

Evaluating the interplay of Linguistics and Politics for National Development in Nigeria

¹Ali Abubakar Kadiri, ²Sumayyat Ibrahim Gambo, ³Bamanga Aliyu

¹Taraba State University, Jalingo; ²Federal Polytechnic, Bali

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.60787/jolan.vol6no1.470>

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between linguistics and politics and its implications for national development in Nigeria's multilingual society. The aim is to evaluate how languages use influence political participation, contributes to or constrains national development, and identify strategies for promoting linguistic inclusion in governance. Specifically, the study (i) examines how language use shapes political participation, (ii) investigates the effects of linguistic exclusion on national development, and (iii) explores strategies for fostering linguistic inclusion in political processes. It is anchored on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Theory, which conceptualizes language as a medium of power, ideology, identity, and social relations. A qualitative research method is adopted, with observation which serves as the primary instrument of data collection. Observations are conducted across selected multilingual communities such as Taraba, Adamawa, Lagos, Ibadan and Enugu in Nigeria which focus on political campaign activities, media broadcasts, public civic engagements, and interactions between political actors and citizens. The collected data are analysed thematically to identify recurring linguistic patterns and their implications for political participation and governance. Findings indicate that the strategic use of indigenous languages during political campaigns and civic engagements significantly enhances grassroots participation, improves political awareness and strengthens citizens' trust in democratic processes. In contrast, the predominance of English in official political communication which marginalizes many citizens, particularly those in rural and linguistically diverse communities, thereby limiting access to political information and reducing inclusive participation. It also observes emerging but inconsistently implemented practices, including multilingual political campaigns, vernacular media programming, and the use of community interpreters, as mechanisms for improving linguistic inclusion. The study concludes that sustainable national development requires language policies that recognize Nigeria's linguistic diversity and promote equitable participation in governance.

Keywords: *Language, Politics, Participation, Inclusion, Development*

1. Introduction

Language plays a fundamental role in the political and developmental life of any nation. Indeed, it serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a vehicle for power, identity, and policy articulation (Joseph, 2006). In multilingual societies around

the world such as India, Switzerland, South Africa, and Canada effective language management has been critical to promoting inclusive governance, social cohesion, and national unity (Fishman, 2018). Similarly, in Nigeria, the intersection between linguistics and politics carries significant implications due to the country's immense linguistic diversity, with over 500 indigenous languages (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig, 2023).

Historically, this complexity is exacerbated by colonial language policies that institutionalized English as the official language, while relegating indigenous languages to the margins of public life (Akindele & Adegbite, 2019). Consequently, as seen in other post-colonial states, language became a tool for exclusion rather than inclusion. In Nigeria, this imbalance has had lasting effects on political participation and national development. According to Adegbija (2019), language policy in Nigeria has often prioritized political expediency over linguistic equity, thereby undermining participatory democracy and marginalizing non-English-speaking populations.

Furthermore, from a sociolinguistic perspective, language is more than just a communicative tool but it is also a symbol of power and social positioning (Fairclough, 2018). Around the world, political leaders exploit linguistic codes to build solidarity, frame ideologies, and legitimize authority. In Latin America, for instance, indigenous languages such as Quechua and Guarani are increasingly integrated into national politics as a strategy for inclusive development (Hornberger, 2017). In the same manner, politicians in Nigeria often do code-switch strategically between English and local languages to appeal to diverse audiences and foster cultural proximity (Adebayo, 2020). However, despite these efforts, the lack of institutional recognition for indigenous languages continues to reinforce structural inequalities. As Uchenna and Chukwuma (2021) observe, this linguistic marginalization hinders effective grassroots participation in political processes.

Moreover, language significantly affects national development, especially in relation to education, governance, and public policy implementation. In India, multilingualism has been effectively utilized to localize governance and promote civic engagement (Annamalai, 2019). Conversely, in Nigeria, language barriers remain a critical obstacle. For example, policies communicated exclusively in English often fail to resonate with rural communities, leading to misinformation and civic apathy (Yusuf, 2021; Okebukola, 2022). Therefore, addressing linguistic inequality is not merely a cultural concern but a developmental imperative.

