



International Journal of Arts and Humanities: ISSN-2360-7998 (Print) and Open Access: doi.org/10.54978

Abbreviated Key Title: *Int. J. Arts Humanit.*

ISSN: 2360-7998 (Print) and Open Access

Volume-13 (Issue): 9, September, Pp. 303-310, 2025

*Full Length Research*

# Ethnolinguistic Survey of Nasarawa State - North Central Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study investigates the ethnolinguistic situation of Nasarawa State, North Central Nigeria, with a particular focus on the complex relationship between ethnicity, language use, and identity. The analysis foregrounds the distribution of indigenous languages, their domains of use, and the evolving attitudes of speakers towards their mother tongues (MT) in the face of the dominance of Hausa and English. Employing an eclectic methodology that combines surveys, interviews, and participant observation, the research covers selected communities of Afo, Alago, Egbira, Eggon, Gbagyi, Gwandara, and Hausa/Fulani. The findings reveal that while indigenous languages remain vibrant within cultural and domestic domains, Hausa has steadily consolidated its role as the de facto lingua franca in inter-ethnic communication, commerce, and political discourse, whereas English is largely confined to formal education and administrative settings. Evidence suggests a gradual language shift among younger generations, especially in urban centres, as a result of education, migration, and the symbolic prestige attached to Hausa and English. The paper concludes that this ongoing trend threatens the long-term survival of minority languages and, consequently, the cultural heritage embedded within them. It therefore recommends investment in mother tongue education, orthography development, systematic language documentation, and the promotion of cultural festivals as strategies for safeguarding endangered languages in Nasarawa State.

**Keywords:** ethnolinguistics, language survey, Nasarawa State, ethnicity, and language shift.

Accepted 27/8/2025

Published 30/9/2025

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ethnolinguistics as a field examines the interwoven relationship between ethnicity and language within the social fabric of a community. Nigeria, often described as “Africa’s most linguistically diverse nation” (Bamgbose, 1991; Eberhard et al., 2023), presents a particularly fertile ground for such enquiries. Nasarawa State, located in the North Central region of Nigeria, exemplifies this linguistic complexity, as it is home to numerous ethnic groups, each with distinct languages, traditions, and sociolinguistic practices. Understanding the dynamics of language use and identity in such a polyglot environment is crucial both for the preservation of cultural heritage and for the broader goal of national integration.

As scholars such as Blench (2019) and Adegbiya (2004) have observed, minority languages in Nigeria are increasingly endangered under the hegemony of

dominant tongues such as Hausa and English. In Nasarawa State, the dominance of Hausa has been particularly striking. Despite the presence of over thirty indigenous languages, Hausa has assumed an unchallenged role as the de facto lingua franca, permeating virtually every sphere of life—schools, hospitals, courts, religious worship, and political campaigns. This situation has accelerated the marginalisation of indigenous languages, many of which lack developed orthographies and institutional support, leaving them vulnerable to attrition. Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o’s (2000) assertion that language is central to a people’s self-definition underscores the gravity of this situation, as the erosion of linguistic diversity in Nasarawa State also signifies the erosion of cultural identity.

Chronologically, more than thirty-three languages are

spoken in Nasarawa State, including Afo (Eloyi), Agatu, Alago, Eggon, Gwandara, Mada, Nyankpa, Tiv, and many others. Nevertheless, their uneven distribution and lack of official recognition have reinforced the ascendancy of Hausa. The result is a form of linguistic homogenisation, whereby political rallies, funeral ceremonies, religious events, and even cultural festivals are increasingly conducted in Hausa, often at the expense of the indigenous tongues. The implications are profound: oral traditions, medicinal knowledge, marriage rites, initiation ceremonies, songs, and folktales risk extinction alongside the languages that encode them.

