

Bridging Language Barriers: Promoting Multilingualism For Quality Education And Social Equity In Niger State

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Abstract:

This study assesses the impact of language barriers on educational quality and social equity in three linguistically diverse local government areas (LGAs) of Niger State: Bida, Shiroro, and Kontagora. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research analyzes quantitative data on educational outcomes by language background and gathers qualitative insights through interviews and focus groups with students, teachers, and administrators. The study evaluates the potential of multilingual education, integrating local languages alongside English as a strategy for enhancing understanding, improving educational outcomes, and promoting social inclusion. The findings revealed students' perceptions of language use barriers from the second item demonstrated stronger endorsement of bilingual instruction, with a higher mean ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.04$), students' perceptions on multilingual education about the Sustainable Development Goals with a high mean score ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.02$), perceptions on bilingual instructional strategies recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 1.01$), students' perceptions on institutional and instructional support for multilingual education. The first item yielded a mean score of 4.19 ($SD = 1.19$). The finding also revealed a diverse and experienced teaching workforce with strong multilingual capabilities. English is spoken by all teachers while a significant number also speak Hausa (79%), Nupe (34%), and Gbagyi (31%). This study has provided empirical evidence on the role of multilingual education in improving academic performance and promoting social equity. It's therefore recommended to address language-based disparities and support a more inclusive and equitable educational system in Niger State

Key Word: *Academic performance, bilingual, Language, multilingual, perceptions, proficiency.*

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I. Introduction

Language plays a central role in educational access, quality, and success. For multilingual societies such as Nigeria, the choice of instructional language significantly affects students' comprehension, participation, and academic performance. In Niger State, while English remains the official medium of instruction as stipulated in the Nigerian National Policy on Education, most students at the basic education level speak indigenous languages such as Nupe, Hausa, and Gbagyi as their first language. This linguistic disconnect often translates into poor comprehension, reduced engagement, and low performance, especially among students from rural and linguistically marginalized backgrounds.

Globally, the challenge of language barriers in education is well-documented. According to UNESCO (2022), over 40% of children worldwide receive instruction in a language they do not speak or understand fluently. The consequences are severe: these children are less likely to complete primary school, develop literacy, or transition to higher levels of education. In Nigeria, these issues are even more pronounced given its complex linguistic diversity, weak policy implementation, and inadequate teacher training on multilingual pedagogy.

Multilingual education, which involves teaching students in both their mother tongue and a second (often official) language, has been proposed as a practical and equitable solution. This approach helps students build foundational skills in a familiar language while gradually acquiring proficiency in the national language. Several studies have shown that students taught bilingually perform better in literacy and numeracy tests, participate more actively in class, and show increased confidence in learning situations (Benson, 2019; Garcia & Wei, 2018).

The challenges posed by language barriers in education are not unique to Niger State. Across the world, studies have shown that students taught in a language they do not speak fluently often struggle with understanding content, engaging fully in the classroom, and achieving high academic standards. Language is not just a medium of instruction but also a critical factor in shaping students' self-confidence, sense of belonging, and ability to thrive academically. In regions where linguistic diversity is not adequately addressed, educational

inequities often deepen, leaving students from non-dominant language backgrounds at a significant disadvantage compared to their peers.

Language is not only a medium of communication but also a determinant of access, inclusion, and achievement in education. In multilingual contexts, the language of instruction often dictates who benefits from schooling and who is left behind. This chapter reviews the global, regional, and national literature on language barriers, multilingual education, student performance, and equity. It also examines the theoretical perspectives that support multilingual pedagogies and highlights the research gap this study seeks to address. The medium of instruction in schools plays a critical role in determining students' academic access and success. When students are taught in a language they do not speak fluently, they face significant comprehension challenges that undermine learning. UNESCO (2022) reports that over 40% of the global student population receives instruction in a language they do not understand, leading to reduced literacy and academic failure.

In Nigeria, this situation is compounded by the coexistence of over 500 indigenous languages with English as the official instructional medium. Students from rural areas, where English exposure is limited, often struggle to cope with English-only instruction, especially in early schooling years (Namse, 2020). The result is widespread educational exclusion.

Benson (2019) emphasized that language barriers are not only academic issues but also moral and social concerns. They create invisible ceilings that prevent learners from reaching their full potential, regardless of their intelligence or motivation. Students who fail to grasp lessons due to language constraints are at higher risk of disengagement and dropout.

Multilingual education refers to the deliberate use of two or more languages in teaching and learning. It is designed to provide learners with access to education in their first language while gradually transitioning them into additional languages, such as national or international languages (Garcia, 2018). Garcia and Wei (2018) argue that multilingual education allows learners to use their full linguistic repertoire, enhancing cognitive flexibility and critical thinking. They suggest that bilingual and multilingual students often outperform monolingual peers when both languages are nurtured in school environments.

Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2021) found that students who received early education in their mother tongue demonstrated better understanding, greater retention, and improved self-esteem. These findings are consistent across several African countries where local language programs have been piloted, including Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Cameroon. In the Nigerian context, Ezeokoli and Osisanwo (2020) discovered that pupils in schools that integrated indigenous languages performed better in both literacy and numeracy tests compared to those in English-only schools.

This evidence supports the claim that language familiarity enhances comprehension, reduces anxiety, and promotes classroom participation. Multilingual education is central to the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality). SDG 4 emphasizes inclusive and equitable education for all, while SDG 10 aims to empower and promote social inclusion regardless of language, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. According to Brock-Utne and Mercer (2021), failure to recognize language diversity in education systems leads to institutional exclusion, disproportionately affecting poor and rural learners. They argue that without language-inclusive policies, SDG targets will remain unattainable in many African contexts.

Your study aligns directly with these findings. Students in Niger State, especially those from Gbagyi, Nupe, and Hausa backgrounds, face marginalization when their languages are excluded from formal education. Multilingual instruction offers a way to democratize knowledge and create equitable opportunities for learners of all backgrounds. Teachers are central to the success of multilingual education. Their beliefs, language proficiencies, and classroom practices determine how effectively students are supported linguistically. Yet, many teachers lack formal training in bilingual methods, particularly in public schools in low-resource settings (Trudell, 2019).

In Nigeria, Adegbiya (2022) found that while many teachers acknowledge the benefits of using local languages, institutional barriers such as curriculum rigidity, absence of materials, and policy ambiguity hinder implementation. This aligns with findings from your study, where teachers report positive outcomes from using local languages but also express the need for clearer guidance and resource support.

Teacher perceptions also influence student engagement. A teacher who views a student's home language as an asset rather than a barrier creates a more inclusive environment, reducing linguistic shame and improving learner confidence (Benson, 2019).

Translanguaging is a pedagogical strategy that allows learners to use multiple languages flexibly during learning. Unlike traditional bilingual approaches that separate languages, translanguaging encourages students to draw on all linguistic resources simultaneously to make meaning (Garcia & Lin, 2017). Garcia and Lin (2017) argue that translanguaging is particularly useful in multilingual classrooms because it mirrors how people naturally communicate in multilingual societies. It validates students' live experiences and empowers them to co-construct knowledge using the languages they know best. In the context of Niger State, where students

frequently switch between English and indigenous languages in informal settings, translanguaging offers a culturally relevant framework for formal instruction. Qualitative findings reveal that students feel more relaxed, confident, and participatory when teachers code-switch or explain concepts in familiar terms.

Objective of the study

This study investigates how multilingual instruction can be used as a tool to promote equitable and quality education in Niger State. Specifically it sets to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To assess the impact of language barriers on students' academic performance.
- ii. To evaluate the effectiveness of multilingual education approach using local languages alongside English in achieving SDGs 4 and 10.
- iii. To explore teachers and students' perception of multilingual education practice.
- iv. To recommend empirical evidence-based on multilingual education for stakeholders in education.

The following research questions serve as a guide to the study:

- i. How do language barriers affect students' academic performance?
- ii. How effective is the multilingual education approach, using local languages alongside English, in contributing to the achievement of SDGs 4 (Quality Education) and 10 (Reduced Inequalities)?
- iii. What are the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the practice of multilingual education?
- iv. What empirical evidence on multilingual education can inform policy and practice for educational stakeholders?

II. Material And Methods

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of how language barriers affect student learning and how multilingual education can improve academic outcomes and equity. Specifically, a descriptive cross-sectional survey was used to collect data from a diverse population at a single point in time, while qualitative interviews were conducted to provide in-depth perspectives from teachers.

The choice of a mixed-method design is justified by the complexity of the research problem. Language use in education involves not only observable academic outcomes but also subjective experiences such as learner confidence, participation, and teacher perception. As Cameron (2018) noted, triangulating data through both numerical and narrative evidence strengthens the reliability and depth of educational research.

Study Area

The study was conducted in three Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Niger State: Bida, Shiroro, and Kontagora. These LGAs were purposefully selected to represent the linguistic and cultural diversity of the state:

Bida is predominantly Nupe-speaking area in the southern senatorial zone, Shiroro is located in the central zone, mainly inhabited by Gbagyi speakers and Kontagora in the northern senatorial zone, characterized by a Hausa-speaking population. These regions were chosen not only for their linguistic diversity but also for their differing educational infrastructure, allowing for a more balanced view of how language affects education in varying contexts.

