



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION COUNTRY PROFILE

Nigeria

PREPARED FOR

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ABBREVIATIONS

BESDA	Better Education Service Delivery for All
DFID	U.K. Department for International Development
EGIDS	Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale
EGR	Early Grade Reading
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
L1	First Language
L2	Second (or additional) Language
LOI	Language of Instruction
NCE	Nigerian Certificate in Education
NCRRD	Nigeria Center for Reading Research and Development
NEDS	Nigeria National Education Data Survey
NEI+	Northern Education Initiative Plus
NERDC	Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council
NIPEP	Nigeria Partnership for Education Project
NPE	National Policy on Education
PLANE	Partnership for Learning for All in Nigerian Education
RANA	Reading and Numeracy Activity
RAYL	Revitalizing Adult and Youth Literacy
REEP-A	Research for Effective Education Programming—Africa
STEPIN	Strengthening Teachers' English Proficiency in Northern Nigeria
TDP	Teacher Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

INTRODUCTION

Enhancing reading skills in the early grades is a key education priority for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Despite some improvements in access and learning in sub-Saharan Africa, literacy levels in the early grades remain low, and progress has been slow. Efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the early grades have led to an increased focus on the role of the language of instruction (LOI). Recent research has demonstrated that mismatches between the LOI and the language that students and teachers speak and understand best, can hamper effective teaching and learning (University Research Co., 2019). Thus, it is critical to understand the LOI policy and linguistic context of a country when trying to design programs to improve literacy and learning outcomes.

Currently, USAID supports Early Grade Reading (EGR) initiatives in 19 countries across sub-Saharan Africa. Many policies in these countries have recently shifted toward adopting the mother tongue as the language for initial literacy acquisition, and then transitioning to a second or additional language, such as a regional, national, or international language, as the subsequent LOI.

Government policies and strategies related to teachers and LOI reflect country priorities, approaches, and objectives for early grade literacy. During the design-phase of donor-funded reading programs, decisions are made regarding the manner and extent to which national policies are incorporated into project design, and when alternative approaches or additional elements need to be considered. However, government policies on LOI, and other information relevant for informing design, are often difficult to find and are not easily accessible.

The LOI country profiles aim to address this need. The profiles will allow the USAID Africa Bureau, USAID Missions, and partner organizations to quickly understand the country's linguistic and policy context in order to design an approach that most effectively helps improve EGR outcomes. These profiles, designed for 18 of the countries with current or upcoming USAID EGR initiatives, aim to clearly and succinctly describe and illustrate the country's linguistic landscape and official LOI policy. This country profile in particular provides information on language policy and practice in Nigeria.



LINGUISTIC CONTEXT

Nigeria is home to more languages than any other African nation. According to SIL International's *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, there are 515 living languages in the country. Of these languages, 19 are institutional, 76 are developing, and 299 are vigorous, while 82 are in trouble and 39 are dying (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2020). For more information on how languages are categorized on the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), please see Table 1.

The de facto national language of Nigeria is English, which is spoken as a second language (L2) by 104 million of a total population of 195.9 million Nigerians (Eberhard et al., 2020). The three most prominent indigenous languages are Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. Hausa is the de facto provincial language of the northern region with 53.7 million speakers, 35.8 million who speak it as their first language (L1) and 17.9 million who speak it as an L2. Igbo is the de facto provincial language of the southeastern region with 29 million speakers, and Yoruba is the de facto provincial language of the southwestern region with 42 million speakers, 40 million of whom speak it as an L1 and 2 million who speak it as an L2 (Eberhard et al., 2020).

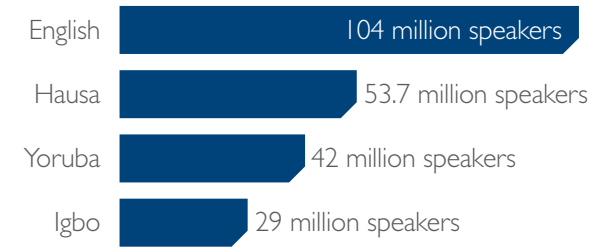
Nigeria is a highly multilingual society, and many Nigerians have strong attachments to their ethnic or local languages (Trudell, 2018). As such, many Nigerians speak multiple indigenous languages. Multilingualism with English is less common. More affluent Nigerians and those in urban areas tend to use English more frequently and are highly supportive of its wider use, while the use of English is much less common in rural areas and among those in lower socioeconomic brackets (Trudell, 2018). For more information on the geographic dispersion of indigenous language families across Nigeria, see Figure 2.

