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LANGUAGE AND UNITY: INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN FOSTERING SOCIAL COHESION AMONG UNDERGRADUATE COHORTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role of language in promoting social cohesion among undergraduate students at Sa'adu Zungur University, Bauchi State, Nigeria. The university brought together students from different languages and cultural groups. The study examined how students used English and indigenous languages like Hausa to interact and form social bonds. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to obtain both measurable patterns and personal experiences. A total of 200 undergraduate students were selected using a stratified sampling technique across the three campuses of the university: Gadau, Misau, and Bauchi. This approach ensured representation of linguistic and demographic diversity of the institution. The findings showed that students used more than one language, especially in informal settings, strengthens student relationships. However, the study also identified challenges, such as language barriers leading to feelings of exclusion among students from different linguistic backgrounds. Despite these challenges, the research showed that promoting the use of both English and indigenous languages can enhance inclusivity and campus cohesion. It also suggested that when universities support the use of different languages through fair and inclusive language policies, students reported greater inclusion and belonging. The study provided recommendations for making higher education more welcoming to students from different language backgrounds.

Keywords: Higher education, linguistic diversity, language and unity, multilingualism, social cohesion.

INTRODUCTION

Language plays an important role in helping people stay connected and work together, especially in communities where people speak different languages. It not only facilitates communication but also shapes

identities, influences social interactions, and fosters unity among disparate groups (Fishman, 1999; Ramesh, 2023). In places where different cultural and language groups come together, language becomes more than a way of exchanging ideas. It helps define group boundaries, express culture, and promote inclusivity or exclusion (Chowdhory & Poyil, 2021; Gumperz, 1982). The relationship between language and social cohesion is mostly salient in educational institutions, where students from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds converge, interact, and form the future workforce (De Kock et al., 2018; Susanna, 2016).

However, in many multilingual academic environments, language differences can create both opportunities for inclusion and challenges to unity. Students often rely on shared languages to form relationships, but when those languages differ, communication gaps may lead to exclusion or misunderstanding. Understanding how language influences student unity has become a growing concern in contexts where linguistic diversity is the norm.

In Nigeria, this issue becomes especially relevant. The country is home to over 500 indigenous languages, with English serving as the official language of instruction and administration (Borisova & Ilina, 2014). This rich linguistic diversity can enrich social integration and cultural awareness, but it can also make communication difficult in higher education settings (Yoko, 2023). Universities in Nigeria, such as Sa'adu Zungur University, Gadau, offer a way to study how language affects students' relationships, how they work in groups, and how united they feel. The ability to manage language differences is important for building an inclusive academic environment, improving collaborative learning, and encouraging mutual respect among students (Wijayanti, 2024). However, the coexistence of many languages can also cause communication problems, confusion, and a lack of social connection if not managed properly (Al Dilaimy, 2024).

Sa'adu Zungur University, Gadau, attracts students from diverse ethnic and linguistic communities across the major regions in the country. This makes it an ideal setting to study how language shapes unity and social cohesion among students. The university environment necessitates effective communication strategies that accommodate diverse linguistic backgrounds while still helping students build a shared academic and social community. Previous studies have broadly addressed the relationship between language and social integration in multicultural settings (Musgrave & Bradshaw, 2014; Pirchio et al., 2020), yet there is a scarcity of research focusing specifically on Nigerian higher education institutions and the unique challenges they face in managing linguistic diversity. This research gap is particularly evident in the context of Sa'adu Zungur University, where the interplay between English and indigenous languages like Hausa can impact social interactions and cohesion among students.

The main concern in this context is that language differences can both enhance and impede social cohesion within the university setting. On one hand, the presence of multiple languages can enrich the cultural experience and foster a sense of inclusivity. On the other hand, it can create misunderstandings, leading to feelings of exclusion, reduced collaboration, and lower academic performance (Wijayanti, 2024). Addressing these challenges is essential for creating a cohesive and supportive academic environment that not only accommodates but also makes use of linguistic diversity to enhance educational performance and social harmony.

This study seeks to bridge this research gap by investigating the role of language in fostering social cohesion among undergraduate cohorts at Sa'adu Zungur University, Gadau. By exploring how language use influences social interactions, group formation, and overall unity within the student body, the research aims to provide insights that can help create policies and practices to improve social integration in linguistically diverse educational settings. The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To examine how the use of different languages among undergraduate students at Sa'adu Zungur University affects social interactions and unity.

