



From Trans-Saharan to Trans-Atlantic Contacts: Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin in Nation-Building in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria's linguistic diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for nation-building, particularly in the context of colonial and pre-colonial historical interactions. Despite the widespread use of indigenous and contact languages such as Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin, there remains a lack of coherent policy and scholarly consensus on their role in fostering national integration. The problem this paper addresses is the limited recognition of these languages as historical products of Trans-Saharan and Trans-Atlantic exchanges and their underutilisation in nation-building discourse. The objective of the paper is to examine Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin as linguistic outcomes of historical trade networks and to assess their potential contributions to social cohesion and national integration in Nigeria. The paper adopts a qualitative research design, relying on secondary sources including academic literature, historical texts, policy documents, and credible media reports, analysed through content analysis. The theoretical framework is grounded in historical linguistics and social constructivism, which explain how languages evolve through contact and how they function as socially constructed tools of identity and integration. Findings reveal that Hausa, influenced by Trans-Saharan trade and Nigerian Pidgin, shaped by Trans-Atlantic interactions, have evolved into widely used lingua francas that transcend ethnic boundaries. Their continued expansion demonstrates their capacity to facilitate communication across diverse groups. The paper concludes that these languages can play a significant role in nation-building if properly recognised and integrated into language policy. It recommends inclusive language planning, multilingual education policies, and greater institutional support for indigenous and contact languages. The paper contributes to knowledge by linking linguistic evolution to historical trade systems and positioning Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin as strategic assets for national cohesion.

Keywords: Hausa language, Nigerian Pidgin, Trans-Saharan trade, Trans-Atlantic trade, nation-building, multilingualism, language policy, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Nigeria's linguistic situation mirrors a broader global pattern in which multilingual societies continually navigate the balance between cultural diversity and national cohesion. Multilingualism is, in fact, a widespread global phenomenon, as evidenced by the existence of over 7,000 living languages worldwide compared to approximately 195 sovereign states (Eberhard et al., 2023). This disparity, where linguistic diversity far exceeds political boundaries, naturally gives rise to multilingual societies in which individuals and communities regularly use two or more languages in everyday communication. Although the degree of linguistic diversity varies across countries, truly monolingual or linguistically homogeneous states are exceedingly rare (Chin, 2023). Current estimates suggest that by 2025, over 7,159 living languages are in use globally, yet about 95% of the world's population communicates using only around 400 of these languages, highlighting a significant concentration of linguistic usage alongside vast diversity (Barua, 2025). This uneven distribution of languages has encouraged many nations to adopt lingua francas for administration, education, and interethnic communication (Barua, 2025). In multilingual states, such common languages help bridge communication gaps and promote social and political integration. Africa, in particular, exemplifies this reality, as the continent accounts for roughly one-third of the world's linguistic diversity rule (Eberhard et al., 2023). Countries such as Nigeria, Cameroon, and Tanzania are especially notable for their high levels of multilingualism, shaped by long-standing

historical processes including pre-colonial trade, migration, religious expansion, and colonial rule (Eberhard et al., 2023). In West Africa, linguistic diversity has been further influenced by centuries of Trans-Saharan trade networks dating back to at least the 8th century, as well as Trans-Atlantic exchanges between the 15th and 19th centuries. These interactions facilitated sustained contact among diverse language communities, fostering patterns of communication, borrowing, and adaptation that continue to shape the region's linguistic landscape today.

Nigeria is widely recognised as one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with over 500 indigenous languages spoken across its geopolitical zones (Lewis et al., 2016). Within this multilingual setting, Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo are the most widely spoken indigenous languages, alongside English, which was introduced during British colonial rule in the nineteenth century and continues to function as the official language of administration, education, and formal communication. In addition to these, Nigerian Pidgin has emerged as a widely used contact language, particularly in urban centres, where it facilitates interaction among speakers of different ethnic backgrounds and linguistic traditions. Hausa, in particular, has historical roots in the Trans-Saharan trade networks that connected West Africa with North Africa and the wider Sahel region. Through centuries of commercial exchange, migration, and intercultural contact, Hausa evolved into a major lingua franca across present-day northern Nigeria and neighbouring areas, supporting trade, diplomacy, and cultural interaction (Blench, 2014).

In contrast, Nigerian Pidgin developed during the Trans-Atlantic trade period, when European traders, initially Portuguese in the fifteenth century and later predominantly British in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, interacted with African coastal communities. As noted by Opeyemi (2024), sustained language contact during this period gave rise to pidgins and, in some cases, creoles, as simplified communication systems designed to meet practical trading needs. The presence of lexical items of Portuguese origin in contemporary West African Pidgin English, such as *sabi* (to know) and *pikin* (child), reflects this early phase of European contact and linguistic influence. Over time, as British commercial and colonial dominance expanded, Nigerian Pidgin was further developed and standardised informally as a medium of communication between colonial administrators and local populations. Despite this rich linguistic heritage, Nigeria continues to face significant challenges in national integration, governance, and social cohesion. Linguistic diversity, while culturally enriching, can also reinforce ethnic identities in ways that complicate political communication and public participation. Maledo (2021) observes that Nigeria's multilingual composition, comprising hundreds of indigenous languages alongside English, creates structural challenges in education, governance, and nation-building. Language-related tensions often arise from perceptions of marginalisation, unequal representation, and competition among ethnic groups, which can contribute to political friction and social fragmentation. However, Maledo (2021) also argues that, if effectively managed, linguistic diversity can serve as a resource for cultural enrichment and inclusive development rather than a source of division.

Although English remains the principal language of formal administration, its limited accessibility among segments of the population, particularly where literacy rates remain uneven, underscores the continued importance of widely spoken indigenous languages and contact languages such as Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin. Their practical accessibility and widespread usage position them as vital instruments for improving communication, enhancing civic participation, and promoting inclusive national integration in a linguistically diverse society like Nigeria. The problem this paper addresses lies in the limited scholarly and policy recognition of Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin as historically grounded linguistic outcomes of Trans-Saharan and Trans-Atlantic exchanges, as well as their underutilisation as instruments for fostering national unity. While these languages are widely used in everyday communication, they are often marginalised in formal policy frameworks, particularly in education and governance, where English dominates. This disconnect raises important questions about how language policy aligns with social realities in a multilingual state. The objective of this paper is therefore to examine the historical development and linguistic evolution of Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin within the context of trade and cross-cultural interaction, and to assess their potential contributions to nation-building in Nigeria. By situating these languages within broader historical and socio-political processes, the paper seeks to highlight their functional relevance beyond informal communication.