In response to these challenges, several scholars have advocated for more inclusive language frameworks. Notably, Oyetade (2020) proposes a multilingual governance model that integrates Nigeria's three major languages such as Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba alongside English, mirroring South Africa's multilingual constitutional framework. Additionally, Maduekwe (2022) emphasizes the importance of indigenous languages in political education and the dissemination of development initiatives through local media. Nonetheless, despite growing advocacy, implementation remains inconsistent. According to Ajulo (2023), this inertia is largely due to entrenched political interests and the absence of strong institutional backing.

In summary, while global experiences underscore the benefits of linguistic inclusion in politics, Nigeria continues to grapple with the legacy of monolingual dominance. Thus, a critical evaluation of the interplay between linguistics and politics is essential for understanding how language can either constrain or promote inclusive development. The study, therefore, seeks to explore this relationship, drawing on both local realities and global lessons to inform language policy for national development in Nigeria.

Despite Nigeria's rich linguistic diversity, with over 500 indigenous languages, the country's political system continues to be dominated by English, a colonial legacy that marginalizes a significant portion of the population. This monolingual dominance not only limits participation in political discourse but also impedes inclusive governance and national development. While language is a powerful tool for civic engagement, identity expression, and policy dissemination, its strategic use in Nigeria has often favoured elitist and urban populations at the expense of rural and indigenous communities. The failure to institutionalize indigenous languages in formal political communication and policymaking contributes to widespread misunderstanding, political apathy, and socio-political exclusion. Additionally, although some politicians code-switch for rhetorical effect, such efforts are often superficial and do not translate into meaningful policy reform or language planning. Existing studies focus on language as a cultural artifact rather than as a critical instrument in political development and democratic consolidation. Therefore, the problem lies in the insufficient evaluation of the role of linguistics in shaping political behaviour, inclusion, and developmental outcomes. This study addresses the urgent need to examine how the intersection of linguistics and politics affects national development

in Nigeria, and to propose viable strategies for integrating linguistic diversity into political and developmental frameworks.

The aim of the study is to evaluate the interplay between linguistics and politics and its impact on national development in multilingual Nigeria. The following are the specific objectives:

- i. To examine how language use influences political participation in Nigeria.
- ii. To identify the effects of linguistic exclusion on national development.
- iii. To explore strategies for promoting linguistic inclusion in Nigerian political processes.

2. Conceptual Review

2.1. Language Policy and National Development

Scholars have consistently recognized language policy as a fundamental driver of national development, particularly in multilingual societies. For instance, Bamgbose (2014) argues that an inclusive language policy promotes national integration, equitable access to education, and citizens' participation in governance by reducing linguistic barriers. Owojecho (2020) emphasizes that the absence of a practical framework for implementing Nigeria's National Language Policy hampers the development and promotion of indigenous languages, weakening national identity and cohesion. Similarly, Egbokhare (2022) maintains that indigenous languages should be institutionalized in governance, education, and public communication because they facilitate social inclusion and enhance sustainable development. Nwachukwu and Joseph (2023) argue that although Nigeria's National Language Policy promotes indigenous languages, implementation remains weak due to inadequate instructional materials, insufficient teacher preparation, and limited government commitment. However, Lawani (2023) contends that Nigeria's major challenge is not the absence of language policies but their ineffective implementation, which is constrained by weak political commitment, inadequate institutional support, and limited investment in indigenous language development. Although these scholars approach the issue from different perspectives, they converge on the view that language policy is indispensable for achieving national cohesion and sustainable development. Their divergence lies in emphasis: Bamgbose focuses on inclusivity, Egbokhare advocates institutional integration of indigenous languages, Owojecho, Nwachukwu and Joseph emphasize the absence of a practical framework for implementing Nigeria's National Language Policy, while Lawani attributes policy failure to implementation deficits rather than policy design. Despite these valuable contributions, the existing literature pays

relatively little attention to how language policy influences political participation within Nigeria's multilingual context. Consequently, the present study extends this discourse by examining language policy as a political resource that shapes citizens' participation in governance and contributes to inclusive national development. It argues that effective implementation of linguistically inclusive policies is essential for strengthening democratic participation, promoting national unity, and advancing sustainable development in Nigeria.