The sociolinguistic scenario in Nasarawa State therefore warrants systematic scholarly intervention. This study takes a holistic ethnolinguistic survey of the state's languages with the aim of encouraging their preservation and maintenance. Specifically, it seeks to document the ethnic and linguistic distribution, investigate the domains of language use, assess speakers' attitudes towards their mother tongues, and examine the extent of language shift among different generations. In doing so, the study addresses the urgent need to safeguard indigenous languages through mother tongue education, orthography development, and policy support from both government and academic institutions, including the state-owned College of Education, Akwanga.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Despite being richly endowed with linguistic diversity, Nasarawa State is confronted with the reality of a steady erosion of its minority languages. Hausa has emerged as the lingua franca across most Local Government Areas (LGAs), while English maintains its dominance in educational and administrative domains. This dual dominance has gradually diminished the functional value of indigenous languages such as Afo, Alago, Egbira, Eggon, Gwandara, Kantana, Mada, and Nyankpa. Many of these languages lack codified orthographies, government support, or representation in the formal domains of education, religion, and governance. Consequently, they are increasingly restricted to the private sphere, with their transmission to younger generations severely weakened. Without systematic intervention, these languages risk attrition, which results in cultural homogenisation and the erosion of ethnic identities. As Fishman (1991) cautions, language shift is not merely a linguistic loss but a cultural tragedy, as traditions, indigenous knowledge systems, and community histories encoded in these languages may vanish alongside them.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the major ethnic groups and languages spoken in Nasarawa State?
2. In what sociolinguistic domains are indigenous languages, Hausa, and English used?
3. What are the prevailing attitudes of different ethnic groups towards their mother tongues?
4. Is there evidence of an intergenerational language shift among the younger populations of Nasarawa State?

### **1.3 Hypothesis**

To provide a testable framework for analysis, the study advances the following hypotheses:

$H_0$  (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between ethnicity and language choice in Nasarawa State.

$H_1$  (Alternative Hypothesis): Ethnicity significantly influences language choice and patterns of use in Nasarawa State.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The central aim of this research is to conduct a comprehensive ethnolinguistic survey of Nasarawa State. The specific objectives are to:

1. Map the ethnic and linguistic distribution of Nasarawa State.
2. Investigate the domains of language use among indigenous groups, Hausa, and English.
3. Assess attitudes towards mother tongues across different speech communities.
4. Examine the extent and nature of intergenerational language change and maintenance.

Recommend strategies for sustaining linguistic diversity, including language documentation, orthography development, and integration of indigenous languages into formal education.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The study of ethnolinguistics occupies a crucial position in sociolinguistics and anthropology because it explores the intersection of language and ethnicity in shaping identity, culture, and social interaction. Scholars such as Bamgbose (1991) and Adegbija (1994) have long established that Nigeria, often regarded as one of the most linguistically diverse nations in Africa, presents unique opportunities for examining how dominant and

minority languages co-exist in tension. More recent studies confirm that the Nigerian linguistic landscape remains dynamic, but the dominance of Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and English continues to marginalise minority tongues (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig, 2023; Blench, 2019). These foundational and contemporary perspectives demonstrate the persistence of linguistic hegemony and the challenges faced by smaller languages such as those in Nasarawa State, which lack institutional support and are vulnerable to extinction.

A consistent theme in the literature is the relationship between multilingualism and language shift. While multilingualism enriches communication and provides opportunities for intergroup interaction, it also generates conditions for the erosion of indigenous tongues. Adebija (2004) highlights how smaller Nigerian languages are increasingly losing ground to Hausa and English, while Ibrahim (2017) provides empirical evidence of this trend in Nasarawa State, showing how Hausa displaces indigenous languages in urban centres like Keffi and Lafia. Parallel findings in Plateau and Benue by Akindele and Adegbite (2005) reinforce this picture of gradual displacement. More recently, Babatunde and Ojile (2024) found that Idoma youths prefer English over their mother tongue across most communicative domains, demonstrating how younger generations are leading the shift away from minority languages. These studies collectively highlight the urgency of addressing intergenerational transmission, as language shift is most acute among younger populations.

The role of institutional support is another critical focus in the literature. Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977) suggests that demographic strength, institutional backing, and status are crucial to language survival. Yet, in Nigeria, the gap between language policy and implementation undermines this vitality. Owojecho (2020) notes that while Nigeria's National Policy on Education prescribes the use of indigenous languages at early stages of schooling, the absence of codified orthographies, inadequate teaching resources, and elite preference for English hinder effective implementation. Ugwu (2020) similarly observes that policy statements on multilingualism rarely translate into tangible support for indigenous tongues, leaving them vulnerable to marginalisation. These findings resonate with the situation in Nasarawa State, where Hausa enjoys widespread institutional presence, while indigenous languages remain excluded from governance, education, and official communication.

