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LANGUAGE POLICY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN NIGERIA: EVIDENCE FROM MULTILINGUAL ECONOMIC PRACTICES IN OGBOMOSO

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ABSTRACT
This study examines how language choice relates to customer communication, trust, market participation and social-media commerce in a multilingual Nigerian setting. Rather than treating a small local survey as a measure of national economic growth, it combines a focused review of language-policy and language-economics scholarship with an exploratory questionnaire study of 48 respondents engaged in business or other economic activities, predominantly in Ogbomoso, Oyo State. Responses collected through an online questionnaire in October 2026 were analysed using descriptive frequencies and percentages; answers to the open-ended item were grouped into recurring themes. Twenty-six respondents (54.2%) identified Yoruba and English together as their most frequently used customer-communication languages, while 43 (89.6%) reported using more than one language at least sometimes. Forty-five respondents (93.8%) said that using a language familiar to customers helps build trust, and 43 (89.6%) reported using social media for economic activity. Twenty-nine respondents (60.4%) reported using more than one language in online promotion. At the same time, 14 (29.2%) had lost or nearly lost a business opportunity because of a language or communication problem. These descriptive results suggest that respondents perceive multilingual communication as a practical resource for customer relations and digital promotion, while language differences can still create barriers. Because the sample is small, non-probability-based and geographically limited, the findings are exploratory and cannot establish that multilingualism causes economic growth. The article recommends language-inclusive communication, multilingual digital content and further larger-scale research linking language practices to measurable economic outcomes.

Keywords: language policy; economic growth; multilingualism; Nigeria; Ogbomoso; trade; digital economy; language and development

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1. Introduction

Language is part of the infrastructure through which people learn, work, exchange information, negotiate and trade. In multilingual societies, decisions about which languages are taught, recognised in public institutions and used in commercial communication can affect who accesses information and participates confidently in economic life. Language policy is therefore relevant not only to cultural identity and education but also to the distribution of communicative opportunities. Human-capital approaches emphasise the role of education and skills in productivity (Becker, 1964; Lucas, 1988), while research on language and trade has shown that linguistic distance and translation can matter for cross-border exchange (Melitz & Toubal, 2014).

Nigeria offers a significant setting for examining these issues. English has a central role in formal administration, much schooling and many formal-sector interactions, while Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Nigerian Pidgin and other languages support everyday communication across different communities and economic settings. The coexistence of these languages may create complementary opportunities: English can help some sellers address wider audiences, while locally familiar languages can support comprehension and rapport in community-based transactions. It may also create exclusion when people cannot readily understand a language used in an important transaction or digital message.

Digital platforms have added another dimension to this relationship. Social-media services enable small businesses and self-employed workers to advertise, respond to customers and build networks without relying solely on physical location. Yet the benefits of these channels depend partly on the language used in posts, product descriptions and customer exchanges. A multilingual message may improve accessibility for some audiences, but the extent of its usefulness must be demonstrated through evidence rather than assumed.

The problem addressed here is that general claims about multilingualism and economic development are often made without showing how language choices are experienced by economic actors in specific Nigerian communities. This study addresses that gap through an exploratory survey of 48 respondents and distinguishes respondents' perceptions from claims about national economic growth. It does not treat a small local sample as a measure of Nigeria's economy; rather, it uses responses from an Ogbomoso-centred sample to describe ways in which language choice may facilitate or complicate economic participation.

The study asks: (1) Which languages do respondents report using most often in customer communication, and why? (2) How do respondents perceive the relationship between language choice, communication, trust and business transactions? (3) What roles do respondents attribute to language choice in social-media promotion and customer reach? (4) What language-related barriers do respondents report, and what policy implications follow? The article proceeds with a review of relevant scholarship, an integrated theoretical framework and an explicit methodology, followed by results, discussion, implications, limitations and conclusion.