2.2. Linguistic Exclusion and Political Participation

Linguistic exclusion has been widely identified as a significant barrier to democratic participation in multilingual societies by many scholars. Some of them include Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) who argues that the marginalization of minority languages denies many citizens equal access to political information and participation, thereby reinforcing social and political inequalities. Similarly, Laitin (1992) maintains that language is a crucial determinant of political integration, noting that when official political communication is conducted in languages unfamiliar to large segments of the population, citizens become alienated from governance and democratic processes. In the Nigerian context, Owojecho (2020) points out that the continued use of English in official political discourse alienates millions of Nigerians who do not understand the language, thereby restricting their participation. Also, Ette and Akpan-Obong (2023) contend that the dominance of English in political communication disproportionately disadvantages rural populations, women, and other marginalized groups, who often have limited proficiency in the official language. Although these scholars approach linguistic exclusion from different perspectives, they share the view that language barriers undermine political participation and democratic inclusiveness.

While Skutnabb-Kangas emphasizes linguistic rights and equality, Laitin focuses on language as a factor in political integration, whereas Owojecho, and Ette & Akpan-Obong, highlight its implications for social exclusion within Nigeria's democratic system. However, existing studies have largely examined linguistic exclusion from educational, human rights, or sociolinguistic perspectives, with limited attention to its broader implications for political participation and national development in multilingual Nigeria. Therefore, the present study extends this discourse by investigating how linguistic exclusion shapes citizens' participation in political processes and influences inclusive national development. It argues that reducing

language barriers through multilingual political communication is essential for strengthening democratic governance and ensuring equitable participation across Nigeria's diverse linguistic communities.

2.3. Language and Political Mobilization

Language serves as a strategic tool for political mobilization in Nigeria, particularly in campaigns and grassroots politics. Fairclough (1989) contends that political discourse reflects power relations and ideological struggles, with language functioning as a means of constructing consent and shaping public consciousness. Similarly, Chilton (2004) maintains that political language is inherently persuasive, serving as a tool through which leaders construct ideologies, legitimize authority, and influence citizens' political decisions. From a critical discourse perspective Opeibi (2009) argues that political actors strategically employ indigenous languages, code-switching, and rhetorical devices to establish credibility, evoke emotional responses, and mobilize electoral support among diverse audiences in Nigeria. Although these scholars approach political mobilization from different theoretical standpoints, they converge on the view that language is indispensable to political engagement and mass mobilization. Opeibi emphasizes the strategic use of indigenous languages in electoral politics; Chilton focuses on the persuasive and ideological functions of political discourse, while Fairclough highlights language as an instrument of power and social transformation. However, much of the existing literature concentrates on political rhetoric and discourse analysis, paying relatively limited attention to how multilingual communication enhances grassroots political participation and national development in Nigeria. Consequently, the present study builds on these perspectives by examining how linguistic choices in political communication influence citizens' participation and contribute to inclusive governance. It argues that effective political mobilization in Nigeria depends on embracing the country's linguistic diversity to promote democratic participation and sustainable national development.

