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# Integrating Hausa Language and Culture into the Basic Education Curriculum in Northern Nigeria: Implications for Cultural Preservation and Literacy Development

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### ABSTRACT

Culture and language can only be meaningfully integrated into a formal education structure via curriculum development strategies that align with Indigenous knowledge systems. This paper adopted library research approach to evaluate the current integration of Hausa culture and language into Nigeria's Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) with particular reference to Northern Nigeria and suggests best curriculum integration practices to enhance it. It discovered that despite the role some Hausa culture and language play in Nigeria's formal education and the several advantages of culturally integrated curriculum, they are yet to be significantly integrated into the nation's basic education curriculum. It identified the following as the best curriculum development approaches for successful integration of the culture and language: community involvement and consultation in the curriculum development processes, contextualization of the curriculum content, integration of the culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum, ensuring curriculum flexibility by incorporating Indigenous culture alongside formal subjects and teachers training in Indigenous knowledge systems and culturally responsive pedagogy. Other strategies include the development of education policies that formally recognize and support the inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems and a fitting system for monitoring the impact of the integration. The paper recommends among other things that Nigeria government should undertake periodic curriculum review to enhance the representation of Hausa language and culture in the BEC to benefit from the immense advantages associated with culturally integrated curricula

### Introduction

The term culture or civilization is derived from the Latin word for cultivation and refers to the way of life of a social group and it includes sanctions, values and beliefs that can be communicated with necessary modifications from one generation to the succeeding one. It also includes knowledge, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Nakpodia, 2010). Culture would therefore simply mean the total way of life of members of the community although the concept has different meanings. It is defined, propagated and sustained through language which is therefore an expression of culture without being entirely synonymous with it. Thus, "*Culture can hardly be fully developed and applied outside language and conversely, language and culture are coeval and are meaningful and comprehensible only in the context of each other*" (Ifemesia in Obiegbu, 2016: 73). Thus, a culture that finds expression in its language has the best chance of survival and development if this language has both oral and written forms of transmission. Moreover, a culture that finds expression in an alien language is an endangered species because any culture without its language is subject to problems of interpretation and meaning (Obiegbu, 2016).

Culture is preserved or modified through education by way of curriculum development (Nakpodia, 2010). The term curriculum has no one generally accepted definition, but it is most comprehensively described as experiences, a view that is in accord with the present paper. One example of such a definition is that of Kelly (2004:8) who sees curriculum as "the totality of the experiences the pupil has as a result of the provision made". The curriculum is an inevitable aspect of education and a reflection of what people in the society feel, believe and do and this in essence, is their culture. It is therefore firmly rooted in culture and must always be firmly based on it and any society whose education and curriculum are not based on its culture is in danger of being unrooted and estranged by the social institution on which it should depend its survival (Obiegbu, 2016).

Hausa culture and language are a property of the Hausa society situated in the savannah region in Northern Nigeria, forming the majority of the people inhabiting the middle belt and northern states of Nigeria. The Hausas are largely agrarian but practice such occupations as fishing, hunting, leather works, pottery, textiles, blacksmithing and weaving (Nakpodia, 2010). Hausa cultural practices include knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, customs, religion, mode of dressing, food, marriage, and so on, most of which have stood the test of time (Akachukwu & Muomalu, 2023). The Hausa culture is not only in need of more integration into Nigeria's education curriculum but also needs the current role it plays in Nigeria's formal education faces many challenges, such as lack of adequate resources, teacher training, stakeholder involvement, and policy support which must be confronted through timely revision of the

curriculum (Ifarajimi, 2022). The present paper examines the integration of the Hausa language and culture into the basic education curriculum in northern Nigeria and the implications of so doing for cultural preservation and literacy development.