Table 1. Assessing Language Vitality: EGIDS Scale

Institutional	The language is used by institutions beyond the home and community
Developing	The language is in vigorous use and with literature in a standardized form
Vigorous	The language is not standardized but it is used among all generations
In Trouble	Intergenerational transmission is breaking down
Dying	Only fluent users, if any, are middle-aged or older
Extinct	The language is not used

Source: SIL International, n.d. For more information, please see: www.ethnologue.com/about/language-info

Most widely-spoken languages in Nigeria

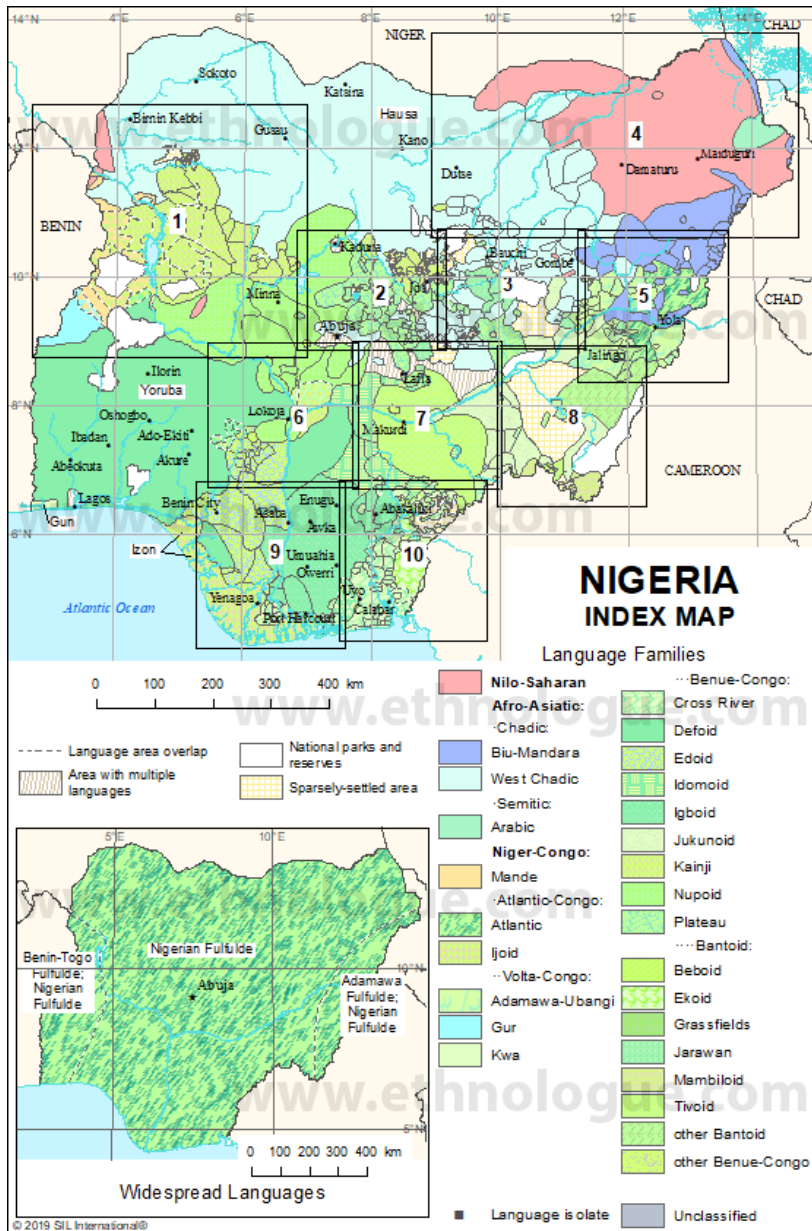


Source: Eberhard et al., 2020

Figure 1. Map of Nigeria



Figure 2. Mapping of Indigenous Language Families in Nigeria



Source: Eberhard, David M., Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). (2020). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Twenty-third edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION POLICY

In Nigeria, the national language policy has been specified in a series of language provisions in the Constitution and the National Policy on Education (NPE) (Trudell, 2018). The most recent version of the NPE, adopted in 2013, describes language provisions throughout the document, rather than devoting a section to outlining the LOI policy. The NPE specifies that if the community is monolingual, the language of the immediate environment should be used as the LOI for the first three years of primary school and English will be taught as a subject. In Grade 4, English will be gradually introduced as the LOI, and the language of the local community is taught as a subject. French and Arabic are also taught as subjects from Grade 4 onward (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). The policy does not specify what should be done in cases where the local community is bilingual or multilingual.