The significance of this paper lies in its contribution to ongoing debates on language policy, national integration, and development in Nigeria. By foregrounding Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin as legitimate tools of communication with deep historical roots, the paper provides a framework for rethinking multilingual governance and inclusive nation-building. It also offers insights for policymakers, educators, and development practitioners seeking to enhance communication effectiveness, reduce linguistic exclusion, and strengthen social cohesion in Nigeria's diverse society.

2. Conceptual Clarification

2.1 Language and Linguistic Contact

Language is a structured and rule-governed system of communication used by humans to convey meaning, organise thought, and facilitate social interaction. From a structural perspective, Saussure (1916) conceptualises language as a system of signs comprising the signifier and the signified, emphasising its arbitrary and relational nature. Chomsky (1957) advances a generative view, arguing that language is underpinned by an innate universal grammar that enables

humans to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences. Halliday (1978) adopts a functional perspective, viewing language as a social semiotic system shaped by the communicative needs of its users. Sapir (1921) defines language as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires, while Bloomfield (1933) frames it as a set of habits formed through social conditioning and observable behaviour. Crystal (2008) further synthesises these views by describing language as a dynamic and evolving system that reflects cultural and social realities.

Linguistic contact, on the other hand, refers to the interaction between speakers of different languages within shared social spaces, often resulting in borrowing, code-switching, pidginisation, or creolisation. Weinreich (1953) defines language contact as the situation in which individuals or groups regularly use more than one language. Thomason and Kaufman (1988) emphasise that sustained contact leads to structural changes in languages, particularly through borrowing and convergence. Hockett (1958) highlights the role of bilingualism in facilitating linguistic exchange, while Myers-Scotton (1993) focuses on code-switching as a product of social negotiation in multilingual contexts. Winford (2003) further elaborates that language contact phenomena are shaped by social hierarchy, power relations, and patterns of interaction. It could be observed that, language is both a cognitive and social construct, while linguistic contact is a historically and socially driven process that reshapes languages through interaction. In multilingual societies such as Nigeria, linguistic contact has been central to the emergence of hybrid and lingua franca systems like Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin.

2.2 Hausa Language

The conceptual origins of the term “Hausa” are commonly explained through oral traditions and mythological narratives rather than verifiable historical records. One widely cited account traces “Hausa” to the expression “Ya Hausa,” loosely interpreted as “he came on a cow,” a phrase associated with early migration stories preserved in local folklore (Ifemesia, 1968a). Another tradition links the term to “Habasha,” an ancient designation for Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia), suggesting that the Hausa people may have originated from or passed through that region (Musa, 2023). While such narratives are deeply embedded in cultural memory and play an important role in shaping collective identity and historical consciousness, they are largely symbolic in nature. They do not consistently align with archaeological, linguistic, or documentary evidence and are therefore regarded in academic discourse as mythological explanations rather than factual accounts of origin. In contrast, scholarly approaches to the origins of the Hausa people and their language rely on systematic methodologies such as comparative linguistics, historical geography, and archaeological research. From an etymological and historical perspective, the term “Hausa” is often associated with “Ausa,” a geographical designation linked to the Songhai Empire, used to describe regions located to its east. In its earliest usage, “Ausa” functioned primarily as a spatial identifier rather than an ethnic label, employed by neighbouring West African groups to refer to a cluster of politically organised city-states collectively known today as Hausaland (Musa, 2023). These city-states included major centres such as Kano, Katsina, Daura, Zaria, Sokoto, and Gobir, which were integrated into broader networks of economic, political, and cultural interaction across the Sahel.

Hausaland occupied a strategically important position within the Trans-Saharan trade system, which connected West Africa to North Africa through active trade routes between the 14th and 18th centuries (Lovejoy, 2016). This location facilitated sustained exchanges among merchants, scholars, and travellers, contributing to the region’s economic vitality and cultural dynamism. In this context, “Ausa” evolved beyond a mere geographic reference to become a functional descriptor shaped by patterns of mobility, commerce, and communication. As Trimmingham (1962) notes, the term “Ausa,” applied to regions along the eastern Niger, was used to identify the inhabitants as “eastern people,” while Hausa speakers, in turn, referred to Songhai as “Tammatawa,” meaning “westerners.” Such reciprocal naming conventions highlight the relational and interactional nature of early regional identities. Over time, through sustained contact and increasing political organisation among the Hausa city-states, the term “Ausa” gradually transformed into “Hausa,” coming to denote not only a geographic region but also the people, language, and cultural identity associated with it. This evolution underscores the idea that linguistic and ethnic identities often emerge through long-term processes of exchange, integration, and mutual recognition rather than from a singular origin point.

Geographically, Hausaland was situated to the east and south-east of the Songhai Empire during its height in the 15th and 16th centuries. The Songhai Empire, with prominent centres such as Gao and Timbuktu in present-day Mali and Niger, controlled key segments of the Trans-Saharan trade network, facilitating the movement of goods including gold, salt, and manuscripts across vast distances (Hunwick, 2003). In contrast, the Hausa city-states were located further inland in what is now northern Nigeria and southern Niger, occupying a transitional zone between the western Sahel and the southern forest regions. This positioning enabled Hausaland to function as a critical commercial corridor through which trade routes traversed both east–west and north–south axes. As a result, Hausa cities developed into major centres of commerce and interaction. Kano, in particular, emerged as a significant commercial hub by the 18th and 19th centuries, reportedly hosting large volumes of caravan trade that involved thousands of traders annually (Last, 2008). Goods such as salt from the Sahara, leather products, textiles, gold, and kola nuts circulated through these networks, alongside the diffusion of Islamic teachings and scholarly traditions. The adoption of Ajami (the use of Arabic script for Hausa) from at least the

15th century further facilitated literacy, record-keeping, and religious scholarship among Hausa-speaking Muslim communities, reinforcing Hausa as a language of commerce, religion, and administration (Newman, 2000).