### **Representation of Hausa Culture and language in Nigeria's Basic Education Curriculum (BEC)**

As a segment of the curriculum content, Hausa cultural elements were first modified by the colonial masters and inculcated into Nigeria's formal education curricula and this process was followed by a series of educational policies and reforms aimed at re-orientating children and youth to imbibe Nigerian local traditions, since independence, in October 1st 1960. Today, the Hausa cultural elements are reflected in the nation's curriculum in the form of historical narratives, indigenous knowledge systems, and cultural practices and such subjects as History, Civic Education, and Cultural Studies, to advance a sense of cultural identity and pride among students. The country's basic educational institutions also reflect these cultural practices in cultural events, festivals, and performances organised to commemorate Nigeria's cultural heritage and promote intercultural understanding among students (Nweke & Boh, 2024).

Hausa culture and language are also reflected by the role Hausa plays as a language of instruction in Nigerian schools in areas where the language is the most dominant. The language policy of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in Nigeria stipulates that within the first three years of a child's life in Primary School, he/she should be taught in the local language and English should be taught as a subject and that from Primary Four, the English Language should be the medium of instruction for all subjects and the indigenous language should be taught as a subject (Obiegbu, 2016). This implies that where the Hausa language is the majority in Nigeria, it must be used as the medium of instruction during the first three years of primary education and that during this phase, the teacher is supposed to use English-language subject textbooks for teaching, but explain them to the pupils in the Hausa which is the Language of Immediate Environment. The role of Hausa as a language of Instruction in Nigeria's basic education schools is however limited not only by the inadequacy of the language provisions in the National Policy on Education (NPE) but also by several challenges to the implementation of the provisions of the language policy (Trudell, n. d).

The integration of the Hausa language into Nigeria's basic education structure as a subject of study is also another remarkable representation of the Hausa culture in the educational framework of the country. Section 4.19 of the National Policy on Education (NPE) states that from primary 4 to primary 6, the language of the immediate environment is a subject (as is French), with English as a medium of instruction. Section 5.24 of the policy also states: "As a core subject in JSS, 'the language of the environment shall be taught as L1 where it has orthography and literature. Where it does not have, it shall be taught with an emphasis on orality as L2'". The policy further states in its Section 5.25 that senior secondary school non-vocational electives include 'any Nigerian Language that has orthography and literature, etc (National Policy on Education, 2013). Thus, the NPE recognizes the Hausa language as a course of study at the senior primary, junior secondary and senior secondary levels of Nigerian education. The implication of this policy is that language teachers must instruct their students on the cultural background of language usage; choose culturally appropriate teaching styles and explore culturally based linguistic differences to promote understanding (Obiegbu, 2016). However, the teaching of Hausa language study is hindered by the inadequacy of well-trained teachers, inadequate instructional materials and facilities and teachers' emphasis on lecture and project methods of teaching (Trudell, n. d).

### **The role of Hausa culture in Nigeria's formal education**

Hausa culture plays a significant role in Nigeria's basic education. The use of the Hausa mother tongue as a medium of instruction in early formal education, to start with, improves comprehension and retention, while the use of many aspects of the Hausa language such as proverbs and folktales in language and literature classes enhances the child's reading and writing capabilities, improves his critical thinking and enriches his vocabulary and cultural literacy. Several empirical studies confirm this stand. Wushishi, Istudshafa & Sadiq (2016) for example, discovered that the use of the Hausa Language as a medium of instruction significantly impacted the academic performance of secondary school Biology Students in Sokoto State, Nigeria. Similarly, Ado, Isyaku, Abdullahi & Sadiq (2024) uncovered that the group of students taught scientific concepts, laws and principles via Hausa (Mother Tongue) proverbs and aphorisms had significantly higher achievement than those taught using the conventional English language. Abubakar (2024) also found the effectiveness of the Hausa Language as a medium of teaching on learning outcomes of some sampled private primary school pupils in Gwadabawa Local Government Area, Sokoto State, Nigeria.

