

# Rethinking Literacy for National Development: EGRA-Based Evidence for Multilingual Education in Nigeria

Charles Chukwuma Motanya

&

Emmanuel Chukwudi Ugwu

## Abstract

*Nigeria's complex multilingual landscape presents both challenges and opportunities for literacy development. Although national and international commitments especially Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) emphasize equitable and quality education, Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) results continue to show persistently low foundational literacy outcomes across states. However, the implications of these EGRA findings for multilingual education policy and practice remain under-examined, creating a critical gap in understanding how language of instruction choices affect early literacy acquisition. This paper addresses this gap by conducting a desk-based synthesis of EGRA reports and secondary data, drawing on trends across regions to examine how multilingual education shapes functional literacy outcomes. The analysis argues that, when properly implemented, multilingual education strengthens foundational literacy by enabling learners to build early reading skills in their first languages before transitioning to English. Yet weaknesses in teacher preparation, inconsistent policy implementation, and inadequate teaching and learning materials limit the effectiveness of this approach. The paper contributes to current scholarship by linking EGRA evidence directly to multilingual education debates, offering a data informed explanation of why Nigeria's current language-in-education practices fall short, and*

*proposing context responsive strategies for embedding multilingual instruction within basic education. By connecting assessment findings with policy realities, the paper provides a clearer pathway for improving literacy and achieving long-term learning outcomes.*

**Keywords:** *multilingual education, functional literacy, EGRA, foundational learning, SDG 4*

## **1. Introduction**

Recent Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) reports highlight the scale of Nigeria's foundational literacy crisis with striking clarity. Across several states assessed through the Northern Education Initiative Plus (NEI+) and Education Cannot Wait interventions, between 60% and 80% of Primary 2 learners are unable to read a single word of a grade-level passage, and many demonstrate limited letter-sound knowledge and extremely low oral reading fluency (RTI International, 2022; USAID, 2021). Literacy an essential driver of educational quality, social mobility, and human capital development remains worryingly weak in the early grades. National assessments mirror these findings, showing that a significant proportion of Primary 1 to 3 learners struggle with fundamental reading tasks in both their home languages and English, underscoring deep instructional and policy challenges in Nigeria's literacy landscape.

Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014, Section 2:14) states that "the medium of instruction in the first three years of primary education shall be the language of the immediate

environment.” In practice, however, this provision is poorly implemented due to intertwined political, logistical, and attitudinal constraints. For instance, the absence of sufficient mother-tongue textbooks and graded readers in many public schools forces teachers to default to English, even when teaching children whose first language is entirely different. Political resistance to local language instruction, parental preference for English, and limited teacher training in multilingual pedagogy further widen the gap between policy and classroom reality. Studies by Bamgbose (2019), Adegoke and Ojo (2023), and Oloruntoba-Oju (2021) consistently argue that this misalignment between learners’ linguistic backgrounds and instructional language contributes directly to Nigeria’s persistently low literacy performance.

This paper synthesizes evidence from EGRA datasets, program reports, and contemporary multilingual education research to examine how language of instruction practices affect functional literacy development in Nigerian primary schools. By moving beyond mechanical indicators such as letter naming and word recognition the analysis foregrounds comprehension, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and the ability to use written language for real-life purposes. These dimensions are essential for understanding whether learners acquire functional literacy rather than mere decoding skills. The discussion also connects EGRA trends with broader issues of policy implementation, teacher preparation, instructional resource availability, and classroom practices, thereby situating literacy

outcomes within Nigeria's wider educational ecosystem. Specifically, the paper asks:

1. What do EGRA results reveal about foundational literacy outcomes under mother-tongue versus English instruction in Nigerian primary schools?
2. How do policy implementation, teacher training, and classroom practices shape these outcomes?