Over time, the term “Ausa” became increasingly associated not only with a geographic region but also with the people and language of the area. However, as scholars such as Bala Usman (1979) argue, Hausa identity as a unified ethnic construct did not originate as a fixed or static category but rather developed through processes of political centralisation, Islamic influence, and later colonial classification. During the period of the Sokoto Caliphate (1804–1903), Hausa-speaking regions experienced greater political integration, which contributed to the consolidation of shared linguistic and cultural identities across previously autonomous city-states. The subsequent imposition of British colonial administration in the early 20th century further formalised ethnic categories for administrative convenience, thereby reinforcing and standardising “Hausa” as a distinct identity in modern Nigeria (Usman, 1979). In contemporary terms, Hausa stands as one of the most widely spoken languages in Africa, with tens of millions of native and second-language speakers across Nigeria, Niger, Ghana, Cameroon, and beyond (Blench, 2014). Its historical foundations in trade, migration, religion, and intercultural contact continue to shape its role as a major lingua franca in West Africa. Accordingly, “Ausa” should be understood primarily as a historically grounded geographic and commercial designation that gradually evolved into a broader linguistic and socio-cultural identity. This transformation reflects centuries of sustained interaction among diverse groups, illustrating how language and identity are continuously shaped by historical processes of exchange, mobility, and integration rather than by a singular or isolated point of origin.

Linguistically, Hausa is classified as a Chadic language within the Afro-Asiatic family, a classification established by scholars such as Greenberg (1963). It is one of the most widely spoken languages in Africa, with tens of millions of speakers across Nigeria, Niger, Ghana, and parts of Cameroon. Historically, Hausa developed as a major lingua franca along Trans-Saharan trade routes linking West Africa to North Africa and the Mediterranean world, facilitating commerce, diplomacy, and cultural exchange. Its adaptability and extensive use in trade and administration contributed to its spread beyond its original speakers, making it a central medium of inter-ethnic communication in the region.

Scholarly analyses further underscore the linguistic and cultural depth of Hausa. Newman (2000) highlights its grammatical complexity, dialectal variation, and processes of standardisation, while Jaggar (2001) emphasises its structural richness and flexibility. Blench (2014) situates Hausa within the wider linguistic geography of West Africa, noting its enduring role as a regional lingua franca. In addition, Adamu (2018) provides a comprehensive overview of Hausa language and literature, tracing its development from oral traditions, such as folktales, praise poetry, and proverbs, to written forms. The adoption of *Ajami* (Arabic script), influenced by Islamic scholarship from the 14th century onwards, and the later introduction of Roman orthography during the colonial period, significantly shaped Hausa literary production.

Contemporary Hausa literature now encompasses diverse genres, including prose, poetry, and drama, reflecting both historical continuity and modern transformation. Moreover, Hausa continues to function as a major language of communication, trade, and media across West Africa. As noted by World Language Library (2026), it is widely used as both a first and second language, with a rich oral and written tradition that reflects social, moral, and spiritual life. Its dual script tradition, *Ajami* and Latin, further illustrates its historical depth and cultural adaptability. Overall, Hausa stands not only as a linguistic system but also as a dynamic cultural and historical institution, deeply embedded in the socio-economic and intellectual life of West Africa.

2.3 Nigerian Pidgin

Nigerian Pidgin is a contact language that emerged during the Trans-Atlantic trade era through sustained interactions between European traders and African populations, and it subsequently expanded under colonial administration. Today, it functions as a widely used lingua franca across Nigeria’s ethnically diverse society, particularly in urban centres where intergroup communication is frequent. In linguistic terms, Afeadie (2015) conceptualises Pidgin as a form of English that has been modified and reshaped through contact with one or more other languages. Within this contact framework, English is typically regarded as the superstrate language, associated with higher socio-political influence, while the indigenous languages that contribute structural and lexical features are referred to as substrate languages. Building on this, Faraclas (1996) characterises Nigerian Pidgin as existing along a creole continuum, where speakers employ varying levels of complexity depending on their linguistic competence and social context. This continuum reflects the fluidity of usage, ranging from simplified forms to more expanded and stable varieties. Similarly, Elugbe and Omamor (1991) emphasise the practical importance of Nigerian Pidgin as a medium of inter-ethnic communication, highlighting its role in bridging linguistic divides in everyday interactions. Holm (1988), in his broader classification of pidgins and creoles, situates Nigerian Pidgin within the English-based pidgin family, noting its structural simplification relative to standard English alongside significant lexical borrowing from English vocabulary.

From a functional perspective, Hymes (1971) underscores the communicative efficiency of pidgins in multilingual environments, arguing that such languages emerge to satisfy immediate and practical communication needs where no

common language exists. Complementing this view, Mufwene (2001) interprets pidgins as products of ecological adaptation, shaped by socio-economic conditions, population movements, and patterns of interaction among diverse language communities. Taken together, these perspectives illustrate that Nigerian Pidgin is not merely a simplified form of English but a dynamic, adaptive linguistic system that has evolved in response to historical trade, colonial contact, and ongoing socio-cultural interactions across Nigeria.

Nigerian Pidgin evolved as a practical communication tool among traders, colonial administrators, and local populations, particularly in coastal regions engaged in Atlantic trade from the 15th century onwards. Over time, it has expanded beyond informal contexts into media, music, and popular culture, reflecting its growing sociolinguistic relevance. Nigerian Pidgin therefore, is a dynamic and adaptive contact language that has transcended its origins in trade to become a widely accepted medium of everyday communication, reinforcing its role as an informal but powerful integrative language in Nigeria.

2.4 Nation-Building

Nation-building refers to the process through which a state fosters unity, shared identity, and political stability among diverse populations. Anderson (1991) conceptualises the nation as an “imagined community,” highlighting the role of shared symbols, language, and narratives in constructing national identity. Gellner (1983) links nation-building to industrialisation and the need for a culturally homogeneous workforce. Deutsch (1953) emphasises communication and social mobilisation as key to national integration. Smith (1991) focuses on shared historical memories, myths, and cultural symbols, while Nairn (1977) discusses the political dimensions of nationalism as a response to uneven development and colonial legacies. In the African context, nation-building has been shaped by colonial boundaries, ethnic diversity, and post-colonial governance challenges. Nigeria, in particular, has struggled with balancing ethnic plurality and national unity since independence in 1960. Language plays a critical role in this process, as it influences inclusion, participation, and identity formation. As could be observed from above scholarly views, nation-building is both a political and socio-cultural process that depends heavily on inclusive communication systems. In multilingual societies, the strategic use of widely spoken languages such as Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin can enhance cohesion, participation, and a shared sense of belonging.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is a theoretical perspective that explains how knowledge, meanings, identities, and social realities are constructed through human interaction rather than existing as fixed or objective entities. Its intellectual foundations are commonly associated with scholars such as Vygotsky (1978), Berger and Luckmann (1966), Mead (1934), Gergen (1991), and Bandura (1986). Vygotsky (1978) emphasises the role of social interaction and cultural tools in cognitive development, arguing that learning is mediated through language and social engagement. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that reality is socially constructed through processes of externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation, while Mead (1934) highlights the formation of the self through symbolic interaction. Gergen (1991) extends this by viewing knowledge as relational and historically situated, and Bandura (1986) underscores the importance of observational learning within social contexts.