In addition, the 2015 National Policy on Special Needs Education in Nigeria declares that the federal and state governments will be responsible for coordinating training in both Sign Language and Braille to ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are met. However, both Sign Language and Braille are not specified as official LOI for students who are deaf or hard of hearing or with visual impairments, and it is unclear the degree to which this policy has been implemented.¹

Many scholars and practitioners have noted a lack of consistency and clarity regarding the government language policy in Nigeria as well as in implementation. For instance, in an analysis of language issues in education in Nigeria, Trudell notes that the NPE limits instruction in local languages to only monolingual communities (2018). However, it is unclear whether that is an actual policy directive or a matter of editing that made the policy unclear. Other scholars have noted similar discrepancies regarding the semantics of the language policy.

In practice, it appears that instruction in local languages is limited. For instance, in a survey of 100 basic education teachers in Gusau, Zamfara State, 70% of teachers reported that students prefer to be taught in English rather than a local language (Ibrahim & Gwandu, 2016). The same survey also revealed that only 26% of teachers were aware of provisions for multilingual education in the NPE, and only 7% of teachers had actually been implementing such provisions. Furthermore, 93% of teachers reported not having the necessary materials to teach in local languages (Ibrahim & Gwandu, 2016).

¹ For more information, see: http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/planipolis/files/ressources/nigeria_special_needs_policy.pdf

In its 2018-2022 strategic plan, the Federal Ministry of Education acknowledged confusion around the use of languages, particularly in education, and outlined its intention to establish a comprehensive, clear National Language Policy. According to the plan, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) has developed a workplan for producing and implementing a National Language Policy. However, budgetary constraints have prevented further work on the policy as of the publishing of the strategic plan (Federal Ministry of Education, 2018).

CLASS TIME

In Nigeria, the education system follows a 1-6-3-3-4 structure, including one year of pre-primary education, six years of primary school, three years of junior secondary, and three years of senior secondary followed by four years of tertiary education (World Bank, 2021). In 2004, Nigeria introduced the Universal Basic Education Act, which made basic education free and compulsory for all Nigerian children. Basic education consists of nine years of compulsory schooling, with six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary education. In 2012, the Act was revised to also include one year of pre-primary education for all children (World Bank, 2021).

The NERDC revised the national basic education curriculum in 2014. For Grades 1 to 3, the revised curriculum includes six mandatory subjects, outlined in Table 2, and Arabic as an optional subject. For Grades 4-6, the curriculum also adds pre-vocational studies and French as subjects.

As demonstrated in Table 2, there is no subject devoted to teaching reading. Instead, students are expected to learn to read during their English Studies classes (Trudell, 2018). This can prove challenging, particularly in Grades 1-3, when students do not yet have the prerequisite oral language and vocabulary skills in English to support literacy acquisition. As such, literacy remains a critical issue in Nigeria. Data collected from the National Education Data Survey (NEDS) in 2015 revealed that over 51% of children aged 5 to 16 could not read a single word (World Bank, 2021). Regional and socioeconomic inequities persist, with illiteracy rates as high as 72% for children in the North East and North West parts of the country (World Bank, 2021).

Table 2. National Curriculum for Primary Grades 1-6, 2015

Grades 1-3	Grades 4 -6
English Studies	English Studies
Mathematics	Mathematics
Nigerian Languages	Nigerian Languages
Basic Science and Technology	Basic Science and Technology
Religion and National Values	Religion and National Values
Cultural and Creative Arts	Cultural and Creative Arts
Arabic Language (optional)	Arabic Language (optional)
	French Language
	Pre-Vocational Studies

Source: NERDC, 2015

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING CURRICULUM FOR LITERACY

To become a primary school teacher in Nigeria, teachers must, at a minimum, have earned a Nigerian Certificate of Education (NCE). An NCE can be earned through three years of training at either state universities across the country or the National Teachers' Institute (RTI International, 2015). The National Teachers' Institute offers distance learning courses for teachers to earn their certifications. These distance programs allow candidates to earn an NCE or more advanced teaching certifications (RTI International, 2015).

Although the NCE is the minimum requirement for all basic education teachers, the curriculum is targeted at producing specialized teachers for pre-primary and early childhood education, primary education, junior secondary education, adult and non-formal education, or special needs education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2014). The primary education stream is divided into lower primary and upper primary tracks, with all primary education trainees required to take four courses in the lower primary stream including reading methodology. Teachers in the primary education stream are expected to complete training in all subjects included in the primary school curriculum. They are also expected to complete at least one pedagogy course for each of the following subjects: English, English as a second language, numeracy and mathematics, natural sciences/physical and health education, and social sciences (Federal Ministry of Education, 2014). Additionally, teacher trainees are required to spend 26 weeks gaining practical experience in a classroom for at least 10 class periods each week (RTI International, 2015).

