KOUNOUZ Journal

Volume:02 / N°: 01 Année : (2026)

LOCALISATION AND EDUCATION AS FACTORS SHAPING LANGUAGE CHOICE IN NIGERIA'S DIGITAL SPACE

LA LOCALISATION ET L'ÉDUCATION COMME FACTEURS DU CHOIX LINGUISTIQUE DANS L'ESPACE NUMÉRIQUE NIGÉRIAN

Christiana Yetunde OLASUNKANMI & Temitope BALOGUN & Julianah AKINDELE[1]

[1]Department of English and Literary Studies, Osun State University, Osogbo, **NIGÉRIA**

christiana.olasunkanmi@uniosun.edu.ng

Réception : 12/12/2025 Acceptation : 22/02/2026 Publication : 30/05/2026

Résumé de l'article:

Des études récentes examinent la relation entre la localisation, l'éducation et l'usage des langues sur les réseaux sociaux. Cette recherche étudie comment la localisation (urbaine ou rurale) et le niveau d'éducation influencent le choix linguistique parmi les utilisateurs nigérians des réseaux sociaux, et si l'usage en ligne s'aligne sur les pratiques linguistiques officielles. En adoptant une approche mixte, des données ont été collectées auprès de 300 répondants via WhatsApp et 36 entretiens dans six États du Sud-Ouest nigérian. Les résultats révèlent une fracture urbain-rurale : 94% confirment qu'English est davantage utilisé par les citadins, et 86,7% reconnaissent que la localisation affecte directement le choix linguistique. L'étude conclut que l'urbanisation et l'éducation conditionnent largement l'usage de l'anglais, soulignant l'importance de politiques linguistiques équilibrées entre communication mondiale et préservation de la diversité linguistique indigène.

Mots-clés : contexte numérique, domination, intersection, choix linguistique, préservation

Abstract of the article:

Recent studies examining the relationship between location, education, and language use on social media are a growing area of inquiry. This research investigates how location (urban or rural) and educational level affect language choice among Nigerian social media users, and whether online language use aligns with official language practices. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 300 respondents via WhatsApp questionnaires and 36 semi-structured interviews across six South-West Nigerian states. Findings show a significant urban-rural divide: 94.0% confirmed English is used more by urban dwellers, while 86.7% agreed that location directly affects language choice. The study concludes that urbanization and education largely drive English usage, highlighting the importance of language policies that balance global communication needs with the preservation of indigenous linguistic diversity.

Keywords : digital context, dominance, intersection, language choice, preservation

Introduction

Language choice on digital space constitutes a multifaceted sociolinguistic phenomenon shaped by diverse factors such as cultural identity, audience orientation, communicative intent, and socio-technological affordances. In multilingual societies such as Nigeria - where over 520 languages co-exist (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2024) - the dominance of English on digital platforms has become particularly salient. Among younger, urban, and educated Nigerians, English often functions as the default medium of communication on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. This linguistic preference reflects not only Nigeria's colonial history and postcolonial sociolinguistic hierarchies but also the broader globalizing influence of English as the lingua franca of digital communication (Crystal, 2001 ; Danet & Herring, 2007).

The predominance of English on social media can be traced, in part, to the historical evolution of the Internet and digital technologies, which were originally designed and disseminated in English-speaking contexts. The linguistic architecture of early social media platforms, coupled with the English-centric interface of most mobile devices and applications, continues to perpetuate English usage in online communication (Danet & Herring, 2007; Warschauer, 2003). This technological bias reinforces the symbolic capital of English in cyberspace, often at the expense of local languages.

Previous studies examining the hegemony of English in Nigerian digital discourse (e.g., Opeibi, 2016; Igboanusi, 2017; Afolayan, 2018; Akinseye, 2019) have consistently highlighted the marginalization of indigenous languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa in online interaction. These scholars attribute the linguistic imbalance to socio-cultural prestige, educational factors, and the global communicative power of English. However, despite the increasing centrality of social media as a defining communicative space in the 21st century, there remains a paucity of empirical research exploring how socio-geographical variables—particularly location and educational background—mediate language choice among Nigerian netizens.