The key assumption of social constructivism is that meaning is co-created through interaction, and language is central to this process as both a medium and product of social relations. In multilingual societies such as Nigeria, Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin exemplify socially constructed linguistic systems that have emerged to facilitate communication across ethnic boundaries. For instance, Nigerian Pidgin has established itself as a vital, pragmatic, and rapidly growing lingua franca in Nigeria’s urban centers, bridging communication gaps among more than 250 diverse ethnic groups. Emerging as an essential tool for interaction in metropolitan areas, particularly Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Warri; it is used for daily commerce, social interaction, and political engagement by both educated and uneducated Nigerians (Echezona et al., 2022). Similarly, Hausa has evolved as a lingua franca across Northern Nigeria and beyond, facilitating trade and social integration across diverse communities.

The strengths of social constructivism lie in its ability to explain the dynamic relationship between language, identity, and society. It provides a robust framework for understanding how languages gain social legitimacy and spread through everyday interactions. However, it has been criticised for overemphasising social processes while underestimating structural constraints such as political power, economic inequality, and institutional policies (Hammersley, 1992). Additionally, critics argue that it may lack predictive power due to its emphasis on context-specific interpretations. Despite these limitations, social constructivism remains highly relevant to this paper as it explains how Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin function not merely as linguistic systems but as socially negotiated tools of inclusion, identity formation, and intergroup communication. Their widespread use across Nigeria demonstrates how repeated social interactions can institutionalise languages as national communicative resources.

3.2 Historical Linguistics

Historical linguistics is the study of language change over time, focusing on how languages evolve through processes such as sound change, borrowing, divergence, and convergence. Foundational scholars in this field include Schleicher (1861), Saussure (1916), Meillet (1921), Bloomfield (1933), and Hock and Joseph (1996). Schleicher's comparative approach treated languages as organic entities that evolve similarly to biological organisms. Saussure (1916) distinguished between synchronic and diachronic analysis, emphasising the importance of studying language at specific points in time as well as across historical periods. Meillet (1921) highlighted the role of social factors in language change, while Bloomfield (1933) adopted a structural approach to linguistic analysis. Hock and Joseph (1996) provide a comprehensive account of mechanisms of linguistic change, including grammaticalisation and lexical borrowing.

The central assumption of historical linguistics is that languages are not static but continuously shaped by contact, migration, trade, and cultural exchange. In the African context, Hausa developed significantly through Trans-Saharan trade networks between West Africa and North Africa from as early as the 8th century, facilitating contact with Arabic and other languages. This interaction led to the incorporation of Arabic loanwords into Hausa, particularly in domains such as religion, governance, and commerce. Similarly, Nigerian Pidgin emerged during the Trans-Atlantic trade period (15th–19th centuries), when European traders interacted with coastal African communities, resulting in a simplified contact language that later expanded under colonial administration.

Case studies demonstrate the historical evolution of these languages. For example, Hausa became a major medium of Islamic scholarship following the spread of Islam in Northern Nigeria between the 14th and 19th centuries, with cities such as Kano and Katsina serving as trade and intellectual hubs. Nigerian Pidgin, on the other hand, gained prominence in the 20th and 21st centuries, particularly in urban and oil-producing regions such as the Niger Delta, where multilingual interactions necessitated a common communicative medium. According to Eberhard et al. (2023), Nigerian Pidgin is spoken by millions of Nigerians as a second or contact language, reflecting its historical trajectory and contemporary relevance.

The strengths of historical linguistics lie in its ability to trace the origins and developmental pathways of languages, providing empirical evidence of how Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin emerged through sustained contact. However, its limitations include a reliance on reconstructed data, which may not always capture the full complexity of oral traditions and undocumented linguistic interactions. It may also underplay the role of contemporary socio-political dynamics in shaping language use. Notwithstanding these limitations, historical linguistics is highly applicable to this paper as it situates Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin within broader historical processes of trade, migration, and cultural exchange, thereby explaining their evolution as contact languages that bridge diverse linguistic communities in Nigeria.

3.3 Language Ecology Theory

Language ecology theory conceptualises languages as elements within a broader ecological system influenced by social, political, economic, and environmental factors. This perspective is closely associated with Haugen (1972), who introduced the metaphor of ecology in linguistics, as well as Mufwene (2001), Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001), and Hornberger (2002). Haugen (1972) defines language ecology as the study of the interactions between a language and its environment, while Mufwene (2001) emphasises the evolutionary nature of languages within specific socio-economic contexts. Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001) expand the concept by examining how languages compete, adapt, and survive within multilingual ecosystems. Hornberger (2002) further develops the framework through her work on language policy and planning in multilingual settings.

The central assumption of language ecology theory is that languages exist in dynamic relationships with one another, competing for survival and adapting to changing environments. Factors such as urbanisation, globalisation, migration, education policy, and media influence determine the vitality and spread of languages. In Nigeria, Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin have thrived due to their adaptability and widespread use in commerce, media, and informal communication. For instance, Hausa is one of the most widely spoken languages in West Africa, with tens of millions of speakers across Nigeria, Niger, Ghana, and Cameroon, while Nigerian Pidgin functions as a cross-ethnic medium in urban centres and informal sectors. A contemporary case study is the use of Nigerian Pidgin in broadcast media and digital communication. Radio stations such as Wazobia FM and television programmes increasingly utilise Pidgin to reach broader audiences, reflecting its ecological adaptability in modern communication environments. Similarly, Hausa is extensively used in Northern Nigeria's media landscape, including radio, television, and literature, reinforcing its ecological dominance in that region.

