

## PROPOSING A CONSTRUCTED NATIONAL LANGUAGE FOR NIGERIA: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

Nigeria's linguistic diversity and repeated failure to establish a unified national language have sustained ongoing debates in language planning. Previous efforts, including constructed language proposals such as Guosa, have not achieved institutional adoption. Recent policy shifts, including the 2022 National Language Policy and its cancellation in 2025, alongside renewed scholarly and public debates in 2026, have intensified the search for alternative solutions. This study adopts a conceptual and comparative analysis approach, drawing on language planning theory (Spolsky, 2012), existing empirical evidence, and international comparative cases of language policy implementation and constructed language adoption. Findings indicate that while Nigeria's multilingual structure necessitates a unifying linguistic mechanism, prior constructed language efforts failed largely due to weak institutionalisation and lack of systematic planning. Empirical evidence also shows mixed public attitudes, with perceived benefits of linguistic unity but significant cultural and practical barriers. Comparative analysis highlights that successful cases, such as Bahasa Indonesia, depended on strong state support and pre-existing lingua franca conditions, while alternative strategies like Burkina Faso's 2026 AI-driven language development prioritise strengthening existing languages instead of constructing new ones. The study proposes a structured, institutionally guided approach to constructing a neutral Nigerian language, distinguishing it from prior attempts by embedding formal planning mechanisms, educational integration, and technological support. Nevertheless, political feasibility and public acceptance remain critical constraints in the current policy environment.

**Keywords:** National Language, Multilingualism, Language Policy, National Identity, Nigerian Language, Constructed Language

## Introduction

Nigeria exemplifies a linguistically diverse society, featuring over 500 languages spoken by a population exceeding 200 million (Adegbija, 2004; Nnamani, 2024). This variety of languages shows how rich Nigeria's culture is, but it makes it harder for people to communicate and stay united as a country. Since there is no singular most-widely spoken native language, English, the language of colonial rule, is the official language for governance and education (Ofuegbu, 2026; Ogunleye, 2026). Although perceived as neutral (Adegbite, 2003, as cited in Ofuegbu, 2026), English inadequately represents indigenous identities and can marginalise significant populations, particularly at the local level (Ogunleye, 2026).

Efforts to advance any of the principal indigenous languages (Hausa, Yoruba, or Igbo) have historically encountered obstacles due to ethnic rivalries, political distrust, and apprehensions regarding cultural imposition (Ofuegbu, 2026). This is why Nigeria does not have a national language, underlining the problematic dilemma of national identity and having many languages. Recent literature and policy developments underscore the unresolved challenge of a Nigerian national language. Historical attempts to elevate any single ethnic language have consistently faltered, and several constructed language schemes have been proposed without success. For example, Nigerian linguist Guosa Alex Igbineweka created Guosa in 1965 by blending Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo and other languages, aiming for a neutral lingua franca. However, Fakuade (1992) criticised Guosa as “unacceptable” and lacking “guiding principles or scientific methods”, and it never achieved official adoption. More broadly, public opinion surveys show divided attitudes: Jegede (2024) found that a sample of 500 respondents recognised the potential benefits of a unified language but reported “substantial cultural and practical challenges” to implementing one.

Government interest in language policy has recently intensified. In 2022, Nigeria adopted its first National Language Policy, designed by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council. Lawani (2025) notes this was “Nigeria’s first comprehensive framework for regulating the status, functions, and use of its over 540 indigenous languages”. Crucially, the 2022 policy mandated mother tongue or local community language instruction from early childhood through Primary 6 (Akinselure, 2026; Lawani, 2025). However, this policy was cancelled on February 6, 2025. The cancellation has prompted public debate: at a University of Ibadan forum in April 2026, linguists led by Francis Egbokhare denounced the repeal as “linguistic genocide” and demanded its reversal. Meanwhile, the National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) is already promoting indigenous language literacy through new programs (e.g. NYSC corps language training) (NICO, 2024).

Despite these initiatives and debates, no unified solution has emerged. Prior scholarship (e.g. Fakuade 1992; Jegede 2024) has examined individual proposals, but none have been adopted. This paper addresses that gap by revisiting the concept of a neutral “Nigerian” language. It critically examines past efforts (Guosa), contemporary attitudes (public surveys and academic critiques), and recent policy shifts (2022 Policy, 2025 repeal) to assess the potential and design requirements of such a language today.

## Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 1. Language and National Identity

Language is a construct of humanity that a society employs to help communicate meaning. Traditional definitions emphasise its symbolic and systematic characteristics. For example, Sapir (1921) characterises language as a non-instinctive system for conveying ideas, emotions, and desires through voluntarily created symbols; while de Saussure (1916) describes language as a system of signs regulated by social convention. These definitions characterise language not merely as a medium of communication but as a social institution.

Language also plays a big part in how people form their identities. It functions as a repository of cultural knowledge, transmitting values, beliefs, and practices (Chinaguh, 2025). Language goes beyond a way to share messages. It is a way to express culture and consciousness (Bamgbose, 2023). This is a critical issue in linguistically diverse societies, as language can influence individual and group identities. As Nnamani (2024) notes, language can provide a symbol of national unity, promoting communication between different groups and creating a sense of belonging.

Nevertheless, the relationship between language and identity is not straightforward. When language divides overlap with ethnic divides, language can also be divisive. In Nigeria, the association of major languages, such as Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, with specific ethnic groups makes their use as symbols problematic. As Ofuegbu (2026) points out, prioritising one language can be interpreted as a form of cultural imposition and can create tension. This ambivalence of language as both "unifying" and "dividing" is a central theme in national language policy debates.

### **Official Language vs National Language**

Sociolinguistically, there is a difference between the official language and the national language. Official languages are functional languages used in administration, government and formal contexts. A national language, on the other hand, is symbolic, symbolising a nation's culture and identity (Nnamani, 2024). In many postcolonial countries, these functions diverge. This is the case in Nigeria, where English is the official language because of its legacy in colonialism and its perceived impartiality across tribes (Ogunleye, 2026; Ofuegbu, 2026). However, it does not symbolise indigenous cultural heritage or connect with all members of the population, especially in rural communities. This is a gap between the official language and the linguistic practices of the people.

The lack of an indigenous national language is, therefore, a nation-building problem. Although English serves as a language of administration and formal communication, it does not play the unifying and identity-building role of a national language. This is an important point in understanding why the issue of a national language is still unresolved in Nigeria.

### **Language Planning Theory**

Language planning offers insights into managing language diversity. Spolsky (2004) defines language planning as conscious efforts to manage language use, which are usually grouped into three interrelated areas:

- status planning (the allocation of languages for official purposes);
- corpus planning (the creation and standardisation of language forms) and;
- acquisition planning (the encouragement of language learning, particularly through education).

In Nigeria, language policy has primarily been influenced by status planning that prioritises English as the official language. Although policies like the National Policy on Education promote the use of local languages in the early years of education, their implementation has been patchy, leading to the ongoing predominance of English in formal settings (Achike et al., 2022). This demonstrates the effects of policy without implementation. Many Nigerian languages, particularly less widely spoken ones, lack corpus planning, with standardised orthographies and institutional support. This, as Adegbija (2004) argues, has led to the endangerment of some indigenous languages. Acquisition planning has also been variable, with little investment in local teacher training and curriculum development.

The theory of language planning also encompasses the notion of constructed languages. Linguistic studies acknowledge that languages can be created or modified to fulfil social and political goals (Spolsky, 2004; Levy, 2003). Such initiatives are not without their problems, especially in terms of acceptance and legitimacy. However, they provide a framework for considering other approaches to longstanding linguistic challenges. For

Nigeria, this offers a basis for considering the merits of a neutral, constructed national language.

Multilingual nations often differentiate an official language (for government and law, e.g. English in Nigeria) from a national language (a symbol of cultural unity). Scholars, such as Spolsky (2012) often highlight that successful national languages typically require a corpus-planning process (standardisation), status planning (official recognition), and acquisition planning (education/promotion).

### **Constructed Language in Context and Prior Proposals for a Constructed Nigerian Language**

Constructed or planned languages have a mixed global record. In some post-colonial states, standardising or creating a national language succeeded when it built on a preexisting lingua franca and had strong state support. Indonesia famously adopted Bahasa Indonesia (from Malay) at independence, a language which “was the native language of less than 5% of the population” but had long served as a widespread trade lingua franca (Paauw, 2009). Paauw (2009) also notes that Indonesia was “virtually alone among post-colonial nations” in successfully promoting an indigenous language nationally. Malay’s neutrality and egalitarian history (no single ethnic group monopolised it) helped its acceptance. In contrast, schemes like Esperanto lacked a nation’s backing and failed to gain mass adoption, and independent projects such as the Hebrew revival had the advantage of powerful nationalist movements and state sponsorship (Paauw, 2009). We consider these cases as cautionary lessons for Nigeria.