TEACHER LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY/LANGUAGE SPECIFIC TRAINING

To enroll in a teacher training program in Nigeria, teachers must have completed senior secondary school and earned an "O" Level in English Language. Further, instruction at relevant training programs takes place in English. The general studies component of the NCE curriculum is designed to expose teacher trainees to the academic subjects taught in schools. One of the primary objectives of the general studies component is strengthening trainees' proficiency in English to ensure effective teaching and communication in the classroom (National Commission for Colleges of Education Abuja, 2012). To this end, teacher trainees take five courses in General English over the course of their studies for the NCE (National Commission for Colleges of Education Abuja, 2012). The curriculum does not appear to incorporate any training on developing teachers' proficiency in or their ability to teach local languages.

In classrooms, teachers' language proficiencies can hamper implementation of the language provisions within the NPE. Research from the British Council reports that codeswitching between the mother tongue and English is widely practiced in Nigerian primary classrooms (Trudell, 2018). Many teachers in Grade 4 and above are not proficient in English and thus rely on local languages to describe difficult concepts or make clarifications, even though English should be used as the primary LOI at this point. Implementation of the NPE is further complicated by a lack of teaching and learning materials in the local languages (Trudell, 2018). For Grade 1 and beyond, all textbooks for all subjects are written in English, except learning materials for the Nigerian Languages subject, which means that teachers are expected to read the materials in English but then teach them in a local language. Teachers do not receive any specific training for codeswitching between the teaching and learning materials in English and teaching that content in another language (Trudell, 2018).

TEACHER IN-SERVICE

As of 2016, approximately 72% of teachers in both public and private primary schools in Nigeria met the minimum qualifications to serve as a primary school teacher (Federal Ministry of Education, 2016). The National Teachers' Institute offers in-service training for teachers to earn or upgrade their qualifications as well as other professional development opportunities such as workshops. These trainings are offered via a distance learning format, allowing teachers to continue teaching while also upgrading their skills (RTI International, 2015). However, a 2012 survey of 15 schools found that 47% of teachers reported never having an in-service training opportunity (RTI International, 2015).

The U.K. Department for International Development (DFID) supported in-service teacher training in Nigeria from 2013 to 2018 through its Teacher Development Programme (TDP). Implemented by Mott MacDonald and other partners, TDP aimed to improve teaching quality in primary and junior secondary schools as well as in colleges of education in northern Nigeria. One of the primary focuses of TDP was improving teachers' English proficiency. As such, the British Council developed the Strengthening Teachers' English Proficiency in Northern Nigeria (STEPIN) program, a component of TDP, to assist teachers in Grade 4 and above who lacked adequate proficiency in English to facilitate the switch to English as the LOI. STEPIN offered training to 62,000 teachers in northern Nigeria to improve their own English skills as well as training on using English in the classroom and teaching methodology (Trudell, 2018).

USAID READING PROGRAM APPROACH AND ONGOING PROGRAMS

In alignment with the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education, USAID's programming in Nigeria aims to support the needs and priorities of the partner country to ensure that gains from the programming are sustained.

As such, USAID launched the **Northern Education Initiative Plus (NEI+)**², a five-year (2015-2020) activity aimed at improving access to educational opportunities in Bauchi and Sokoto states and improving the reading skills of more than one million children and youth, with a focus on girls, orphans, and children enrolled in non-traditional schools. NEI+ is implemented by Creative Associates International, Inc., and is currently in its sixth year of implementation as a result of delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic (DevTech Systems, Inc., 2021).

NEI+ has three primary objectives: 1) strengthening the government's technical and administrative capacity to provide effective early grade reading instruction, 2) improving the government's commitment and accountability mechanisms for providing effective instruction, and 3) delivering literacy, numeracy, and life skills instruction to out-of-school children and youth (DevTech Systems, Inc., 2021). The activity has worked to reform the teaching of early grade reading in Hausa and the transition to English, informed by global best practices for multilingual education (NEI+, 2018a).

USAID has also supported EGR instruction through the \$1 million, three-year (2017-2020) **Nigeria Center for Reading Research and Development (NCRRD)** activity. Through a partnership with Florida State University, this capacity development activity established the Nigerian Center for Reading Research and Development at Bayero University-Kano and trained faculty in conducting research on early grade reading. The NCRRD now produces rigorous research and acts as a convener of stakeholders involved in early grade reading around the country (Florida State University, 2020).