The strengths of language ecology theory lie in its holistic approach, which integrates linguistic, social, and environmental factors to explain language survival and change. It is particularly useful in multilingual societies where languages interact within complex socio-political systems. However, critics argue that the ecological metaphor may be overly deterministic or metaphorical, lacking precise analytical tools for measuring language interaction (Mufwene, 2001). Additionally, it may not fully account for individual agency in language choice. Despite these limitations,

language ecology theory is highly relevant to this paper as it explains how Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin have adapted and persisted within Nigeria's multilingual environment. Their resilience can be attributed to their ecological niches as trade languages, media languages, and everyday communication tools, demonstrating their importance in fostering communication, integration, and national cohesion.

4. Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative research design based on secondary sources, which is appropriate for examining the historical and socio-linguistic development of Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin within broader processes such as Trans-Saharan and Trans-Atlantic trade and nation-building in Nigeria. Qualitative research enables an interpretive understanding of social phenomena through the analysis of texts, historical accounts, and policy documents rather than numerical data (Creswell, 2014). Data were collected from academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, historical records, language surveys, and relevant policy documents. These sources were selected for their relevance to linguistic evolution, trade interactions, and the socio-political role of language. For instance, ethnolinguistic data and historical accounts of trade routes provide contextual evidence for how Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin developed as lingua francas in different historical periods. Content analysis was employed to identify and interpret recurring themes such as language contact, linguistic diffusion, and the role of language in social integration. This method allows for systematic coding and categorisation of textual data to draw meaningful insights (Krippendorff, 2018). The combination of historical evidence and thematic analysis ensures a coherent and contextually grounded interpretation of the subject matter.

5. Historical and Linguistic Context

5.1 Hausa and Trans-Saharan Trade

The historical development of Hausa is closely tied to the Trans-Saharan trade networks that connected West Africa with North Africa and the broader Middle East from as early as the 8th century, reaching their peak between the 13th and 19th centuries. These trade routes facilitated the movement of goods such as gold, salt, leather, and textiles, as well as the exchange of ideas, religion (particularly Islam), and language. Hausa emerged as a major commercial lingua franca within this system, enabling communication among traders, scholars, and travellers across vast geographical and linguistic divides. Its widespread adoption was not merely a product of ethnic identity but of economic necessity and social interaction, which encouraged linguistic convergence across diverse groups (Newman, 2000; Blench, 2014).

Historically, the Hausa identity itself was more fluid than commonly represented in contemporary discourse. Pre-colonial political organisation in Hausaland was decentralised, comprising city-states such as Kano, Katsina, Zaria (Zazzau), Sokoto, and Gobir, each with its own political structures and cultural practices. Individuals were often identified by their place of origin rather than a unified ethnic label. For example, people from Kano were referred to as *Kanawa* (or *Ba Kanawa* in plural form), those from Katsina as *Katsinawa*, from Sokoto as *Sakkwatawa*, and from Zaria as *Zazzagawa*. These identifiers reflected geographical and political affiliations rather than a homogenised ethnic consciousness. The consolidation of "Hausa" as a broad ethnic category was significantly influenced by colonial administrative practices in the 19th and early 20th centuries, which grouped diverse but linguistically related populations under simplified classifications for governance purposes (Usman, 1979; Musa, 2023).

The role of Islam significantly reinforced the spread of Hausa as a language of communication, scholarship, and administration. Between the 14th and 19th centuries, the establishment of major Islamic centres such as Kano and Katsina facilitated the development of Hausa as a medium for religious instruction and intellectual exchange. Through sustained interaction with Arabic-speaking scholars from North Africa and the Middle East, numerous Arabic loanwords were incorporated into Hausa, particularly in domains such as religion, governance, and commerce. By the 19th century, Hausa had evolved into one of the most widely spoken languages in West Africa, with a speaker base extending across present-day Nigeria, Niger, Ghana, and parts of Cameroon. Contemporary estimates place the number of Hausa speakers at over 50–80 million globally, underscoring its continued relevance as a regional lingua franca (Eberhard et al., 2023). Historical case studies further illustrate this expansion: Kano emerged as a major commercial hub along Trans-Saharan trade routes, where merchants from diverse linguistic backgrounds relied on Hausa as a common medium of exchange, while Katsina developed as both a centre of Islamic learning and trade, reinforcing the language's role in scholarly and economic networks. These developments demonstrate that Hausa's growth was closely tied to trade, religion, and socio-political organisation, rather than ethnic homogeneity, positioning it as a key instrument of integration across West Africa.

5.2 Nigerian Pidgin and Trans-Atlantic Trade

Nigerian Pidgin emerged during the Trans-Atlantic trade period (approximately the 15th to 19th centuries), when European traders, initially Portuguese, followed by English, Dutch, and others, established coastal trading posts along West Africa. These interactions created the need for a simplified and flexible medium of communication between Europeans and local populations engaged in trade. Over time, a contact language developed, incorporating elements of

English vocabulary with structural influences from indigenous Nigerian languages, resulting in what is now known as Nigerian Pidgin or “Broken English” (Faraclas, 1996; Elugbe & Omamor, 1991).

Unlike fully standardised languages, pidgins typically arise in multilingual environments where speakers do not share a common language. Nigerian Pidgin initially functioned as a trade language along the coastal regions, particularly in areas such as the Niger Delta, where early European contact was most intense. With the expansion of colonial administration in the 19th and early 20th centuries, its usage spread inland, facilitated by urbanisation, labour migration, and administrative communication needs. By the post-independence period, Nigerian Pidgin had evolved beyond a trade jargon into a widely used *lingua franca* across ethnic groups, especially in urban centres such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, Warri, and Benin City.

Contemporary estimates suggest that Nigerian Pidgin is spoken by over 100 million people as a second or contact language, making it one of the most widely used informal communication systems in Nigeria (Eberhard et al., 2023). Its widespread adoption cuts across everyday interaction, entertainment, commerce, and digital communication, reflecting its function as a practical *lingua franca* in a highly multilingual society. In urban settings such as Lagos, Nigerian Pidgin operates as a neutral bridge among speakers of Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and other indigenous languages, particularly in markets, transport systems, and informal business environments where interethnic communication is routine. Its relative simplicity and flexibility make it accessible to individuals with varying levels of formal education, thereby enhancing its effectiveness as a tool for mass communication and social interaction.