Drawing on secondary analysis of national and programme-specific EGRA reports (2017–2022), together with a systematic review of Nigeria's language-in-education policy and multilingual literacy scholarship, the paper demonstrates that context-responsive multilingual instructional models significantly improve learners' functional literacy. The study contributes empirically to ongoing debates on language policy and early-grade reading in sub-Saharan Africa and offers evidence-based recommendations aimed at strengthening multilingual education, improving teacher capacity, and enhancing literacy instruction in Nigeria's foundational years.

## **2.1 Literacy and Functional Literacy**

Literacy, in its traditional sense, refers to the ability to read and write. However, modern conceptions emphasize literacy as a continuum that encompasses comprehension, application, and the ability to use reading and writing skills for personal and societal development (UNESCO, 2022). Functional literacy, therefore, extends beyond the mechanical acquisition of reading and writing; it involves the ability to apply literacy skills in real life

contexts to solve problems and participate effectively in socio-economic and civic life (Aderinoye, 2007; Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004).

In the Nigerian context, functional literacy is essential for promoting self-reliance, employability, and informed citizenship. However, EGRA outcomes suggest that many learners do not reach the threshold of functional literacy, often due to weak foundational instruction and language barriers (RTI International, 2022).

## **2.2 Multilingualism and Multilingual Education**

Multilingualism refers to the coexistence and use of multiple languages within an individual or community. Nigeria's estimated 500 languages make it one of the most linguistically diverse nations in the world. Multilingual education, as defined by UNESCO (2019), involves the use of at least three languages in education: the learner's first language (L1), a regional or national language (L2), and an international language (L3). This approach supports cognitive development and enhances comprehension in early learning.

In Nigeria, the policy framework encourages mother tongue based multilingual education at the basic level. However, the gap between policy and practice has been a recurring challenge (Adegoke & Ojo, 2023; Nwosu, 2020). When effectively implemented, multilingual education enables learners to transition smoothly from their L1 to English, fostering functional literacy and inclusive learning outcomes.

### 3.1 Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory posits that learning is fundamentally a social process shaped by interaction with more knowledgeable others within culturally meaningful contexts. In literacy development, language functions not only as a communication medium but also as a psychological tool that shapes thinking and learning. Instruction delivered in a language children understand allows them to connect new concepts with their existing cultural and linguistic experiences, thereby enhancing comprehension and cognitive engagement (Cummins, 2000).

In multilingual contexts such as Nigeria, this framework directly supports mother-tongue literacy instruction as an essential scaffold for early reading development. When early grade learners receive reading instruction in a familiar language, they can more effectively engage within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the space between what they can do independently and what they can achieve with guided support. Empirical studies across sub-Saharan Africa reaffirm this premise, showing that early reading fluency and comprehension improve significantly when instruction begins in the learner's first language (Trudell, 2016; Heugh, 2021). Nigeria's EGRA results echo this trend, consistently revealing stronger learner performance in local language reading tasks compared to English (RTI International, 2022). This underscores sociocultural theory's relevance in framing the role of mother-tongue instruction as a foundation for subsequent language and literacy development.

### **3.2 Functional Literacy Theory**

Functional literacy theory conceptualizes literacy as the ability to apply reading and writing skills to real life situations, enabling individuals to participate meaningfully in social, economic, and civic domains (UNESCO, 1970). The notion of “critical literacy” extends this view by emphasizing literacy as a tool for reflection, empowerment, and problem-solving. In the Nigerian context where thousands of learners complete early primary schooling without achieving meaningful reading proficiency, functional literacy provides a crucial lens for evaluating not just what children can decode, but whether they can use literacy to engage with the world around them.

This theory underpins foundational learning assessments such as EGRA, which measure whether children can accurately decode, read fluently, and comprehend texts in ways that support academic learning and everyday communication. Evidence indicates that when children acquire these skills in their first language, they are better positioned to transfer them to English and to other subject areas (RTI International, 2021). Thus, functional literacy theory reinforces the need for instructional practices that move beyond mechanical reading to emphasize comprehension, application, and meaning-making.