2. Literature review

2.1 Language policy and multilingualism in Nigeria

Nigeria's linguistic diversity has long raised questions about how languages should be recognised and used in education, public institutions and everyday social and economic life. Ogunmodimu (2015) argues that language-policy debates in Nigeria should account not only for the relationship between English and indigenous languages but also for inequalities among major and minority Nigerian languages. This perspective is relevant to inclusive policy because a framework that recognises only a small number of widely spoken languages may leave speakers of smaller languages with limited institutional support. Banda (2009), writing about African

language planning more broadly, similarly challenges policy approaches that treat multilingualism as a collection of separate monolingual communities. He argues for attention to speakers' linguistic repertoires and to the social contexts in which languages are used.

These arguments suggest that language policy should be assessed not only by the formal status assigned to a language but also by whether people can use their linguistic resources to participate in education, public communication and economic activity. The present study applies this concern to reported customer communication and social-media practices among respondents recruited around Ogbomoso. The survey does not assess the implementation of national language policy directly; rather, it examines everyday practices that may be relevant to the broader question of language access and economic participation.

2.2 Language policy, education and human capital

Language policy in education is an important part of the debate because educational language practices influence access to learning and the development of communication skills. Ibrahim and Gwandu (2016) investigated multilingual-education policy among 100 basic-education teachers in Gusau, Zamfara State. They reported challenges involving policy implementation, teacher preparation, curriculum materials and the practical demands of multilingual classrooms. Their findings point to a distinction between a policy's stated objectives and its implementation in schools. Although the study is not recent, it provides Nigerian evidence about the practical difficulties of translating multilingual policy into educational practice.

The economic relevance of language education can be interpreted through Human Capital Theory, which treats education and skill development as investments that may improve productive capacity (Becker, 1964). In the context of language, the relevant question is whether learners and workers acquire the linguistic resources needed to understand information, communicate with others and access opportunities. The 2025 chapter by Adeleye and Dele, "The Role of Language in Enhancing Economic Development," brings language and economic participation together in a Nigerian context. The authors report a qualitative study based on structured interviews with 16 purposively selected participants, including linguists, economists and market actors. Their discussion links language skills to employability, market access, technological knowledge and the costs of language barriers (Adeleye & Dele, 2025). Because this is a small qualitative study, its contribution is explanatory and context-sensitive rather than nationally representative.

For the present article, these studies provide context for examining language as a resource that may support participation, while cautioning against assuming that a language policy automatically produces educational or economic benefits. The current questionnaire does not measure educational achievement, language proficiency or wages. It instead focuses on how respondents describe language use in customer interaction and economic communication.

2.3 Multilingualism, trade and entrepreneurship

Economic exchange depends on the exchange of information about products, prices, quality, payment and delivery. Where customers and sellers do not share a sufficiently understood language, clarification may require additional time, assistance or translation. Conversely, using a language familiar to the customer may make information easier to understand and may support a more comfortable interaction. These mechanisms provide a plausible connection between language and trade, but their effects depend on the market, the participants and the task involved.

Adeleye and Dele (2025) argue that language competence can function both as an individual resource and as a form of market infrastructure. Their interview-based discussion identifies language barriers as a possible source of missed opportunities and exclusion, while multilingual competence may help people navigate commercial and professional settings. Kyeu (2026) also conceptualises language as economic infrastructure and discusses code-switching, trust, negotiation and access to trade networks in African market settings. However, Kyeu's paper describes its evidence as illustrative case material and qualitative analysis; it should therefore be treated as a recent conceptual contribution, not as proof of a quantified causal effect on trade or economic growth.

Earlier Nigerian work also argues that multilingualism should be considered in development planning. Ogunwale (2013), drawing on an empirical survey in secondary schools in south-western Nigeria as well as wider discussion of language and development, argues that indigenous languages can support the production and use of knowledge. This study does not directly investigate retail transactions, but it contributes a regional perspective on the relationship between linguistic resources and development. Taken together, these sources support investigating how sellers and other economic actors use languages in practice, while leaving open the empirical question of how reported practices relate to measurable business outcomes.

2.4 Language use and the digital economy

Digital platforms give small businesses and self-employed people additional channels for product promotion, customer service and maintaining commercial relationships. Yet online communication is useful only when intended audiences can access and understand the message. Language choice may therefore be relevant to the clarity of product descriptions, the ability to answer customer questions and the range of audiences a business can address. English may be useful for communicating beyond a local area, while Yoruba or other familiar languages may support communication with particular customer groups. Multilingual posts may combine these purposes, although their usefulness should be assessed in relation to the audience and the type of product or service.