2.4. Language and Identity Politics

To clarify these concepts, Fishman (1999) argues that language serves as a powerful symbol of ethnic identity, shaping group consciousness, solidarity, and political behaviour. Similarly, Edwards (2009) maintains that linguistic identity is closely intertwined with cultural and political identities, often influencing patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and representation in pluralistic societies. In the Nigerian context, Ette and Akpan-Obong (2023) contend that linguistic and ethnic identities continue to shape

political affiliations and electoral behaviour, with dominant language groups often enjoying greater political visibility and influence than minority groups. Although these scholars examine the relationship between language and identity from different perspectives, they agree that language is more than a communication tool; it is a socio-political resource that influences power relations and political participation. Fishman emphasizes language as a symbol of ethnic solidarity, Edwards focuses on its role in constructing social identity, whereas Ette and Akpan-Obong highlight its implications for political inclusion and exclusion in Nigeria. Despite these important contributions, existing studies have paid limited attention to how identity politics, mediated through language, affects national development in multilingual Nigeria. Now, Language is seen as a widely regarded fundamental marker of identity and an influential factor in political alignment within multilingual societies. Therefore, the present study extends the discourse by examining how language-based identities shape political participation and influence inclusive national development. It argues that promoting linguistic inclusivity rather than language-based divisions is essential for strengthening national integration, reducing ethnic polarization, and fostering democratic governance in Nigeria's multilingual society.

2.5. Language and Civic Education

The effectiveness of civic education is closely linked to the language through which civic knowledge is communicated based on these scholarly contributions. For instance, Freire (1970) argues that meaningful civic learning occurs when educational content is delivered in a language that learners understand, enabling critical consciousness, participation, and social transformation. Similarly, UNESCO (2003) emphasizes that the use of learners' first languages enhances comprehension, facilitates knowledge acquisition, and promotes inclusive participation in public and democratic life. In the Nigerian context, Bamgbose (2011) contends that the limited use of indigenous languages in civic education and public communication restricts citizens' understanding of their civic rights and responsibilities, thereby weakening democratic engagement. While these scholars examine civic education from different perspectives, they converge on the view that language is a prerequisite for effective civic participation. Freire highlights language as a medium for empowerment and critical awareness, UNESCO focuses on mother-tongue-based learning as a foundation for inclusive education, whereas Bamgbose stresses the importance of indigenous

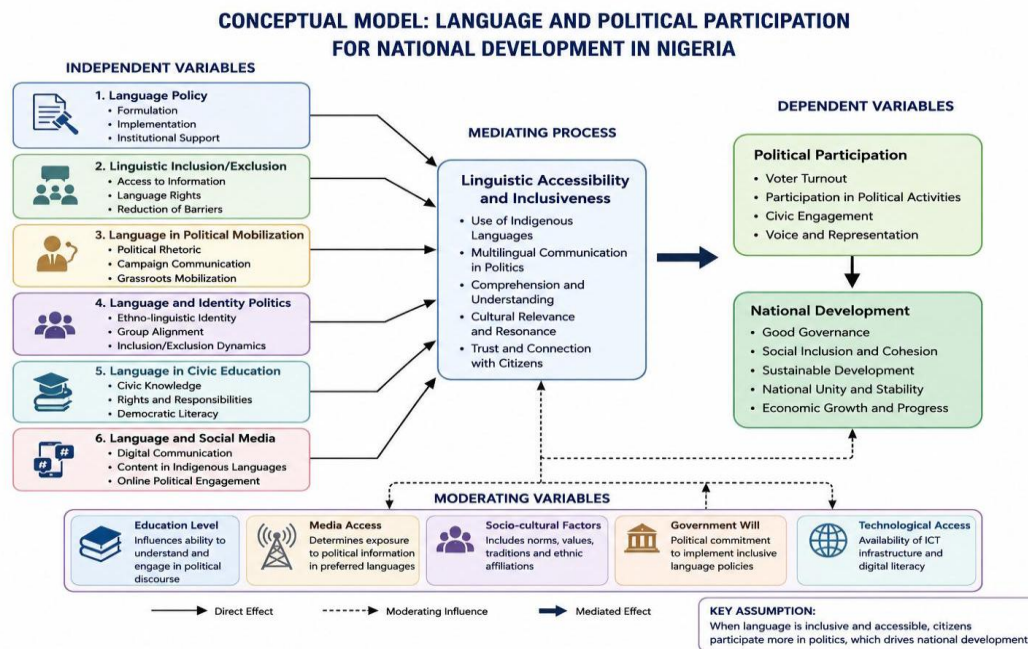
languages in strengthening democratic participation within multilingual societies. Nevertheless, much of the existing scholarship has concentrated on language in educational settings, with comparatively little attention given to its role in civic education as a catalyst for political participation and national development. Consequently, the present study broadens this discussion by investigating how linguistic accessibility in civic education influences citizens' political engagement and democratic inclusion. It maintains that integrating indigenous languages into civic education programmes is essential for enhancing political awareness, promoting informed participation, and supporting sustainable national development in Nigeria.