Academic literature does examine proposals similar to our idea. Notably, Fakuade (1992) critically analysed Guosa, Alex Igbineweka’s 1965 attempt to merge elements of Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, etc. into one “Nigerian” language. Fakuade concluded that Guosa was an “unacceptable” planned language that “has no guiding principles or scientific methods.” In other words, it lacked a systematic planning framework or any institutional backing, which contributed to its failure. Similarly, the long-standing “three-language” policy (Yoruba–Hausa–Igbo) has been criticised for excluding hundreds of smaller languages (Fakuade, 1992). These findings imply that any new language project must be methodically grounded and inclusive.

More recently, Jegede (2024:1) provides empirical data on attitudes toward language unification. In a survey of 500 Nigerians, he found that while many see a unified language as beneficial for national identity and cohesion, “substantial cultural and practical challenges” (such as ethnic loyalties and logistical complexity) remain. This confirms the social challenges identified by earlier analysts. On the policy side, governmental agencies have begun exploring language initiatives. For example, the National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) launched a program in 2024 offering Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba instruction to NYSC corps members (NICO, 2024). Although not a unified language, such programs signal official interest in multilingual education.

From the foregoing, one may find that the literature suggests that previous attempts in Nigeria did not succeed primarily due to a lack of systematic planning and political support. Informed by this, our proposal emphasises an explicit institutional framework (supporting Spolsky’s models) and learning from successful cases like Indonesian planning. We also note that these prior works underscore public scepticism. Therefore, any new language will face acceptance issues that must be anticipated and carefully addressed.

### **Sociolinguistic Overview of Nigeria's Language Diversity**

#### **1. Language Families in Nigeria**

Nigeria is home to one of the world's richest linguistic diversities, with more than 500 languages belonging to three of Africa's major language families (Adegbija, 2004; Nnamani, 2024). Nigeria’s over 500 languages span three major families: Niger-Congo (including

Yoruba, Igbo, Fulfulde, Edo, etc.), Afroasiatic (Hausa, Kanuri), and Nilo-Saharan (Kanuri, etc.). No one language dominates national discourse; rather, Hausa is estimated at 25% of Nigerians, Yoruba 21%, and Igbo 18% (These figures come from demographic studies e.g. Nnamani, 2024). The remaining population speaks several other regional and minority languages. Meanwhile, English remains the official language (widely learned). These families are further subdivided into distinct branches. For example, the Benue-Congo and Volta-Niger subfamilies contain many of Nigeria's major languages, which have resulted from extensive migration and cultural exchange. Yet language policy and public conversations largely favour Nigeria's three major languages - Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo - with little attention given to the vast majority of minority languages. This reflects a power imbalance in Nigeria's linguistic hierarchy. This diversity enhances cultural identity, but poses challenges for language policy. Speakers of minority languages are reluctant to accept the dominance of major languages for fear of exclusion. As a result, the choice of a national language has been unresolved since 1960 (when the country gained independence).

## 2. Sociolinguistic Distribution

Language distribution in Nigeria is very uneven. Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo constitute the biggest percentage of the population (Nnamani, 2024). These are the regional lingua francas, linked to the northern, southwestern and southeastern geopolitical zones. Alongside these major groups are a plethora of minority languages that are often localised.

**Table 1. Indigenous Language Distribution in Nigeria**

Language	Estimated Share of Population	Linguistic Role	Source
Hausa	25%	Regional lingua franca (Northern Nigeria)	Nnamani (2024)
Yoruba	21%	Regional lingua franca (South-West Nigeria)	Nnamani (2024)
Igbo	18%	Regional lingua franca (South-East Nigeria)	Nnamani (2024)
Nigerian Pidgin	60+ million speakers	Inter-ethnic lingua franca	Jegede (2024)

Nigerian Pidgin (an English-based creole) is the most widely spoken lingua franca, reportedly used by over 60 million Nigerians. Although Pidgin has no formal standard, linguists note growing codification efforts and expanding domains (social media, pop culture), and it functions as a bridge across ethnic lines (Jegede, 2024; Ogunleye, 2026). Research also highlights recent efforts to standardise Pidgin orthography and use it on social platforms, even though it still lacks formal official status (Nwosu, 2025). In sum, Pidgin is widely used and gaining sociolinguistic legitimacy, even if it has not been formally institutionalised. At the same time, dynamics like urbanisation and migration are driving language change, often at the cost of minority languages.