The sources supplied for this review offer some support for considering language as part of economic participation and market access, but they provide limited direct empirical evidence about Nigerian social-media marketing. Kyeu (2026) recommends that digital platforms and market-information systems better accommodate African languages, but this is a policy argument rather than a platform-level test of advertising performance. Adeleye and Dele (2025) discuss technological knowledge and economic participation, but their study is not specifically a social-media marketing study. The distinction matters: the literature makes a reasonable case for investigating language accessibility online, but it does not establish that multilingual advertising necessarily increases sales.

The present study addresses this local descriptive question by asking respondents whether they use social media for economic activity, which languages they use online, whether they use multiple languages in promotion, and how they perceive language choice in relation to customer reach and responses. Since the questionnaire did not collect platform analytics or audited sales records, these results are interpreted as respondents' self-reported practices and perceptions rather than objective measures of digital-market performance.

2.5 Language, customer trust and economic participation

Trust is relevant to commercial relationships because customers and sellers need to exchange information and reach an understanding about the terms of a transaction. A shared or familiar language may help participants clarify expectations, explain a product and respond to

concerns. Kyeu (2026) discusses the role of code-switching in negotiating relationships and reducing uncertainty in African market interactions. Adeleye and Dele (2025) similarly identify language barriers as potential constraints on market access and participation. These arguments are consistent with the proposition that language may influence the experience of economic interaction, but the precise effects require evidence from particular settings.

The current questionnaire directly asks respondents whether a familiar language helps build trust and whether they have lost or nearly lost a business opportunity because of a communication problem. These items allow the study to report participants' perceptions and experiences. They do not independently verify the value of transactions lost, establish the cause of a lost opportunity, or show that language was the only factor involved. Accordingly, the discussion treats trust and opportunity-loss responses as descriptive evidence, not as causal proof.

2.6 Synthesis and research gap

The literature reviewed here provides three relevant insights. First, Nigerian language-policy scholarship highlights the need to consider the relationship between English, indigenous languages and unequal access to language resources (Ogunmodimu, 2015; Ibrahim & Gwandu, 2016). Second, work connecting language and development argues that linguistic competence may support market access and participation, while language barriers may impose practical costs (Adeleye & Dele, 2025; Kyeu, 2026; Ogunwale, 2013). Third, African language-planning scholarship cautions against treating multilingual communities as separate, uniform language groups and calls attention to the ways people draw on more than one language in everyday life (Banda, 2009).

Nevertheless, the literature available for this review offers limited directly comparable evidence about how small-scale economic actors around Ogbomoso describe language choice in face-to-face customer communication and on social media. The available sources also differ in method and scope: some are policy-oriented, some are theoretical, and the recent economic-language studies rely on qualitative interviews or illustrative analysis rather than a representative business survey. The present study therefore contributes an exploratory, local description based on 48 questionnaire responses. It examines reported language choices, reasons for choosing a language, perceived effects on trust and customer communication, social-media language practices, and self-reported language-related opportunity loss. It does not claim to represent all Nigerian businesses or to demonstrate a causal effect on national economic growth.

The specific research gap is thus not that language and economic development have never been discussed, but that more local evidence is needed on how multilingual communication is experienced by economic actors in particular Nigerian communities, including in digital business communication. The study provides initial descriptive evidence for Ogbomoso-centred respondents and identifies questions that future research can test using larger samples, defined sampling frames, platform analytics and business-performance measures.

3. Theoretical framework

The analysis integrates Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital and language-planning perspectives. These approaches are complementary rather than interchangeable. Human Capital Theory helps frame language-related learning and communicative skills as capabilities that may support productive participation. Linguistic capital explains why the value of a language depends on the social and institutional setting, and why competence in a prestigious language may confer advantages not equally available to all speakers. Language planning provides the policy level: decisions about language

status, educational provision and public communication can influence which linguistic resources people can develop and use.

