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Nigerian Pidgin as a Tool for Political Mobilization, Civic Engagement and Inclusive Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

The ability to communicate effectively is crucial for active participation in politics and citizenship activities. Nevertheless, the linguistic variety in Nigeria creates numerous barriers to the spread of political knowledge and civic education. While many people cannot understand English, which is Nigeria's national language, the importance of using Nigerian Pidgin for political mobilization and civic activities has not been explored sufficiently yet within the scope of governance research. The present study aims to explore the potential of using Nigerian Pidgin for political mobilization, civic engagement, and inclusive governance in Nigeria. Following a qualitative approach, the present study uses documentary research methods based on the analysis of secondary sources. These sources include literature, media news, political campaigns' materials, governmental awareness programs, voter education initiatives, and social media discussions. Being guided by the principles of Participatory Communication Theory, the present study analyzes the use of Nigerian Pidgin for political communication and civic activities. From the findings, it is clear that Nigerian Pidgin helps with political mobilization because of information simplification concerning politics and governance, contributes to voter education and voter mobilization through campaign communication, boosts political campaign communication, helps in civic education through both traditional and modern communication media, and supports digital political mobilization and activism. Moreover, the research reveals that Nigerian Pidgin plays a role in inclusive governance by reducing language barriers, facilitating the communication process between the government and its citizens, and providing a chance for more people's participation in public affairs.

Keywords: Nigerian Pidgin; Political Mobilization; Civic Participation; Inclusive Governance; Political Communication

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is an indispensable tool in governance, political communication, and democratic participation. Governments use language in communicating their policies, while political actors use it in mobilizing political support. Language also enables citizens' participation in civic processes. The success of any form of political communication is largely determined by the ability to be understood by its targeted audience (McQuail, 2010).

Nigeria is one of the most linguistically diverse countries with more than 500 indigenous languages being spoken by its people (Eberhard et al., 2024). However, despite English being the official language of both governance and formal education, many Nigerians do not understand English adequately. As such, communication in English limits many people's access to information on politics, civic education, and public policies, especially those in rural communities (Igboanusi, 2020).

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The need to overcome linguistic barriers in Nigeria led to the evolution of Nigerian Pidgin, which has become one of the most widely accepted means of communication throughout ethnic groups and educational backgrounds (Faraclas, 2013). Developed through language contact in the western part of Africa, Nigerian Pidgin has become the preferred medium of daily conversation in Nigeria.

Noteworthy, Nigerian Pidgin has increasingly become relevant in politics. It is regularly used by various political actors, electoral bodies, media outfits, and civic associations to communicate their political messages, educate voters, and inform citizens about governance issues (Ajiboye, 2019). The usage of Nigerian Pidgin by radio stations like Wazobia FM and other digital media has further made it accessible to Nigerians (Ajiboye, 2019). It has been effective in facilitating political campaigns and civic engagements such as the #EndSARS movement (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2021).

Even as the relevance of Nigerian Pidgin grows, research on the language has primarily emphasized its linguistic characteristics without sufficiently analyzing its political significance, especially in relation to governance and civic participation. This study therefore analyzes the usage of Nigerian Pidgin in political mobilization and civic participation in Nigeria.

This study specifically aims to: explore the role of Nigerian Pidgin in political communication; discuss its impact on voter participation and political mobilization; analyze its role in civic engagement and democratic participation; evaluate its contributions to governance and citizen participation.

The study, in general, contributes to literature on language and democracy in African countries with diverse languages.

2. METHODOLOGY

For this study, a qualitative descriptive approach was used. This approach was adopted considering the explorative nature of the study that sought to investigate the role of Nigerian Pidgin in political mobilization and civic engagement using the analysis of communication practices and evidence already available.

Data for this study were collected using secondary sources such as journal articles, books, conferences, government publications, media, policies, credible online materials among others that pertain to topics such as Nigerian Pidgin, political communication, civic engagement, and governance in Nigeria. Further data collection was also carried out through messages, voter education material, radio and TV broadcasts, enlightenment programs, and social media content in the use of Nigerian Pidgin for political communication.