Given this gap, there is a compelling need to investigate how location (urban vs. rural contexts) and education intersect to shape linguistic preferences on social media and to uncover the underlying motivations for the continued hegemonic use of English in Nigeria's digital sphere. Such an inquiry is vital not only for understanding the sociolinguistic dynamics of online interaction but also for promoting linguistic diversity and digital inclusion in an increasingly Anglophone cyberspace.

1. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The proliferation of social media platforms has significantly transformed patterns of human communication, reshaping the ways in which individuals interact, construct identities, and disseminate information in the digital age. With millions of active users engaging daily across platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok, social media has evolved into an indispensable aspect of modern sociocultural life (Maxwell & Daliluba, 2013 ; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). A considerable body of scholarship has documented the hegemonic presence of English in online communication, emphasizing its dominance and perceived superiority over indigenous languages (Crystal, 2000 ; Edwards, 2009 ; Ifukor, 2010 ; Chiluwa, 2012 ; Awonusi & Adebileje, 2019). English often functions as the default medium for interaction even in linguistically diverse settings, a phenomenon attributed to globalization, colonial legacies, and the structural design of digital technologies that privilege English-language interfaces (Pew Research Center, 2019). Notably, most of these studies tend to generalize English dominance without adequately interrogating how specific sociological variables—such as geographical location and educational background—mediate language choices among users.

Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this critical gap by examining how location and education shape netizens' language preferences and rationales for language choice on social media platforms. The research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of linguistic diversity in digital contexts, advancing the discourse on inclusivity, identity performance, and sociolinguistic equity in the era of digital globalization.

Research Objectives :

The specific objectives of this research are :

i. ascertaining whether location (rural or urban dwellers) has a direct impact in online spaces.

ii. finding out if educational level is a major factor determining language choice in online spaces.

iii. examining the reasons for the hegemonic use of English in online spaces.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Location's Impact on Language Choice

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that geographical location significantly influences linguistic behavior on social media platforms. Users tend to adopt languages that are dominant or symbolically significant within their immediate environments,

often reflecting regional linguistic hierarchies and cultural affiliations (Opeibi, 2019; Ifukor, 2010). In multilingual settings such as Nigeria, social media interactions frequently mirror offline linguistic realities, where language serves as a marker of both geographical identity and cultural belonging.

For instance, Deumert and Lexander (2013) observed that social media users in multilingual African contexts, including Nigeria and South Africa, frequently engage in code-switching and code-mixing to index their geographical and cultural identities. In the Nigerian case, individuals from the Yoruba-speaking south-west often alternate between Yoruba and English, while those from the Hausa-speaking north tend to integrate Hausa expressions into English-based posts (Opeibi, 2019). Such linguistic choices function commonly as communicative tools but also as symbolic assertions of local identity within globalized digital spaces. Consequently, location does not merely denote a physical place but also embodies a socio-semiotic resource through which online identities are articulated.

2.2 Education's Effect on Language Choice

Education constitutes another powerful determinant of language behaviour in online communication. Several studies have underscored the role of educational attainment in expanding linguistic repertoires, shaping attitudes toward languages, and influencing proficiency levels that enable users to participate in global discourses (Gardner-Chloros, 2009; Dornyei & Csizer, 2012). In the Nigerian digital context, individuals with higher educational qualifications tend to exhibit more diverse and fluid linguistic practices, often switching between English and indigenous languages to achieve specific communicative or stylistic effects (Opeibi, 2019).

Blommaert (2012) argue that educational experience mediates access to linguistic capital, especially English, which serves as a lingua franca in international communication. Accordingly, educated Nigerian users may prefer English on social media due to its perceived prestige, international visibility, and capacity to reach wider audiences. Conversely, users with lower levels of formal education, who may have stronger attachment to local linguistic identities, often rely on indigenous languages to sustain social networks within more localized digital communities. Education thus shapes not only linguistic competence but also ideological orientations toward language use, influencing users' perceptions of legitimacy, modernity, and authenticity in online communication.