Analytically, the framework links policy and language resources to reported practices, then to perceived participation outcomes. Policy and institutional context shape access to language learning and the relative value of languages; language resources influence choices in customer interaction and digital promotion; these practices may affect comprehension, trust, customer reach and transaction completion. The survey measures the middle and perceived-outcome parts of this chain, not macroeconomic growth itself.

Language policy and institutional support → language resources and linguistic capital → customer communication and digital promotion → perceived trust, reach and transaction ease

Figure 1. Integrated analytical pathway used in this study. The arrows represent the study's conceptual propositions, not causal effects tested by the survey.

The framework guides the research questions as follows: Human Capital Theory informs the discussion of language-related communicative capacity and learning; linguistic capital informs analysis of the different perceived functions of Yoruba and English; and language planning informs the policy recommendations concerning accessible public information, multilingual education and digital inclusion. Because the survey is descriptive, the framework is used to interpret patterns rather than to test a causal model.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design and setting

The study used an exploratory cross-sectional questionnaire design. An online questionnaire titled "Language Use and Economic Participation in Ogbomoso, Oyo State, Nigeria" collected 48 responses. The questionnaire included closed questions on respondent characteristics, business or economic activity, customer-language choices, communication, social-media use, customer trust, reported lost opportunities and policy attitudes, as well as one open-ended question on language-related challenges and coping strategies. Responses were collected between 8 and 15 October 2026, as shown by the timestamps in the downloaded spreadsheet.

The survey was circulated online and the available dataset contains 48 completed records. The sample is therefore a small, non-probability sample, best described as a convenience/voluntary-response sample. The data include respondents reporting locations in Ogbomoso and nearby or online settings; one respondent explicitly entered Ibadan and one entered Oluponna/Iwo. For that reason, the results are reported as evidence from respondents recruited around Ogbomoso, not as a perfectly bounded or representative sample of Ogbomoso businesses.

4.2 Instrument and variables

The questionnaire covered: (a) sex, age group, type and duration of economic activity, reported location and educational qualification; (b) language used most often with customers, frequency of using more than one language and reasons for language choice; (c) perceived effects of familiar languages, Yoruba, English and multilingual communication on comprehension, relationships and transaction completion; (d) use of social media, platforms, online language and multilingual advertising; and (e) customer trust, language-related opportunity loss and support for bilingual/multilingual economic communication. The open-ended item asked respondents to describe language-related challenges and how they managed them.

4.3 Data analysis

The spreadsheet was checked for the number of records and the distribution of responses. Closed-ended items were summarised using counts and percentages, with the denominator stated as 48 unless a question explicitly allowed a different denominator. The questionnaire's platform item permitted multiple platform selections in a single cell; therefore, its categories are reported as the combinations entered by respondents rather than as mutually exclusive platform totals. Open-ended answers were read and grouped descriptively into recurring content categories, including difficulties communicating with Hausa-speaking customers, use of interpreters or relatives, translation tools, gestures or product images, and reports of no substantial difficulty. These categories are illustrative summaries, not a formal reliability-tested coding scheme. A consistency check also identified five respondents who answered 'No' to current social-media use but nevertheless entered a platform and/or online-language response. These entries have not been silently recoded or deleted. Accordingly, the platform and online-language tables summarise recorded questionnaire entries from the full sample and should not be read as a verified profile of current social-media users only.

No inferential tests were conducted because the study is exploratory, the sample is small and non-random, and the questionnaire primarily measures self-reported perceptions. The percentages describe this sample only. They should not be interpreted as estimates for all businesses in Ogbomoso or Nigeria, and the data do not measure revenue, productivity, employment creation or national GDP.

4.4 Ethical considerations and limitations of the method

The questionnaire introduction explained the purpose of the study and stated that participation was voluntary. Respondents were not required to provide their names or other personally identifying information, and responses are reported in aggregate. The online form did not include a separate consent-confirmation checkbox, and formal ethical approval was not obtained from an institutional ethics committee. These circumstances are stated transparently, and no claim of formal ethical approval or separate checkbox-based consent is made.