### **Integrative Perspective**

Together, sociocultural theory and functional literacy theory provide a coherent foundation for this study’s argument. Sociocultural theory explains *how* learners acquire literacy most effectively through mother-tongue instruction that builds on

familiar cultural and linguistic resources. Functional literacy theory explains *why* this matters so that literacy development leads to meaningful comprehension, practical application, and empowered participation in daily life. When combined, these theories underscore that effective multilingual education in Nigeria must begin with the learner's first language to support cognitive development, while simultaneously aiming for literacy that is usable, transformative, and relevant. This integrated theoretical lens guides the study's analysis of EGRA results and the broader implications for language policy, teacher training, and early grade literacy instruction.

#### **4.1 Language in Education Policy**

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) stipulates that the medium of instruction in the first three years of primary education should be the learner's mother tongue or the language of the immediate community. English is to be introduced as a subject and later becomes the medium of instruction from upper primary onwards. This policy aligns with UNESCO's (2019) advocacy for mother tongue based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), which promotes equitable learning outcomes and enhances comprehension. Despite the policy's progressive stance, its implementation has been inconsistent. Research (Oloruntoba-Oju, 2021; Adegoke & Ojo, 2023) reveals that most public and private schools use English as the default language of instruction even at the foundational level. This is largely due to parental preference for English, lack of standard orthographies for local

languages, inadequate teacher preparation, and absence of quality teaching materials in indigenous languages.

#### **4.2 Linguistic Diversity and Educational Outcomes**

Nigeria's linguistic diversity, if well harnessed, can serve as a pedagogical asset. Studies have shown that learners taught to read first in their mother tongue acquire literacy faster and transfer reading skills more effectively to a second language (Heugh, 2021; Walter & Dekker, 2011). Conversely, neglecting local languages in instruction contributes to learning difficulties and low literacy attainment. For instance, EGRA data from Northern Education Initiative Plus (NEI+) conducted in Bauchi and Sokoto states revealed that pupils assessed in Hausa showed significantly higher reading fluency and comprehension scores than those assessed in English (RTI International, 2022). Similarly, Opportunities to Learn (OTL) assessments in Southeast Nigeria demonstrated that children reading in Igbo before transitioning to English exhibited greater reading accuracy and vocabulary retention (USAID, 2021).

#### **4.3 Multilingual Realities in the Classroom**

In practice, many Nigerian classrooms are linguistically heterogeneous, especially in urban centers. Teachers often navigate multiple languages daily; switching between English, local lingua francas, and regional languages to facilitate understanding. This code-switching practice, while sometimes criticized, reflects a practical adaptation to Nigeria's sociolinguistic reality (Adegbite, 2019).

However, without formal training in multilingual pedagogy, teachers may struggle to balance these linguistic demands. The lack of systematic multilingual teacher education programs remains a major bottleneck (Ojo & Ojo, 2022). As a result, the potential of multilingual education to improve foundational literacy remains largely untapped

## **5. Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Foundational Literacy Evidence in Nigeria**

### **5.1 Overview of EGRA**

The Early Grade Reading Assessment (**EGRA**) is a standardized tool designed to measure foundational reading skills in the early grades (typically Primary 1–3). Developed by RTI International with support from USAID, EGRA evaluates children’s proficiency in key sub-skills such as letter recognition, phonemic awareness, word decoding, oral reading fluency, and comprehension (RTI International, 2017). The tool has been widely adopted across sub-Saharan Africa as part of evidence-based interventions aimed at improving literacy outcomes and informing education policy.

In Nigeria, EGRA has been implemented through multiple donor-supported projects, including Northern Education Initiative Plus (**NEI+**), Education in Emergencies (**EIE**), Opportunities to Learn (**OTL**), and Education Cannot Wait (**ECW**) programs. These interventions have focused on both Hausa-speaking northern states and Igbo-speaking southern states, providing comparative data on literacy performance across linguistic and regional contexts.