Population of the Study

The study population comprised Junior Secondary School (JSS) students and their teachers in public schools across Niger State. These schools are at the Upper Basic Education level, which is critical for foundational academic development and often where language barriers become most visible.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A multi-stage cluster sampling technique was adopted for selecting participants. This involved three major stages: First Stage – LGA Clustering: The state was divided into its three senatorial zones, with one LGA selected from each zone (Bida LGA from Zone A, Shiroro from Zone B, and Kontagora from Zone C). Second Stage – School Selection: In each LGA, three junior secondary schools were randomly selected, making a total of nine schools. Third Stage – Participant Selection which includes students from each school, a random sample of students across JSS1–JSS3 was drawn, leading to a total of 300 student respondents. And 29 teachers across the selected schools were included in the study. These teachers participated in syndicate group discussions. This sampling method ensured representation across linguistic groups, school levels, and instructional contexts, improving the generalizability of findings.

Instruments for Data Collection

Two instruments were developed for data collection. These include a structured questionnaire which was designed using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) and a semi-structured interview guide which was used during syndicate group discussions with teachers.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

To ensure content validity, both instruments were reviewed by three language education experts at Niger State College of Education, and a pilot test was conducted with 20 students and 5 teachers outside the selected LGAs. Feedback informed minor modifications. Items were revised for clarity, alignment with objectives, and relevance to the local context. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a reliability score of 0.82, which is considered acceptable (Picincu, 2020).

Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher and trained assistants visited each school. Respondents were briefed, given consent forms, and allowed adequate time to complete the instrument. Assistance in understanding the questionnaire items was provided when necessary, especially for students with literacy difficulties. Teacher Syndicate Sessions: Group discussions were conducted in quiet spaces within each school. Conversations were audio-recorded (with consent) and later transcribed verbatim. Ethical Considerations: Informed consent was obtained from all participants, including school approval for students under 18. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was assured. The study received ethical clearance from the Niger State College of Education Ethics Committee.

Method of Data Analysis

Data from the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS (Version 25). Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and percentages were calculated to summarize students' responses. Tables were generated to aid interpretations. Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically using manual coding. Recurring ideas were grouped under categories aligned with the research questions, such as language comprehension, teaching strategies, and policy challenges. The combination of quantitative trends and qualitative insights allowed for rich, triangulated interpretations, ensuring the research findings were both statistically valid and contextually grounded. The data collected from students and teachers across selected junior secondary schools in Bida, Shiroro, and Kontagora LGAs of Niger State were presented and analyzed. The findings are structured to respond directly to the research questions and objectives as earlier stated.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Students (N = 300)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	135	45.0
	Female	165	55.0
Age Group	9–10 years	73	24.3
	11–12 years	194	64.6
	13–14 years	33	11.0
Language	Nupe	87	29.0
	Hausa	84	28.0
	Gbagyi	63	21.0
	Others	66	22.0
Class Level	JS1	74	24.7
	JS2	98	32.7
	JS3	128	42.7

III. Result

Demographic Profile of Students

Table 1 above shows that the study sample comprised a total of 300 students, whose demographic information is presented across four categories: language, class level, age and gender. The language distribution revealed that the participants were from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The largest subgroup identified as Nupe, accounting for 29.0% of the sample (n = 87), followed by Hausa speakers at 28.0% (n = 84). Students who spoke other languages made up 22.0% (n = 66), while Gbagyi speakers represented the smallest group at 21.0% (n = 63). This distribution indicates relatively balanced linguistic representation, though Nupe and Hausa speakers slightly dominate the sample. Such diversity highlights the multilingual context of the study and the potential influence of language background on educational experiences. Furthermore, the class level showed that a high representation came from JS3 students at 42.7% (n = 128), followed by JS2 at 32.7% (n = 98), and JS1 at 24.7% (n = 74). This suggests that more senior students were slightly more involved in the study, possibly due to greater academic maturity or accessibility during data collection.

The spread also supports comparisons across different levels of secondary education.

Additionally, the age of respondents ranged from 9 to 14 years and categorized into three groups. The majority of students fell within the 11–12 years category, comprising 64.6% of the sample ($n = 194$), followed by 9–10 years at 24.3% ($n = 73$), and 13–14 years at 11.0% ($n = 33$). This reflects a typical age structure for junior secondary school students in Nigeria, with most learners in mid-adolescence. However, the gender data revealed a slightly female dominated sample, with females making up 55.0% ($n = 165$) and males comprising 45.0% ($n = 135$). This suggests a relatively balanced but female majority sample, which is important to note in analyzing any gender-related trends in the data.