6. Language and Nation-Building: *Crossroads and Connections*

Language constitutes a fundamental pillar in the process of nation-building, particularly within multilingual societies such as Nigeria, where over 500 indigenous languages coexist alongside English as the official language (Eberhard et al., 2023). In such a complex linguistic environment, effective communication across ethnic, regional, and cultural boundaries is indispensable for fostering political participation, social cohesion, and economic development. Within this context, Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin have historically emerged as practical *lingua francas* that facilitate interaction among Nigeria’s diverse populations. Their widespread adoption reflects not only communicative necessity but also long-standing socio-historical dynamics shaped by trade, migration, urbanisation, religious exchange, and colonial administrative structures.

Hausa functions as a dominant regional *lingua franca* in Northern Nigeria and extends its influence beyond national borders into neighbouring West African countries such as Niger, Ghana, and Cameroon. With tens of millions of speakers, Hausa has maintained its relevance over centuries through its association with Trans-Saharan trade networks, Islamic scholarship, and evolving political institutions (Newman, 2000). In contemporary Nigeria, Hausa serves as a primary medium of communication in numerous northern states, including Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, Bauchi, Adamawa, Taraba, Gombe, Jigawa, Zamfara, Nasarawa, most parts of Plateau and some parts of Benue and Kogi States, and Abuja, Federal Capital. In these regions, it operates as a shared linguistic bridge among ethnically diverse communities, enabling everyday interactions in markets, transportation systems, workplaces, and public institutions. A practical illustration of this role can be seen in commercial hubs such as Sabon Gari in Kano, where traders from different linguistic backgrounds rely on Hausa to negotiate transactions and sustain economic exchange, thereby promoting both commerce and social integration (Muhammad & Muhammad, 2024).

Beyond its role in commerce, Hausa plays a significant institutional function in media and public communication. It is extensively used in radio and television broadcasting to disseminate news, educational content, religious programming, and public service announcements to broad audiences. International broadcasters such as BBC Hausa, Voice of America Hausa, Radio France Internationale Hausa, and Deutsche Welle Hausa, alongside local stations like Freedom Radio Kano and Arewa Radio Kano, leverage the language to reach millions of listeners across Nigeria and the diaspora. Television platforms such as the NTA Hausa Service further enhance accessibility to information, particularly for populations with limited proficiency in English (Abdulummin, 2022). Through these media channels, Hausa contributes to civic awareness, political engagement, and inclusive governance by ensuring that vital information is communicated in a language widely understood by the populace.

In addition to its communicative and institutional functions, Hausa has developed a robust cultural presence within Nigeria’s creative industries, particularly in film, music, and comedy. A central component of this cultural expansion is the Hausa-language film industry, commonly known as Kannywood, which emerged in the 1990s and has since become a major cultural and economic force in Northern Nigeria. Its early development is often associated with the commercial success of films such as *Turmin Danya* (“The Draw”), which helped establish a distinct cinematic tradition blending indigenous Hausa cultural values with stylistic influences from Bollywood, especially in narrative structure, musical integration, and moral storytelling (McCain, 2017). Kannywood productions frequently explore themes such as religion, morality, family dynamics, and contemporary social issues, thereby functioning not only as entertainment but also as a medium for cultural preservation and social education. Prominent figures such as Rabilu Musa Ibro, Ali Nuhu, and Adam A. Zango have played significant roles in popularising Hausa-language cinema, enhancing its visibility both domestically

and among diaspora audiences. The industry has also contributed to job creation and the reinforcement of regional identity.

Hausa's adaptability extends further into music and comedy, where it serves as a powerful medium for cultural expression and audience engagement. Musicians such as Aminu Ala, Fati Niger, Naziru M. Ahmad, and Ali Jita employ Hausa to convey cultural values, everyday experiences, and social commentary. In the realm of political music, artists such as Dauda Kahutu Rarara use Hausa songs as vehicles for political mobilisation, campaign messaging, and public awareness, demonstrating the language's relevance in political discourse (Yusuf, Abubakar, and Abubakar, 2026). Similarly, comedians including Musah Daria, Dan Hausa, Ayuba Dutse, Dan Michika, Man Marghi, and Sarkin Dariya integrate Hausa into multilingual comedic performances that appeal to diverse audiences, often blending humour with subtle critiques of societal norms.

In the digital age, Hausa has further expanded its reach through social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok, where content creators produce a wide range of materials including news analysis, educational videos, religious teachings, and entertainment content. This digital proliferation reflects the growing relevance of Hausa in global communication networks. For instance, the Hausa service of Radio France Internationale recorded substantial growth across multiple digital platforms in June 2025, accounting for 13% of the broadcaster's total monthly audio and video views. On TikTok, it achieved approximately 12.2 million views with over 800,000 followers and nearly 5 million likes. On Facebook, it recorded 8.2 million views and a following of about 1.6 million users, while YouTube engagement included 415,000 views and over 60,000 subscribers, representing a 45% increase from the previous month. The service's website also recorded 313,000 visits, marking a 25% monthly increase, culminating in approximately 20.7 million total video views across platforms (Radio France Internationale, 2025). These figures underscore Hausa's growing significance as a transnational medium of communication, further reinforced by an estimated 7.5 million weekly listeners and broadcasts distributed via FM, shortwave, and partner stations across multiple African countries. The expansion of Hausa-language media, alongside interactive initiatives such as audience engagement programmes, highlights its role in facilitating real-time communication, cultural exchange, and access to information beyond national borders.

Parallel to Hausa, Nigerian Pidgin operates as a nationwide lingua franca, particularly in urban centres characterised by ethnic diversity and high rates of internal migration. In cities such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, Benin City, Kaduna, Jos, Makurdi, Lafia, and Warri, Nigerian Pidgin serves as a practical medium of communication among speakers of Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and numerous other languages. Its widespread acceptance is largely due to its perceived neutrality, as it is not associated with any single ethnic group, making it an inclusive and accessible means of interaction in both informal and semi-formal contexts. Nigerian Pidgin is extensively used in markets, transportation systems, workplaces, religious settings, and increasingly in digital communication and popular culture. With over 100 million second-language speakers (Eberhard et al., 2023), Nigerian Pidgin has become a crucial communicative bridge in Nigeria's multilingual society. Its historical development is closely linked to colonial trade, labour organisation, and urbanisation, particularly in sectors such as shipping, oil production, and port activities in the Niger Delta, where individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds required a common language for coordination. The structural composition of Nigerian Pidgin, which combines English-derived vocabulary with grammatical influences from indigenous languages, has contributed to its flexibility and continued evolution over time.