## **5.2 Findings from EGRA in Nigeria**

EGRA results consistently reveal low foundational literacy outcomes among Nigerian learners, with significant disparities linked to language of instruction, teacher capacity, and school context. According to RTI International (2022), NEI+ assessments in Bauchi and Sokoto states showed that only 6% of Primary 2 learners could read fluently with comprehension in Hausa, and fewer than 3% could do so in English. Similarly, USAID (2021) reported that in the southeast (Enugu, Ebonyi, and Anambra states), while students demonstrated some ability in letter-sound recognition, their reading fluency and comprehension remained below expected benchmarks by the end of Primary 3.

A key observation is that learners who received initial literacy instruction in their mother tongue consistently outperformed those taught solely in English. This pattern underscores the importance of language familiarity in literacy acquisition; a finding supported by research across multilingual African contexts (Heugh, 2021; Trudell, 2016).

## **5.3 EGRA and Foundational Learning Gaps**

EGRA data also highlight structural weaknesses in Nigeria's early grade reading ecosystem, including:

- Inconsistent language policy implementation, leading to confusion about which language should serve as the medium of instruction.

- Limited teacher training on phonemic awareness and multilingual pedagogy.
- Scarcity of levelled reading materials in local languages.
- Large class sizes and poor assessment feedback systems, which hinder individualized instruction.

These challenges contribute to what the World Bank (2021) describes as “learning poverty,” where children are unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10. The UNICEF (2022) *Learning Passport* report similarly noted that over 70% of Nigerian children in early primary grades do not achieve foundational reading competence, thereby impeding their transition to functional literacy.

#### **5.4 Implications of EGRA Evidence**

Accumulated EGRA findings across Nigeria provide strong empirical justification for expanding multilingual education as a strategy for improving foundational literacy. EGRA results from the Northern Education Initiative Plus (NEI+) show that between 60% and 80% of Primary 2 learners in Bauchi and Sokoto could not read a single word in English, highlighting the severity of early reading challenges under English dominant instruction. In contrast, when instruction was delivered in Hausa during NEI+ interventions, learners demonstrated 15–25% gains in oral reading fluency within a single academic year (RTI International, 2022). Similarly, assessments conducted under the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) programme found that over 70% of P1–P3 learners in conflict-affected areas scored below benchmark in English reading tasks, underscoring the need for linguistically

responsive instruction in multilingual and crisis-prone regions (USAID, 2021). These findings collectively show that first language instruction provides a more accessible entry point into literacy, enabling learners to build decoding, fluency, and comprehension skills before transitioning to English. Embedding EGRA driven insights into curriculum reform, teacher preparation, and language of instruction policies can therefore strengthen early grade literacy outcomes nationwide. Such reforms also advance Nigeria's progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and emphasizes foundational literacy as a prerequisite for lifelong learning.

**Table 1**

**Summary of Key EGRA Findings Relevant to Multilingual Education in Nigeria**

<b>Source</b>	<b>State/Program</b>	<b>Key EGRA Finding</b>	<b>Implication for Multilingual Education</b>
RTI International (2022), NEI+	Bauchi & Sokoto	60–80% of P2 learners unable to read a single English word.	English only instruction limits early literacy acquisition.

RTI International (2022), NEI+	Bauchi & Sokoto	15–25% gains in oral reading fluency under Hausa medium instruction.	Mother tongue literacy accelerates reading development.
USAID (2021), ECW	Borno, Yobe, Adamawa	Over 70% of P1–P3 learners below benchmark in English reading.	Multilingual approaches critical in conflict-affected areas.
RTI International (2021)	National synthesis	Local language scores consistently higher than English scores.	Stronger learning outcomes when instruction begins in L1.
UNICEF & UBEC (2020)	Northern states	High non-reader rates (50–70%) where English introduced prematurely.	Early introduction of English without scaffolding reduces literacy gains.