2.3 The Intersection of Location and Education on Language Choice

The intersection of location and education introduces a layered understanding of language choice in Nigeria's social media ecosystem. Both factors interact to produce

nuanced linguistic patterns that reflect varying degrees of access, exposure, and identity negotiation. Opeibi (2019) found that Nigerian users with higher educational attainment, particularly those residing in urban centers, predominantly used English on social media to project cosmopolitan identities and engage broader audiences. Conversely, users from rural areas or with limited educational backgrounds tended to prefer indigenous languages, using them as markers of solidarity and cultural pride.

Similarly, Ifukor (2010) noted that rural users with less formal education often employed local languages to strengthen communities, while urban users more exposed to English through schooling and professional contexts favoured English or hybrid linguistic forms that combined English with local expressions. These findings highlight how education amplifies the sociolinguistic influence of location by facilitating access to global linguistic resources and shaping perceptions of communicative appropriateness in online discourse.

3. METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between location, education, and language choice in Nigeria's digital context. Quantitative methods were employed to collect measurable data through structured questionnaires, while qualitative methods were utilized to capture participants' lived experiences, attitudes, and rationales behind their linguistic choices in digital communication spaces.

The research focused on a sample of 300 Nigerian social media users (netizens) residing in the southwestern geopolitical zone of Nigeria. This region - comprising Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti States - was purposively selected due to its high level of digital connectivity, linguistic diversity, and socio-cultural influence within Nigeria's broader communication landscape. The sample was deliberately limited to literate Nigerians who possess smartphones, as these individuals are active on Facebook and WhatsApp and can engage effectively with online surveys and interviews.

The questionnaire was disseminated electronically via Google Forms and WhatsApp polls, leveraging these platforms' accessibility and popularity among Nigerian internet users (Statista, 2023). For the qualitative component, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 36 participants, drawn purposively from the six southwestern states (6 participants per state). The interviews explored participants' daily social media use, linguistic preferences, perceived social value of English and indigenous languages, and how geographical and educational backgrounds shape their communicative behaviors online.

The study specifically selected Facebook and WhatsApp as focal social media platforms for data collection and analysis. Facebook and WhatsApp are among the most widely used social networking platforms in Nigeria, serving multiple socio-cultural and economic functions, including community building, employment networking, product marketing, and information dissemination (Global Digital Report, 2024). Data collected were analyzed using frequency distribution and tables ; Gumperz's (1985) Interactional Sociolinguistics served as the theoretical framework, emphasizing how social context, power, and identity shape linguistic choices.

4. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The pervasive dominance of English on social media platforms in Nigeria has significant implications for the nation's language-in-education policy and broader linguistic ecology. Nigeria's multilingual environment—characterized by over 520 indigenous languages (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2024) - presents both opportunities and challenges for language planning and pedagogy. The prominence of English in digital spaces reflects not only the legacy of colonial education and governance but also the contemporary global valorization of English as a language of technology, modernity, and socioeconomic mobility (Adegbite, 2010 ; Bamgbose, 2011). Consequently, this trend risks deepening linguistic inequalities and marginalizing indigenous languages, particularly in educational and digital domains.

Findings from this study underscore the need for policy interventions that align with Nigeria's multilingual reality and the socio-cultural dynamics of the digital age. The results suggest that language-in-education policies should be revisited to promote additive multilingualism, where English and indigenous languages coexist and complement each other rather than compete (Bamgbose, 2011 ; Igboanusi, 2017). The increasing use of social media by students offers educators new opportunities to develop context-specific teaching materials that reflect local linguistic and cultural realities (Ogunmodimu, 2020). For instance, educational content can be designed to incorporate bilingual or multilingual resources that combine English with major indigenous languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa, thereby reinforcing language awareness and cultural inclusivity.

Ultimately, a re-imagined language policy that integrates indigenous languages into both education and digital spaces aligns with Nigeria's national goals of promoting unity in diversity and fostering inclusive development (Federal Ministry of Education, 2013). Such an approach supports the broader vision of multilingual education for sustainable development, as advocated by UNESCO (2019), and ensures that language learning in Nigeria remains equitable, contextually relevant, and pedagogically transformative.