## 3. Implications of Linguistic Diversity

Linguistic diversity in Nigeria has both benefits and drawbacks for the nation. While it highlights Nigeria's cultural diversity, it also poses challenges in communication, governance, and social cohesion. As Ofuegbu (2026) notes, diversity is both a cultural asset and a unifying challenge. A lack of a lingua franca among indigenous languages hampers communication and potentially fuels ethnic tensions. This is especially true in the education

sector. The use of English as the language of instruction, despite state support for mother-tongue schooling, results in a mismatch between the language used at home and in classrooms. This leads to low academic performance and high levels of educational disadvantage, as many classrooms are not taught in the students' mother tongue (Ogunleye, 2026). The unequal status of languages also has implications for the economy, where English language skills play a significant role in accessing economic opportunities, thus compounding social inequalities (Chinaguh, 2025).

Finally, the suppression of minority languages also poses a threat to cultural diversity. Without institutional support, many languages are in danger of extinction, which has implications for cultural identity and knowledge (Adegbija, 2004). These issues highlight the need for a delicate balance in language policy, which promotes national unity without neglecting linguistic diversity. Lack of such a policy is at the heart of Nigeria's language conundrum (Ofuegbu, 2026).

## **Historical Attempts at National Language Policy**

### **1. Historical Overview of Language Policies in Nigeria**

Prior to the colonial period, Nigeria was highly multilingual, with hundreds of languages spoken by various ethnic groups (Elugbe, 1994 cited in Aito, 2005). These languages were members of various groups (Benue-Congo, Chadic, etc.) and were used mainly within confined groups. Some languages (Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulfulde and Kanuri) acted as lingua francas for commerce and administration, but none had a unifying effect across the country. The languages were largely oral, further cementing their significance as symbols of local identity, rather than means of political consolidation.

The arrival of colonialism shifted the status of languages in Nigeria. The British colonial government elevated English as the language of administration and formal education, conferring on it elite status and institutionalising it in the legal system and the education system (Adejimola, 2010). Local languages were allowed primarily in early primary school and informal settings, but English was mandated for higher education. This established a hierarchical linguistic structure whereby English was associated with modernity, power and privilege, whereas indigenous languages were viewed as inferior. At independence, English had become the de facto official language of Nigeria.

After independence, Nigeria continued to use English as the official language, as enshrined in constitutional provisions. For example, the 1999 Constitution requires English for legislative purposes, with some minimal recourse to local languages. Education policy has sought to foster language diversity, such as the National Policy on Education, which calls for mother-tongue-based education in early years and the study of major Nigerian languages. But implementation has been problematic. The continued prominence of English in official and educational settings suggests a disconnect between policy and practice (Obins et al., 2025). As a result, the focus has been more on co-existing with English than on replacing it.

Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo have long been proposed for national language status based on their size and influence. Although constitutionally acknowledged to some extent, none has become a national language. Attempts to prioritise any one have met with opposition due to ethnic sensitivities and concerns about cultural dominance. Thus, their status is largely symbolic, and English remains the de facto national language. This dilemma reflects the challenges of choosing a unifying indigenous language in Nigeria.

### **2. The 2022 National Language Policy and Its 2025 Cancellation**

The 2022 National Language Policy marked a notable shift as it mandated mother-tongue education from Early Childhood through Primary 6 (Akinselure, 2026; Lawani, 2025). In practice, this meant children should initially learn in their local Nigerian language (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, or other community language) and switch to English later. The policy aimed to “safeguard Nigeria’s linguistic heritage” and improve learning outcomes (Lawani,

2025). However, it also faced criticism for implementation hurdles (shortage of materials, teacher training, and parental preference for English).

In early 2025, the policy's fate abruptly changed. On February 6, 2025, the Federal Minister of Education announced the cancellation of the mother-tongue policy (Akinselure, 2026). This decision was reportedly taken at an international education conference in Abuja. The cancellation meant that, unexpectedly, Nigeria would revert to English-only instruction in schools, with no clear alternative language framework.