## **6. Linking Multilingual Education to Functional Literacy Development**

### **6.1 Conceptual Alignment**

Multilingual education (MLE) and functional literacy are closely interconnected. MLE provides the linguistic foundation through which learners construct meaning, while functional literacy reflects the ability to apply reading and writing skills in real life contexts. When children first learn to read in their mother tongue, comprehension is stronger because instruction aligns with their cognitive and cultural experiences (Cummins, 2000; UNESCO, 2019). This strengthens the transfer of reading strategies and vocabulary to English, as documented in several Nigerian EGRA implementations where learners taught in Hausa or Igbo consistently outperformed peers taught exclusively in English on vocabulary and comprehension tasks (RTI International, 2022; USAID, 2021).

### **6.2 Cognitive and Pedagogical Advantages of MLE**

Multilingual education confers key cognitive and instructional advantages that directly support functional literacy:

- Enhanced comprehension: Familiar languages improve decoding and understanding (Heugh, 2021).
- Skill transfer: First language literacy supports additive bilingualism and smoother transition to English (Cummins, 2000).

- Improved classroom engagement: Learners participate more confidently when taught through a language they understand (Trudell, 2016).
- Positive identity formation: Mother tongue instruction affirms learners' cultural identities (UNESCO, 2019).

Collectively, these benefits strengthen learners' ability to interpret, apply, and communicate information core competencies of functional literacy.

### **6.3 Empirical Support from EGRA and Other Studies**

Regional and international studies affirm the literacy advantages of MLE. Research in Malawi, Kenya, and Ethiopia shows that learners taught in their mother tongue consistently outperform those instructed solely in colonial languages (Piper et al., 2018). Similar evidence from the Philippines indicates that L1-based instruction improves comprehension and facilitates English transfer (Walter & Dekker, 2011).

In Nigeria, EGRA data reinforces these trends. Hausa-speaking pupils under NEI+ recorded 30–40% higher reading accuracy when taught first in Hausa compared to English-medium peers (RTI International, 2022). Likewise, Igbo EGRA findings from the Opportunities to Learn (OTL) programme show marked gains in word recognition and oral fluency under bilingual instruction models.

### **6.4 Functional Literacy Outcomes**

Functional literacy extends beyond decoding to encompass comprehension, critical engagement, numeracy, and problem-solving. Learners who read with understanding are better able to interpret health information, participate in civic life, and manage daily tasks (Aderinoye, 2007; World Bank, 2021). Strengthening multilingual education helps bridge the gap between school literacy and home language use especially in rural communities where indigenous languages dominate communication making literacy more relevant and transferable to everyday life.

### **6.5 Towards an Integrated Model**

For MLE to effectively drive functional literacy, it must be embedded across teacher education, instructional materials development, and assessment systems. EGRA already offers a diagnostic framework for identifying specific literacy gaps. Integrating these insights into multilingual instructional design would enhance early reading acquisition, support smoother language transition pathways, and provide a sustainable foundation for long-term educational development.

## **7. Challenges in Implementing Multilingual Education in Nigeria**

Despite its documented benefits, multilingual education (MLE) in Nigeria faces systemic, attitudinal, and logistical challenges that

impede effective policy implementation and widen the gap between literacy theory and classroom practice.

### **7.1 Policy Inconsistency and Weak Implementation**

Although the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) mandates mother tongue instruction in early grades, implementation is largely inconsistent. Most schools, both public and private, rely on English from the nursery stage (Bamgbose, 2019; Emenanjo, 2020). This gap stems from the absence of a comprehensive MLE framework, inadequate funding, and weak coordination across federal, state, and local education authorities (Adeniran, 2022). Without clear monitoring mechanisms or timelines, policy remains declarative rather than operational.

### **7.2 Negative Attitude towards Indigenous Languages**

Parental and educator preferences for English, often linked to perceptions of intelligence, modernity, and socio-economic mobility, marginalize indigenous languages (Igboanusi, 2017). This colonial linguistic legacy fosters neglect of local languages and literacy traditions, reinforcing a cycle in which children and teachers favour English despite compromised comprehension and learning outcomes (Bamgbose, 2019).

