

# THE IMPACT OF INTERNAL MIGRATION PATTERNS ON INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE RETENTION AND EVOLUTION IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*This research investigates how internal migration within Nigeria affects the retention, evolution, and potential endangerment of indigenous languages. As people move from rural to urban areas, or between culturally distinct regions, linguistic interactions occur, leading to shifts in language use, hybridization, or even language attrition. This study is anchored on Language ecology theory, and language contact theory. The study will explore Migration Trends, Language Contact and Shift, Urbanization and Language Dominance and the implications for Language Development It fills a gap in understanding how migration intersects with Nigeria's complex multilingual landscape, with implications for cultural identity, education policy, and language planning.*

**Keywords:** *Internal Migration Patterns, Indigenous Language, Retention and Evolution.*

## 1. Introduction

### Background of the study

Nigeria is renowned for its linguistic diversity, housing over 500 indigenous languages, many of which serve as critical markers of cultural identity and heritage. However, this rich linguistic tapestry is under increasing pressure due to socio-economic and demographic shifts. Among these, internal migration stands out as a significant factor influencing the dynamics of language use. Internal migration, characterized by movements between rural and urban areas or across culturally distinct regions, has become a defining feature of Nigeria's population redistribution. This phenomenon is driven by economic opportunities, educational pursuits, and socio-political factors, often resulting in interactions between diverse linguistic groups.

As people migrate within Nigeria, they frequently adopt the dominant languages of their new environments for social integration,

economic participation, and education. In urban areas, English and a few dominant indigenous languages, such as Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, often overshadow minority languages. This dominance creates linguistic hierarchies, potentially leading to the marginalization and attrition of smaller languages. Additionally, the interaction of speakers from different linguistic backgrounds often leads to hybridization, code-switching, and the evolution of new linguistic forms. While these processes can enrich Nigeria's linguistic landscape, they also pose grave challenges for the retention and development of endangered languages.

Despite existing research on Nigeria's multilingualism, the intersection of internal migration and indigenous language dynamics remains under explored. Understanding how migration patterns influence language retention, evolution, and endangerment is crucial for shaping policies on cultural

preservation, education, and national integration.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

The increasing rates of internal migration in Nigeria pose a growing threat to the sustainability of indigenous languages. While migration fosters cultural exchange and linguistic interaction, it also accelerates language shift and attrition, particularly among minority language groups. Urbanization further compounds this issue, as dominant languages increasingly replace minority languages in key domains such as education, governance, and social communication. Without intervention, these trends may lead to the gradual extinction of several indigenous languages, resulting in the loss of cultural heritage and diversity.

Existing research falls short and inadequately addresses the mechanisms through which migration patterns influence indigenous language retention and evolution. There is a critical need to investigate the sociolinguistic impact of migration on Nigeria's multilingual landscape to inform policies that balance linguistic diversity with social integration.

### Purpose of the Study

This study aims to examine the impact of internal migration patterns on the retention, evolution, and endangerment of indigenous languages in Nigeria. By exploring the relationship between migration, urbanization, and linguistic change, this research seeks to identify trends in language dominance, shifts, and hybridization. The study also aims to highlight the implications of these processes for cultural identity, education policy, and language planning. Ultimately, it seeks to provide recommendations for fostering sustainable multilingualism in Nigeria.

### Research Questions

In order to carry out a holistic study, the following research questions were asked:

*How do internal migration patterns in Nigeria influence the retention and use of indigenous languages?*

*What role does urbanization play in the dominance or attrition of minority languages?*

*In what ways do linguistic interactions among migrants from different cultural backgrounds contribute to language evolution or hybridization?*

*What are the implications of internal migration-induced language shifts for cultural identity, education policy, and language planning in Nigeria?*

*How can language planning and policy interventions mitigate the potential negative effects of migration on indigenous languages?*

## 3. Review of Literature

### Internal Migration and Linguistic Dynamics

Internal migration is a major factor in shaping linguistic interactions in multilingual societies. Migration from rural to urban areas often leads to a shift in language use, with migrants adopting dominant languages for economic and social integration. According to Arowolo (2021), urban centers in Nigeria are linguistic melting pots where indigenous languages compete for relevance against dominant languages such as English, Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo. These dominant languages often gain precedence in education, commerce, and governance, marginalizing minority languages.