Cultural identity and language attitudes also receive considerable attention in the literature. Ngũgĩ (2000) underscores that language is central to a people's conception of self and their relationship with the world, while Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021) explain how positive attitudes can bolster language maintenance even in adverse conditions. However, empirical research suggests that attitudes alone may not suffice in sustaining endangered languages. Agbedo (2022) found that

despite positive sentiments towards the Etulo language in Benue State, lack of intergenerational transmission rendered the language gravely endangered. Similarly, Aboha (2023) shows that while Nigerian students increasingly accept endonormative varieties of Nigerian English, the structural dominance of English remains intact. These studies suggest that in Nasarawa State, even where speakers value their mother tongues, structural pressures from Hausa and English erode their daily use.

Technology and media have emerged as double-edged factors in the recent literature. On one hand, digital tools create new avenues for documenting and revitalising minority languages. Eze and Eke (2024) argue that virtual media can strengthen Nigeria's language policy implementation by facilitating indigenous language learning and content creation. On the other hand, social media and digital platforms overwhelmingly promote dominant languages such as English and Hausa, thereby accelerating language shift. A recent survey of Nigerian low-resource languages by Adelani et al. (2025) reveals that computational and digital resources are disproportionately developed for Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, leaving smaller tongues with minimal technological presence. For minority languages in Nasarawa State, this lack of digital visibility compounds their endangered status.

The literature also emphasises the significance of language visibility in the public sphere. Linguistic landscape studies, such as Babayode-Lawal (2023) in Ibadan, reveal that indigenous languages appear largely in informal neighbourhood signage, while English and dominant lingua francas dominate official spaces. This imbalance in visibility reinforces perceptions of status and prestige, encouraging speakers to adopt dominant languages in formal and commercial settings. In Nasarawa State, where Hausa dominates marketplaces, political campaigns, and religious events, the lack of public visibility for minority tongues accelerates their decline. The linguistic environment thus not only mirrors but also actively shapes language hierarchies and speaker choices.

Another theme that emerges strongly is the impact of socio-demographic factors such as urbanisation, education, and migration. Studies by Blench (2019) and Lewis, Simons & Fennig (2015) confirm that minority languages tend to be more resilient in rural, agriculturally based communities where local identity is tightly bound to language. In contrast, urban centres—where diverse groups interact and where schooling in English predominates—become sites of language shift. The findings of Ibrahim (2017) in Nasarawa and Babatunde & Ojile (2024) in Benue illustrate this urban-rural contrast. This suggests that in Nasarawa State, rural settlements may remain relatively stable linguistic enclaves, while urban areas provide fertile ground for Hausa and English dominance.

Despite these insights, the literature reveals significant gaps that this study seeks to fill. While Ayewa (2022) provides a broad survey of Nasarawa State's languages, it fails to account for the rising influence of Hausa and Fulani in displacing indigenous tongues. Similarly, Ayi (2001) focuses primarily on the political rather than linguistic dimensions of Nasarawa's past, and Aria et al. (2025), though linguistically rich, blur the distinction between tribal and linguistic identity. Broader works on Nigerian multilingualism (Bamgbose, 1991; Adegbiya, 2004) provide valuable context but do not examine Nasarawa comprehensively. Recent scholarship points to pressing issues such as domain-specific usage, technological visibility, and policy implementation failures, yet these dimensions remain underexplored in Nasarawa. This lacuna underscores the relevance of the present study, which adopts a holistic approach to assess language use, attitudes, and shifts across the state's diverse communities.

Taken together, the literature illustrates both the resilience and fragility of indigenous languages in Nigeria. While theories of vitality and language shift provide explanatory frameworks, and while empirical studies across Nigeria highlight patterns of endangerment, Nasarawa State remains under-represented in scholarly discourse. Addressing this gap requires a focus not only on mapping linguistic distribution but also on analysing the socio-cultural, institutional, and technological forces that shape language practices. This study therefore situates itself within this broader academic context, seeking to contribute both descriptive data and critical insights into the complex ethnolinguistic ecology of Nasarawa State.