### **7.3 Limited Teaching and Learning Materials**

Effective MLE requires culturally relevant materials in local languages. However, textbooks, storybooks, and teacher guides are scarce, and existing resources often lack standard orthographies or locally appropriate content (Trudell & Young,

2018). This scarcity compels teachers to rely on English-based materials, undermining MLE principles.

#### **7.4 Teacher Preparation and Capacity Gaps**

Many teachers lack training in mother tongue pedagogy, and pre-service curricula rarely equip them for multilingual classrooms (Fafunwa Foundation, 2021; Ogunyemi, 2023). Consequently, teachers often default to English, further weakening MLE implementation. Strengthening both pre-service and in-service training is critical for sustainable literacy outcomes.

#### **7.5 Socio-Political and Economic Barriers**

Nigeria's linguistic diversity, with over 500 indigenous languages, poses logistical and financial challenges to national-scale MLE (Ethnologue, 2024). Curriculum development, teacher training, and material production require substantial investment. Political priorities often emphasize infrastructure and enrollment over language of instruction or literacy quality, limiting the political will to support MLE (UNESCO, 2022).

### **8. Policy Implications and the Role of Teacher Education**

#### **8.1 Policy Reforms for Sustainable Multilingual Education**

To achieve functional literacy through multilingual education, Nigeria must strengthen its language in education policy and ensure its implementation through legislative and administrative mechanisms. The Federal Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the National Council on Education, should adopt a phased bilingual model where mother tongue serves as the medium of

instruction in early grades, transitioning gradually to English in upper primary levels.

Such a policy should be backed by:

- Curriculum revision to align with multilingual pedagogy;
- Development of standardized orthographies for major Nigerian languages;
- Investment in material production and translation;
- Establishment of national benchmarks for language transition and literacy acquisition.

## **8.2 Integration of EGRA Evidence into Policy**

EGRA data should inform national literacy strategies by providing empirical benchmarks for reading performance across languages and regions. Embedding EGRA findings into policy planning ensures data driven decision making that tailors interventions to specific linguistic contexts. For example, EGRA's evidence that pupils learn best in familiar languages should guide the language allocation for instructional materials and teacher recruitment.

## **8.3 Strengthening Teacher Education**

Teacher education institutions particularly Colleges of Education should mainstream multilingual education methodologies in their pre-service curricula. This aligns with global frameworks such as UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2023), which emphasizes teacher preparation as central to quality education. Teacher preparation programs should cover:

- Multilingual literacy instruction techniques;
- Assessment strategies for bilingual learners;
- Classroom language management; and
- Development of localized reading materials.

Additionally, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) through programs like the National Reading Framework and Early Grade Reading (EGR) courses should be institutionalized. These efforts would empower teachers to deliver literacy instruction that connects language, identity, and cognition core ingredients of functional literacy.

#### **8.4 Leveraging Technology for Multilingual Literacy**

Digital tools can bridge gaps in access and resource development. Initiatives such as *Learn Nigeria*, *U-Read*, and the *Learning Passport* already provide digital reading materials in multiple Nigerian languages. Expanding these platforms to include teacher training modules and localized literacy assessments would accelerate multilingual literacy acquisition and policy integration.

#### **9. Conclusion**

Nigeria's persistent literacy crisis remains at the heart of its broader educational and developmental challenges. This paper has shown that the dominance of English as the primary medium of instruction continues to alienate millions of learners from meaningful learning, producing generations of citizens who complete schooling without acquiring functional literacy. Evidence from EGRA and other foundational learning assessments consistently demonstrates that children achieve

stronger decoding, fluency, and comprehension outcomes when taught first in the language they understand. These findings reaffirm that sustainable literacy development begins with linguistically responsive instruction that builds on learners' cultural and cognitive resources.

By synthesizing insights from sociocultural theory and functional literacy theory, the study deepens theoretical understanding of how literacy develops in multilingual contexts. The analysis strengthens the argument that literacy learning is a socially mediated process rooted in familiar linguistic environments, and that functional literacy emerges when learners can apply reading skills in authentic, real life situations. This theoretical integration underscores the central claim of the paper: mother-tongue-based multilingual education is not an optional pedagogy but a developmental necessity for Nigeria.