2. To identify strategies that can use language diversity to promote a more cohesive and inclusive academic environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language and Social Cohesion

Language plays an important role in building and maintaining social cohesion. It helps people communicate and also shapes how they see themselves in relation to others. Fishman (1999) argues that language is not just a communication tool but also a key factor in forming collective identities and promoting unity within different groups. In multicultural societies, the way people use language plays an important role in bringing different groups together. When language is used effectively, it can help people understand one another better and work together more easily. However, when language differences are not managed well, it can lead to misunderstandings or division. This can make it harder to build a united and peaceful community (Gumperz, 1982). The dual role of language as a unifying and dividing force underscores its significance in maintaining social harmony, particularly in settings characterized by linguistic diversity. This concept is especially relevant in university environments, where shared language practices can influence both academic engagement and social integration. Building on this idea, the next section looks at how these challenges appear in schools and universities, where people from many backgrounds meet daily.

Linguistic Diversity in Educational Institutions

Educational institutions, especially universities, often reflect the larger language situation of the country. In Nigeria, students come from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, which makes the campus community highly diverse (Aroge, 2024). In such settings, language diversity can either enrich the academic experience or pose significant challenges to social integration. The presence of multiple languages within a student body necessitates strategic communication practices to ensure inclusivity and mutual respect. Umunnakwe (2017) notes that English is the official language of instruction in Nigerian universities, but often operates alongside indigenous languages. This blend of languages shapes both social interaction and academic collaboration on campus. As a result, it is important to manage this linguistic diversity thoughtfully, so that students who are less proficient in English do not feel left out, and the learning environment remains inclusive for everyone. Despite these realities, limited research has examined how Nigerian students actively navigate this linguistic mix in both formal and informal university settings. To better understand these patterns, it is important to consider how culture influences how students use language in different settings.

Cultural Influences on Language Use and Social Integration

Cultural dimensions significantly impact language use and its role in social integration. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory provides a framework for understanding how cultural values such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance influence communication styles within organizations and educational institutions (Cronjé, 2011). In high power distance cultures like Nigeria, hierarchical structures are more pronounced, and formal language is often used to convey respect and authority (Ehrnrooth et al., 2024). This cultural preference for formality influences how students interact with both peers and teachers. Moreover, collectivist cultures emphasize group harmony and

interdependence, encouraging collaborative language use and inclusive communication practices that foster a sense of community and shared purpose among students (Mockaitis et al., 2012; Yamagishi et al., 1998). Students often move between formal and informal ways of speaking, depending on the situation. Typically, they use English in formal settings and switch to indigenous languages in more relaxed, social environments. This pattern helps explain how language choices reflect the cultural context of university life.

Language Strategies in Multilingual Environments

Effective language strategies are essential for promoting social cohesion in multilingual educational settings. One common method is code-switching, the practice of alternating between two or more languages within a conversation, emerges as a common strategy among students managing linguistic diversity (Byrne, 2024). This allows students to express themselves better and find common ground with others. Using inclusive pronouns and collaborative language can reinforce group identity and collective responsibility, thereby strengthening social bonds (Mandell et al., 2017). However, the effectiveness of these strategies depends on the context and the degree to which they are supported by institutional policies and practices that promote linguistic inclusivity and respect for cultural diversity. While these strategies have been noted in global contexts, few studies explore their structured or informal use among undergraduates within Nigeria's trilingual university environments.

Previous Studies on Language and Social Cohesion in Nigerian Contexts

Existing literature on language and social cohesion in Nigerian educational contexts have highlighted the complex relationship between linguistic diversity and unity. Nigeria’s multilingual landscape, with over 500 indigenous languages, presents both opportunities and challenges for fostering social cohesion in educational settings. Research by Alabi (2024) suggests that language plays a significant role in shaping group identity and inclusion, particularly in university environments where diverse linguistic backgrounds often influence social interactions. Studies by Ugwu (2020) and Njoku et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of incorporating indigenous languages alongside English to promote inclusivity and unity, noting that linguistic diversity can either foster solidarity or create divisions depending on how it is managed. Other studies, such as those by Ogunyemi and Bada (2019) and Oloruntoba-Oju and van Pinxteren (2023), have shown that when students' native languages are acknowledged and utilized in academic and social spaces, it enhances their sense of belonging and participation in campus life. However, these studies also acknowledge challenges, particularly the dominance of English and the marginalization of indigenous languages, which can lead to exclusion and a lack of cohesion. These findings highlight the need for inclusive language policies that accommodate Nigeria’s linguistic diversity to promote social harmony in educational settings. With this in mind, the next section discusses the main challenges and some possible solutions for managing language diversity on campus. These studies focus largely on general institutional language policy or classroom practices.