The cultural significance of Nigerian Pidgin is particularly evident in the music industry. Pioneering musicians such as Fela Kuti utilised Pidgin extensively in Afrobeat during the 1970s and 1980s to articulate political dissent, critique military rule, and address corruption and social inequality. His use of Pidgin ensured that his messages were accessible to ordinary citizens, thereby transforming music into a tool for mass political consciousness and resistance. In a similar vein, Baba Fryo used Pidgin in the 1990s to depict the realities of urban working-class life, particularly in Lagos, reinforcing its role as an authentic voice of the grassroots population. In contemporary contexts, Nigerian Pidgin continues to gain both national and international prominence. Artists such as Ida Banton have projected Pidgin onto global platforms, with songs like *No Wahala* achieving widespread streaming success. Similarly, Olamide frequently blends Yoruba, English, and Pidgin in his lyrics, while Tiwa Savage and Yemi Alade incorporate Pidgin expressions to enhance relatability among Nigeria's linguistically diverse audience. In addition, Eedris Abdulkareem employs Nigerian Pidgin English as a vehicle for socio-political critique, particularly in songs such as *Nigeria Jaga Jaga*, where he confronts corruption, inequality, and systemic failures. His use of expressive Pidgin lyrics situates music as a medium for public discourse, political awareness, and social commentary, reinforcing his reputation as a fearless commentator on national issues (Desen, 2010).

Beyond music, Nigerian Pidgin plays a prominent role in comedy and broadcasting. Comedians such as Bovi Ugboma, Basketmouth, and AY Makun frequently incorporate Pidgin into their performances, using code-switching to enhance humour and ensure accessibility across different social groups. In the media landscape, radio stations such as Wazobia FM Lagos, Wazobia FM Abuja, and Wazobia FM Port Harcourt broadcast entirely in Nigerian Pidgin, thereby

institutionalising its use in formal communication contexts. These developments demonstrate how Pidgin has transitioned from an informal contact language into a recognised medium for mass communication, education, and entertainment.

Despite these strengths, the potential of Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin in nation-building remains underutilised within Nigeria's formal institutional framework. The continued dominance of English as the official language of governance, education, and legal proceedings reflects colonial legacies that prioritise a foreign language over indigenous alternatives. This linguistic hierarchy has contributed to exclusion, particularly among citizens with limited proficiency in English, thereby constraining access to public services and meaningful political participation. Key democratic processes, including elections, legislative debates, and judicial proceedings, are predominantly conducted in English, which can limit engagement among populations more fluent in Hausa, Nigerian Pidgin, or other indigenous languages. As Bangbose (2011) observes, the marginalisation of African languages in formal domains risks undermining cultural heritage while restricting equitable access to education and civic life.

Policy implementation challenges continue to impede the institutional recognition of Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin. Although Nigeria's National Policy on Education affirms the importance of mother tongue instruction at the early stages of learning, recent developments indicate a policy shift in which the Federal Government has officially discontinued the National Language Policy that previously mandated the use of indigenous languages as the medium of instruction from early childhood through primary education (Nairametrics, 2025, November 12). Consequently, English remains the dominant language of instruction beyond the foundational levels. This ongoing reliance on English limits the effective integration of indigenous lingua francas into formal education and governance systems, thereby constraining their potential role in national development and inclusive communication.

Comparative experiences from countries such as Tanzania, where Kiswahili has been successfully institutionalised as a national language, demonstrate that adopting an indigenous lingua franca can strengthen national integration and enhance civic participation (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1998). Nigeria's hesitation to fully institutionalise Hausa or Nigerian Pidgin reflects broader political, ideological and identity-related considerations surrounding language policy. Nevertheless, both languages possess significant potential as instruments of nation-building if supported by inclusive and well-implemented linguistic policies. In summary, Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin function as vital communicative bridges within Nigeria's multilingual landscape, with profound implications for nation-building. While Hausa maintains strong regional dominance in the northern part of the country and Nigerian Pidgin serves as a widespread national lingua franca, both remain underutilised in formal institutional settings. Addressing this gap through comprehensive language planning and policy reform could enhance national integration, improve citizen access to governance, and promote a more inclusive national identity rooted in linguistic diversity rather than exclusion.

7. Findings

The findings of this paper indicate that both Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin are historically rooted in major intercontinental trade systems that significantly shaped West Africa's linguistic landscape. Hausa, for instance, developed through centuries of Trans-Saharan trade linking West Africa with North Africa and the Middle East between approximately the 8th and 19th centuries. These extensive trade networks facilitated continuous interaction among merchants, scholars, and travellers, enabling Hausa to emerge as a widely used medium of communication across diverse communities. Its incorporation of Arabic loanwords and its adoption as a language of Islamic scholarship further strengthened its trans-regional relevance (Newman, 2000; Blench, 2014). In contrast, Nigerian Pidgin originated during the Trans-Atlantic trade era (15th–19th centuries), when European traders required a simplified communicative system to interact with coastal African populations. Over time, this contact language evolved through colonial expansion, labour migration, and urbanisation into a widely spoken lingua franca, now used by over 100 million people as a second or contact language across Nigeria (Eberhard et al., 2023). These historical developments demonstrate that both Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin are products of sustained intercultural contact rather than isolated linguistic evolution.

A second key finding is that Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin function effectively as lingua francas across ethnic and regional boundaries, thereby facilitating communication in Nigeria's highly multilingual society. Hausa is dominant in Northern Nigeria and serves as a unifying medium among diverse ethnic groups in states such as Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, Jigawa, Kebbi, Niger, Bauchi, Gombe, Adamawa, Yobe, Borno, Taraba, Nasarawa, Taraba, Plateau, Benue, and Zamfara. It is widely utilised in commerce, education, religion, and media, with radio and television broadcasts reaching millions of speakers daily. For example, Kano, one of Nigeria's largest commercial hubs with a population exceeding 4 million, relies heavily on Hausa as the primary language of market interaction, enabling traders from different linguistic backgrounds to communicate efficiently. Similarly, Nigerian Pidgin operates as a neutral and accessible medium of communication in urban centres such as Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Warri, where internal migration has produced linguistically heterogeneous populations. Its widespread use in informal sectors, including markets, transportation, small-scale enterprises, as well as in music, broadcasting, and social media, highlights its role as a practical tool for inter-ethnic communication. Collectively, these examples demonstrate how both languages help reduce communication barriers and promote everyday social interaction.