5. RESULTS

Table 1 : Location's Impact (rural vs urban dwellers) on language choice in Nigeria's digital spaces

Items	Groupings	Frequency	Percentage
Do rural users engage more with local languages content in Nigerian digital spaces ?	**No**	**85**	**28.3**
	Yes	**215**	**71.7**
Does location affect language choice in the Nigerian digital spaces ?	**No**	**34**	**11.3**
	Yes	**266**	**86.7**
Do urban dwellers use English more on Facebook and WhatsApp than rural dwellers ?	**No**	**18**	**6.0**
	Yes	**282**	**94.0**
Is Code-mixing and Code-switching more common among urban users on Facebook and WhatsApp ?	**No**	**64**	**21.3**
	Yes	**236**	**78.7**
Do users in metropolitan regions engage more on FB/WA than rural users due to greater exposure to English ?	**No**	**27**	**9.0**
	Yes	**273**	**91.0**
Total		**300**	**100%**

Table 1 shows that geographical location significantly shapes language choice in Nigerian digital spaces. Most respondents, 215 (71.7%), agreed that rural users engage more with local-language content, while 85 (28.3%) disagreed. A large majority, 266 (86.7%), affirmed that location influences language choice, compared to 34 (11.4%)

who disagreed. Similarly, 282 respondents (94.0%) agreed that urban users rely more on English on Facebook and WhatsApp than rural users, with only 18 (6.0%) dissenting. Code-mixing and code-switching were perceived as more common among urban users by 236 respondents (78.7%), whereas 64 (21.3%) disagreed. Finally, 273 respondents (91.0%) agreed that metropolitan users are more active on these platforms due to greater exposure to English, while 27 (9.0%) disagreed.

Table 2 : Educational level as a major factor determining language preference in Nigeria's digital spaces

Items	Groupings	Frequency	Percentage
What encounters do you have with the English language?	**At home with my parents**	**40**	**13.3**
	In the school with teachers and other students	**260**	**86.7**
The distinguishing feature of social media platforms is their capacity for English communication.	**No**	**22**	**7.3**
	Yes	**278**	**92.7**
The English language's dominant use allows netizens to connect with a larger audience.	**No**	**97**	**32.3**
	Yes	**203**	**67.7**
The English language's domestication in Nigeria encourages netizens to be globally and culturally cohesive on social media.	**No**	**31**	**10.3**
	Yes	**269**	**89.7**
The most popular language for cross-cultural and international communication is English.	**Agree**	**85**	**28.3**

Items	Groupings	Frequency	Percentage
	Disagree	**115**	**38.3**
	Neutral	**23**	**7.8**
	Strongly Agree	**34**	**11.3**
	Strongly Disagree	**43**	**14.3**
Total		**300**	**100%**

Table 2 identifies education as a key determinant of language preference. Only 40 respondents (13.3%) first encountered English at home, whereas 260 (86.7%) reported initial exposure in school. Most respondents, 278 (93.0%), agreed that digital spaces facilitate communication in English, while 22 (7.3%) disagreed. Regarding online reach, 203 respondents (67.7%) agreed that English enables wider connectivity, compared to 97 (32.3%) who disagreed. Additionally, 269 respondents (89.7%) agreed that the domestication of English promotes global and cultural interconnectedness, while 31 (10.3%) disagreed. Views on English as the primary medium for cross-cultural communication were mixed: 85 (28.3%) agreed, 34 (11.3%) strongly agreed, 115 (38.3%) disagreed, 43 (14.3%) strongly disagreed, and 23 (7.6%) were neutral.

Table 3: Responses on reason for the hegemonic use of English in Nigeria's digital spaces

Items	Groupings	Frequency	Percentage
Which language do you prefer on Facebook and WhatsApp ?	**English**	**256**	**85.3**
	Yoruba	**35**	**11.7**
	Others	**9**	**3.0**
If your choice is English, enunciate the reasons in the boxes below.	**Historical/Official Status**	**150**	**50.0**

Items	Groupings	Frequency	Percentage
	Global Connectivity	**90**	**30.0**
	Ease of typing/tech support	**30**	**10.0**
	Perceived prestige	**30**	**10.0**
Is English seen as a language of economic opportunity in Nigeria ?	**No**	**20**	**6.7**
	Yes	**280**	**93.3**
Many netizens in Nigeria use the English language for linguistic relativity to the outside world ?	**No**	**4**	**1.3**
	Yes	**296**	**98.7**
Is English a unifying language among Nigerians of diverse ethnic groups ?	**No**	**27**	**9.0**
	Yes	**273**	**91.0**
Total		**300**	**100%**