Therefore, the demographic data reveal a linguistically and educationally diverse sample, offering a broad base for analyzing the impacts of multilingual education practices. The balanced gender representation and varied class levels strengthen the generalizability of findings across different student groups. The dominance of the 11–12 age group aligns with the peak of junior secondary school attendance, making the data particularly relevant for evaluating language and learning dynamics during a critical academic stage

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Following the analysis of the demographic data, this section presents the analysis and discussion of findings related to multilingual education and its impact on students' academic performance. This section explores how the use of multiple languages in instructional delivery influences various aspects of learning, including comprehension, motivation, participation, and confidence. Drawing on quantitative responses and existing literature, the discussion highlights patterns in students' perceptions of bilingual and multilingual teaching practices. It also examines the relationship between language inclusion in the classroom and academic outcomes.

Language and Academic Performance

Table 2 data examined students' perceptions on language use barriers and academic performance in instruction. From the first item, students reported experiencing difficulty when lessons were delivered solely in English ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.41$). A majority of respondents either strongly agreed (54.3%) or agreed (19.3%) with this statement, suggesting that English-only instruction may present a comprehension barrier for many learners. In contrast, responses to the second item demonstrated stronger endorsement of bilingual instruction, with a higher mean ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.04$) and a lower standard deviation, indicating greater consensus among students. Specifically, 57.7% strongly agreed and 30.3% agreed that using both English and a native language enhances academic performance. These findings reflect a shared belief in the effectiveness of multilingual instructional approaches.

Similarly, the third item revealed that students feel more confident in class when they understand the language of instruction ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.12$), with 51.7% strongly agreeing and 27.3% agreeing. This outcome emphasizes the link between language comprehension and learner confidence. However, the fourth item showed more variation in responses ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.41$), with 29% of students strongly agreeing and 23.3% disagreeing that language difficulties contribute to academic failure. The high standard deviation suggests differing perspectives, likely influenced by variations in students' English proficiency levels. Lastly, students expressed moderate to strong support for the use of indigenous languages to aid understanding of complex academic material ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.33$). A total of 43% strongly agreed and 28.3% agreed, reinforcing the perceived value of local language use in facilitating comprehension.

Table 2: Language and Academic Performance

S/N	Statement	% SA	% A	% D	% SD	Mean	SD
1	I sometimes find it hard to understand lessons taught only in English	54.3	19.3	7.0	14.7	4.00	1.41
2	I perform better when both English and my language are used	57.7	30.3	4.7	5.3	4.29	1.04

3	I feel confident when I understand the language used in class	51.7	27.3	8.0	5.3	4.10	1.12
4	I have failed a test due to poor understanding of English	29.0	22.0	23.3	15.7	3.00	1.41
5	I understand lessons better when explained in my local language first	43.0	28.3	9.7	12.7	3.76	1.33

Multilingual Education and SDG Goals

Table 3 above explores students' perceptions on multilingual education in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 and SDG 10). The first item recorded a high mean score ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.02$), with 61% of students strongly agreeing and 28.3% agreeing that teachers frequently use bilingual explanations during lessons. The low standard deviation reflects a strong consensus among students, suggesting that multilingual teaching practices are commonly implemented as part of an inclusive approach consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education).

The second item yielded a mean of 3.91 ($SD = 1.27$), with over 74% of students expressing agreement to some degree. This result highlights the belief that bilingual instruction enhances comprehension, further supporting the pedagogical importance of integrating students' home languages into classroom instruction to foster educational equity. The third item produced a mean score of 3.78 ($SD = 1.25$), with 40.7% strongly agreeing and 30.7% agreeing. These findings suggest moderate support for the idea that multilingual education promotes fairness, though the relatively broader spread in responses may reflect differences in how effectively such instruction is implemented across classrooms.

The fourth item showed a higher mean score ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 1.11$), with 59.7% of students strongly agreeing. This result indicates strong optimism about the role of multilingual policies in enhancing participation, reducing dropout rates, and supporting academic success, particularly among students from linguistically diverse or marginalized backgrounds. Finally, the fifth item yielded a mean of 3.81 ($SD = 1.30$), with 72.7% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that schools are actively promoting equity and quality through bilingual practices. Despite this positive perception, the slightly higher standard deviation suggests variability in how consistently these practices are implemented across different school environments.