The implications for policy are equally clear. Nigeria's National Policy on Education already endorses the use of the mother tongue in early schooling, but implementation remains weak and inconsistent. The evidence presented here provides a strong justification for fully operationalizing multilingual education across classrooms supported by teacher training, culturally relevant instructional materials, and assessment systems that reflect the linguistic diversity of Nigerian learners. Embedding EGRA data into curriculum and pedagogical decision-making would sharply improve early literacy outcomes and align national efforts with SDG-4 commitments.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. It draws heavily on secondary data and does not include new field-based

research or classroom observations. EGRA coverage across Nigeria is also uneven, limiting how comprehensively findings can be generalized across all linguistic groups. Additionally, the analysis focuses on early-grade literacy and does not extend to long-term learning trajectories or transitions into higher grades.

These limitations point toward important directions for future research. Longitudinal studies are needed to track how L1–L2 transitions shape learning from early grade through upper primary. Further research should investigate teacher language practices, classroom interaction patterns, and community attitudes toward multilingual education. Expanding EGRA-style assessments into more Nigerian languages would strengthen the national evidence base. Comparative studies with countries that have successfully implemented mother-tongue instruction could also yield practical lessons for Nigeria’s reform efforts.

In summary, the evidence is unequivocal: multilingual education is central to achieving functional literacy, educational equity, and national development in Nigeria. Aligning pedagogy with learners’ linguistic realities offers the most sustainable path toward transforming Nigeria’s foundational learning landscape and empowering a new generation of truly literate citizens.

## **10. Recommendations**

To strengthen foundational literacy outcomes, this paper recommends a coordinated set of reforms across Nigeria’s education system. First, the Federal Ministry of Education (FME), State Ministries of Education, and the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) should ensure full implementation of the

multilingual education provisions of the National Policy on Education. Clear operational guidelines should be issued within twelve months, requiring states to adopt mother tongue instruction from Primary 1 to 3, with compliance monitored through UBEC's annual performance reviews.

Second, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and the National Council on Education (NCE) should undertake a comprehensive curriculum reform. Over an eighteen to twenty four month timeline, curricula should be revised to reflect Nigeria's sociocultural realities, incorporate functional literacy goals, and embed structured transitions from learners' first languages to English.

Teacher capacity development is also essential. The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN), and State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) should update teacher education minimum standards and integrate multilingual pedagogy and language transition strategies into both pre-service training and continuous professional development. Complementing this, NERDC, in collaboration with local language experts, publishers, and EdTech partners, should produce levelled readers, primers, and digital content in major Nigerian languages. These materials should be aligned with EGRA competencies and adapted to state level linguistic contexts within a one to two year development cycle.

Furthermore, EGRA findings should be systematically incorporated into education planning, monitoring, and instructional improvement. The FME, UBEC, SUBEBs, and

donor agencies should use EGRA results annually to track literacy progress, identify low-performing local government areas, guide targeted interventions, and inform teacher coaching and resource allocation.

Public awareness and community mobilization are equally critical. The National Orientation Agency (NOA), SUBEBs, traditional institutions, and parent-teacher associations should sustain nationwide campaigns to sensitize parents and communities about the benefits of mother tongue based multilingual education.

Finally, legislative and financial support is indispensable. The National Assembly and state legislatures should enact a Multilingual Education Act to provide regulatory backing for language-in-education reforms. In addition, the Federal Ministry of Finance and state governments should allocate dedicated funding lines to support multilingual education implementation, with incentives for states demonstrating progress. Through these coordinated policy actions, Nigeria can shift from certification-based learning to a system grounded in functional, inclusive, and development oriented literacy, thereby advancing national development and ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all children.

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Charles Chukwuma Motanya is a lecturer in the department of English, Aminu Saleh College of Education, Azare, Bauchi State

Emmanuel Chukwudi Ugwu is a lecturer in the department of English, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State.