5. Results

The results below describe the 48 responses in the downloaded spreadsheet. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place and may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Table 1. Respondent profile: sex

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Female	28	58.3%
Male	20	41.7%

Table 2. Respondent profile: age group

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
36-45	23	47.9%
26-35	14	29.2%
46-55	8	16.7%
56 years and above	2	4.2%
18–25	1	2.1%

Table 3. Main type of economic activity

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Trading/shop business	17	35.4%
Online business	7	14.6%
Fashion/clothing business	4	8.3%
Food business	4	8.3%
Provision/cosmetics business	3	6.3%
Seminarian/ Photography	1	2.1%
Baking and pastries None	1	2.1%
Hairdressing/barbing	1	2.1%
Photography	1	2.1%
Real estate industry	1	2.1%
Online registration and Computer Business Center	1	2.1%
I'm an Educator	1	2.1%
Artisan/technical service	1	2.1%
Poultry	1	2.1%
Teaching	1	2.1%
Phone/accessories business	1	2.1%
Graphics design and printing	1	2.1%
Piggery farming	1	2.1%

Trading/shop business was the most common activity (17 respondents, 35.4%), followed by online business (7, 14.6%). Other activities included fashion/clothing, food, provision/cosmetics, photography, education, technical services, farming and other small enterprises. The sample therefore includes varied economic roles, although it is not a probability sample of a defined business population.

Table 4. Duration of business or economic activity

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
1–5 years	18	37.5%
More than 10 years	16	33.3%
6–10 years	10	20.8%
Less than 1 year	4	8.3%

Table 5. Language most frequently used with customers

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Yoruba and English	26	54.2%
Yoruba	17	35.4%
English	3	6.3%
Yoruba and Nigerian Pidgin	1	2.1%
English and Yoruba	1	2.1%

Twenty-six respondents (54.2%) selected “Yoruba and English” as their most frequently used language combination. A further 17 (35.4%) selected Yoruba, three (6.3%) English, one (2.1%) Yoruba and Nigerian Pidgin, and one (2.1%) entered English and Yoruba as a separate category. The two categories that explicitly list Yoruba and English together amount to 27 responses (56.3%) when combined; they are retained separately in the table because the spreadsheet records them separately.

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Table 6. Frequency of using more than one language with customers

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	18	37.5%
Always	15	31.3%
Often	10	20.8%
Rarely	4	8.3%
Never	1	2.1%

Table 7. Main reason for choosing a language

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Customer's language preference	24	50.0%
To make communication easier	17	35.4%
My personal language preference	4	8.3%
Type of product or service	2	4.2%
Customer's age or background	1	2.1%

Customer preference was the most frequently selected reason for language choice (24, 50.0%), followed by making communication easier (17, 35.4%). Together, these responses suggest that respondents describe language selection as primarily audience-oriented and practical rather than solely a matter of personal preference.

Table 8. Perceived effects of language choice in customer interaction: familiar language

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
To a very great extent	31	64.6%
To a great extent	10	20.8%
To some extent	7	14.6%

Table 9. Perceived effects of Yoruba on effective communication

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
To a very great extent	28	58.3%
To a great extent	12	25.0%
To some extent	6	12.5%
To a small extent	1	2.1%
Not at all	1	2.1%

Table 10. Perceived effects of English on reaching a wider range of customers

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
To a very great extent	17	35.4%
To a great extent	14	29.2%
To some extent	13	27.1%
To a small extent	4	8.3%

Table 11. Perceived effects of multiple languages on customer relationships

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
To a very great extent	25	52.1%
To a great extent	10	20.8%
To some extent	10	20.8%
To a small extent	2	4.2%
Not at all	1	2.1%

Table 12. Extent to which language differences create communication difficulties

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
To some extent	15	31.3%
Not at all	11	22.9%
To a very great extent	8	16.7%
To a great extent	8	16.7%
To a small extent	6	12.5%

Table 13. Perceived effects of multilingual communication on transaction completion

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
To a very great extent	29	60.4%
To a great extent	14	29.2%
To some extent	5	10.4%

Forty-one respondents (85.4%) said a language familiar to customers made communication easier to a great or very great extent. Forty respondents (83.3%) rated Yoruba as helping effective communication to a great or very great extent. For English, 31 (64.6%) rated its contribution to reaching a wider range of customers as great or very great. Thirty-five (72.9%) rated multiple languages as helping customer relationships to a great or very great extent, and 43 (89.6%) gave that rating for completing transactions. Responses on language-difference difficulties were more mixed: 16 respondents (33.3%) reported difficulties to a great or very great extent, while 17 (35.4%) selected not at all or to a small extent.