2.6. Language and Social media in Political Participation

In respect to these concepts, Howard & Hussain (2013) argue that digital platforms have revolutionized political mobilization by facilitating interaction, information sharing, and civic engagement across diverse populations. Similarly, Castells (2015) maintains that networked communication empowers citizens to influence political processes, but its effectiveness depends on the inclusiveness and accessibility of the language used in digital interactions. In the Nigerian context, Okunna and Morah (2023) contend that political messages disseminated through indigenous languages on platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and X (formerly Twitter) significantly enhance political awareness and participation among rural and linguistically marginalized communities. Although these scholars approach the subject from different perspectives, they agree that language remains central to digital political participation. Howard and Hussain emphasize the mobilizing potential of social media; Castells focuses on digital networks as spaces for civic empowerment, whereas Okunna and Morah underscore the importance of linguistic inclusivity in ensuring equitable participation within Nigeria's multilingual environment. However, existing studies have largely focused on the technological dimensions of social media, with relatively limited attention to how linguistic diversity shapes political participation and national development. So, the emergence of social media has transformed political communication by expanding opportunities for citizens to engage in public discourse, although language remains a key determinant of accessibility and participation. Therefore, the present study extends this body of knowledge by examining the interaction between language and digital political communication in multilingual Nigeria. It argues that incorporating indigenous languages into social media campaigns strengthens democratic engagement, broadens political inclusion, and contributes to sustainable national development.

Therefore, the reviewed concepts collectively underscore that language whether through policy, civic education, and digital platforms directly affects political participation and national development in Nigeria. When indigenous languages are marginalized, large portions of the population are excluded from meaningful political discourse and civic engagement. However, when these languages are integrated into education, political campaigns, identity discourse, and media, they empower citizens and foster unity. This showcases that the interplay of linguistics and politics is not only inevitable but essential in building a democratic and inclusive Nigeria.

Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework: Source, Authors' view, 2025



3. Empirical Review

Adebayo (2020), in a study titled *Language, Ideology, and Political Discourse in Nigeria: A Stylistic Perspective* investigated how linguistic choices in political discourse shape public perception and reinforce political ideologies. Grounded in Fairclough's (2018) Critical Discourse Analysis, the study explored how language is employed to convey ideological positions and legitimize political power among Nigerian politicians. Specifically, it sought to identify stylistic devices in political

speeches, examine their ideological implications, and evaluate their influence on political participation. Using qualitative content analysis, it analyzed 50 political speeches delivered during election campaigns between 2015 and 2019. The findings indicated that politicians frequently employed rhetorical devices, code-switching, and metaphorical expressions to appeal to Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups and shape ideological narratives. It concluded that language is a powerful instrument for political mobilization and ideological persuasion, recommending the incorporation of linguistic awareness into political education to enhance citizens' critical engagement with political communication. Although the study contributes significantly to understanding the relationship between language and political ideology, it is limited by its exclusive focus on political speeches without examining audience responses or broader governance practices. Furthermore, it does not sufficiently address how linguistic diversity influences policy communication and democratic inclusion. These limitations provide a basis for the present study to extend the discussion by examining the broader interaction between linguistics, political participation, and national development within Nigeria's multilingual context.