Table 3 examines reasons for the dominance of English online. An overwhelming majority, 291 respondents (97.0%), agreed that English is preferred for digital content, while 9 (3.0%) disagreed. Among these, 150 respondents (50.0%) cited its historical and official status, 90 (30.0%) global connectivity, and 30 respondents each (10.0%) prestige and ease of typing or technological support. Furthermore, 280 respondents (93.3%) viewed English as a language of economic opportunity, with 20 (6.7%) dissenting. Nearly all respondents, 296 (98.7%), reported using English to remain globally relevant, while 4 (1.3%) disagreed. Lastly, 273 respondents (91.0%) agreed that English serves as a unifying language across ethnic groups, compared to 27 (9.0%) who disagreed.

Table 4: Surviving possibility of the varied indigenous language due to the partial/total negligence by Nigerians while in digital spaces

Items	Groupings	Frequency	Percentage
Do netizens think FB/WA should promote local languages ?	**No**	**45**	**15.0**
	Yes	**255**	**85.0**
Are local languages dying due to low usage on Nigerian digital spaces ?	**No**	**135**	**45.0**
	Yes	**165**	**55.0**
Do you prefer the use of local languages content on Nigerian digital spaces ?	**No**	**75**	**25.0**
	Yes	**225**	**75.0**
Nigerian digital space influences younger netizens to use less local languages.	**Agree**	**101**	**33.7**
	Disagree	**15**	**5.0**
	Neutral	**13**	**4.3**
	Strongly Agree	**140**	**46.7**
	Strongly Disagree	**31**	**10.3**
Platforms like FB/WA need to add local languages interface for Nigeria.	**Agree**	**114**	**38.0**
	Disagree	**66**	**22.0**
	Neutral	**18**	**6.0**

Items	Groupings	Frequency	Percentage
	Strongly Agree	**88**	**29.3**
	Strongly Disagree	**14**	**4.7**
Total		**300**	**100%**

Table 4 presents perceptions of local languages in digital spaces. A majority, 255 respondents (85.0%), agreed that platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp should promote local languages, while 45 (15.0%) disagreed. Additionally, 165 respondents (55.0%) agreed that limited digital use is contributing to the decline of local languages such as Yoruba, whereas 135 (45.0%) disagreed. Preference for local-language content was expressed by 225 respondents (75.0%), compared to 75 (25.0%) who disagreed. Concerning youth language use, 101 respondents (33.7%) agreed and 140 (46.7%) strongly agreed that digital platforms discourage frequent use of local languages ; in contrast, 15 (5.0%) disagreed, 34 (10.3%) strongly disagreed, and 13 (4.3%) were neutral. Support for localized language interfaces was also substantial, with 114 respondents (38.0%) agreeing and 88 (29.3%) strongly agreeing, while 66 (22.0%) disagreed and 14 (4.7%) strongly disagreed.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that location—specifically the urban-rural divide—exerts a significant influence on language choice among Nigerian social media users, particularly within the South-West geopolitical zone. Urban residents in major metropolitan centers such as Lagos, Ibadan, and Abeokuta tend to use English as their principal medium of communication on social media. This preference aligns with the multicultural and multiethnic composition of urban spaces, where English functions as a lingua franca that facilitates interaction among speakers of diverse linguistic backgrounds (Opeibi, 2019 ; Jenkins, 2007). As Jenkins (2007) explains in her theory of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), English serves as a neutral medium of communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries, thereby promoting mutual intelligibility in multilingual societies.

In contrast, rural dwellers in Southwestern Nigeria tend to maintain stronger linguistic ties to their indigenous languages, the Yoruba language, and may employ English only when required for formal education, bureaucratic communication, or interactions

beyond their immediate speech communities (Ifukor, 2010 ; Afolayan, 2018). This reflects Gumperz's (1985) sociolinguistic perspective that language use is contextually situated and reflects social identities, group membership, and communicative intent. The current study reinforces this observation through quantitative findings, revealing that 215 (71.7%) of respondents reported that rural users engage more with local languages on Facebook and WhatsApp, while 85 (28.3%) disagreed.