The Hausa language is also replete with proverbs and folktales incorporated by teachers into their lessons to reinforce values such as honesty, respect, perseverance, and communal living all of which constitute Moral and Civic Education. They can be used effectively to inculcate good morals in Nigerian children through a non-formal approach to ensure the breeding of morally sound Nigerian children (Okoroafo & Nnadi, 2018). Like Hausa proverbs, Hausa folklore is also pregnant with moral and civic lessons. One example is the Hausa popular tale 'The Daughter of Bora and Daughter of Mowa' according to which the daughter of Mowa bed-wetted a mat and was directed to go to Bagaja river and wash it, but she refused to obey and accused the daughter Bora for the bed-wetting. Bora was then directed to take the mat to Bagaja river and in the end, she was rewarded for her obedience.

Another role of Hausa culture in the BEC is visible in the adaption, by the teachers, of the language's traditional storytelling method into their classroom practices, making lessons more engaging and participatory. Storytelling is one of the major teaching methods employed by the teachers of both the formal and informal ECC/pre-primary/nursery education centres across all states and the FCT (Humphreys and Crawford, 2015). The pedagogy is particularly significant in implementing culturally relevant instruction. Teachers use it to make their students discuss their experiences, knowledge, and activities with their peers and teachers. They create inclusive classrooms wherein all students feel respected, comfortable and safe to share their experiences and build relationships among students by establishing a safe, trusting, and caring environment. The storytelling approach bridges the cultural gap among students

of different cultures, increases listening skills, enhances self-reflection, improves interactions among students, improves students' connections and relationships, facilitates student engagement and so on (Hunter, n. d).

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### **Curriculum Development Strategies for Integrating Hausa Culture and Language into Nigeria's BEC**

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For a better representation of the Hausa language and culture in Nigeria's Basic Education Curriculum, curriculum development strategies that align with indigenous knowledge systems, ensuring that the language and culture are preserved, respected, and meaningfully integrated into formal education, must be adopted. One such strategy is community involvement and consultation in the curriculum development processes. This implies the consultation of elders, traditional leaders and indigenous knowledge holders in the community to assist curriculum developers with fundamental issues to include in the curriculum (Kugaraa & Mdhluli, 2023). These stakeholders engage in collaborative dialogue about the goals, content, methods and outcomes of the curriculum, making it reflective of the needs, interests, values and aspirations of the learners and their communities, and that they are relevant, meaningful and respectful of their cultural diversity and increasing the stakeholders' ownership, commitment and support for the curricula (Ifarajimi, 2022). Involving these local community figures will ensure that education policies and practices reflect diverse cultural values and aspirations and enhance the relevance and effectiveness of education initiatives, fostering collaboration and mutual understanding (Nweke & Boh, 2024).

Another curriculum development approach is the contextualization of the curriculum content. This means designing the curriculum content in a manner that reflects the local environment, economy, social structures and history. It also involves the use of indigenous languages where possible, to enhance understanding and cultural relevance and the adaption of scientific and historical content to include indigenous worldviews and explanations. Content contextualization enables students to learn about diverse cultural perspectives, histories, and contributions as part of their educational experience (Brown and Davis in Nweke & Boh, 2024). It also acknowledges the social identities of learners, turns learning into a positive experience, changes the attitude of learners towards science and, through re-validation of Indigenous knowledge, leads to cultural renaissance. Contextualization of the curriculum content also significantly improves the teaching-learning situation and motivates students who now see that recognition is given to what they do and say in their communities (De Beer and Whitelock, 2021).

One other curriculum development strategy that aligns with indigenous knowledge systems is the integration of culturally relevant pedagogy or indigenous approaches to learning into the curriculum (Amuthenu, 2023). Indigenous pedagogies are vital for effective teaching and learning if coupled with culturally safe, respectful, and conducive environments. According to Amuthenu (2023), these approaches can have a significant and engaging impact on all students' learning, prompting teacher educators to employ diverse resources and redesign approaches to meet curriculum objectives. He further laments that academics should enhance student teachers' contextualization skills, enabling them to align their teaching with local contexts and serve as effective role models. Teachers therefore training institutions need to incorporate the approach to enable their graduates to successfully employ it and to connect curriculum content to students' cultural backgrounds and experiences (Nweke & Boh, 2024).