Migration also fosters linguistic interactions, often leading to code-switching, hybridization, and even the emergence of new dialects (Bamgbose, 2019). However, as dominant languages overshadow minority ones, language attrition becomes a significant risk, especially for smaller communities with fewer speakers. This phenomenon aligns with the language contact theory, which highlights the impact of interlinguistic interactions on language shift and evolution (Thomason, 2001).

### Urbanization and Language Dominance

Urbanization amplifies the dynamics of language shift. Urban centers are spaces where economic necessity often dictates linguistic choices, with many abandoning their native tongues to learn dominant languages. Studies by Yusuf and Ibrahim (2020) show that urban dwellers in Nigeria, particularly second-generation migrants, increasingly prioritize English or dominant indigenous languages over

their native languages. This linguistic dominance reinforces societal hierarchies and accelerates the decline of endangered languages.

The language ecology theory underscores how urbanization disrupts the balance of linguistic ecosystems. Urban migration creates environments where minority languages struggle to compete with dominant languages, leading to linguistic imbalance and, ultimately, the extinction of less dominant languages (Haugen, 1972).

#### **Migration and Language Evolution**

The interactions arising from migration often lead to language evolution through processes like pidginization and creolization. For instance, Nigerian Pidgin has become a lingua franca among urban dwellers, serving as a medium for inter-ethnic communication (Adebayo, 2022). While such linguistic adaptations promote communication, they can erode the structural integrity of indigenous languages, as many speakers adopt simplified forms.

Hybridization also occurs when speakers merge linguistic elements from different languages, creating new variants. This aligns with Thomason's (2001) view that language contact induces linguistic innovation, though it often happens at the expense of linguistic purity.

#### **Implications for Cultural Identity and Policy**

The erosion and bastardization of indigenous languages have profound implications for cultural identity. Language is not just a tool for communication but also a repository of cultural knowledge and traditions. As migration-induced language shifts occur, younger generations risk losing their connection to their ancestral heritage (Yusuf & Ibrahim, 2020). Addressing this requires policies that prioritize the preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages.

The language ecology theory provides a framework for designing such policies, emphasizing the need to maintain linguistic diversity. Furthermore, education policies that incorporate indigenous languages as mediums of instruction, especially in early childhood

education, can help reverse language loss trends (Bamgbose, 2019).

#### **4. Methodology** **Research Design**

This study utilized a mixed-method or eclectic research design to explore the impact of internal migration on indigenous language retention and evolution in Nigeria. This approach integrated quantitative and qualitative methods, providing a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between migration, urbanization, and linguistic dynamics. The study was guided by language contact theory and language ecology theory, which informed the examination of language shifts, dominance, and hybridization in migration contexts.

#### **Study Area**

The research was conducted in three major urban centers—Lagos, Kano, and Port Harcourt—representing diverse linguistic and socio-economic contexts, as well as in selected rural communities with significant migration outflow. These areas were selected to capture the influence of migration from source and destination perspectives, reflecting Nigeria's complex multilingual landscape.

#### **Population and Sampling**

The target population included internal migrants, language experts, educators, and community leaders. A total of 500 respondents participated in the survey, while 30 individuals, comprising migrants and key informants, were engaged through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed:

*Purposive Sampling: Urban and rural areas with high migration activity were chosen.*

*Stratified Sampling: Participants were categorized based on linguistic and regional backgrounds to ensure diverse representation.*

*Snowball Sampling: Migrants and speakers of minority languages were identified through community networks.*

#### **Data Collection**

##### **Quantitative Methods**

*Structured Surveys: Questionnaires captured data on migration patterns, language use, and perceptions of language shifts. These surveys were administered to migrant populations in urban centers and rural communities.*

### **Qualitative Methods**

*Semi-Structured Interviews: Migrants, educators, and language experts were interviewed to gain in-depth insights into the socio-cultural effects of migration on indigenous languages and patterns.*

*Focus Group Discussions: Conducted with community members to explore collective attitudes toward language retention and evolution.*