What remains underexplored is how students themselves experience, negotiate, and manage language differences in their everyday peer relationships and group dynamics. This current study addresses that gap by combining student perceptions, language practices, and contextual experiences across multiple university campuses. With this in mind, the next section discusses the main challenges and some possible solutions for managing language diversity on campus.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory, developed by Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede in 1980. The theory helps explain how cultural values influence communication and social

relationships, especially in diverse settings like universities. Two key dimensions from the theory are most relevant here. The first is Power Distance, which refers to how much people accept unequal power in institutions. In Nigeria, this often results in formal language use in classrooms as a sign of respect, especially when speaking to lecturers or authority figures. The second is Individualism versus Collectivism, which looks at how much people see themselves as part of a group. In Nigeria's collectivist culture, students tend to value group identity, shared experiences, and close social ties, often using indigenous languages to express this sense of belonging. These two cultural values help explain why students use English more in formal academic settings and switch to local languages like Hausa in informal group interactions. Hofstede's theory gives a useful way to understand how cultural norms shape language choices and how those choices affect unity among students.

Research Gap

While several Nigerian studies have addressed the institutional, policy-related, or curriculum-based roles of language in higher education, few have focused on the lived experiences of undergraduate students across campuses with varying linguistic and cultural compositions. Moreover, prior research has not adequately examined how formal and informal language choices affect peer bonding, perceived inclusion, and social cohesion. This study addresses that gap by using a mixed-methods design to explore not only how students use language, but how those language practices influence everyday social interaction, group formation, and a sense of belonging in the academic community.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to understand how language shapes social unity among undergraduate students at Sa'adu Zungur University. The university operates across three campuses: Gadau (the main campus), Misau, and Bauchi, each hosting distinct faculties and attracting students from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Given the complexity of exploring language use and unity in such a diverse environment, a mixed-methods approach was chosen to integrate quantitative breadth with qualitative depth. The quantitative component provided measurable indicators of language-related patterns across the campuses, while the qualitative component yielded refined insights into the lived experiences of students as they navigate linguistic diversity. Combining both types of data helped build a deeper and more complete picture of how language affects student relationships across all campuses. Because of this design, it became important to carefully select participants to reflect the linguistic diversity of the entire student population.

Sampling

A purposeful sampling strategy was employed to ensure that all three campuses and their respective faculties were included. Initially, administrative records were reviewed to identify faculties known for their linguistic diversity. From the selected faculties on each campus, because it allowed for the systematic inclusion of subgroups based on campus, faculty, year of study, and demographic characteristics. This method best fits the research aim because it ensures that patterns of language use and social cohesion are not skewed by overrepresentation or underrepresentation of any specific group, which is critical when examining multilingual settings.

This process resulted in a total of 200 undergraduate participants from across the three campuses, ensuring breadth and variability in the sample. To achieve adequate representation of participants, 110 students were

selected from Gadau main campus, 30 from Misau campus and 60 from Bauchi campus. The selection of 110 students from the Gadau campus, 30 from the Misau campus, and 60 from the Bauchi campus was based on the distribution of faculties and corresponding student populations at each location. As the main campus, Gadau houses six faculties (Agriculture, Arts, Basic Medical Sciences, Education, Science, and Pharmaceutical Sciences), naturally accommodating a larger and more academically diverse undergraduate population, thus justifying the larger sample of 110 participants to capture a fuller range of linguistic and social experiences. In contrast, Misau with its single faculty (Law) has a more focused environment and fewer students, making 30 participants sufficient for meaningful representation. Bauchi, hosting two faculties (Management Sciences and Social Sciences), occupies a middle ground and thus warranted an intermediate sample size of 60 students. The study adjusted the sample sizes to match the academic diversity and student population of each campus. This approach helps ensure that the selected participants represent the various linguistic contexts and social cohesion found across the university's different environments. Once the participants were selected, the researchers moved to data collection, using two different methods to gather reliable information.

Data Collection Method

Data collection took place over the course of a single academic semester. This allowed the researchers to observe language use and the nature of student interactions during their regular academic activities. The quantitative data were collected first using a structured questionnaire that was distributed in person. Students filled out the questionnaire anonymously during their class session, which made it easier for them to respond and helped achieve a high response rate. The questionnaire focused on how often students used different languages (such as English, Hausa, and other local languages). It also asked about their views on how inclusive the language environment was on campus, and how language affected their group interactions, academic collaboration, and overall sense of unity within the university community. The questionnaire was tested among a small group of students for clarity and reliability before being distributed more broadly across the three campuses. Responses from completed surveys were digitally recorded, cleaned, and prepared for analysis.

