communities where educational inequalities are already pronounced. In such contexts, foreign language instruction is often irregular, poorly coordinated, or entirely absent.

Second, teacher competence and pedagogical preparedness emerged as equally critical concerns. Several studies on language education in Nigeria indicate that many French teachers are trained primarily in literary or theoretical aspects of the language rather than in communicative and learner-centred pedagogical approaches. This mismatch between academic preparation and classroom realities often limits student interaction, reduces communicative competence, and weakens language acquisition outcomes. Hult, in his discussion of foreign language education policy, emphasizes that language policy outcomes are shaped by how effectively teachers translate policy goals into meaningful classroom practice [19]. In Nigeria, the limited availability of in-service training and professional development programmes further constrains teachers' ability to adapt to evolving curricular demands and technological innovations.

Arabic language education presents a somewhat different but equally complex structural challenge. In many parts of Nigeria, Arabic instruction remains historically associated with Islamic Studies and traditional Qur'anic education rather than modern secular foreign language education. As Hauwa explains, the historical separation between religious and secular educational systems has hindered the integration of Arabic into mainstream school curricula [3]. This institutional divide affects curriculum design, teacher recruitment, and public perceptions of Arabic as a language of broader academic or socioeconomic value.

Taken together, these findings suggest that teacher-related challenges are not merely operational issues but systemic constraints that directly affect the feasibility of implementing Nigeria's multilingual educational aspirations.



Sociocultural Realities

The findings further reveal that sociocultural and economic realities significantly shape language preference and educational priorities in Nigeria's multilingual context. Language choices are rarely neutral; rather, they are influenced by perceptions of prestige, cultural affiliation, and expected economic returns. As Nikolovski notes, language policy and language planning are deeply intertwined with questions of social value and communicative relevance within specific societies [20].

English occupies the most dominant position in Nigeria's linguistic hierarchy because it functions as the language of administration, formal education, commerce, and upward socioeconomic mobility. Proficiency in English is widely associated with academic success, employability, and access to both national and global opportunities. In this sense, English has become a form of linguistic capital within Nigerian society. Nikolovski similarly argues that language policy often reflects broader social and political priorities, with certain languages receiving greater institutional support because of their perceived utility [21].

French and Arabic, by contrast, occupy more specialized and context-dependent domains. French is commonly associated with diplomatic engagement, regional integration, and economic cooperation within West Africa, particularly within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Given Nigeria's geopolitical location among Francophone neighbours such as Benin, Niger, and Cameroon, French has clear strategic relevance. However, despite this regional importance, the language often receives limited practical support in schools.

Arabic occupies a unique sociocultural and religious domain. In Northern Nigeria and among Muslim communities nationwide, Arabic is strongly associated with Islamic scholarship, religious identity, and Qur'anic literacy. However, outside these contexts, it is less frequently perceived as a language of mainstream economic mobility or professional advancement.

Another recurring theme in the reviewed studies is parental and societal perception of educational returns. Many parents and guardians prioritize subjects such as English, Mathematics, and Science because they are widely viewed as direct pathways to employment, technological advancement, and financial stability. As Hult observes, foreign language education policies are often shaped not only by institutional frameworks but also by public attitudes and broader socioeconomic realities [19]. Consequently, foreign language subjects are frequently treated as supplementary rather than essential.

These findings demonstrate that sociolinguistic attitudes and economic considerations significantly mediate the implementation and effectiveness of Nigeria's foreign language education policy.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a substantial gap between Nigeria's multilingual policy aspirations and the institutional realities of its educational system. From the perspective of LPP Theory, this gap reflects a persistent imbalance between status planning and acquisition planning. While status planning symbolically assigns functions and prestige to particular languages, acquisition planning concerns the practical mechanisms through which those languages are taught, learned, and sustained. Nikolovski emphasizes that effective language planning requires a balance between symbolic recognition and practical implementation, a balance that appears weak in the Nigerian context [20].

Nigeria's National Language Policy demonstrates ambitious multilingual intentions consistent with broader global trends in foreign language education policy [19]. The policy assigns distinct functional roles to English, French, Arabic, and indigenous languages. English facilitates access to global communication and international knowledge systems; French supports regional diplomacy, trade, and cross-border communication within West Africa; and Arabic reflects Nigeria's historical, intellectual, and religious ties to the wider Islamic world. However, as Budd notes, the existence of policy intentions alone does not guarantee implementation unless adequate institutional support mechanisms are in place [18].



The findings suggest that Nigeria's language policy currently functions more effectively at the symbolic level than at the operational level. Although the policy articulates an inclusive and globally oriented linguistic vision, implementation remains weak, fragmented, and inconsistently funded. Structural issues such as inadequate teacher preparation, outdated curricula, and insufficient educational infrastructure undermine the policy's practical feasibility. This reflects the broader disconnect between policy formulation and classroom realities identified in comparative studies of language education policy [18].