### **Secondary Data**

*Document Analysis: Migration records, census data, and previous studies were reviewed to provide contextual support for the primary data.*

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Quantitative Analysis**

*Data from surveys were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. This included cross-tabulations to identify patterns of language retention and regression analysis to explore relationships between migration patterns and language shifts.*

#### **Qualitative Analysis**

*Interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and analyzed thematically. Themes included language attrition, hybridization, and socio-cultural integration, guided by the principles of language ecology and language contact theories.*

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered to ethical research principles:

*Participants were informed of the study's purpose, and written consent was obtained.*

*Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the research process.*

*Participation was voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any stage.*

### **Limitations**

The study encountered challenges such as logistical difficulties in accessing remote rural

areas and potential biases introduced by language barriers, requiring interpreters. Additionally, self-reported data may have been subject to social desirability or recall bias.

By employing this robust methodological framework, the study effectively captured the complex dynamics of internal migration and its impact on indigenous language retention, providing valuable insights into Nigeria's multilingual and socio-cultural landscape.

### **Presentation of Data Analysis**

#### **Introduction**

The analysis of data collected through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions is presented in alignment with the study's research questions. The findings integrate the theoretical perspectives of language contact theory and language ecology theory while incorporating insights from researchers cited in the review of literature. These findings provide a nuanced understanding of how internal migration affects indigenous language retention, evolution, and cultural identity in Nigeria.

#### **Research Question 1**

**How do internal Migration Patterns in Nigeria influence the Retention and Use of Indigenous languages?**

#### **Findings and Discussion**

Survey results showed that approximately 65% of respondents experienced a reduction in their use of indigenous languages after migrating to urban centers. Interviews revealed that migrants often prioritize dominant languages like English, Yoruba, or Hausa in urban areas due to social and economic pressures. This aligns with Arowolo's (2021) observation that urban environments function as linguistic melting pots where smaller languages are overshadowed by dominant ones.

Several participants shared that indigenous languages are mostly used in private family settings or during cultural ceremonies. One respondent noted, "My children understand some words in our native language, but they speak English at home and in school." This trend confirms Bamgbose's (2019)

argument that indigenous languages risk being relegated to ceremonial use in urbanized societies, with younger generations gradually losing fluency.

### **Research Question 2**

#### **What Role does Urbanization Play in the Dominance or Attrition of Minority Languages?**

##### **Findings and Discussion**

The study found that urbanization accelerates the dominance of major languages at the expense of minority languages. Survey data indicated that only 40% of urban migrant parents actively teach their native languages to their children. Interviews with educators and language experts further emphasized that schools in urban areas often prioritize English, sidelining indigenous languages.

These findings resonate with Yusuf and Ibrahim's (2020) observation that urbanization disrupts the balance of linguistic ecosystems, favoring dominant languages for socio-economic reasons. One language expert explained, "In urban settings, there's little incentive to maintain minority languages because they don't provide economic advantages." This supports Haugen's (1972) language ecology theory, which highlights how shifts in social environments impact the survival of less dominant languages.

### **Research Question 3**

#### **In What Ways do Linguistic Interactions among Migrants from different Cultural Backgrounds Contribute to Language Evolution or Hybridization?**

##### **Findings and Discussion**

Approximately 50% of respondents reported engaging in code-switching and code mixing languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, and English. Focus group discussions revealed that linguistic interactions in urban centers foster the emergence of hybridized dialects, which facilitate inter-ethnic communication but dilute traditional language structures.

For instance, participants frequently referenced Nigerian Pidgin as a common medium of communication in multicultural urban areas. Adebayo (2022) argues that pidginization is a natural outcome of migration-

induced language contact, promoting linguistic adaptation. One participant explained, "We mix words from different languages to ensure everyone understands us—it's easier that way." This is in tandem with Thomason's (2001) assertion under language contact theory that interlinguistic interaction leads to innovation and hybridization, albeit sometimes at the cost of linguistic purity.

### **Research Question 4**

#### **What are the Implications of Migration-induced Language Shifts for Cultural Identity, Education Policy, and Language Planning in Nigeria?**

##### **Findings and Discussion**

Over 70% of survey participants expressed concern over the loss of cultural identity due to the declining use of indigenous languages. Interviewees emphasized that language is a critical vehicle for transmitting cultural knowledge, values and world view, with one educator stating that, "When a language is lost, the connection to heritage and identity weakens significantly."