To ensure both validity and reliability, the questionnaire underwent several steps. First, items were adapted from existing studies and then reviewed by two experts in sociolinguistics and educational research to confirm content validity. Second, a small pilot test was conducted with 15 students across two campuses to assess clarity, internal consistency, and response time. Based on their feedback, ambiguous terms were rephrased and overlapping items were removed. Finally, internal reliability was confirmed using Cronbach’s alpha, with values above 0.70 considered acceptable for the key domains.

The questionnaire items used in this study were not directly adopted from a single source but were carefully adapted from a variety of published studies relevant to language use, inclusivity, and group interaction in Nigerian educational contexts. This approach ensured that the instrument was well-aligned with the study's specific objectives and the cultural realities of university students.

Key sources that guided the adaptation of the questionnaire items included. Yusuf (2022), whose work provided ideas related to language use in academic settings. Akindele et al. (2022) contributed valuable insights on the role of indigenous languages in informal communication and peer interactions. The study by Aboh (2023) offered perspectives on linguistic diversity and students’ perceptions of inclusion, while Obiakor (2024) informed items related to institutional support for language use and overall inclusivity. Each item was modified to fit the university context, reflect local languages such as Hausa, and focus on real-life student experiences across formal, informal, and group settings. This process allowed the questionnaire to cover three major domains: the frequency and context of language use, perceptions of inclusivity, and the influence of language on group interaction and unity.

The qualitative phase employed focus group discussions and individual interviews to explore the complexities of language and social cohesion. At each campus, separate focus groups were organized, comprising 6-8 students each who had indicated a willingness to elaborate on their experiences. These discussions were guided by semi-structured prompts that encouraged participants to reflect on instances where language facilitated or hindered unity, to describe language-based strategies that promoted inclusivity, and to explain how linguistic diversity was navigated in everyday campus life. In addition to the focus groups, semi-structured interviews with key informants, such as student leaders, peer mentors, and faculty advisors, provided further contextual insights. All discussions and interviews were audio-recorded (with informed consent) and transcribed verbatim. Throughout the data collection period, ethical considerations were rigorously upheld. All participants were informed about the study's objectives, assured of their voluntary participation and confidentiality, and given the option to withdraw at any stage. With both sets of data collected, the researchers turned to analysis to make sense of the responses and uncover clear patterns.

Data Analysis Method

Data analysis began after all data had been collected. For the quantitative survey data, descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, means, standard deviations) were first computed to summarize participants' responses across the three campuses. Inferential test (ANOVA) was employed to determine if observed patterns in language-related behaviors and perceived unity differed significantly among the campuses. This helped determine whether any observed differences were meaningful. Although the study did not aim to compare subgroups directly, these tests confirmed whether the results were generally the same across the university or varied by campus.

The qualitative data, comprising focus group and semi-structured interview transcripts, were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Initially, researchers familiarized themselves with the transcripts by reading them multiple times and making preliminary notes. Subsequently, an open coding process was undertaken, generating initial codes that captured key ideas related to language use, unity, inclusivity, and campus life. These codes were then grouped into broader categories and refined into themes that reflected core aspects of how language shaped social cohesion. Example themes included "Linguistic Negotiation and Shared Identity," "Inclusive Language Practices and Peer Support," and "Barriers and Facilitators of Cross-Campus Unity." The thematic analysis did not rely on any specific language or cultural frameworks; instead, it emerged inductively from the data, ensuring that the results resonated directly with participants' lived experiences.

Following the separate quantitative and qualitative analyses, the findings were integrated. The purpose of integration was to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. While the quantitative data suggested general patterns of linguistic usage and perceptions of unity, the qualitative insights revealed the underlying social mechanisms and contextual factors that explained these patterns. Points of convergence (e.g., universally recognized language practices that enhanced group cohesion) and divergence (e.g., subtle campus-level variations in language use) were identified and discussed. Triangulation of these data sources increased the credibility and depth of the conclusions, enabling the study to present a well-substantiated narrative on the central role of language in fostering unity among undergraduates.

By integrating these steps in research design, sampling, data collection, and data analysis, the study successfully addressed its objectives. The comprehensive approach allowed for a detailed understanding of how language use influences social interactions, unity, and the potential for strategic language-based interventions to nurture a more inclusive academic community at Sa'adu Zungur University.