There, however, was a backlash. In April 2026, the University of Ibadan hosted a national dialogue titled "Education in the Mother Tongue: To Be or Not to Be?" (Alimi, 2026). Leading linguists and educators decried the cancellation. Prof. Francis Egbokhare called the repeal a form of "linguistic genocide" and urged immediate reversal (Akinselure, 2026). Similarly, Prof. Durotoye Adeleke and others warned that dropping indigenous language instruction threatened Nigeria's cultural identity and unity. The Tribune noted that this discourse occurred "amid heightened national attention" on the potential void left by the policy's removal (Alimi, 2026). In sum, the abrupt policy reversal in 2025 has created a policy vacuum and intensified debate over Nigeria's language planning.

### **Comparative Perspectives: Multilingual Nations**

#### **1. Russia and India**

Russia is a multilingual country with a highly centralised language policy. At the national level, Russian is the only official language, with some republics acknowledging other languages for specific purposes. Russian reigns supreme in public administration, education, and society, despite the country's more than 100 minority languages. Comparative studies show that this centralisation may enhance national unity, but at the cost of linguistic diversity (Omotade & Oluwafemi 2018). As comparative discussions of multilingual states note, language policies favouring the dominant language can lead to the erosion of minority language use, constraining its scope of use and hence hastening its extinction (Omotade & Oluwafemi, 2018). This suggests a trade-off between national unity and inclusivity.

India presents an alternative approach to institutionalised multilingualism. It does not have a national language, but acknowledges many. National languages (Hindi and English) coexist with multiple regional languages within state governance. This type of pluralism stems from an attempt to balance national unity and diversity. Odinye & Odinye (2012, p.632) characterise India as a "pluralistic, multilingual and multiethnic nation" in which language policy allows for regional diversity while ensuring functional integration. The growth in the number of constitutionally recognised languages also demonstrates an adaptive approach.

#### **2. Burkina Faso: Investing in Existing Languages**

A contrasting strategy to "invent a language" is to leverage existing languages with technology. In 2026 Burkina Faso launched a major initiative to integrate its national languages into emerging technology. Workshops were held to build artificial intelligence resources (speech recognition, machine translation, etc.) for four major languages (Moore, Dioula, Fulfuldé, Gulmancema) (Njoya, 2026). Rather than create a new language, Burkina Faso is enhancing the usability and prestige of its existing languages through digital tools. This inclusive approach broadens accessibility, children can use familiar languages in new media, without the sociopolitical barriers of imposing an engineered language. It offers a model worth noting for Nigeria. That is, investing in technology and literacy for major Nigerian tongues could strengthen national cohesion without resorting to construction from scratch.

#### **3. Lessons for Nigeria**

Multilingual countries employ different approaches to managing language diversity with different consequences, evidence suggests. Russia's experience shows the unifying

power of a lingua franca but also the dangers of centralised policy that tends to suppress minority languages (Omotade & Oluwafemi, 2018). By contrast, India exemplifies the possibility of a pluralistic approach, but one that demands careful institutional arrangements and is not free of tensions (Odinye & Odinye, 2012). Further lessons can be drawn from examples like Indonesia, where a neutral lingua franca was developed and established as a national language. Paauw (2009:8) describes this as a "miraculous success", showing how planned language policies can promote national unity without favouring a dominant ethnic group. International experience offers valuable lessons. As noted, Indonesia's Bahasa Indonesia succeeded in part because Malay had long served as a neutral lingua franca and posed no ethnic threat (Paauw, 2009). India ultimately affirmed a multilingual approach (officially recognising multiple regional languages) rather than a single new language.

Another instructive comparison is the 2007 Belarus project to develop "Trasianka" (a mix of Belarusian and Russian). It collapsed due to lack of political support. More generally, planned auxiliary languages (Esperanto, Interlingua, etc.) have never achieved national adoption because they lack both a native community and state sponsorship. Modern Hebrew, however, succeeded through a dedicated nationalist movement and state investment. These cases underscore that ordinary planning mechanisms and political will are critical for any constructed language to succeed. For Nigeria, these cases underline the importance of a balanced approach to fostering unity and maintaining diversity. It must be non-ethnic and accessible to a wide audience. This stresses the need to consider other options, including the viability of a constructed language, while preserving existing languages.

### **The Proposal: Creating the National Language, "Nigerian"**

#### **1. Why a Neutral Language?**

Since none of Nigeria's languages has been adopted as the national language, other approaches may be needed. A national language may provide a theoretically neutral solution, free from ethnic and colonial associations. As opposed to English, which is often seen as a colonial legacy; and as opposed to Hausa, Yoruba or Igbo, which are all identified with ethnic groups, such a language could symbolise collective ownership and identity. Neutrality is key to this idea. In the past, artificial languages like Esperanto were created to bridge communication gaps among different language groups without favouring any one group. As general linguistic studies have observed, Esperanto's neutrality and internationality were designed to promote linguistic equality and unity. Although it hasn't been widely adopted, its principles are worth considering.