The sociolinguistic hierarchy identified in the findings further complicates implementation. English remains the dominant language of economic mobility and educational advancement, thereby attracting greater investment, social prestige, and learner motivation. In contexts where professional success is strongly tied to English proficiency, other languages tend to be marginalized. This pattern aligns with Nikolovski's observation that language policies often privilege languages perceived to offer greater economic or political capital [21].

Comparative experiences from multilingual societies suggest that language policies are more likely to succeed when supported by strong institutional frameworks and clear socioeconomic incentives. Hult argues that foreign language education becomes more sustainable when reinforced by employment opportunities, cultural exchange programmes, scholarships, and international cooperation initiatives [19]. Such incentives create practical motivations for language learning beyond symbolic policy declarations.

In Nigeria, strengthening these institutional and economic linkages could improve the practical relevance and long-term sustainability of foreign language education. Integrating foreign language proficiency into labour-market opportunities, regional diplomacy initiatives, and international academic exchange programmes may enhance learner motivation and public support.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings reveal a structural mismatch between Nigeria's multilingual aspirations and its educational realities. Although the National Language Policy provides a visionary framework for linguistic inclusion and global engagement, its implementation is constrained by several interconnected challenges:

1. Inadequate institutional and infrastructural capacity;
2. Severe shortage of qualified and professionally prepared teachers;
3. Fragmented, outdated, and insufficiently contextualized curricula;
4. Sociolinguistic attitudes that privilege English over other languages;
5. Weak policy continuity, monitoring, and governance mechanisms.

Despite these challenges, the policy remains an important instrument for promoting national integration, regional diplomacy, and international communication. If effectively implemented, it has the potential to produce linguistically competent, culturally grounded, and globally competitive citizens.

Recommendations

To enhance both the feasibility and the positive impact of Nigeria's National Language Policy on foreign language education, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Strengthen Teacher Education and Certification;
2. Develop Context-Sensitive Curricula;
3. Incorporate Technology and Digital Learning;
4. Promote Public Awareness;
5. Institutionalize Monitoring and Evaluation;
6. Foster Regional and International Partnerships;
7. Encourage Research and Innovation in Language Education.



Conclusion

Nigeria's National Language Policy¹⁵ represents an ambitious attempt to recalibrate the country's linguistic landscape in line with contemporary educational, cultural, and global realities. By mandating the learning of one Nigerian language, English, and at least one foreign language – French or Arabic – the policy envisions a citizenry that is linguistically versatile, culturally rooted, and globally competitive. The policy's emphasis on multilingual competence reflects Nigeria's broader aspiration to strengthen national cohesion while enhancing regional and international engagement.

The findings of this study indicate, however, that significant structural barriers continue to undermine the feasibility of this vision. Persistent challenges such as inadequate funding, limited teacher preparation, outdated curricula, insufficient learning resources, and weak institutional coordination hinder the translation of policy ideals into tangible outcomes. These constraints reinforce the enduring divide between policy formulation and policy implementation, a pattern long observed in Nigeria's educational sector [3]. The entrenched sociolinguistic hierarchy that privileges English further weakens motivation for the study of other languages, including French, Arabic, and indigenous languages.

Despite these obstacles, the policy retains considerable transformative potential. With sustained political commitment, coordinated institutional support, and strengthened capacity-building mechanisms, the policy could foster national integration, facilitate regional diplomacy – particularly within ECOWAS – and enhance Nigeria's participation in global knowledge economies. Beyond their academic value, French and Arabic offer opportunities for intercultural dialogue, intellectual enrichment, and broader diplomatic influence. Realizing these opportunities requires reframing multilingualism as a national development strategy rather than an optional educational component.

To move toward meaningful implementation, the government must prioritize long-term investment in teacher development, curriculum renewal, monitoring frameworks, and inter-ministerial collaboration. Stakeholders, including parents, school administrators, and policymakers, must also cultivate public appreciation for multilingualism and its economic, cultural, and geopolitical benefits. When properly executed, a functional language policy can transform Nigeria's linguistic diversity into a cohesive asset, advancing sustainable development, cultural preservation, and global engagement.

Future research should examine teacher preparedness and pedagogical capacity for French, Arabic, and Nigerian languages, as this would clarify the training gaps that hinder effective implementation of the National Language Policy. Longitudinal investigations into learner motivation and language attitudes, across both urban and rural contexts, are also needed to better understand how sociolinguistic perceptions shape learning outcomes.

Comparative studies of multilingual policy implementation in other African countries where language planning has been more successful could offer useful models for Nigeria. Additionally, impact assessments of curriculum reforms and teaching materials would help determine their effectiveness in improving language acquisition. Scholars should further explore the economic and diplomatic advantages of multilingualism, especially the ways in which French and Arabic proficiency influence employability, regional mobility, and Nigeria's strategic engagement within ECOWAS and beyond. Evaluations of governance and monitoring structures, such as the potential establishment of a National Language Implementation and Evaluation Council, would also be beneficial.