Table 1

Questionnaire Items and their Corresponding Domains

Domain/Aspect	Item Code	Item Text
Instruction	-	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement, using the following scale: 1 = Agree and 2 = Disagree.
Frequency and Context of Language Use	Q1	I regularly use English to communicate with classmates and instructors in formal academic settings (e.g., lectures, seminars).
	Q2	I often use Hausa or another indigenous language when interacting with peers informally (e.g., during breaks, in dormitories).
	Q3	The language I choose to speak on campus (English or indigenous) generally depends on who I am talking to and the social setting.
	Q4	I frequently hear a mix of English and indigenous languages used around campus, reflecting the linguistic diversity of our student community.
Perceptions of Inclusivity and Linguistic Harmony	Q5	I feel that my ability to speak an indigenous language (e.g., Hausa) helps me connect more easily with certain groups of students.
	Q6	When students and faculty acknowledge multiple languages during discussions or announcements, it makes me feel more included in the university community.
	Q7	I believe that encouraging the use of both English and indigenous languages on campus helps ensure that no one feels left out due to language barriers.
	Q8	If the university provided more resources to support indigenous language use (e.g., language clubs, bilingual signs), I believe the campus would feel more cohesive.
Influence of Language on Group Interactions and Unity	Q9	Working in group projects or study groups is easier and more productive when members can comfortably switch between English and an indigenous language to clarify points.
	Q10	I notice that friendships and study networks often form among students who share a common indigenous language, strengthening their sense of unity.
	Q11	When students use multiple languages within the same conversation, it tends to create a supportive atmosphere that encourages everyone to contribute.
	Q12	Language-related misunderstandings on campus are relatively rare because students try to accommodate each other's linguistic backgrounds.
	Q13	Hearing a variety of languages spoken freely around the university makes me feel that this is an institution that respects cultural and linguistic diversity.
	Q14	I feel that recognizing indigenous languages alongside English is important for building a campus-wide sense of identity and belonging.
	Q15	When administrators and faculty acknowledge and respect different languages, it fosters a unified academic community where students trust one another more.

RESULTS

Quantitative Insights

Before presenting the table, it is important to briefly describe the observed data patterns. The mean scores across most items show generally high levels of agreement, particularly in domains related to inclusivity and identity. Standard deviations remain relatively low, suggesting consistent responses among participants.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) for each questionnaire item, categorized by domain/aspect. The analysis is based on responses from 200 undergraduate students across three campuses of Sa'adu Zungur University: Gadau (110 students), Misau (30 students), and Bauchi (60 students). The response scale used was a binary agreement scale, where 1 = Agree and 0 = Disagree.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Key Questionnaire Items and their Interpretations

Domain	Item	Mean	Std. dev.	Interpretations
Frequency and Context of Language Use	Q1	4.10	0.68	High mean suggests English is consistently used in formal academic contexts.
	Q2	3.85	0.74	Moderately high, indicating frequent use of indigenous languages in informal peer settings.
	Q3	3.98	0.72	Participants adapt language choice to context and audience, showing linguistic flexibility.
	Q4	4.05	0.67	High mean reflects that mixed-language usage is common on campus, highlighting a linguistically rich and dynamic environment.
Perceptions of Inclusivity and Linguistic Harmony	Q5	3.90	0.78	Ability to speak an indigenous language is seen as somewhat helpful for social connections.
	Q6	4.05	0.73	Acknowledging multiple languages makes participants feel included.
	Q7	4.15	0.65	Very high mean suggests overwhelming support for the idea that encouraging both English and indigenous languages prevents exclusion and fosters unity.
	Q8	4.25	0.62	Highest mean in this domain indicates strong belief that providing more resources for indigenous language use would significantly enhance campus cohesion.
Influence of Language on Group Interactions and Unity	Q9	4.00	0.77	Positive view that code-switching and multilingual practices improve group productivity.
	Q10	3.85	0.79	Moderately high agreement that friendships form among those sharing a common indigenous language.
	Q11	4.10	0.70	High mean shows that using multiple languages within conversations creates a supportive atmosphere for participation.
Campus-Wide Cohesion and Identity	Q12	3.75	0.80	Slightly positive, indicating language-related misunderstandings are not very common.
	Q13	4.30	0.55	High agreement that hearing multiple languages fosters respect for diversity
	Q14	4.45	0.50	Very strong belief in the importance of recognizing indigenous languages alongside English is crucial for building a sense of identity and belonging on campus.
	Q15	4.20	0.63	High agreement that administrative recognition of multiple languages boosts trust and unity.