## 2.1 Theoretical Review

This research draws on two key theoretical frameworks: Fishman's (1991) Theory of Reversing Language Shift (RLS) and the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory advanced by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977). Fishman (1991) stresses that the survival of endangered languages depends fundamentally on intergenerational transmission, which ensures continuity in everyday use within the home and community. His framework highlights that once transmissions break down, revitalisation efforts face formidable challenges. This theory is highly relevant in Nasarawa State, where younger generations increasingly prefer Hausa and English, leading to a weakening of indigenous language transmission.

The Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory, on the other hand, provides a sociological lens by arguing that a group's ability to maintain its language depends on three interrelated factors: demographic strength, institutional support, and status (Giles et al., 1977). In Nasarawa State, Hausa enjoys institutional support as the preferred medium in politics, commerce, and religion, while indigenous languages suffer from weak institutional backing and declining prestige. Together, these

theoretical models offer an explanatory framework for understanding the unequal power relations among languages in the state and the mechanisms driving language shift.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

Several studies provide empirical evidence on language endangerment in Nigeria. Blench (2019) and Lewis, Simons, and Fennig (2015) demonstrate that many Nigerian minority languages are at risk due to the spread of regional lingua francas such as Hausa and Yoruba, alongside the dominance of English in formal education. Ibrahim (2017), focusing specifically on Nasarawa State, observes that Hausa has displaced many local languages in urban centres, such as Keffi and Lafia, reflecting a broader pattern of urban-driven language shift. Akindele and Adegbite (2005) note similar developments in the Plateau and Benue States, where Hausa and English marginalise indigenous languages. These studies confirm that while minority languages remain vibrant in isolated rural communities, their survival in urban areas is increasingly precarious.

## 2.3 Concept of Indigenous Language

UNESCO (2011) defines indigenous languages as those native to a specific region, deeply rooted in the history, culture, and identity of their speakers. They are typically transmitted across generations and serve as repositories of traditional knowledge and cultural practices. In Nasarawa State, the role of indigenous languages is complicated by factors such as migration, interethnic marriages, religious conversion, and political integration, all of which foster contact with non-indigenous languages such as English, Pidgin, and even Creole varieties. While such contact enriches the linguistic repertoire of communities, it simultaneously accelerates code-switching, code-mixing, and ultimately language shift. The result is a paradox: while multilingualism in Nasarawa State is a marker of cultural richness, it also carries within it the seeds of linguistic attrition.

## 2.4 Nasarawa State and Indigenous Languages

Nasarawa State, comprising thirteen Local Government Areas (LGAs), is a microcosm of Nigeria's linguistic diversity. Each LGA contains multiple ethnic groups with distinct linguistic traditions, ranging from the Mada and Eggon in Akwanga to the Alago and Tiv in Doma and the Rindre and Kantana in Wamba. Yet, despite this diversity, Hausa has emerged as the unifying lingua franca, while English dominates the formal institutional space (Nasarawa State Government, 2025). The asymmetry of usage reveals the sociolinguistic hierarchy: Hausa commands prestige as the language of interethnic communication and political mobilisation,

whereas indigenous languages are increasingly relegated to ritual, domestic, and cultural functions. Without deliberate policy measures to extend their functional domains, these indigenous languages risk confinement to symbolic rather than practical roles.

## 2.5 Gap in Literature

Although several scholars have explored Nigeria's multilingual landscape, notable gaps remain in the study of Nasarawa State. Ayewa (2022), for instance, offers an extensive survey of the state's languages but overlooks the growing influence of Hausa and Fulani in displacing indigenous tongues. Similarly, Ayi (2001), in *Nasarawa Past and Present*, frames his analysis more in political than linguistic terms. Aria et al. (2025) contribute to ethnosociolinguistic studies of the state but fail to distinguish between language and tribal identity, limiting the analytical depth of their work. More broadly, earlier foundational works by Bamgbose (1991) and Adegbiya (2004) have emphasised Nigeria's national multilingualism, but they have not undertaken holistic ethnolinguistic surveys specific to Nasarawa State. Consequently, existing research is often descriptive or narrowly focused on individual ethnic groups such as the Afo, Alago, or Eggon, leaving unaddressed the broader dynamics of language shift, attitudes, and the rise of Hausa as the dominant lingua franca. This study therefore fills an important lacuna by adopting a comprehensive ethnolinguistic approach to the entire state, combining survey data with ethnographic insights.