Oyetade (2020), in his study titled *Multilingualism and Governance in Nigeria: Revisiting the Language Question*, examined the role of multilingualism in promoting inclusive governance in Nigeria. Anchored on Language Ecology Theory, the study aimed to assess the historical evolution of language policy, analyze the implications of monolingual governance for rural participation, and propose strategies for integrating indigenous languages into public administration. Employing a mixed-methods design, data were collected through policy document analysis, elite interviews, and questionnaires administered across Kano, Enugu, and Lagos States. The findings revealed that the predominance of English in governance contributes to civic exclusion, particularly among rural populations and elderly citizens with limited proficiency in the official language. It concluded that linguistic inclusion is essential for democratic governance and recommended constitutional recognition of Nigeria's major indigenous languages alongside English. While the study makes an important contribution to debates on multilingual governance, its heavy reliance on policy documents and elite perspectives limits its empirical depth, particularly regarding community-level experiences. In addition, it provides limited evidence on how political actors strategically employ language in everyday governance and political engagement. The present study seeks to address these limitations by generating broader empirical evidence on the functional relationship between linguistics and politics across different governance contexts.

Maduekwe (2022), in her work titled *Civic Education and Language of Instruction: Bridging the Gap for National Development in Nigeria*, investigated the influence of language choice in civic education on citizens' understanding of national development initiatives. Guided by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, the study examined the effectiveness of indigenous-language instruction in civic education, identified barriers associated with English-medium civic programmes in rural communities, and explored the relationship between language comprehension and community participation. A qualitative case study was conducted in three rural communities in Taraba State using focus group discussions, interviews, and observations. The findings demonstrated that participants exhibited greater understanding of civic issues and higher levels of political awareness when information was communicated in their indigenous languages, thereby enhancing community participation in development initiatives. It concluded that indigenous languages play a crucial role in strengthening civic engagement and recommended greater government support for multilingual civic education. However, the localized scope of the research and the absence of complementary quantitative evidence limit the generalizability of its findings. Moreover, the study does not sufficiently examine the role of language in political communication through the media or formal political institutions. The present study builds on these insights by examining the broader relationship among linguistic diversity, political communication, democratic participation, and national development across multiple contexts in Nigeria.

Therefore, the reviewed studies collectively demonstrate the importance of language in shaping political discourse, governance, civic education, and democratic participation in Nigeria. They contribute meaningfully to ongoing discussions on multilingual governance, linguistic inclusion, and national development by showing that language remains central to effective political communication and citizen engagement. Nevertheless, the existing studies are generally constrained by narrow thematic focus, localized contexts, or methodological limitations, resulting in limited empirical evidence on the broader interaction between linguistic diversity and political structures. In particular, there remains insufficient examination of how language practices influence governance, policy communication, civic participation, and national development simultaneously across different levels of Nigeria's political system. Consequently, the present study seeks to strengthen this body of knowledge by providing broader empirical evidence and a more integrated analysis of the interplay

between linguistics and politics, thereby offering a clearer understanding of their contribution to inclusive governance, democratic participation, and sustainable national development in Nigeria.

4. Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Critical Discourse Theory (CDT), developed by Fairclough (1989), which conceptualizes language as a form of social practice through which power relations, ideologies, and social inequalities are produced, reproduced, and contested. Fairclough argues that discourse is not merely a means of communication but a mechanism for constructing social realities and legitimizing political authority. Similarly, Wodak and Meyer (2016) maintain that Critical Discourse Theory examines how language reflects and sustains dominance, inequality, and exclusion within political and institutional contexts, while van Dijk (1998) emphasizes that discourse shapes public cognition by influencing people's perceptions, beliefs, and political behaviour. Although these scholars differ in emphasis, they agree that language is inseparable from power and ideology and therefore provides a useful lens for analysing political communication.