Table 14. Use of social media for economic activity

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	43	89.6%
No	5	10.4%

Table 15. Social-media platforms or combinations reported

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
WhatsApp	21	43.8%
WhatsApp, Facebook	9	18.8%
WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram	4	8.3%
WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok	3	6.3%
WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram	3	6.3%
Facebook	2	4.2%
WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter)	2	4.2%
WhatsApp, Facebook,	1	2.1%

Instagram,		
TikTok	1	2.1%
WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter)	1	2.1%
I have not used any before but will soon be using it	1	2.1%

Table 16. Main language used for business communication on social media

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
English	31	64.6%
English and Yoruba	6	12.5%
Yoruba	5	10.4%
English, Yoruba and Nigerian Pidgin	5	10.4%
For now none	1	2.1%

Table 17. Use of multiple languages in online promotion

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	29	60.4%
No	13	27.1%
I do not advertise or promote my products or services online	6	12.5%

Table 18. Perceived effects of local languages on reaching customers through social media

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
To some extent	15	31.3%
To a great extent	12	25.0%
To a very great extent	10	20.8%
To a small extent	7	14.6%
Not at all	4	8.3%

Table 19. Perceived effects of English on reaching customers beyond the local area

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
To a very great extent	23	47.9%
To a great extent	16	33.3%
To some extent	7	14.6%
Not at all	2	4.2%

Table 20. Perceived effects of multiple languages on online promotion

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
To a very great extent	23	47.9%
To a great extent	13	27.1%
To some extent	10	20.8%
Not at all	2	4.2%

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Table 21. Perceived effect of language choice on customer responses to online messages

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
To some extent	16	33.3%
To a very great extent	13	27.1%
To a great extent	12	25.0%
Not at all	4	8.3%
To a small extent	3	6.3%

Table 22. Perceived change in customer reach associated with social media

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
To a very great extent	26	54.2%
To a great extent	11	22.9%
To some extent	6	12.5%
Not at all	3	6.3%
To a small extent	2	4.2%

Forty-three respondents (89.6%) reported using social media for business or economic activity. WhatsApp was the most frequently represented platform, either alone or in combinations. English was the most commonly entered main language for online business communication (31, 64.6%), although some respondents used Yoruba or a combination of English, Yoruba and Nigerian Pidgin. Twenty-nine respondents (60.4%) said they used more than one language to advertise or promote products or services online; 13 (27.1%) did not, and six (12.5%) did not advertise online. Note that five respondents who answered "No" to current social-media use nevertheless supplied platform and/or online-language responses; the related tables therefore present recorded answers, not a fully reconciled current-user-only breakdown.

Thirty-nine respondents (81.3%) rated English as helping them reach customers beyond their local area to a great or very great extent. Thirty-six (75.0%) gave the same rating to multilingual communication as a support for online promotion. For local languages on social media, 22 respondents (45.8%) rated their contribution as great or very great, while 22 (45.8%) selected some or small extent; four (8.3%) selected not at all. This is a more mixed response than the ratings for English and multilingual promotion, and it cautions against assuming that every respondent sees the same online value in local-language content.