Documentary analysis was used as the main tool for data collection in this study. This technique involved the examination and interpretation of written or recorded material in an effort to develop understanding on social phenomenon. Documents related to the investigation of political mobilization, voter education, civic engagement, inclusion, and communication between government and citizens were analyzed to identify themes.

The data collected in the study were analysed through the use of thematic content analysis. This involved organizing the relevant data obtained from the different sources into themes according to the goals of the research study. These include themes such as political awareness, voter mobilisation, campaign communication, media communication, online activism, civic participation, and governance communication. The analysis process will help to find patterns of communication that show how Nigerian Pidgin enables political communication and citizen engagement in Nigeria.

The Participatory Communication Theory forms the basis for the analysis in this study. The theory highlights dialogue, inclusiveness, and active participation of citizens in communication activities (Thomas, 1994). According to the theory, communication is improved when it takes



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place in the languages spoken and understood by the participants of the communication. In view of the goals of this study, it is important to highlight how Nigerian Pidgin helps in reducing linguistic barriers in politics.

3. RESULTS

Based on the analysis of sources like documentary sources, political campaign literature, voter education messages, media programs, government awareness programs, and social media communications, it is clear that Nigerian Pidgin makes a vital contribution to politics and civic engagement in Nigeria. Five important themes were identified from this study. These include political awareness, voter mobilization, political campaign communication, media civic education, and digital political participation. Table 1 summarizes the key findings.

Table 1: Key Roles of Nigerian Pidgin in Political Mobilization and Civic Engagement in Nigeria

S/N	Theme	Evidence Identified	Contribution to Civic Engagement
1.	Political Awareness	Radio programmes, political broadcasts, public announcements	Improves public understanding of political issues
2.	Voter Mobilization	Voter education campaigns, election messages, PVC awareness campaign	Encourages voter registration and electoral participation
3.	Political Campaign Communication	Campaign rallies, campaign slogans, candidate outreach programmes	Enhances interaction between politicians and citizens
4.	Civic Education through Media	Radio discussions, television programmes, community awareness campaign	Promotes knowledge of civic rights and responsibilities
5.	Digital Political Participation	Social media activism, online political discussions, advocacy campaign	Expands citizen participation in governance and public discourse

3.1 Nigerian Pidgin and Political Consciousness

As per the results obtained, the use of Nigerian Pidgin contributes greatly to political consciousness among the citizens since the language makes political knowledge easy to comprehend. Complex terms which are often employed to express various ideas about politics in English are put into simple form using Nigerian Pidgin, thus contributing to citizens' comprehension.

In an analysis of political radio programs, it has been found that those who speak in Nigerian Pidgin address issues including electioneering, governance, corruption, accountability, and development. This allows citizens of different educational levels to understand politics and the policies of their governments.

For instance, instead of using technical political terminologies like "electoral accountability" and "democratic participation," political analysts make use of simplified terms from Nigerian Pidgin, such as: "Make the government account for their activities.", "It is the citizens who have power in a democratic society.", and "The government should clarify its intentions."

These results show that the use of these expressions promotes understanding among the citizens.

3.2 Nigerian Pidgin in Voter Mobilization



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The third major finding relates to the use of Nigerian Pidgin in voter mobilization. Many electoral communication texts include Nigerian Pidgin, used to mobilize voters for the purpose of voter registration, PVC collection, and voting.

The study came up with many voter education messages in Nigerian Pidgin that have been very popular over time in Nigeria.

Table 2: Examples of Nigerian Pidgin Voter Education Messages

Nigerian Pidgin Message	English Interpretation	Purpose
Your PVC na your power	Your voter card is your power	Encourage voter registration
No sell your vote	Do not sell your vote	Discourage vote buying
Shine your eye before you vote	Be informed before voting	Voter education
Na who you vote for go lead you	Your vote determines your leader	Electoral responsibility
Vote wisely make better life come	Vote wisely for a better future	Political awareness

These messages are communicated through such mediums as radio jingles, campaign advertisements, community-based programs, and social media. Due to their straightforwardness and clarity, they are also more understandable than those messages expressed only in formal English.

Moreover, the study results have shown that the use of Nigerian Pidgin in educating the voters helps to involve the audience more actively.