² For more information, see: <http://neiplus.com/>

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITHIN USAID PROJECTS

An integral component of NEI+ is supporting community engagement for improved access and quality of education. In particular, NEI+ is working to strengthen existing community mechanisms that support informal learning by establishing an additional 11,000 non-formal learning centers that target adolescent girls and youth. (NEI+, 2018b). These learning centers will cultivate learners' literacy, numeracy, and life skills. The activity is also working to build the capacity of local governments and organizations to manage and monitor these non-formal learning centers (NEI+, 2018b).

Additionally, NEI+ is working with local organizations, such as the Reading Association of Nigeria, to promote a culture of reading and build local demand for access to quality education opportunities. Some activities to build community support for education and reading include setting up school libraries, organizing local reading competitions, and radio discussions around reading and the state of education (NEI+, 2018b).

OTHER DONOR FUNDED READING PROGRAMS

Alongside USAID, several other organizations are involved in implementing projects to address literacy and language issues across Nigeria, which are described below.

Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA)³

BESDA is a five-year (2017-2022), \$611 million initiative of the World Bank that aims to improve access to education for out-of-school children (Result Area 1), improve literacy, (Result Area 2), and strengthen accountability for results in the education sector in Nigeria (Result Area 3). The initiative is funded through a program-for-results instrument, in which the World Bank and the Nigerian government agree on a set of results and states develop interventions, demonstrate proof of concept, and implement programs

3 For more information, see: <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P160430>

to address the intended result areas. Payment is dependent upon education outputs and outcomes (World Bank, 2017). BESDA's work under Result Areas 1 and 2 is focused on 17 states across Nigeria, with a focus on states with the highest number of out-of-school children. Work under Result Area 3 is ongoing nationwide.

Nigeria Partnership for Education Project (NIPEP)⁴

NIPEP was a five year (2015-2020), \$100 million initiative of the Global Partnership for Education and the World Bank to improve access and quality of basic education in five states across Nigeria. Targeting Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, and Sokoto states, the project aimed to promote school effectiveness and improved learning outcomes, increase access to basic education with a focus on out-of-school girls, and strengthen education planning and management systems (World Bank, 2021). The project conducted an early grade reading assessment (EGRA) to measure improvements in the quality of education in selected states, measuring Hausa reading skills for Grade 2 and 3 students and English reading skills for Grade 3 students. Analysis of the endline EGRA data revealed minor improvements in reading skills, with oral reading fluency improving by only 1 word in Hausa and 0.6 words in English (World Bank, 2021).

Partnership for Learning for All in Nigerian Education (PLANE)⁵

PLANE is an eight-year (2019 – 2027) program of the U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) that aims to improve teaching, school quality, education management, and the efficient delivery of education across Nigeria. PLANE works in three states across northwestern Nigeria – Kano, Kaduna, and Jigawa – and will also address education in emergencies in Borno and Yobe states in the northeast, in the hopes of benefitting up to 2 million children across the country (FCDO, 2021).

4 For more information, see: <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P143842>

5 For more information, see: <https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/projects/GB-GOV-1-300416>

Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA)⁶

RANA, a five-year (2015-2020) pilot project funded by DFID and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), aimed to improve the quality of literacy and numeracy instruction in Grades 1-3 in 200 schools across Katsina and Zamfara states in northern Nigeria. The RANA project was implemented by FHI 360 and formed a subset of UNICEF's Girls' Education Project Phase 3. The project employed a Hausa-based approach to early grade reading and integrated numeracy and gender-sensitive themes into project materials (FHI 360, n.d.). Activities of the project included developing Hausa-language teaching and learning materials, teacher training, community mobilization, and early grade reading policy work (Trudell, 2018).

Revitalizing Adult and Youth Literacy (RAYL)

In 2011, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched RAYL, a nationwide project aimed at eradicating illiteracy in Nigeria. The project works to improve national capacity to design and deliver literacy programming and provide literacy training to youth and adults who have been excluded from the education system (Trudell, 2018). RAYL has been active across 36 states in Nigeria, and has strengthened the capacity of grassroots literacy facilitators, university staff, and community-based organizations to deliver literacy programming. The project has also distributed teaching and learning materials to support its literacy work (Trudell, 2018). RAYL, originally a five-year initiative (2011-2016), was re-introduced in Nigeria in 2018 and programming is ongoing.

⁶ For more information, see: <https://www.fhi360.org/projects/reading-and-numeracy-activity-rana>

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