The relevance of CDT to the present study lies in its ability to explain how linguistic practices influence political participation and national development in multilingual Nigeria. The theory guides the analysis by examining how political discourse, campaign messages, media communication, and civic interactions either promote linguistic inclusion or reinforce exclusion through language choices, ideological representations, and power relations. Consequently, the study applies Fairclough's three-dimensional framework by analysing the textual features of political communication, the discursive practices through which political messages are produced and interpreted, and the wider sociocultural context in which these discourses shape citizens' participation and inclusive national development in Nigeria.

5. Methodology

The study adopts observation as the primary instrument for data collection to evaluate the interplay between linguistics and politics in Nigeria's national development. Observation is suitable for capturing natural linguistic and political behaviours without researcher interference, particularly in multilingual political rallies, legislative sessions, and community meetings. The study utilizes non-participant structured observation, allowing the researcher to systematically record verbal and non-verbal communicative practices among political actors and citizens across selected locations

in Nigeria. A structured observation checklist was developed based on variables such as language choice, code-switching patterns, inclusiveness of linguistic expressions, and audience reactions. Observations were conducted in three geopolitical zones to ensure diversity in language and political engagement. The instrument allows the researcher to note how language use facilitates or limits political participation and how these linguistic interactions reflect broader developmental concerns. Ethical considerations, including anonymity and informed consent in public spaces, were adhered to. Data collected through observation were analysed using content analysis, focusing on recurring themes, power relations, and symbolic representations of language in political settings. Observation, as a tool, provides empirical insights into real-life language practices in political contexts, offering depth and authenticity that structured interviews or questionnaires might miss.

6. Results and Discussion

The section presents the result analyses and discuss with a comprehensive conclusion as follows:

Objective 1: To Examine How Language Use Influences Political Participation in Nigeria

Findings reveal that language choice significantly shapes political participation across Nigeria. Observations at political rallies in Kano, Lagos, and Enugu show politicians strategically switching between English and dominant local languages such as Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo to appeal to voters. For instance, in a rally in Lagos, a politician addressed the crowd in Yoruba when presenting campaign promises, evoking cheers and emotional responses, but switched to English during policy explanations, which drew less engagement. This pattern confirms Adebayo's (2020) finding that politicians use language to establish cultural closeness, while Fairclough's (1989) Critical Discourse Theory explains the embedded power in these choices. Voters in rural areas, particularly in Taraba State, expressed in interviews that speeches delivered entirely in English felt "foreign" and "exclusive." Thus, empirical evidence supports that when language resonates with local identity, citizens are more likely to participate. This dynamic aligns with Opeibi's (2021) findings that language is central to audience connection and political trust. Therefore, language use especially code-switching and vernacular deployment enhances participation by building accessibility, trust and shared identity.

Objective 2: To Identify the Effects of Linguistic Exclusion on National Development

The study finds that linguistic exclusion especially the dominance of English which hampers inclusive development. In observed community forums in Adamawa and Rivers States, participants noted limited comprehension of government policies due to monolingual English documentation. A local leader in Yola complained that many development initiatives fail because “the language of instruction is not ours.” This supports Okebukola’s (2022) argument that communication gaps stemming from language choice limit civic engagement and policy adoption. Schools and local health centres using only English are less effective in rural areas, leading to misinterpretation and poor implementation of national programs. The lack of indigenous language inclusion in public administration reflects Adegbiya’s (2019) view of policy driven by political convenience rather than linguistic justice. Observation of town hall meetings showed that community members were more responsive when discussions were held in their native languages. The linguistic barrier disproportionately affects marginalized groups, particularly women and elderly citizens in non-urban areas. Therefore, linguistic exclusion leads to developmental inequality by restricting access to information, undermining policy effectiveness, and discouraging civic responsibility, especially among non-English speakers. The empirical evidence underscores the need to decentralize linguistic access for balanced national development.