For each item, the Mean was calculated as the total number of "Agree" responses divided by the total number of participants (200). The Standard Deviation (SD) for a binary variable was calculated using the formula:

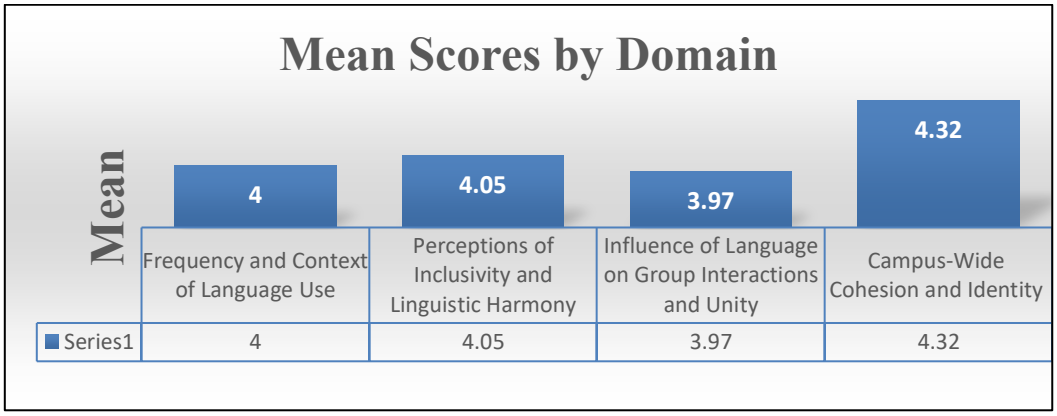
$$SD = \sqrt{px(1-p)}$$

where p represents the mean proportion of "Agree" responses.

The mean scores for most items are above 3.5, and many are close to or above 4.0. These high scores suggest that students frequently participate in multilingual interactions and believe these practices support inclusivity, peer collaboration, and group unity. Notably, the highest scores were observed in the domain of Campus-Wide Cohesion and Identity, particularly items Q13 to Q15. This emphasizes students' strong belief that the use and recognition of indigenous languages significantly contribute to feelings of identity and belonging.

Figure 1

Mean Scores by Domain



The figure illustrates that students across the university hold positive perceptions of language diversity. The domain of Campus-Wide Cohesion and Identity scored the highest, followed closely by Inclusivity and Linguistic Harmony, indicating that language practices are perceived as important not only for communication but also for building institutional identity and social unity. These results confirm that language is a significant factor in both formal and informal student life. To further examine whether student perceptions varied across different campuses, the study conducted inferential statistical testing.

Table 3

Results of One-Way ANOVA by Campus

Domain	F-statistics	*p*-value	Interpretation
Frequency and Context of Language Use	1.26	0.29	No significant differences among campuses.
Perceptions of Inclusivity and Linguistic Harmony	1.75	0.18	No significant differences among campuses
Influence of Language on Group Interactions and Unity	0.85	0.44	No significant differences among campuses
Campus-Wide Cohesion and Identity	2.03	0.13	No significant differences among campuses

None of the p-values fell below the conventional significance level (e.g., $p < 0.05$), suggesting that there were no statistically significant differences in perceptions or language-use patterns across the campuses. This result supported the idea that linguistic influences on social cohesion are consistent across Gadau, Misau, and Bauchi campuses, despite their varying faculty structures and student demographics.

Qualitative Insights

The focus group interviews revealed that language plays a central role in promoting social cohesion at Sa'adu Zungur University. English is widely used as the primary medium for academic communication across all campuses. Students from various linguistic backgrounds, particularly those from the Gadau campus, expressed a sense of unity when using English in lectures and seminars, as it provided a common ground for all participants. However, when it came to informal social interactions, indigenous languages like Hausa and other indigenous languages, took prominence, with students often using these languages to bond within smaller peer groups. Many participants reported feeling a stronger sense of belonging when speaking their native languages in social settings, as it allowed for easier communication and shared cultural expressions.

However, the interviews also highlighted certain challenges associated with language diversity. Some participants reported feeling excluded when dominant languages, particularly Hausa, were used in group discussions where not everyone understood the language. Students from Yoruba or Igbo backgrounds were more likely to experience this kind of exclusion, especially during mixed-group interactions. These situations created feelings of discomfort and limited their ability to contribute fully to conversations or activities. As a result, language choice in group settings sometimes influenced who participated and who remained silent.