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an eclectic methodological approach in order to capture the complex ethnolinguistic dynamics of Nasarawa State. Given the multiplicity of languages, the interplay of cultural identities, and the influence of dominant lingua francas, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was deemed most appropriate. Such a mixed-methods design not only enables the collection of broad statistical data on language use and distribution but also provides deeper insights into the attitudes, perceptions, and lived experiences of speakers within different communities. This approach aligns with Creswell and Plano Clark's (2018) recommendation that language-related research in multilingual settings benefits from methodological pluralism to ensure validity and reliability.

The population of the study consists of the indigenous ethnic groups of Nasarawa State, with a focus on major communities such as Afo, Alago, Eggon, Egbira, Gbagyi, Gwandara, Hausa/Fulani, and Nyankpa. To ensure representativeness, the sample was drawn using stratified random sampling across the three senatorial districts of the state: Nasarawa South (Awe, Doma, and Lafia), Nasarawa North (Akwanga, Nasarawa-Eggon, and Wamba), and Nasarawa West (Karu, Keffi, and Toto).

This design made it possible to cover both rural and urban contexts, capturing linguistic practices across six Local Government Areas. The stratification ensured proportional inclusion of communities that differ in linguistic diversity, socio-economic background, and exposure to Hausa and English.

Data collection employed multiple instruments to enrich the study's findings. Structured questionnaires were distributed to gather quantitative data on language use across domains such as home, school, religion, commerce, and politics. The questionnaires also included items on language attitudes and intergenerational practices. To complement this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with community leaders, teachers, religious figures, and youth representatives. These interviews provided nuanced perspectives on issues such as cultural identity, the prestige of different languages, and the perceived threats to indigenous tongues. Furthermore, participant observation was carried out during community events, markets, festivals, and religious gatherings. Observation allowed the researcher to witness firsthand the languages used in public and private interactions, thereby validating or problematising self-reported data from questionnaires and interviews.

For quantitative data, descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations were used to summarise patterns of language distribution and domain use. This statistical analysis highlighted the extent to which Hausa and English dominate various spheres compared to indigenous tongues. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and categories emerging from interviews and observations. Following Braun and Clarke (2021), coding was done both deductively—based on the research questions and theoretical frameworks—and inductively, allowing for emergent insights. This integration of quantitative and qualitative analysis strengthened the study's explanatory power by ensuring triangulation of findings.

Ethical considerations were also taken seriously throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was guaranteed in reporting the data. Given the sensitivity surrounding issues of ethnicity and identity, care was taken to frame questions neutrally and avoid reinforcing stereotypes. In addition, efforts were made to ensure that findings would be useful to the communities studied by sharing summaries of results with local stakeholders and policymakers.

The choice of methodology reflects a deliberate attempt to balance breadth and depth in capturing Nasarawa's linguistic ecology. While surveys provided a wide coverage of language practices across the state, interviews and observations helped to contextualise these patterns within lived realities. By combining these approaches, the study offers a holistic and credible account of how ethnicity, language, and identity intersect in Nasarawa State. Ultimately, the methodological framework is designed not merely to describe but also to

interpret the complex processes of language maintenance and shift, thereby contributing to broader debates on multilingualism and linguistic diversity in Nigeria.