In Nigeria, a constructed language could serve as a unifying second language rather than a mother tongue. This effectively overcomes the shortcomings of past proposals to prioritise the "big three" languages, which have historically sparked opposition for fear of cultural supremacy. By offering a new language not previously identified with any group, "Nigerian" could help resolve existing tensions, while providing symbolic ground for national unity.

#### **2. Learning from Guosa: Why Previous Attempts Failed**

The Guosa experience is a cautionary case for the current proposal. Created privately by Igbneweka in the 1960s, Guosa blended major Nigerian languages. However, it lacked institutional support. It was never part of any official language plan, lacked educational materials or training programs, and relied on ad-hoc dissemination. As Fakuade (1992) stated, Guosa was "an unacceptable planned language" because it had "no guiding principles or scientific methods". It never underwent systematic codification or standardisation under a government body, so it remained a curiosity rather than a living medium. This is a pitfall that "Nigerian" must avoid.

### 3. Linguistic Framework

A constructed language's success hinges on its design. For "Nigerian" to be widely accepted and used, it has to be simple, inclusive and accessible. Firstly, it must be simple and regular. As observed in Esperanto, which has regular spelling, grammar and few irregularities, it eases the learning process. A phonetic alphabet, in which each letter represents a single sound, would promote literacy and ease of learning. Likewise, consistent grammar, with invariable tense markers and no intricate inflectional systems, would enable quick acquisition for various learners.

Secondly, cultural representation is essential for vocabulary. The lexicon of "Nigerian" should draw on a variety of indigenous languages, major and minor, to reflect the diversity of Nigeria's languages. This is in line with the more general view that language encapsulates identity and culture (Bamgbose, 2023). This means using linguistic features from different sources to symbolise a collective rather than individual or group identity.

Moreover, simplicity is fundamental for widespread adoption. Similar to Esperanto, which utilises vocabulary from easily recognised linguistic sources to improve its accessibility, "Nigerian" should favour familiarity and efficiency of use. This could involve the choice of familiar phonological features or international standardised terms for technical disciplines.

Finally, the language should be culturally neutral in structure and use. The language should not contain features that might be associated with a particular ethnic or religious group. A familiar writing system, such as a Latin-based alphabet, would probably be a positive feature in terms of accessibility, as it is used in education and administration. Lack of historical and political baggage would also enhance its acceptability as a national resource. It would be developed by linguists, universities and language institutes in Nigeria. Corpus planning would involve:

- Lexical selection from Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Tiv, Kanuri, Efik, and others.
- Simplified morphology to enhance learnability.
- Standardised orthography.

### 4. Corpus Planning Strategy

The creation of "Nigerian" would be a corpus planning strategy, involving the planned development and standardisation of linguistic elements. As proposed by Spolsky (2004), this would involve the creation of vocabulary, grammar, orthography, and other linguistic elements to standardise and streamline the language.

Vocabulary would be developed through the adaptation of words from various Nigerian languages, complemented with neologisms as needed. The grammar would need to be formalised to emphasise simplicity and clarity, and the orthography would provide consistent representation in written forms. This would help shape the language and its effectiveness for educational, administrative and media purposes. While there is little literature that directly addresses the construction of a national language in a setting such as Nigeria, studies on language planning generally indicate that a coordinated and structured development of the corpus is needed to ensure its sustainability (e.g., Spolsky, 2004). The viability of this project would rely on unity, openness and inclusivity in the planning process.

By contrast, our "Nigerian" language concept is explicitly designed for formal planning. The proposal envisions creating it through a government sanctioned language commission or NERDC-like body, following established corpus-planning procedures (e.g. phonology and grammar by linguists, standardised orthography) and status planning (official pilot programs). For example, the proposal would involve early introduction in select schools alongside existing curricula, and coordinated media and translation support, which will essentially front-load Spolsky's status and acquisition planning. This mirrors how Bahasa

Indonesia was rolled out with state promotion: Indonesian was chosen as a neutral lingua franca and integrated into schools immediately after independence (Paauw, 2009).