3.3 Use of Nigerian Pidgin in Political Campaigns

From the research results, it can be noted that the Nigerian Pidgin is increasingly becoming a prominent language for conducting political campaigns in Nigeria. Politicians commonly use the Nigerian Pidgin in rallies and other forms of public engagements as a means of winning their audience and creating cultural similarities. Some of the slogans used during the campaigns include: "Your votes are going to determine tomorrow.", "Let us all work together to create a better Nigeria.", "The better days are yet to come.", "It is high time that there was some positive change.", "All should be given equal opportunities."

By using the Nigerian Pidgin, politicians manage to communicate in a language that is understood by their audiences. It appears from the results that messages delivered through the Nigerian Pidgin have more emotional effect on the citizens.

Moreover, use of the language makes it easier to deliver the campaign message. Instead of delivering complicated policy documents, politicians make them simple and understandable to their audiences.

3.4 Nigerian Pidgin in Media-Based Civic Education

It can be shown from the study that Nigerian Pidgin is an important language that helps in civic education in Nigeria by means of radio, television, and community media. It has been recognized by media houses that people are easily attracted to communication done in Nigerian Pidgin because of increased participation in programs conducted in it.

Some of the topics that political discussion shows, current affairs programs, and public enlightenment programs discuss in Nigerian Pidgin are: Elections, Good governance, Citizenship rights and duties, Anti-corruption, Development programs, and Security education.



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The participants tend to be more involved and express their views in programs conducted in Nigerian Pidgin because of their comfort with this language. It helps in active citizenship as well.

Moreover, health, tax, environmental sanitation, and security awareness programs use Nigerian Pidgin in their campaign for the following reasons: "Suspected movements, report immediately.", "Security is everyone's responsibility.", "Keep your surroundings clean.", "No room for corruption."

3.5 Nigerian Pidgin and Digital Political Participation

One of the most important discoveries in this study is the increasingly common use of Nigerian Pidgin in digital political participation. The emergence of social media platforms has become one of the major areas for political discourse, civic advocacy, and citizen participation, while Nigerian Pidgin is widely used as the primary language of communication.

It was found that Nigerian Pidgin is extensively used on such platforms as Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube when talking about issues such as governance, elections, corruption, economic hardship, and accountability.

Of particular importance was the use of Nigerian Pidgin during civic movements and political events. Thus, during the #EndSARS campaign, people widely used Nigerian Pidgin to communicate about the movement itself and participate in protest-related activity. Slogans such as: "We no go gree.", "Soro soke.", "Enough is enough.", and "Na our right to protest." were common at that time.

This was the case in other civic activism initiatives and even recent elections when citizens employed the language on social media platforms to disseminate information about their preferred candidates and to critique current political governance.

In conclusion, these results show that the Nigerian Pidgin has developed into a highly valuable digital tool of communication that contributes to citizen empowerment and engagement in the democratic process.

4. DISCUSSION

From the findings obtained from the study conducted, it can be seen that the Nigerian Pidgin is no longer used merely as an informal language but is being used to mobilize people and facilitate political and civic engagement in the country. The increased use of the Nigerian Pidgin language in political campaigns, voter education, media broadcasts, public awareness programs, and other such activities clearly indicates that the Nigerian Pidgin language has emerged to play a critical role in political and civic participation.

One of the findings which have been made through this research is that the use of Nigerian Pidgin language helps citizens develop their political awareness. This finding helps justify the fact that language is an important factor when it comes to democratic participation. Multilingual states see greater political participation when information regarding politics is provided to citizens in a language that they speak (Igboanusi, 2020). Therefore, the widespread use of the Nigerian Pidgin language during radio broadcasts and other political discussions facilitates citizen participation.

The results also show that Nigerian Pidgin is an effective means for voter mobilization. The level of political participation greatly relies on voters' access to information regarding the election process and awareness about the importance of participating. As seen in voter education slogans like "Your PVC na your power" and "No sell your vote," Nigerian Pidgin helps make election information more understandable and promotes active engagement in politics. This result is supported by studies which highlight the significance of culturally relevant communication in boosting voter turnout and engagement (Ajiboye, 2019).