To address these concerns, several students suggested a more inclusive communication approach in informal and group-based activities. They recommended balancing the use of English and indigenous languages in discussions to ensure that no one felt left out. This strategy, they believed, would help create more respectful and inclusive environments, especially during group assignments, student meetings, and extracurricular engagements. These qualitative insights support the quantitative findings, where students indicated that inclusive language practices could enhance social cohesion and unity across campuses, especially through creation of a more welcoming environment for all linguistic groups.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study provide significant insights into the role of language in fostering social cohesion among undergraduate cohorts at Sa'adu Zungur University. The results of the study showed that language plays an important role in shaping social interactions, identity formation, and perceptions of unity across the university's diverse student body. One of the key findings was the dominant use of English in formal academic settings, particularly in lectures and seminars, where it serves as the primary medium for communication among students and faculty members. This aligns with the broader trend in African universities, where English is typically employed as the lingua franca in academic environments (Bamgbọse, 2000). This pattern reflects Hofstede's Power Distance dimension, which characterizes Nigerian society as one where formal structures and hierarchy are valued. The preference for English in academic settings supports this cultural expectation, as it signals formality, respect, and institutional authority. However, the use of indigenous languages such as Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, etc., depending on the campus and context, was found to be prevalent in informal interactions among students, particularly in social spaces outside of formal academic settings.

The data also revealed that while English functions as a unifying language in formal academic settings, indigenous languages foster a sense of solidarity and community within specific ethnic groups. This finding is consistent with the work of Fishman (1999) and Gumperz (1982), who emphasize that language serves both as a means of communication and as a social marker that defines in-group and out-group boundaries. In line with these studies, the use of indigenous languages in informal settings at Sa'adu Zungur University

is reflective of a natural inclination to bond within one's cultural and linguistic group, thereby reinforcing ethnic identities. This aligns closely with Hofstede's Collectivism dimension, where in-group loyalty and shared identity are culturally emphasized. The reliance on indigenous languages in peer relationships demonstrates how collectivist values are embedded in students' daily language choices, promoting closeness within ethnic groups. This cultural and linguistic affiliation is particularly noticeable at the Misau and Bauchi campuses, where the linguistic homogeneity of the student population fosters the frequent use of local languages.

Another important finding was the positive relationship between the perceived inclusivity of the campus environment and the frequency of English language use. Students who reported higher levels of inclusivity in their academic and social interactions were also those who used English more regularly. These findings are aligned with studies that highlight the role of a common language in promoting inclusivity and social cohesion in multilingual settings (Namugenyi Kato, 2024; Woo & Giles, 2017) English, as the medium of instruction and communication in academic contexts, enables students from diverse linguistic backgrounds to participate equally in classroom discussions and academic activities, thus contributing to a greater sense of unity and shared purpose across the student body. This reinforces the institutional role of English within a high-power distance structure, where it supports uniform access to authority and educational resources across diverse student groups.

However, the study also found that students who predominantly used indigenous languages in their interactions expressed a strong sense of belonging to their linguistic or ethnic group, but perceived a lesser degree of inclusivity in campus-wide interactions. This suggests that while indigenous languages strengthen in-group solidarity, they may unintentionally create obstacle to broader social cohesion. This situation arises particularly when dominant indigenous languages, such as Hausa, are used in group settings where not all participants share that language. In such contexts, students from minority language backgrounds may experience social withdrawal or communication breakdowns. These challenges are most visible in cross-ethnic interactions where the lack of a shared language contributes to miscommunication, limited interaction, or group segregation. Rather than stating that language is simply "unifying or divisive," these findings show that language unites when shared across groups (as with English in academic spaces), but divides when it reinforces group boundaries in informal, ethnically homogenous settings. This aligns with the work of Gumperz (1983), who describes how language can act as a powerful symbol of group identity and inclusion while simultaneously reinforcing social divisions.

The differences observed between the three campuses further underscore the complexity of language use in fostering social cohesion. Students at Gadau campus, where there is a greater mix of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, were more likely to use English as a bridge language in both formal and informal contexts. In contrast, students at Misau and Bauchi campuses, where the student population is more ethnically homogenous, used indigenous languages more frequently in both academic and social settings. These findings highlight how language practices are influenced not only by individual preferences but also by the broader social and cultural context of each campus. The diverse linguistic environment at Gadau necessitates a more collectivist application of English to include all members, whereas homogeneity at Misau and Bauchi supports in-group bonding through shared local languages. The results support previous studies that emphasize the role of local contexts in shaping linguistic practices and social dynamics (Faulstich Orellana & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2016; Pennycook, 2010).

In accounting for the findings, it is important to recognize that while English provides a unifying framework for communication, it is not without its challenges. Students from minority linguistic groups may feel marginalized or less confident in using English, which could limit their participation in academic and social activities. This is particularly significant for students whose proficiency in English may not be as strong as that of their peers. Consequently, while English facilitates communication across different

linguistic groups, it may inadvertently contribute to feelings of exclusion among non-native speakers. This tension reflects the challenges of applying a high-power distance language norm (English) to a student population with different levels of English proficiency. This reinforces the need for strategies that promote linguistic inclusivity and support students in developing proficiency in the medium of instruction, without diminishing the value of indigenous languages.