## **5. Institutional Framework**

Institutional backing would be crucial in the development and adoption of “Nigerian”. Large-scale language planning requires the involvement of academic, government and educational institutions. A coordinating body, such as a National Language Development Commission, is required to standardise, promote and integrate with policy.

Current institutions, such as universities and language research institutes, would be vital for building the language structure and resources. Consistent with language planning research, implementation would also necessitate a connection with language acquisition planning, especially through its integration into the education system (Spolsky, 2004). Training teachers, developing curricula and teaching materials would be critical in fostering competency. Just as the naira facilitates economic integration across Nigeria independent of ethnic identity, a national language called Nigerian would promote linguistic and national unity. The metaphor enhances the sense of ownership and pride.

## **Implementation Strategy**

### **1. Policy and Legislation**

The adoption of “Nigerian” would need constitutional and legislative support. Current laws, like the 1999 Constitution, already allow for indigenous languages to be used in the legislature (with approval), suggesting a legal openness to language expansion. And constitutional or legislative changes would be needed to recognise "Nigerian" as a national language while maintaining English as an official language in a transition period. This would allow the language to be phased into official uses, such as in public speech, at official events and in administration. As language planning theory highlights, status planning is essential to legitimise a language and enhance its domains of usage (Spolsky, 2004). In the absence of this, implementation would be lacking in legitimacy.

### **2. Political Feasibility in the Current Climate**

Developing a constructed national language in Nigeria would require extensive policy support and educational rollout. We have already noted the policy vacuum after the 2025 cancellation, which suggests limited short-term political appetite for sweeping language reform. The current administration was not willing to implement indigenous language instruction at scale, implying it would likely oppose mandating a new language. Thus, any initiative for “Nigerian” must be incremental and politically sensitive. For example, rather than an immediate nationwide mandate, initial steps could involve symbolic recognition (e.g. cultural festivals, emblematic publications) and small-scale pilots (language labs, optional classes) to build grassroots interest. Over time, if attitudes shift, formal policy adoption could be revisited.

### **3. Educational Integration**

Education offers the best avenue for language spread. Nigeria's National Policy on Education already encourages mother tongue instruction in the early years of education, providing a platform for the introduction of "Nigerian". It could be introduced as a language subject and then adopted as a medium of instruction in higher levels. This progressive approach would support language acquisition planning and allow for skill building. The strategy would require considerable training, curriculum design, and the development of standardised materials. Education is a critical vehicle for language acquisition, so continued support for education would be crucial. Other strategies would include:

- Primary school introduction.
- Teacher training programmes.
- Inclusion in media and broadcasting.

#### 4. Media and Technology

Media and technology will serve as a key factor in popularising "Nigerian". The integration of the language in radio, television and digital media would increase its prominence and usefulness. Public media supported by government, subtitles, and mass awareness campaigns would increase public exposure. Further, digital technologies like keyboards, dictionaries, and apps would aid accessibility and use. As in general language development, technology is becoming an essential part of language spread and standardisation, especially for the young.

Adoption needs to proceed in stages to be successful. History shows that language adoption often takes place in stages, from symbolic to educational, administrative and public spheres. Paauw (2009) notes the gradual integration of Indonesia's national language into different institutions, which contributed to its acceptance. For Nigeria, early stages might involve pilot projects in a few schools and local government areas and a gradual roll-out as funding and public awareness grow. Specific phases, with a central body to coordinate efforts, would be required to monitor implementation and ensure progress. This would enable adjustments and reduce resistance and disruption.

Technology can facilitate these efforts. In countries like Burkina Faso, digital tools are expanding language reach without sole reliance on formal schooling. Nigeria could follow suit by developing software (AI tutors, translation apps, multimedia content) for "Nigerian." For instance, voice-recognition and text-to-speech systems could allow Nigerians to interact in "Nigerian" on phones and computers, thus building a user community organically. Nigeria has already begun in this direction: the government's "N-ATLAS" project in 2024 created open AI language models for Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo and Nigerian English. Such technology-based diffusion (especially via smartphones and radio/TV) might overcome some barriers by meeting users where they are (Njoya, 2026).