Moreover, the study found that 273 (91.0%) of respondents acknowledged that netizens in metropolitan regions engage on FB/WA more than rural users due to exposure to the English language, while 266 (86.7%) believed that English is more prevalent among urban residents than rural ones. A substantial majority (86.7%) also affirmed that geographical location directly influences linguistic choices on digital platforms, corroborating the argument by Opeibi (2016, 2019) that urbanization and technological advancement foster linguistic convergence toward English in Nigeria's cyberspace.

The qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with 36 participants similarly confirmed a strong correlation between urbanization and English language preference. Participants residing in metropolitan areas were more inclined to favour English, not only for communicative convenience but also as a symbol of modernity, education, and cosmopolitan identity (Blommaert, 2012; Akinseye, 2019). This observation supports Blommaert's (2012) sociolinguistics of globalization framework, which posits that global mobility and digital communication reshape linguistic hierarchies, granting prestige to globally dominant languages like English while marginalizing local varieties.

However, this growing urban preference for English introduces concerns about linguistic homogenization and language shift, particularly among younger generations. Scholars such as Jacobson (2019) and Fishman (1991) caution that the erosion of indigenous language use in everyday communication—both offline and online—can lead to a loss of cultural identity, oral heritage, and intergenerational transmission of local knowledge. The findings thus point to a need for deliberate policy efforts to promote indigenous language use in digital and educational spaces to counterbalance the hegemonic dominance of English.

Education emerged as another critical variable influencing linguistic behavior on social media. Respondents with higher educational attainment exhibited a stronger preference for English, using it to signal intellectual competence, global connectivity, and professional status (Opeibi, 2019 ; Afolayan, 2018 ; Akindele, Afolabi, & Olasunkanmi, 2025). Conversely, individuals with limited formal education tended to employ simplified or hybrid forms of English—often incorporating local lexical and syntactic features—to navigate social media communication effectively (Ifukor, 2010 ; Opeibi,

2016). This aligns with Gumperz's (1985) concept of code-switching as a communicative strategy, where users alternate between languages or language varieties to negotiate meaning, identity, and group affiliation.

Furthermore, educational level and language preference appear intricately linked. The semi-structured interviews revealed that participants with tertiary education exhibited a conscious inclination toward English as a language of prestige and opportunity. This pattern mirrors Afolayan's (2018) assertion that English proficiency in Nigeria symbolizes not only literacy but also socioeconomic mobility and intellectual empowerment. In the same vein, Awobuluyi (1990) notes that English, as enshrined in Section 52 of the 1977 Nigerian Constitution, serves as the official language of the nation, consolidating its centrality in administration, education, and the digital sphere.

When interrogating the motivations behind English language preference on social media, the study found that while 30 respondents cited ease of typing/tech support and perceived prestige, 90 associated English with global connectivity, and a significant majority (150 respondents) selected it due to its historical/official status and institutional authority. This trend aligns with Opeibi's (2019) argument that social media language practices in Nigeria are shaped by both structural and ideological forces, where English remains the language of power and digital visibility.

Nonetheless, the study reveals a nuanced dynamic concerning the Yoruba language. Although over half of the respondents (more than 50%) acknowledged Yoruba's relevance on social media, only 11.7% reported actively using it online. This gap between language ideology and language practice echoes Blommaert's (2012) view of linguistic stratification in digital communication, where local languages retain symbolic value but limited functional utility. The findings therefore suggest that Yoruba—while cherished for cultural and identity-related purposes—occupies a subordinate position in digital spaces dominated by English.