Table 3: Multilingual Education and SDG Goals

S/N	Statement	% SA	% A	% D	% SD	Mean	SD
1	Teachers sometimes use both English and our local language	61.0	28.3	4.7	5.0	4.32	1.02
2	Using both languages helps us understand better	50.7	23.3	6.0	9.0	3.91	1.27
3	Multilingual teaching supports equal learning for all students	40.7	30.7	8.3	8.0	3.78	1.25
4	More students would succeed if both languages were used	59.7	21.7	6.0	5.7	4.22	1.11
5	My school promotes fair education by using both languages	51.0	21.7	8.3	9.7	3.81	1.30

Classroom Participation and Practice

Table 4 explored students' perceptions on bilingual instructional strategies, particularly how the combination of English and local languages influences their engagement, comprehension, and confidence in classroom participation. Five Likert-scale items were assessed based on frequency responses, and descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and percentages) were analyzed to understand learners' experiences. Students' responses indicate strong support for multilingual instruction across multiple affective and cognitive domains. The first item recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 1.01$), with 63.7% of students strongly agreeing that bilingual instruction enhances their enjoyment and motivation to learn. This suggests that integrating learners' native languages into teaching makes the educational experience more relatable and engaging.

Building on this, the second item yielded a mean of 3.83 ($SD = 1.26$), with 44% of students strongly agreeing. This indicates that many students feel more confident and comfortable participating in class when they are allowed to express themselves in their local language, emphasizing the importance of linguistic inclusion in reducing anxiety and fostering active classroom involvement.

The third item revealed a mean of 3.87 ($SD = 1.32$), with 46.3% of students strongly agreeing that their teachers are capable of teaching in both English and a local language. This finding highlights the significance of teacher bilingual competence in delivering effective instruction and ensuring students' comprehension. In addition, the fourth item demonstrated a high level of agreement ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.14$), with more than 50% of students strongly agreeing that localized examples presented in familiar languages enhance understanding and accelerate cognitive processing. This suggests that culturally relevant content supports better knowledge retention and clarity.

Finally, the fifth item had a mean score of 3.91 ($SD = 1.35$), with 54.7% of students strongly agreeing that multilingual instruction improves engagement and introduces variety into classroom learning. Although the higher standard deviation indicates some variability in responses, the overall trend affirms that the inclusion of multiple languages contributes to sustaining students' attention and reducing instructional monotony. Validating Garcia and Lin's (2017) theory of translanguaging as a natural and effective classroom strategy

Table 4: Classroom Participation and Practice

S/N	Statement	% SA	% A	% D	% SD	Mean	SD
1	I enjoy lessons more when both English and my language are used	63.7	22.0	6.0	5.0	4.36	1.01
2	I feel freer to answer questions in my local language	44.0	28.7	7.3	8.3	3.83	1.26
3	My teacher explains well in both languages	46.3	28.7	8.3	8.3	3.87	1.32
4	I learn faster when examples are given in my language	51.0	28.0	9.7	4.7	4.16	1.14
5	Using two languages makes learning more interesting	54.7	20.3	11.7	8.7	3.91	1.35

Recommendations and Support for Multilingual Education

Table 5 presented students' perceptions on institutional policy and instructional support for multilingual education. Items evaluated include support from teachers, schools, and governments, as well as preferences for the use of both English and local languages in teaching materials and classroom practice. Descriptive statistics were analyzed to explore students' perceptions regarding institutional and instructional support for multilingual education. The first item yielded a mean score of 4.19 (SD = 1.19), with 81% of students either agreeing or strongly agreeing on the importance of bilingual teacher training. This strong level of endorsement suggests that students recognize the need for educators to be proficient in both English and local languages, highlighting the importance of ongoing professional development for effective and inclusive multilingual instruction.

The second item produced a mean of 3.91 (SD = 1.28), with 45% of students strongly agreeing and 29.7% agreeing that teaching materials should reflect bilingual practices. This result points to a strong preference for accessible, multilingual content. However, the relatively wider standard deviation may indicate disparities in access to such resources across different school contexts.

The third item had a mean score of 4.13 (SD = 1.18), with a combined 80% agreement, reflecting substantial student confidence in the role of government in advancing multilingual education. This finding underscores the perceived importance of policy-level support in promoting educational equity and aligns with the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

The fourth item recorded a mean of 3.97 (SD = 1.27), with 76.4% of students expressing agreement with the use of translanguaging or code-switching practices. This suggests that students see academic value in the ability to use local languages alongside English, as it enhances comprehension and classroom engagement.

Finally, the fifth item had a mean score of 4.00 (SD = 1.31), with 49.3% strongly agreeing and 26.7% agreeing that they prefer dual-language instruction. This reinforces the perceived instructional benefits of using both English and local languages, particularly in improving clarity and understanding of academic content.