The significance of these findings lies in their implications for fostering a more inclusive and cohesive academic environment at Sa'adu Zungur University. The results suggested that while English can be a unifying force in academic settings, there is a need for greater recognition and celebration of linguistic diversity in informal interactions and social activities. Promoting bilingual or multilingual strategies could enhance communication among students from diverse backgrounds, ensuring that no group feels excluded based on language barriers. This could include encouraging the use of indigenous languages in non-formal settings while ensuring that English remains accessible and central to academic discourse. Additionally, initiatives aimed at improving students' language skills, particularly in English, could help mitigate the exclusionary effects of language differences.

The study also pointed to the importance of inclusive campus policies that address the linguistic needs of all students, including those from minority language groups. Such policies could create a more supportive environment for language diversity, where students are encouraged to embrace their linguistic identities while simultaneously participating fully in the academic and social life of the university. The integration of language diversity into university culture, rather than treating it as a barrier to unity, could strengthen students' sense of belonging and community, ultimately contributing to social cohesion. These policies should be based on a clear understanding of how people communicate within the university, taking into account cultural values as described in Hofstede's framework.

While these findings offered valuable insights into the role of language in fostering social cohesion at Sa'adu Zungur University, they are not without limitations. The study focused on a single institution, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other universities or regions with different linguistic and cultural dynamics. Additionally, the sample was drawn from undergraduate students, and it would be interesting to explore how faculty members, administrative staff, or postgraduate students might experience and navigate linguistic diversity.

In essence, the study highlighted the complex relationship between language use and social cohesion at Sa'adu Zungur University. While English facilitates cross-cultural communication and inclusivity in formal settings, indigenous languages play a vital role in fostering group identity and solidarity. However, for social cohesion to be effectively promoted across the university, it is essential to balance the use of English with recognition of linguistic diversity. By fostering a more inclusive environment that respects and celebrates all languages, the university can enhance both its academic success and its social harmony. The implications of these findings have extended beyond the university setting, offering valuable insights for other institutions in multilingual and multi-ethnic contexts, where language plays a key role in shaping both academic performance and social integration.

CONCLUSION

The study focused on investigating the role of language in fostering social cohesion among undergraduate cohorts at Sa'adu Zungur University, with the aim of exploring how linguistic diversity influences social interactions, group dynamics, and campus-wide unity. The research provided insightful findings into how various languages, especially English and indigenous languages like Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, were used in different campus contexts and how this usage affected student cohesion and inclusivity. The study's

findings highlight that language practices among students significantly promote unity in both academic and social contexts. Students from all campuses generally agreed that the use of indigenous languages, in addition to English, facilitated a stronger sense of community and belonging, particularly in informal settings.

The findings also suggested that, while there is a general consensus on the positive role of language in promoting unity, challenges remain regarding language dominance, particularly in mixed-language settings. The data indicated that the use of indigenous languages, especially Hausa, sometimes created barriers for students from non-Hausa linguistic backgrounds, leading to exclusion or feelings of marginalization. However, the interviews and focus group discussions revealed that students recognized these challenges and proposed solutions, such as the inclusion of both English and indigenous languages in group discussions, to bridge the gap. Despite these occasional challenges, the overall impact of linguistic diversity was seen as enhancing social cohesion across the campuses.

The lack of significant differences in language usage patterns across the three campuses (Gadau, Misau, and Bauchi) highlights the consistency in linguistic influences on unity, suggesting that the university's efforts to support inclusivity are relatively successful regardless of the campus or faculty. This finding aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the role of language in both enhancing and sometimes hindering social cohesion in educational settings. The study's results support the notion that promoting multilingual communication practices can help integrate diverse student groups, building inclusivity, and ensuring that no group feels excluded based on language.

However, the study has limitations, notably in its reliance on self-reported data and the exclusion of a more detailed exploration of the factors influencing language usage, such as individual attitudes towards language diversity or the socio-political context of language in Nigeria. Future research could further investigate these dimensions and explore the broader implications of language policies in higher education institutions. Additionally, future studies could incorporate longitudinal data to assess how language practices evolve over time and how they continue to influence social cohesion as students' progress through their academic careers.

The implications of this study are significant for university administrators, faculty members, and policymakers. Promoting language inclusivity through multilingual practices, including the recognition of indigenous languages alongside English, can help enhance social cohesion and academic collaboration across diverse student populations. Universities could adopt language policies that support both the use of indigenous languages and the provision of language support resources to ensure that all students feel included and valued.

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