In sum, the findings substantiate that location and education are pivotal determinants of language choice on Nigerian social media platforms. Urbanization and formal education amplify the dominance of English, while rurality and cultural affiliation reinforce indigenous language use. These dynamics underscore the tension between globalization and linguistic identity, a theme central to contemporary sociolinguistic discourse in multilingual African contexts (Opeibi, 2019 ; Blommaert, 2012 ; Akindele, Afolabi, & Olasunkanmi, 2025).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study identifies location and educational background as salient sociolinguistic factors influencing language preference on social media. Urban dwellers,

who are typically more exposed to global media and formal education, tend to use English more frequently and fluently than their rural counterparts (Ifukor, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2019). Conversely, individuals residing in rural areas often exhibit stronger attachment to indigenous languages, using them to assert communal identity and preserve cultural traditions. Education equally plays a pivotal role in shaping linguistic behavior: individuals with higher educational attainment are more likely to employ sophisticated English expressions on social media as a means of demonstrating intellectual sophistication and social class.

Consequently, this study has illuminated the complex linguistic dynamics that shape social media interactions in Nigeria's digital space. The findings reaffirm that English remains the predominant language of communication within Nigeria's digital ecosystem, primarily because it functions as the nation's official language and the principal medium of instruction, administration, and inter-ethnic communication as articulated in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). This institutional endorsement has entrenched English not only as a symbol of modernity and education but also as a marker of social prestige and global connectivity (Afolayan, 2018). Consequently, English serves as the default linguistic medium through which Nigerian netizens engage in various digital activities, ranging from social interaction to professional networking, thereby reinforcing its hegemonic position in Nigeria's multilingual landscape (Akindele, Afolabi & Olasunkanmi, 2025).

In addition, despite the dominance of English, the study reveals that indigenous languages—particularly Yoruba—continue to maintain a meaningful presence on social media platforms, where they serve as vehicles of cultural expression, identity negotiation, and solidarity among speakers (Opeibi, 2019; Igboanusi, 2017). Such linguistic hybridity underscores the fluid and adaptive nature of digital communication in multilingual societies, demonstrating that Nigerian netizens do not merely adopt English passively but actively localize and indigenize it to suit their communicative needs and cultural contexts (Akinseye, 2019; Bamgbose, 2011).

Ultimately, while English continues to dominate Nigeria's digital discourse due to its institutional and global significance, indigenous languages such as Yoruba persist as vital instruments for the preservation of cultural identity, collective memory, and heritage in cyberspace (Opeibi, 2019 ; Igboanusi, 2017). The findings of this study therefore underscore the need for balanced linguistic pluralism in Nigeria's digital communication landscape—one that recognizes the functional importance of English while actively promoting indigenous language vitality in online and educational contexts. Such a balanced approach would not only foster linguistic diversity and

inclusivity but also sustain the cultural wealth embedded in Nigeria's multilingual society (UNESCO, 2019).

Recommendations

The present study sought to explore the intersection of location and education as determinants of language preference among Nigerian netizens, while also examining the underlying rationale for the predominance of English on social media platforms. Importantly, this research does not attempt to undermine the global relevance of the English language nor to advocate for the replacement of English with any alternative world language. Rather, it critically interrogates how geographical and educational variables intersect to shape linguistic practices in Nigeria's digital sphere, and how these dynamics affect the visibility, vitality, and sustainability of indigenous languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa in cyberspace (Opeibi, 2019).

Future research should therefore extend beyond the parameters of location and education to interrogate additional sociolinguistic variables such as age, gender, religion, ethnicity, and occupation, all of which may further illuminate the complex dynamics underlying language choice on social media platforms (Opeibi, 2016). These variables could offer nuanced insights into how digital identities are negotiated across diverse social strata and cultural backgrounds in multilingual societies like Nigeria.

Finally, subsequent studies may adopt qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviews, digital ethnography, and discourse analysis to explore the lived linguistic experiences of social media users. Such approaches would yield deeper understanding of how Nigerian netizens navigate multilingual realities, negotiate identities, and attribute value to different languages in online discourse (Ifukor, 2010; Opeibi, 2019). In alignment with UNESCO's (2019) advocacy for multilingual education and linguistic diversity as foundations for sustainable development, researchers and policymakers should promote digital inclusivity that integrates indigenous languages into the design of social media platforms, language education curricula, and national digital policies.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

Adegbite, W. (2010). English language usage, uses, and misuse(s) in a non-host second language setting : The case of Nigeria. In O. Obafemi (Ed.), New perspectives in languages, literature, and communication studies (pp. 89-105). University of Ilorin Press.