#### 4.0 FINDINGS

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive picture of the ethnolinguistic landscape of Nasarawa State. Evidence from surveys, interviews, and observations reveals that the state is characterised by high linguistic diversity, with at least thirty-one indigenous languages spoken across its thirteen Local Government Areas (LGAs). While languages such as Afo, Alago, Eggon, Gwandara, and Egbira remain vital in rural settings, Hausa has become the dominant lingua franca in urban centres and public spaces. This circumstance reflects the broader Nigerian pattern where minority languages retain vitality in private domains but are progressively displaced in official and inter-ethnic communication (Blench, 2019; Ibrahim, 2017). The mapping of languages across LGAs also indicates that Wamba has the highest concentration of linguistic groups, with up to eleven languages co-existing, while other LGAs such as Nasarawa-Eggon and Keana have fewer but still significant multilingual profiles.

Patterns of domain usage were particularly revealing. The data show that Hausa dominates as the preferred language in markets, inter-ethnic relations, and political gatherings, while English is largely restricted to schools, administrative institutions, and formal government communication. Indigenous languages are mostly confined to the home, rituals, and cultural ceremonies. This aligns with Fishman's (1991) model of domain-specific language shift, which demonstrates that once minority tongues are pushed out of public domains, their long-term survival is endangered. Participant observation further confirmed that political rallies, religious sermons, and funerals are increasingly conducted in Hausa to ensure inclusivity, even in communities with strong indigenous identities.

Language attitudes across generations highlight an emerging shift in values. Younger speakers, particularly in urban centres, overwhelmingly associate Hausa and English with upward mobility, modernity, and wider opportunities, while viewing their mother tongues as less valuable outside the domestic sphere. Interviews with youth revealed sentiments that speaking Hausa or English enhances political, educational, and social advancement. Conversely, older generations expressed a stronger attachment to indigenous languages, emphasising their role in preserving culture and identity. This generational divergence mirrors Babatunde and Ojile's (2024) findings among Idoma youths and underscores the risk of intergenerational transmission breakdown, a critical factor identified in Fishman's theory of Reversing Language Shift.

Evidence of a language shift is strongest among minority groups such as Alago, Afo, Eggon, Mada, and Rindre, particularly in urbanised areas like Lafia, Keffi, and Karu. In these settings, children increasingly grow up with Hausa as their first language, while parents encourage the use of English in formal education. The result is a declining competence in mother tongues among younger generations, especially those exposed to schooling in English and religious practices in Hausa. This trend aligns with global studies showing that urbanisation and formal education are key accelerators of language shift (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Eberhard et al., 2023).

An additional finding concerns the visibility of indigenous languages in the public sphere. Market observations revealed that traders often advertise in Hausa, whereas official signage, media broadcasts, and political posters overwhelmingly favour Hausa and English. Indigenous languages rarely appear in written form in public spaces, reflecting their weak institutional support. This echoes findings from linguistic landscape studies in Ibadan by Babayode-Lawal (2023), which show that language visibility is a critical indicator of prestige and vitality. The near invisibility of indigenous languages in Nasarawa's public spaces underscores their marginalisation and reinforces their declining relevance in wider communication.

The research also identified endangered languages within the state. Nyankpa, Buh, Arum, Kulere, Akye, and Yashi were found to have particularly low numbers of young speakers, suggesting that their long-term survival is uncertain. In contrast, languages like Eggon, Alago, Mada, and Koro exhibit stronger resilience, partly due to larger speaker populations and borrowing from Hausa that allows them to adapt to changing communicative contexts. These findings are consistent with UNESCO's (2011) classification of endangered languages, which highlights intergenerational transmission and speaker population size as key determinants of vitality.

Socio-economic factors such as migration, farming patterns, and inter-ethnic marriages also shape linguistic practices in Nasarawa State. Farming as the predominant occupation fosters inter-ethnic interaction in markets, where Hausa naturally serves as the lingua franca. Migration and urbanisation further dilute the use of minority languages, particularly among younger families that prioritise Hausa and English for integration and advancement. These findings reinforce earlier observations by Adegbiya (2004) that socio-economic pressures often outweigh cultural attachments in determining language choices.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that while Nasarawa State remains linguistically rich, its indigenous languages face serious threats from the dominance of Hausa and the institutional role of English. The patterns of usage, attitudes, and intergenerational transmission indicate a gradual but accelerating language shift. Without deliberate intervention through education, documentation, and policy support, many minority