Table 23. Whether language choice affects ability to attract customers

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
No	27	56.3%
Yes	19	39.6%
Not sure	2	4.2%

Table 24. Familiar language and trust in business transactions

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	45	93.8%
No	2	4.2%
Not sure	1	2.1%

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Table 25. Reported loss or near-loss of business opportunity due to language/communication

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
No	31	64.6%
Yes	14	29.2%
Not sure	3	6.3%

Table 26. Support for encouraging businesses to use English and relevant Nigerian languages

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	36	75.0%
Agree	10	20.8%
Strongly disagree	1	2.1%
Disagree	1	2.1%

Forty-five respondents (93.8%) said that using a language familiar to customers helps build trust. Fourteen (29.2%) reported having lost or nearly lost a business opportunity because of a language or communication problem, compared with 31 (64.6%) who said no and three (6.3%) who were unsure. Forty-six respondents (95.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that Nigerian businesses should be encouraged to use both English and relevant Nigerian languages in economic communication.

5.1 Open-ended responses: Reported challenges and coping strategies

The open-ended answers provide examples of how language barriers are managed. A recurring challenge was communication with customers who spoke Hausa or another language that the respondent did not understand. Several respondents described calling a relative, colleague or worker who could interpret; others mentioned seeking help from a nearby speaker. Some described using translation tools, simple English, Yoruba, gestures or product images to convey meaning. Other respondents said they had not experienced a significant language problem because their customers spoke the same language. These comments show both the practical resourcefulness of individual sellers and the fact that communication support may depend on informal networks rather than organised translation services. Since the item was open-ended and not all responses were lengthy, these themes should be treated as descriptive, not as estimates of how common each strategy is in the wider population.

6. Discussion

6.1 Multilingual communication as a customer-facing resource

The strongest descriptive pattern is the reported use of Yoruba and English together, alongside the finding that 43 of 48 respondents use more than one language at least sometimes. Customer preference and ease of communication were the two leading reasons for language choice. This pattern is consistent with the view that language selection is responsive to the communicative demands of an exchange. In Bourdieu's (1991) terms, the value of a linguistic resource depends on the market in which it is used: a language that enables rapport in a local transaction may be valuable even if another language has greater institutional prestige.

The responses also suggest that familiarity matters for trust and transaction completion. The finding that 45 respondents associated familiar-language communication with trust and 43 rated multilingual communication as helping transaction completion to a great or very great extent is evidence of respondents' perceptions, not proof that language choice independently increases sales. Nevertheless, these perceptions identify plausible mechanisms that future studies can test with transaction records, customer surveys or sales data. They also support a practical

recommendation: businesses should be encouraged to explain important product and transaction information in a language their customers understand.

6.2 Complementary functions of Yoruba and English

Respondents' answers point to complementary rather than mutually exclusive functions for Yoruba and English. Yoruba received high ratings for effective communication, while English was more strongly associated with reaching customers beyond the local area. This distinction fits the theoretical argument that language resources have context-dependent value. A policy that frames local and international languages as competitors may miss the possibility that sellers need both: one language may support immediate comprehension and relationship-building, while another may connect them to customers and networks beyond their usual environment.

The findings should not be generalised to all Nigerian businesses, and the study did not measure whether English-language communication actually generated new customers or higher income. The data indicate how respondents perceive the functions of these languages. Larger studies should compare sectors, locations, customer groups and business outcomes before drawing stronger conclusions.

6.3 Social media and the digital economy

Social-media use was common in this sample, with 43 respondents reporting use for economic activity. WhatsApp appeared most frequently in the platform responses. Most respondents used English online, but 29 reported using more than one language for promotion. The pattern suggests that respondents may adapt their online language to the intended audience, using English for wider reach and local or multiple languages for accessibility. The mixed responses on local-language impact are important: local-language content was not rated as highly by all respondents, so policy and business guidance should encourage audience-sensitive choices rather than prescribe a single language strategy.

These results contribute a local description of perceived digital practices, but they do not demonstrate that social media or multilingual posting increases revenue. The reported increase in customer reach is self-assessed, and no platform analytics, sales figures or before-and-after comparison were collected. Future research could combine questionnaire responses with post-level language coding, customer engagement statistics and business records to assess whether language choice predicts measurable outcomes.

6.4 Language barriers and unequal access

Although most respondents did not report losing a business opportunity because of language difficulties, 14 respondents did, and a further three were unsure. Open-ended answers mention Hausa-speaking customers and the use of intermediaries or translation tools. These responses show how a language mismatch can require extra time and coordination. The fact that respondents often rely on relatives or acquaintances to interpret points to a practical gap: multilingual communities may need accessible translation support and simple multilingual business information, particularly where transactions involve safety, price, product use or contractual terms.