Afolayan, A. (2018). Language, identity, and communication in digital Nigeria. Ibadan University Press.

Akindele, J., Afolabi, I., & Olasunkanmi, C. (2025). Yoruba Language in Cyberspace : Issues and Viable Options for Vitality. Africania-Inonu Universitesi Uluslararasi Afrika Arastirmalari Dergisi, 5(2), 109-120.

Akinseye, T. (2019). Digital discourse and language dominance in Nigerian social media spaces. Spectrum Books.

Awobuluyi, O. (1990). On the N-L alternation in Yoruba. Departmental seminar paper. Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Ilorin.

Awonusi, S., & Adebileje, A. (2019). English in the Nigerian digital public sphere : Patterns of dominance and resistance. Concept Publications.

Bamgbose, A. (2011). African languages today : The challenge of and prospects for empowerment under globalization. In E. G. Bokamba, R. K. Shosted, & B. T. Ayalew (Eds.), Selected proceedings of the 40th Annual Conference on African Linguistics (pp. 1-14). Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

Blommaert, J. (2012). Chronotopes, scales, and complexity in the study of language in society. Annual Review of Anthropology, 41(1), 311-328.

Chiluwa, I. (2012). Social media networks and the discourse of resistance : A sociolinguistic CDA of Occupy Nigeria on Twitter. Discourse & Society, 23(3), 217-244.

Crystal, D. (2000). Language and the Internet. Cambridge University Press.

Crystal, D. (2001). Language and the Internet. Cambridge University Press.

Danet, B., & Herring, S. C. (2007). The multilingual Internet : Language, culture, and communication online. Oxford University Press.

Deumert, A., & Lexander, K. V. (2013). Texting Africa : Writing as performance. Journal of Sociolinguistics, 17(4), 522-546.

Dornyei, Z., & Csizer, K. (2012). How to design and analyze surveys in second language acquisition research. In A. Mackey & S. M. Gass (Eds.), Research methods in second language acquisition : A practical guide (pp. 74-94). Wiley-Blackwell.

Eberhard, D. M., Simons, G. F., & Fennig, C. D. (2024). Ethnologue : Languages of the world (27th ed.). SIL International.

Edwards, J. (2009). Language and identity : An introduction. Cambridge University Press.

Federal Ministry of Education. (2013). National policy on education (6th ed.). NERDC Press.

Gardner-Chloros, P. (2009). Code-switching. Cambridge University Press.

Global Digital Report. (2024). Digital 2024 : Nigeria. DataReportal.

Gumperz, J. J. (1985). Language and social identity. Cambridge University Press.

Ifukor, P. (2010). Nigerian youth and the digital revolution : An exploratory study of the use of new media technologies by youths in Nigeria. Journal of African Media Studies, 2(2), 147-164.

Igboanusi, H. (2017). Language dominance and identity in Nigerian cyberspace. Journal of Sociolinguistics, 21(4), 547-563.

Jenkins, J. (2007). English as a lingua franca : Attitude and identity. Oxford University Press.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite ! The challenges and opportunities of social media. Business Horizons, 53(1), 59-68.

Maxwell, E., & Daliluba, M. (2013). The impact of social media on communication dynamics. Routledge.

Ogunmodimu, F. (2020). Multilingualism and social media : The role of Nigerian languages in digital communication. Journal of Language and Communication Studies, 5(2), 22-38.

Opeibi, T. (2016). Discourse, politics and the digital public sphere : An analysis of political communication in Nigeria's social media. University of Lagos Press.

Opeibi, T. (2019). Language use on social media in Nigeria. In T. Opeibi, J. A. Osisanwo, & F. A. Oyetade (Eds.), Language, discourse and society in Africa (pp. 147-164). John Benjamins.

Pew Research Center. (2019). Global internet use and language trends. Pew Research Center.

Statista (2024). Global Social Media Usage Statistics. https://www.statista.com

UNESCO. (2019). Policy guide on the integration of multilingual education for sustainable development. UNESCO Publishing.

Warschauer, M. (2003). Technology and social inclusion : Rethinking the digital divide. MIT Press.