Table 1: Recommendations and Support for Multilingual Education

S/N	Items	% SA	% A	% D	% SD	Mean	SD
1	Teachers should be trained to use both English and our local language in class	55.7	25.0	6.0	6.3	4.19	1.19
2	Schools should provide books in both English and local languages	45.0	29.7	10.0	7.3	3.91	1.28
3	Government should support teaching in both English and local languages	51.3	28.7	9.3	3.0	4.13	1.18
4	Students will learn better if allowed to use their local language sometimes in class	46.7	29.7	7.3	10.7	3.97	1.27
5	I would like more lessons explained in both English and my local language.	49.3	26.7	7.3	7.3	4.00	1.31
	Total	49.6	27.96	7.98	6.92	4.04	1.25

Analysis of Teachers' Demographic Characteristics

This section presents an analysis of the demographic characteristics of the teachers involved in the study. Understanding factors such as their language proficiency, gender, age, years of teaching experience, subjects taught, and class levels helps provide context for interpreting their perspectives.

Table 6: Analysis of Teachers' Demographic Characteristics

The table revealed a diverse and experienced teaching workforce with strong multilingual capabilities. English is spoken by all teachers, making it the primary language of instruction, while a significant number also speak Hausa (79%), Nupe (34%), and Gbagyi (31%), reflecting the local linguistic context. This multilingual proficiency offers potential for inclusive and adaptive instruction, especially in junior secondary classes where foundational language skills are critical. The gender distribution shows a male majority (62%), and the age and experience data indicate that most teachers fall within the 31–50 age range, with over two-thirds having more than 10 years of teaching experience. This suggests a mature and professionally seasoned teaching staff.

Academically, English and Social Studies are the most taught subjects, with most teachers handling JSS1–JSS3 classes. This alignment points to a curriculum focus on literacy, citizenship, and foundational learning. The strong representation in junior classes also underscores the importance of teacher language skills, as early secondary education requires effective communication for concept mastery. Overall, the demographic profile supports the implementation of multilingual education strategies and suggests a workforce capable of addressing diverse student needs through both experience and language familiarity.

Interviews Analysis

Specifically, this section presented the report and analysis of the teachers' interviews. The responses gathered from these sessions were carefully transcribed, categorized into thematic areas, and analyzed accordingly to uncover patterns, trends, and meaningful interpretations. The analysis of the data collected from these syndicate groups is presented in the following sections.

Impact of English as the Instructional Language on ESL Students

Teachers observed that using only English in the classroom often poses a major challenge for students who are still developing proficiency in the language. This challenge is magnified in subjects that involve abstract thinking and complex terminology, such as science and mathematics. Students may fail to grasp key concepts because they are focused more on decoding the language than understanding the content. As a result, lessons become less effective, and student performance declines. Teachers also experience frustration, as they must frequently repeat or simplify content to ensure basic comprehension.

Difficulties Encountered When Learning Through English

Many teachers noted that students learning in English often feel overwhelmed, especially when they lack confidence in speaking the language. A common classroom scenario involves students avoiding participation out of fear of making mistakes or being mocked by peers. This silence impacts not only language development but also learning across the curriculum, as students miss out on opportunities to clarify doubts or share ideas. Teachers described how even bright students sometimes retreat into silence due to embarrassment or fear.

Application of Indigenous Languages in Teaching

Teachers emphasized that introducing indigenous languages in the classroom boosts students' engagement and improves their overall comprehension. When students hear concepts explained in a language they understand deeply, learning becomes more personal and relatable. This is especially true in early grades, where foundational skills are built. Teachers also noted that using indigenous languages made it easier to explain culturally embedded concepts and helped learners connect classroom knowledge with real-life experiences.

Contribution of Bilingual Instruction to Inclusive and Equitable Education

Bilingual instruction—where both English and local languages are used—was widely described by teachers as a means of promoting fairness and inclusiveness. This approach ensures that no student is left behind simply because they do not speak English fluently. Teachers observed that when local languages were used alongside English, students who usually struggled became more engaged, while those who were more proficient in English also benefited from clearer explanations and peer discussions.

Teachers' Views on Incorporating Mother Tongue in the Classroom

Teachers strongly supported the idea of using both English and students' mother tongues in classroom instruction. According to them, this dual-language approach simplifies content delivery, especially for complex subjects, and enables more students to follow along. Teachers find it easier to convey instructions, ask questions, and receive meaningful responses when local languages are integrated.

Students' Reaction to Alternating Between English and Local Languages

Teachers reported noticeable improvements in student behavior and performance when both languages were used during instruction. Students who were previously disengaged became more active, asked questions, and showed a better grasp of lesson content. In many cases, students became more curious and confident when they were able to think and respond in a language they were comfortable with.