#### Potential Challenges

The idea of creating a constructed national language for Nigeria, although theoretically sound, is fraught with practical and theoretical concerns. Political opposition. Nigerian languages are strongly linked to ethnic identity and an impartial language might still be seen as a threat if it is seen as being imposed by some groups or the state. As the history of language policies has indicated, language choices can be politicised (Ofuegbu, 2026). Politically, the cancellation of the 2022 policy underlines risk: it shows how quickly well-intentioned language reforms can be reversed by future administrations. Sustained support would require cross-party buy-in or constitutional protection, neither of which is assured. On the positive side, there are indicators of some institutional interest in language issues. For example, NICO's 2024 initiative to teach corps members Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba suggests that government agencies recognise the value of indigenous languages. If "Nigerian" is framed as complementary to (rather than replacing) Nigeria's cultural heritage, it might be more palatable.

Any national language project faces significant challenges. Perhaps most crucial is public acceptance. Empirical evidence confirms that many Nigerians are attached to their mother tongues and wary of imposed languages. Jegede (2024) found that although respondents acknowledge benefits (national cohesion, efficiency), they also foresee "substantial cultural and practical challenges" to adopting a unified language. These include fears of losing ethnic identity and the difficulty of retraining millions of speakers. Our proposal must therefore contend with strong sociocultural resistance.

The other issue is public support. Constructed languages are, by their nature, without native speakers and a long history. As Spolsky (2004) and Levy (2003) point out, language use is integral to identity and social practices, and artificially constructed languages struggle to gain acceptance. Unlike naturally evolved languages, constructed languages face

challenges in being accepted as natural and relevant, especially in communities with a strong sense of identity centred on their native language.

There are also practical and monetary considerations. The creation of a new language would demand considerable resources to conduct research, standardise usage, train teachers and produce materials. Due to the current state of education in Nigeria (Achike et al., 2022), with its lack of resources, suboptimal policy implementation and so on, such an endeavour may be constrained. Moreover, there is the question of need. Some authors believe that other options, such as investing in multilingual classrooms or encouraging the use of lingua francas (such as Nigerian Pidgin), are more feasible (Ogunleye, 2026). These solutions work with the linguistic status quo rather than overhauling the system.

Despite the obstacles, the proposal is still useful. It highlights the institutional failings of language policy and proposes a new approach to thinking about linguistic neutrality and national identity. But its success relies on political commitment, inclusion and acceptance. Also, effective public awareness and representation of the language would minimise opposition.

### **Advantages of Adopting “Nigerian”**

Despite its drawbacks, designating a constructed national language has a number of possible benefits. First and foremost, it provides a means of achieving national integration without favouring any ethnic group. By construction, for instance, a neutral language could serve as a common symbol to promote a sense of unity without the complications of promoting existing indigenous languages.

Furthermore, it could enhance cultural sovereignty by lessening reliance on English, a product of colonisation. As Chinaguh (2025) highlights, language is pivotal to nation-building and development. So a constructed language incorporating indigenous linguistic components could be a way of regaining cultural sovereignty and fostering inclusivity.

The proposal also offers a potential for language innovation and research. The creation of "Nigerian" would foster research in language planning, corpus and sociolinguistics, making Nigeria a case study in language engineering. And if successful, it could serve as a case study for other multilingual countries.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has presented a conceptual analysis of a constructed national language for Nigeria, integrating historical, empirical, and comparative evidence. It is important to note its limitations. First, it is a conceptual rather than empirical study: we have not conducted fieldwork or surveys of actual stakeholders (students, teachers, policymakers). Therefore, our conclusions rely on secondary sources and informed reasoning, not new data collection. Second, while we discuss prior projects like Guosa and the 2022 policy, we have not undertaken new historical or archival research on those cases; they serve mainly as illustrative references. Third, the policy environment continues to evolve (e.g. potential new administrations or budget decisions), so our analysis may need revision as real-world developments occur. In particular, until the 2025 policy cancellation is reviewed or new legislation is passed, any feasibility analysis remains conditional on political shifts.

### **Recommendations**

Despite these constraints, the study suggests concrete next steps for policy. We recommend the following actions:

- i. The National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) or the Federal Ministry of Education should spearhead a comparative analysis of language policy options. This study would involve linguists, educators, and technologists, and clarify costs, benefits, and implementation pathways, as well as an evidence base for decisions.
- ii. The Federal Ministry of Education should reverse the 2025 cancellation of the National Language Policy as a prerequisite for any national language. Reinstating the

policy would signal sustained government commitment to linguistic diversity and provide a stable framework to pilot innovative solutions such as a constructed language.

- iii. Linguists and historians should carry out a systematic review of Alex Igbineveka's Guosa project. Understanding why Guosa failed would yield valuable insights. This analysis should be published so that future language planners may learn from past mistakes.

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