Finally, research on digital and technological tools for multilingual learning is essential, particularly in settings with limited educational resources. Collectively, these areas of inquiry would strengthen evidence-based policymaking and help narrow the gap between the policy's aspirations and its practical implementation.

¹⁵ National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), National Language Policy, NERDC Press, Abuja, 2022.



Appendices

Appendix A

“Application and Language Use in Education”

A. Basic Education

18. 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.

19. English language shall be used as the language of instruction at the Junior Secondary Education level. However, a combined use of English language and the MT or LIC shall be encouraged accordingly.

20. In addition to the study of English language and the MT, a child shall be allowed to study, as an optional school subject, the Nigerian language of the community, if it is different from the MT.

21. Federal, State, and Local Governments shall ensure the effective supervision of the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages.

22. Sustained efforts shall be made to develop and regularly review the curricula for teaching and learning of all Nigerian languages.

23. Efforts shall be made to develop orthographies and metalanguages for the teaching and learning of all Nigerian languages.

24. While French language shall be taught as a compulsory school subject from Primary Four, Arabic language shall be an optional subject from Primary One. However, Arabic language shall be compulsory for learners offering Islamic Studies.

25. Efforts shall be made to develop and produce educational materials in the various Nigerian languages. Registers in Nigerian languages for the various school subjects shall be developed.

26. Programmes and activities aimed at promoting the development and production of educational materials in the various Nigerian languages shall be encouraged and sustained.

27. Efforts shall be made to develop science and technology textual and other instructional materials in various Nigerian languages.

28. Registers of science and technology in the various Nigerian languages shall be developed and regularly updated to encourage the teaching and learning of STEM.

29. Sign language shall be taught to learners who have hearing and speech impairment, from entry point.

30. The medium of instruction for online-based educational programmes shall be the language widely spoken by the target audience.

B. Post-Basic Education

31. The medium of instruction at the Post-Basic Education level shall be English language. However, a combined use of MT or LIC and English language shall be encouraged. For Islamic schools, the medium of instruction shall be Arabic language.

32. Federal and State Governments shall ensure the effective supervision of teaching and learning of Nigerian languages.

33. In addition to the study of the English language, students shall be made to study one Nigerian language as a compulsory subject at the Senior Secondary School level.

34. Efforts shall be made to develop orthographies and metalanguages for teaching and learning of Nigerian languages.

35. Sustained efforts shall be made to develop and review curricula for the teaching and learning of all Nigerian languages.

36. French and Arabic languages shall be offered as optional school subjects at the Post-Basic Education level. However, Arabic shall be compulsory for students offering Islamic Studies.



37. Efforts shall be made to develop and produce educational materials in the various Nigerian languages. Registers in Nigerian languages for the various school subjects shall be developed.

38. Government at all levels shall make efforts to develop science and technology textual and other instructional materials in various Nigerian languages.

39. Government at all levels shall make efforts to develop metalanguages in STEM in the various Nigerian languages.

40. Sign language shall be taught as a subject to learners with speech and hearing impairment. The curriculum for the teaching and learning of sign language shall be developed and periodically reviewed.

41. The teaching of sign language shall be upscaled and developed.

42. Regular training shall be conducted for teachers and other education personnel on sign language.

43. To enhance the acquisition of skills at vocational and training institutions, the language of instruction shall be the language widely spoken in the area where the institution is located and/or English.

44. The medium of instruction for online-based educational programmes shall be in English and the Nigerian language widely spoken by the target audience.

45. Government shall encourage the establishment of Post-Basic institutions that the medium of instruction shall be only in any Nigerian language.

C. Mass and Nomadic Education

(i) Mass Education

46. The delivery of instructions shall be in the MT or LIC. During the period, English language shall be taught as a subject.

47. In addition to the study of English language and the MT, a learner shall be allowed to study, as an optional subject, the Nigerian LIC, if it is different from the MT or second language of choice.

48. While French language shall be taught as one of the subjects at the Post-Literacy level, Arabic language shall be an optional subject for all categories of learners. However, Arabic language shall be compulsory for students offering Islamic Studies.

49. Efforts shall be made to develop and produce teaching and learning materials in the various Nigerian languages.

(ii) Nomadic Education

50. The delivery of instructions shall be in the MT or LIC at the Primary Education level. During this period, English language shall be taught as a school subject.

51. While French language shall be taught as one of the subjects at the Post-Literacy level, Arabic shall be an optional subject for all categories of learners. However, Arabic language shall be compulsory for learners offering Islamic Studies.

52. Efforts shall be made to develop and produce teaching and learning materials in the various Nigerian languages.

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