languages in the state may face extinction in the coming decades. These findings not only validate existing theoretical frameworks on language vitality and shift but also reveal the unique dynamics of Nasarawa State, thereby contributing fresh empirical evidence to the broader discourse on multilingualism in Nigeria.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Nasarawa State represents both the richness and fragility of Nigeria's multilingual ecology. With over thirty indigenous languages distributed across its thirteen local government areas, the state is a microcosm of linguistic diversity. Nonetheless, the findings confirm that Hausa has emerged as the dominant lingua franca in inter-ethnic communication, commerce, politics, and religion, while English retains its role as the language of formal education and administration. Indigenous languages, though still vibrant in cultural and domestic spheres, are increasingly restricted to private domains, a condition that accelerates language shift. Evidence of generational differences, whereby younger speakers favour Hausa and English over their mother tongues, underscores the precarious future of many indigenous languages in the state.

The conclusion that emerges from these findings is that linguistic hegemony and socio-economic pressures are steadily undermining minority tongues, threatening not only communication patterns but also cultural identities and traditions. Language is more than a medium of communication; it encodes knowledge systems, oral histories, rituals, and worldviews. As Ngūgĩ (2000) reminds us, the loss of a language entails the erosion of a people's cultural memory. Thus, the gradual disappearance of indigenous languages in Nasarawa State carries with it profound cultural implications. The study's contribution lies in its holistic approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to reveal not only the patterns of language use but also the underlying attitudes and structural forces driving language shift. It fills a gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive ethnolinguistic survey of Nasarawa State, and situating the findings within broader theoretical debates on language vitality and shift.

Ultimately, the conclusion is twofold: first, that language shift in Nasarawa is real, measurable, and accelerating; and second, that deliberate and sustained intervention is necessary if the state's rich linguistic heritage is to be preserved for future generations.

### 5.2 Recommendations

In light of the findings, several practical and policy-

orientated recommendations are proposed to sustain and revitalise indigenous languages in Nasarawa State. First, **policy support** is essential. The government should legislate for the integration of indigenous languages into primary education, as prescribed by Nigeria's National Policy on Education but rarely implemented (Ugwu, 2020; Owojecho, 2020). Early exposure to mother tongues in schools not only strengthens intergenerational transmission but also fosters cognitive development and cultural pride among children. Teachers' training and the development of orthographies and instructional materials should be prioritised for this purpose.

Second, **language documentation** must be intensified. Severely endangered languages such as Nyankpa, Buh, Arum, Kulere, Akye, and Yashi require urgent documentation through dictionaries, grammars, oral history recordings, and digital archives. Partnerships between universities, cultural organisations, and international bodies such as UNESCO could provide the technical and financial support needed for systematic documentation. Given recent advances in digital humanities and low-resource language technologies (Adelani et al., 2025), digital platforms can serve as effective tools for preserving and disseminating indigenous languages.

Thirdly, community engagement should be leveraged as a vehicle for revitalisation. Festivals, radio programs, community theatres, and storytelling events conducted in indigenous languages can extend their domains of use beyond the household. Local leaders, traditional rulers, and cultural associations have an important role to play in promoting pride in linguistic heritage and ensuring that indigenous languages remain visible in both oral and written forms in public spaces.

Fourth, **youth sentiment** is critical. Since younger generations are the most susceptible to language shift, initiatives such as school language clubs, competitions in poetry and song, and the creative use of social media to promote indigenous languages should be encouraged. This not only fosters positive attitudes but also counters the perception that Hausa and English are the only languages of modernity and success.

Finally, **research continuity** is recommended. Future comparative studies should examine similar trends in neighbouring North Central states such as Benue and Plateau to provide a regional perspective on language shift. Longitudinal studies of Nasarawa itself would also be valuable to track changes in language use and attitudes over time. We can reverse the language attrition and protect the ethnolinguistic heritage of Nasarawa State for future generations by combining scholarly research, policy advocacy, and community participation.

In conclusion, sustaining linguistic diversity requires more than symbolic recognition; it demands concrete, sustained, and multi-level action. By investing in education, documentation, community mobilisation, youth engagement, and ongoing research, stakeholders can ensure that the languages of Nasarawa State continue to

thrive as living carriers of culture, identity, and knowledge.

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