Institutional Support for Local Language Use

While there are no official school policies discouraging the use of local languages, teachers indicated that institutional support is often limited to occasional workshops or verbal encouragement. There is little formal

structure or documentation outlining when and how local languages should be used, leaving teachers to make their own decisions.

Resources Required for Effective Multilingual Instruction

Teachers highlighted the urgent need for teaching materials in local languages. These include textbooks, audio-visual tools, and translated content, and subject-specific resources, especially in science and technical subjects. They explained that without appropriate materials, they are limited in how effectively they can apply multilingual teaching strategies.

Practical Experience of Multilingual Strategies Enhancing Learning

Teachers shared anecdotal evidence where the use of multiple languages made lessons more lively and engaging. For instance, a cultural lesson delivered using Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo generated strong participation and excitement among students. Though informal, such examples suggest that students are more responsive when their languages are represented in the classroom.

Suggestions for Enhancing Multilingual Teaching and Learning

Teachers recommended a range of practical solutions to support multilingual teaching: providing more printed and digital materials in local languages, equipping science classrooms with hands-on tools, and training teachers on how to use multilingual methods effectively. They stressed that the success of any educational reform depends on whether teachers are given the tools and resources to carry it out. From the insights shared, it is clear that teachers view the use of local languages not as a challenge, but as a critical asset in the classroom. Their first-hand experiences show that bilingual instruction improves student engagement, comprehension, and overall academic performance. Teachers are calling for structured support, better materials, and formal recognition of the role of local languages in education. If education systems respond to these voices, they will be better positioned to deliver quality, inclusive, and culturally relevant learning for all students.

IV. Discussion

In Table 2, the data collectively suggests that language is a significant determinant of academic performance among students. The high mean scores in items 1 to 3 underscore how inadequate comprehension of English affects classroom engagement, while bilingual or localized instruction boosts understanding, performance, and confidence. Notably, Item 4 shows that not all students attribute academic failure to language barriers. This suggests that while language is a barrier for many, other factors such as teaching style, curriculum difficulty, or personal study habits may also influence academic outcomes.

This analysis reveals a strong correlation between language comprehension and academic success. When students are taught in a language they understand, their academic performance and classroom confidence improve. Educational stakeholders should consider integrating local languages into the instructional process to bridge comprehension gaps and improve learning outcomes. This finding is in consonance with the earlier findings of Garcia and Wei's (2018) when they postulate that instruction in a familiar language enhances comprehension and performance.

In Table 3, students strongly endorse the view that bilingual teaching promotes equality and fairness in the classroom, values that are central to Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reducing Inequality). By accommodating multiple languages, instruction becomes more accessible to all learners, regardless of linguistic background.

The findings indicate that Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) is more effectively realized when students are taught in languages they are familiar with. Understanding lessons in one's native language enhances learning outcomes and encourages greater engagement. The high level of agreement with Item 1 highlights the importance of teacher involvement in delivering successful multilingual education. Educators' ability to switch between languages when necessary, plays a key role in ensuring that lessons are clear, inclusive, and effective.

Largely, the data shows that students not only favor multilingual education but also regard it as a meaningful strategy for promoting both equity and academic success. Therefore, integrating local languages alongside English in classroom instruction supports international education targets and should be adopted as standard practice at all educational levels. This echoes Brock-Utne and Mercer's (2021) argument that language-inclusive instruction advances SDGs 4 and 10.

In Table 4, students reported greater enjoyment and interest in lessons when taught using both English and their native languages (as reflected in Items 1 and 5), demonstrating enhanced motivation and positive attitudes toward learning. That is, allowing the use of local languages in class makes students feel more comfortable contributing to discussions (Item 2), thereby encouraging a more inclusive and equitable learning

environment. Understanding and processing of academic content improved when instruction included local languages (Item 4), emphasizing the instructional value of culturally familiar references and language.

In Table 5, the consistently high mean scores across all five items (ranging from 3.91 to 4.19) demonstrate strong students' agreement on the importance and relevance of adopting multilingual approaches within Nigerian educational settings. Students believe that the success of multilingual education relies on collaborative efforts among teachers, school authorities, and government bodies to ensure its effective adoption and continuity. The findings support the idea that incorporating multiple languages into classroom instruction not only enhances academic achievement but also fosters greater social inclusion, particularly for learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The Table 5 further highlighted a clear, student-led call for the institutionalization of multilingual education. The high levels of support reflected in the data affirm that language-inclusive teaching is essential for delivering equitable, high-quality education. It is therefore imperative for educators, administrators and policymakers to embed multilingual practices within the foundational structure of the education system. This finding aligns with Garcia and Wei's (2018) theory of multilingualism, which argued that learners benefit cognitively and emotionally when they are allowed to draw upon their full linguistic repertoire.