Yusuf and Ibrahim (2020) highlighted similar concerns, noting that language attrition jeopardizes the preservation of cultural values and traditions. Participants in this study advocated for policies that integrate indigenous languages into school curricula, particularly at the foundational level. This approach aligns with Bamgbose's (2019) recommendation for promoting bilingual education to balance linguistic diversity and national unity.

Language planners interviewed in the study suggested community-based initiatives to revitalize endangered languages, including documentation, public awareness campaigns, and the use of digital media to engage younger speakers. These strategies echo Haugen's (1972) call for a balanced linguistic ecosystem that fosters the sustainability of minority languages while accommodating societal changes.

### **Summary of Findings**

*Language Retention: Indigenous languages are increasingly confined to private and cultural contexts among migrants,*

*confirming the dominance of larger languages in urban settings.*

*Urbanization and Language Dominance: Urbanization intensifies the marginalization of minority languages, creating environments where dominant languages prevail.*

*Linguistic Evolution: Migration fosters hybridization and the emergences of new dialects through inter-ethnic communication, supporting language contact theory.*

*Cultural and Policy Implications: The erosion of indigenous languages has significant implications for cultural identity and necessitates education and language policies that prioritize linguistic preservation and revitalization.*

These findings underscore the complex interplay between migration, language use, and cultural identity in Nigeria, emphasizing the need for strategic interventions to preserve linguistic diversity while fostering national integration.

## 5. General Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that internal migration in Nigeria significantly influences the retention, evolution, and potential endangerment of indigenous languages. The findings reveal that as individuals migrate from rural areas to urban centers or across culturally distinct regions, the use of indigenous languages declines, leading to shifts in linguistic patterns. Dominant languages such as English, Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo overshadow minority languages, particularly in urban environments where economic and social integration often demand linguistic adaptation.

Moreover, the interactions between linguistic groups foster the evolution of hybrid dialects and code-switching, reflecting the adaptive nature of communication in multicultural settings. However, this innovation often comes at the expense of traditional linguistic structures, posing risks to the sustainability of minority languages. The study also highlights the socio-cultural implications of these shifts, particularly the erosion of cultural identity and the weakening of inter-generational language transmission.

These findings underscore the urgent need for strategic interventions to mitigate the adverse effects of migration on Nigeria's multilingual landscape, balancing linguistic diversity with the realities of urbanization and national integration.

## 6. Recommendations

### Policy Interventions for Language Preservation

Governments should implement language preservation policies, including documentation and revitalization programs for endangered indigenous languages. It is more than ever before evident that many of our indigenous languages are threatened and endangered. Incorporate indigenous languages into formal education, particularly at the foundational level, through bilingual or multilingual curricula.

### Promotion of Indigenous Languages in Urban Areas

Establish cultural centers in urban areas to promote the teaching and use of indigenous languages among migrant communities. Encourage community-based language initiatives, such as weekend schools or cultural festivals, to sustain linguistic practices.

### Use of Technology and Media

Develop digital resources, such as mobile applications, e-learning platforms, and media contents, to engage younger generations in learning indigenous languages. Encourage local content creation in indigenous languages across radio, television, and social media platforms.

### Research and Monitoring

Establish research units to continuously monitor the state of Nigeria's indigenous languages and the impacts of internal migration on linguistic diversity. Provide funding for studies that explore innovative methods of revitalizing endangered languages and promoting inter-generational transmission.

### Community Engagement

Engage local leaders, language custodians, and cultural organizations initiatives aimed at preserving and promoting indigenous languages. Foster awareness campaigns,

highlighting the importance of language retention for cultural identity and national heritage.

#### **Integration of Multilingual Policies**

Promote the use of multiple languages in public spaces, official communications, and local governance to reflect Nigeria's linguistic diversity. Support programs that encourage co-existence and mutual respect among linguistic

groups to reduce the dominance of certain languages.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can address the challenges posed by internal migration while fostering a balanced and inclusive linguistic environment that preserves Nigeria's rich cultural heritage.

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