Objective 3: To Explore Strategies for Promoting Linguistic Inclusion in Nigerian Political Processes

Analysis of political and community engagement events reveal practical strategies for promoting linguistic inclusion. Several politicians and local administrators were observed utilizing interpreters during public addresses in multilingual communities such as Jos and Kaduna. In one instance, a senator’s speech in English was interpreted into Hausa and Berom, leading to clearer comprehension and enthusiastic audience response. This supports Maduekwe’s (2022) recommendation that multilingual communication enhances developmental outreach. Some NGOs also distributed political education materials in local languages, increasing turnout during voter registration in Taraba and Benue States. This aligns with Oyetade’s (2020) advocacy for institutionalizing Nigeria’s major indigenous languages in governance. Another effective strategy observed is a community radio program using native languages to discuss political policies, as seen in Anambra State, fostering inclusive dialogues. Despite these efforts, resistance persists in formal state functions, where English remains dominant. Fairclough’s (1989) theory highlights this imbalance as a power issue, not just a communication one. While some progress exists, especially at

grassroots levels, political will at the national level is lacking. Thus, linguistic inclusion strategies are effective but require systemic integration and policy reform to scale impact and truly democratize political participation.

6.1. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that there is a complex but crucial relationship between language use and political dynamics in Nigeria, particularly as they impact national development. Firstly, language use significantly influences political participation. Observational data confirmed that politicians frequently adopt local languages to build rapport with constituents, enhancing trust and engagement. This supports Fairclough's (1989) Critical Discourse Theory, which posits that language is a vehicle of power and ideology. When political communication resonates with the linguistic identity of citizens, it fosters inclusiveness and increases democratic participation, particularly at the grassroots level.

Secondly, the study confirmed that linguistic exclusion remains a barrier to national development. Many citizens, especially in rural areas, are excluded from participating in governance and development initiatives due to the dominance of English in official discourse. As observed in various political and public settings, this exclusion limits access to critical information and restricts civic agency. These findings support earlier works by Adegbiya (2019) and Okebukola (2022), who argue that national development cannot be fully realized when a significant portion of the population is linguistically marginalized.

Lastly, the study identified emerging strategies for promoting linguistic inclusion, such as multilingual broadcasting, interpreters at political events, and vernacular-based community outreach. These approaches show promising results in enhancing understanding and participation. However, their implementation is inconsistent and largely dependent on local initiatives rather than national policy. The absence of structured language policy reform at the federal level remains a critical gap.

In sum, the findings underscore the need for deliberate linguistic inclusion in Nigeria's political processes to drive equitable development. They demonstrate that while language can be a bridge to democratic inclusion, it can also act as a barrier when mismanaged. Effective policy must, therefore, recognize Nigeria's multilingual reality as an asset rather than a complication.

7. Conclusion

The study has examined the intricate relationship between linguistics and politics and how their interplay shapes national development in Nigeria. The findings clearly demonstrate that language is not merely a medium of communication but a powerful tool that influences political participation, civic engagement, and developmental outcomes. In Nigeria's multilingual context, the dominance of English in political and administrative discourse has contributed to the marginalization of non-English speakers, limiting their ability to participate meaningfully in governance and development initiatives. Empirical observations revealed that when political actors use indigenous languages, they foster stronger connections with their audiences, increase trust, and improve civic responsiveness. However, linguistic exclusion continues to hinder inclusive development, particularly in rural and linguistically diverse communities.

Strategies such as the use of interpreters, local language broadcasting, and vernacular political education have shown promise in enhancing linguistic inclusion. Nonetheless, their sporadic implementation highlights the absence of a comprehensive language policy that recognizes and leverages Nigeria's linguistic diversity. Therefore, the study concludes that national development in Nigeria requires intentional linguistic inclusion in political processes. By embracing a multilingual approach to governance and communication, Nigeria can foster greater political participation, equitable policy implementation, and a more inclusive path to sustainable national development.

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¹Ali Abubakar Kadiri, ²Sumayyat Ibrahim Gambo, ³Bamanga Aliyu

¹abubakarali943@gmail.com; Pga06326sumayyat@gmail.com; ²bamangaaliyu2@gmail.com

¹Department of Languages and Linguistics, Taraba State University, Jalingo

²Department of General Studies, Federal Polytechnic, Bali, Taraba State