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In addition, the results also indicate that Nigerian Pidgin enhances political campaign communication by making it easier for political figures to communicate with grassroots populations. It can be noted that political communication becomes more effective when it matches the linguistic and cultural needs of the audience. An increase in the usage of Nigerian Pidgin among political figures during election campaigns shows that political figures understand the benefits of using Nigerian Pidgin, as it helps establish familiarity and inclusion. Thus, the findings support Faraclas' (2013) claims about the nature of Nigerian Pidgin as a means of fostering linguistic interaction in Nigerian communities.

Another noteworthy discovery in this research is the influence of Nigerian Pidgin on civic education via various media channels. Many media houses use the language for civic education about governance issues, citizens' rights, accountability, and other areas of public service. The results of the research indicate that people feel more comfortable participating in public debates in a language that appears to be friendly and accessible to everyone. Therefore, these discoveries can be explained by using Participatory Communication Theory principles, which emphasize dialogue, inclusion, and active citizen participation in communicative practices (Thomas, 1994).

Another aspect of the language's use is associated with increased importance of the language in the realm of digital politics. The evolution of social media platforms has changed political participation since now individuals have more possibilities to voice their opinion, organize rallies, and control the activities of public representatives. During important civic movements like #EndSARS campaign and electoral periods, people widely used Nigerian Pidgin language for mobilizing other people and voicing demands and concerns. Hence, the language proved its value in digital activism because of its wide acceptance across all ethnic groups and education levels.

The results from this study indicate that Nigeria Pidgin plays a vital role in enhancing inclusive governance by facilitating effective communication between government institutions and citizens. Inclusive governance entails that all sectors of society must be informed about what is happening around them and be given the chance to participate in the decision making process. Through use of a common language across ethnic and regional lines, Nigerian Pidgin enhances democratic inclusiveness and citizen participation in governance.

The results further imply the importance of Nigerian Pidgin in matters of security and development in the larger Sub-Saharan African region. Effective communication is vital in disseminating security information, social cohesiveness, and mobilization of citizens in times of national emergencies. Awareness programs on security, health, and other developmental issues will be more effective if conducted using the languages that are understood by citizens. Therefore, Nigerian Pidgin can play a significant role in supporting the communication process.

The results obtained provide sufficient evidence of Participatory Communication Theory. The theory states that participatory communication will be achieved where the communication process is accessible, inclusive, and culturally sensitive. This is well illustrated by Nigerian Pidgin through its ability to promote political information accessibility and citizen-government communication.



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5. CONCLUSION

The research sought to evaluate the function of Nigerian Pidgin as a means of political mobilization and engagement as well as inclusive governance in Nigeria. This was achieved through the analysis of documentary sources including scholarly works, political communication documents, broadcast media, public awareness campaigns, and digital communication platforms.

It is evident that Nigerian Pidgin functions as a means of enhancing political awareness, voter education, political campaign communication, civic education, and digital political engagement. The language has become a vital tool through which various political actors, government departments, non-governmental organizations, media outfits, and even ordinary citizens exchange information regarding governance and engage in dialogue on politics.

The paper further shows that Nigerian Pidgin serves the purpose of inclusive governance by breaking down any language barrier that may hinder citizens from accessing political information and opportunities. The widespread use of the language regardless of ethnic differences, religious backgrounds, education level, and social economic status makes it effective for communication and democratic participation.

Implications from this study can be extended to other multilingual states in Sub-Saharan Africa where language diversity is still a problem for governance and citizen involvement in governance activities. The use of languages that are widely known would help make communication easier and lead to accountability and inclusiveness of governance.

From the results of the research, this study recommends that Nigerian Pidgin should be used by governmental departments in carrying out enlightenment programs and governance activities. There is need for electoral bodies to use Nigerian Pidgin in conducting voter education campaigns to encourage participation in elections. Media houses should also increase political programming in Nigerian Pidgin while civil society organizations should continue using Nigerian Pidgin to campaign for their goals. Lastly, there is need for policy makers to regard Nigerian Pidgin as a vital means of communication in enhancing democratic and inclusive governance.

Through the improvement of access to information and increased citizen participation, Nigerian Pidgin can help enhance democracy, inclusive governance and development in Nigeria and other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa.

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