Triangulating the analysis of teachers' interviews, the findings revealed that using English alone as the medium of instruction often hinders students' understanding, especially in complex subjects. Students struggle with comprehension and confidence, leading to low participation and poor performance. Teachers reported that the use of indigenous languages in the classroom significantly improves students' engagement, understanding, and emotional comfort. Bilingual instruction (combining English and local languages) was seen as a powerful strategy for promoting inclusion and equity. It allows all students, regardless of their language background, to participate fully in the learning process. However, teachers face challenges due to a lack of institutional support, clear policies, and teaching materials in local languages.

Despite these challenges, teachers strongly support multilingual teaching and see local languages as a valuable asset rather than a problem. They recommend more training, resources, and formal policies to support the implementation of bilingual education. The interview analysis revealed a clear and consistent relationship between language comprehension and academic achievement. It was gathered that when students receive instruction in languages they understand (particularly through a blend of English and indigenous languages) their classroom participation, confidence, and overall academic performance significantly improve. The findings strongly support the notion that multilingual education enhances learner engagement and comprehension, bridging critical gaps in understanding.

Students not only perform better in bilingual settings but also express strong support for the integration of local languages in education. They view it as a practical and equitable strategy that fosters inclusion and enables them to fully access the curriculum. This widespread endorsement by learners highlights a growing demand for the institutionalization of multilingual education. Moreover, integrating indigenous languages alongside English aligns with global education targets, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4), which emphasize inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The evidence underscores the need for language-inclusive policies that empower students and reduce barriers to learning.

Therefore, it is imperative for educators, school leaders, and policymakers to formalize and standardize bilingual instructional approaches across all levels of education. Doing so will not only improve learning outcomes but also advance fairness, cultural relevance, and access to quality education in multilingual societies like Nigeria. The findings from the teacher interviews reveal that using English alone as the medium of instruction poses significant challenges for students, particularly in grasping complex concepts. Many students struggle with comprehension and lack the confidence to participate actively, leading to diminished academic performance. However, when indigenous languages are incorporated into teaching, students demonstrate improved engagement, clearer understanding, and greater emotional comfort in the classroom.

Teachers consistently affirmed that bilingual instruction, which combines English and local languages, fosters a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. This approach enables all students, regardless of their language proficiency, to access and interact with lesson content more effectively. Despite their strong support for multilingual education, teachers highlighted several challenges, including the absence of clear institutional policies, insufficient training, and a lack of teaching materials in indigenous languages.

Nevertheless, teachers do not view linguistic diversity as a barrier but rather as a valuable educational resource. They emphasized the urgent need for educational reforms that reflect the multilingual realities of Nigerian classrooms. Recommendations include developing formal policies to support bilingual teaching, providing targeted teacher training, and producing culturally relevant instructional materials in local languages.

V. Conclusion

This study has provided empirical evidence on the role of multilingual education in improving academic performance and promoting social equity in Niger State. The findings demonstrate that language barriers

significantly hinder learners' comprehension and participation in the classroom. Learners and teachers overwhelmingly support the integration of indigenous languages alongside English, as it enhances clarity, confidence, and engagement. These insights are consistent with global research and support the implementation of multilingual education as a practical strategy for achieving inclusive, quality education (SDG 4) and reducing inequalities (SDG 10).

Recommendations

1. The Ministry of Education should develop and enforce policies that support bilingual instruction at the basic education level.
2. Teachers should receive regular training on multilingual pedagogy, including translanguaging techniques.
3. Textbooks and teaching aids should be developed in both English and the major local languages of the regions.
4. Schools should formally incorporate indigenous languages into their timetables and assessment strategies.
5. Government and NGOs should support further research into multilingual education to guide future policy and practice.

These recommendations provide a roadmap for translating positive classroom-level practices into sustainable policy reforms. Based on the findings and limitations of this study, the following areas are recommended for future research:

1. Longitudinal Impact of Multilingual Education: Future studies should track students over several years to assess how consistent exposure to bilingual instruction influences long-term academic performance, language proficiency, and social integration.
2. Comparative Studies Across States: A broader comparative analysis between different Nigerian states (e.g., comparing Niger State with Lagos or Enugu) could offer insight into how regional policies and linguistic diversity affect multilingual implementation.
3. Teacher Training and Multilingual Pedagogy: More research is needed on the effectiveness of professional development programs for teachers in multilingual strategies, including translanguaging and indigenous language integration.
4. Policy Implementation and School Leadership: Investigate the role of school heads, education boards, and policymakers in supporting or hindering multilingual practices at the school level.

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