The findings further reveal that language use in Nigeria is closely intertwined with identity, access, and social inclusion. Language functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a marker of social belonging and participation in political and administrative processes. Proficiency in English, the official language inherited from colonial rule, is often associated with formal education, socio-economic mobility, and access to political power. This has contributed to a linguistic hierarchy in which individuals with limited English proficiency may encounter obstacles in accessing government services, legal institutions, and formal education systems. For instance, electoral materials, legislative proceedings, and judicial processes are predominantly conducted in English, which can limit meaningful participation among citizens who are more fluent in Hausa, Nigerian Pidgin, or other indigenous languages. In contrast, the use of Hausa in Northern Nigeria and Nigerian Pidgin in urban centres has enhanced inclusivity by enabling broader engagement in informal governance, community dialogue, and public discourse. A notable example is their use during public health campaigns in the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), where both languages were employed to communicate critical information on prevention measures, vaccination, and public safety, thereby reaching wider and more diverse audiences.

Finally, the paper finds that existing language policies in Nigeria do not fully harness the potential of indigenous and contact languages for nation-building. Although the National Policy on Education acknowledges the importance of mother tongue instruction at the early stages of schooling, implementation remains inconsistent, with English continuing to dominate as the primary medium of instruction beyond the foundational levels. Recent policy shifts, including the discontinuation of the National Language Policy that previously mandated the use of indigenous languages in early education, further reinforce the centrality of English in formal settings (Nairametrics, 2025, November 12). This policy orientation limits the institutional integration of widely spoken languages such as Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin into governance, education, and administrative frameworks. Comparative experiences from countries like Tanzania, where Kiswahili has been successfully institutionalised as both a national language and a medium of instruction, demonstrate that adopting an indigenous lingua franca can significantly enhance national cohesion and civic participation (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1998). In Nigeria's context, the continued reliance on English reflects enduring colonial legacies and elite preferences rather than the communicative realities of the broader population. Consequently, the potential of Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin to serve as instruments of inclusive governance, national integration, and mass communication remains largely underutilised.

In summary, the findings highlight that Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin are historically grounded, socially functional, and widely accessible languages with substantial capacity to strengthen communication and cohesion in Nigeria. However, their limited integration into formal policy and institutional frameworks constrains their full contribution to nation-building, despite their demonstrated effectiveness in bridging linguistic and ethnic divides across the country.

8. Conclusion

Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin are not merely informal or regionally confined modes of communication but are historically grounded linguistic outcomes of extensive trade networks that have shaped West Africa over several centuries. Hausa developed through sustained Trans-Saharan interactions between approximately the 8th and 19th centuries, facilitating commerce, religious exchange, and cultural diffusion across vast geographical spaces. Similarly, Nigerian Pidgin emerged from Trans-Atlantic trade contacts beginning in the 15th century and was later reinforced through colonial administration, urbanisation, and labour mobility. Their continued evolution into widely used lingua francas demonstrates their resilience and adaptability within Nigeria's multilingual environment. Today, Hausa functions as a dominant regional language in Northern Nigeria, while Nigerian Pidgin serves as a cross-ethnic medium in urban centres nationwide, collectively enabling communication among millions of speakers across diverse linguistic backgrounds (Eberhard et al., 2023). Recognising and integrating these languages into national discourse, particularly in governance, education, and public communication, has the potential to strengthen mutual understanding, reduce linguistic barriers, and promote social cohesion in Nigeria's pluralistic society.

9. Recommendations

In light of the findings, it is recommended that Nigeria adopts a more inclusive and pragmatic multilingual language policy that formally recognises the roles of Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin alongside English and other indigenous languages. Such a policy should move beyond symbolic acknowledgment to practical implementation in key sectors of national life.

Firstly, integrating Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin into the education system, particularly at the foundational and adult literacy levels, would enhance comprehension and learning outcomes, especially among learners with limited proficiency in English. Evidence from other African contexts, such as the institutionalisation of Kiswahili in Tanzania, demonstrates that the use of an indigenous lingua franca in education can significantly improve accessibility and national integration (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1998).

Secondly, these languages should be incorporated into civic communication and public service delivery, including electoral processes, public health campaigns, and legal awareness programmes, to ensure broader citizen participation and inclusivity. The successful use of Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin during public health campaigns, such as those related to COVID-19 (2020–2022), illustrates their effectiveness in disseminating critical information to diverse populations. Furthermore, there is a need to promote systematic research, documentation, and standardisation of indigenous and contact languages to preserve linguistic heritage and support policy development. Academic institutions, linguistic bodies, and government agencies should collaborate to expand corpora, develop orthographies where necessary, and support language planning initiatives.

Finally, media organisations and public institutions should be encouraged to utilise accessible lingua francas such as Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin in broadcasting and public engagement. The growing presence of Pidgin in radio, television, music, and digital platforms, alongside the extensive use of Hausa in Northern media, demonstrates the capacity of these languages to reach wide audiences effectively. Strengthening their institutional presence will contribute to greater inclusion and national unity.

11. Contribution to Knowledge

This paper contributes to existing scholarship by establishing a clear link between linguistic development and historical trade systems, particularly the Trans-Saharan and Trans-Atlantic exchanges that shaped West Africa's sociolinguistic landscape. It advances the argument that Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin are not peripheral or marginal languages but central instruments in processes of communication, identity formation, and social integration. By repositioning these contact languages within the broader framework of nation-building, the paper challenges dominant language hierarchies that privilege colonial languages such as English, and instead highlights the practical and symbolic value of indigenous and contact languages in multilingual societies. Additionally, the paper enriches theoretical and empirical discourse by demonstrating how contact languages emerge, evolve, and sustain themselves through social interaction, economic necessity, and cultural exchange. In the Nigerian context, Hausa and Nigerian Pidgin exemplify how linguistic diversity can be harnessed as a resource rather than a constraint, offering insights into how inclusive language planning can enhance governance, participation, and cohesion in deeply pluralistic societies.

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