From a language-planning perspective, inclusive communication need not mean translating every message into every Nigerian language. It can mean identifying the languages most relevant to a service area, making essential information available in them, and using translation or interpretation support where misunderstanding would be costly. Such measures are consistent with an approach that treats language accessibility as part of participation in economic life.

6.5 Implications for language policy and economic growth

The survey cannot estimate the effect of language policy on national economic growth. It does, however, offer evidence of micro-level practices through which language policy could matter: respondents use multiple languages to communicate with customers, associate familiar language with trust, use digital platforms for economic activity and report occasional lost opportunities linked to communication problems. These are potential pathways, not demonstrated macroeconomic effects. Connecting them to economic growth requires larger, representative samples and direct indicators such as sales, employment, productivity or market expansion.

The implications can be interpreted through Human Capital Theory, which links education and skill development to productive capacity (Becker, 1964), alongside research examining the relationship between language and trade (Melitz & Toubal, 2014). Language-inclusive policy should complement, not replace, access to English and other languages needed for wider communication. The central issue is whether people have the linguistic resources needed for the setting in which they are expected to learn, work, trade or access services.

7. Policy recommendations

i. Promote additive multilingual education: strengthen literacy and learning through languages familiar to learners while developing competence in English and other languages needed for further education and wider economic participation (Heugh, 2009).
ii. Provide essential economic information in relevant languages: public agencies and business-support organisations should make key information on registration, finance, taxation, consumer rights and safety understandable to the communities they serve.
iii. Encourage audience-sensitive multilingual business communication: small businesses should assess their customer base and consider clear Yoruba-English or other relevant language combinations where these improve comprehension.
iv. Support digital-language inclusion: business-development programmes should provide practical guidance on accessible product descriptions, captions, customer service and translation tools across social-media platforms.
v. Develop local translation and interpretation support: chambers of commerce, market associations, local authorities and enterprise-support services could identify common language needs and make referral or translation resources available.
vi. Evaluate outcomes rather than assume impact: future interventions should measure customer comprehension, conversion rates, sales, customer retention and business performance before claiming economic-growth effects.

8. Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, the sample comprises only 48 online respondents and was not selected randomly; the findings are not statistically representative of Ogbomoso or Nigeria. Second, the location field includes a small number of entries outside Ogbomoso or described as online, so the setting is best understood as an Ogbomoso-centred sample rather than a strictly delimited local census. Third, the measures are self-reported perceptions. The study did not collect audited sales, profits, employment, productivity, platform analytics or objective customer outcomes. Fourth, the survey does not establish a response rate because the total number of people invited is not available in the supplied dataset. Fifth, open-ended responses were summarised descriptively and were not independently coded by multiple researchers.

Future research should recruit a larger and more geographically balanced sample, define inclusion criteria in advance, report recruitment and consent procedures, and compare sectors

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and customer groups. Mixed-methods research could combine interviews with business owners and customers, observation of real transactions, language analysis of online posts, platform engagement data and business indicators. Longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs would be needed to assess whether a change in language practice produces measurable economic effects.

9. Conclusion

This study examined reported language practices and economic participation among 48 respondents recruited around Ogbomoso, Nigeria. Most respondents reported using Yoruba and English together or using multiple languages at least sometimes. Familiar-language communication was widely associated with trust, and respondents commonly reported using social media for economic activity. English was perceived as useful for reaching customers beyond the local area, while multilingual promotion was also viewed favourably. At the same time, some respondents reported losing or nearly losing business opportunities because of language or communication problems.

The findings support a cautious conclusion: multilingual communication appears to be a practical resource for many respondents' customer-facing activities, but the study does not establish a causal relationship between language policy and national economic growth. A language-inclusive approach should develop local-language accessibility alongside English and other wider-communication resources, especially in education, public economic information and digital commerce. Stronger claims about economic effects require larger samples and direct measures of business performance.

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