Ensuring that the curriculum remains flexible is another means of developing a curriculum that aligns with indigenous knowledge systems. The curriculum flexibility can be ensured by not only making the curriculum integrative of Indigenous culture alongside formal subjects but also making it considerate of the peculiarities of the learners and their societies. This approach allows for the creation of education systems that are relevant, inclusive, and empowering ultimately contributing to the holistic development of individuals and the advancement of society as a whole and facilitates continuous refinement and improvement based on feedback from stakeholders and emerging societal trends. Cultural integration into the curriculum however requires thorough research and consultation to enable the curriculum planners and implementers to understand the cultural landscape of the community; identify commonalities and shared values across diverse cultural groups; and, incorporate culturally relevant pedagogical practices, assessment methods, and learning materials that resonate with students' backgrounds and experiences. It should also reflect the dynamic nature of culture, acknowledging its evolution over time and its intersection with other social, economic, and political factors (Nweke & Boh, 2024).

Training of teachers in indigenous knowledge systems and culturally responsive pedagogy to facilitate its implementation is also another requirement for developing a curriculum that aligns with indigenous knowledge systems is also must. Teachers must be trained enough to adopt a critical pedagogy approach that challenges the dominant narratives, assumptions and stereotypes that often marginalize or oppress certain groups of learners; the approach that empowers the students to question, critique and transform their social realities. Such an approach must also recognize and address the power dynamics, inequalities and injustices that exist in the educational system and society at large, and advocate for social change (Ifarajimi, 2022). Teacher training programmes should therefore prioritize not only the development of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) but also cultural competence as essential attributes for graduate teachers. Inservice training should also be given to teachers to incorporate subjects and indigenous knowledge in the classroom since many of them were trained in a Western system (Amuthenu, 2023; De Beer & Kriek, 2021; Kugaraa & Mdhluli, 2023).

Developing a curriculum that aligns with Indigenous knowledge systems also requires the development of education policies that formally recognize and support the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems; sufficient financial support for providing adequate resources, training, and documentation of Indigenous knowledge; and, partnerships between schools, local communities, and cultural institutions. Kugaraa & Mdhluli (2023) stress the need for such statutes and policies, cautioning that the policies need funding and resources and should be driven by social, political, etc. historical anecdotes that should form a roadmap to the statutes and policies. Moreover, the policies should support the use of indigenous languages as mediums of instruction particularly at the primary education level to preserve cultural heritage and enhance students' cognitive and academic development. Furthermore, the policies should mandate school administrators, policymakers and other education stakeholders to undergo cultural competence training to address implicit biases, promote cultural humility, and create inclusive educational environments (Nweke & Boh, 2024).

Finally, a culturally integrated curriculum should include a fitting system of monitoring the impact of the integration on student engagement and learning outcomes so that the curriculum content can be adjusted regularly to ensure it remains relevant and effective. The curriculum needs to be updated to align with current standards, culturally appropriated, and supported by effective pedagogical and evaluation methods (Amuthenu, 2023). Such an evaluation system entails a flexible and adaptive curriculum development approach which allows for continuous refinement and improvement based on feedback from stakeholders and emerging societal trends (Nweke & Boh, 2024). Unfortunately, many assessment methods currently used are predominantly rooted in Western traditions and primarily promote academic development through logical, sequential, and measurable activities (Amuthenu, 2023). Methods to evaluate the culturally integrated curriculum should therefore be developed that aligns with the essence of indigenous education and considers the values of students' home cultures.

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### Advantages of Integrating Hausa culture and language into Nigeria's Basic Education Curriculum

Integrating a culture like Hausa culture into a curriculum improves learning outcomes by enhancing students' engagement and motivation in the teaching and learning process, resulting from their seeing their culture, history, and identity reflected in the curriculum (Hunter, n. d). It also enhances students' comprehension and retention of their lessons through the use of culturally relevant pedagogy and resources which are empirically ascertained to improve academic achievement (Nweke & Boh, 2024). Moreover, a culturally relevant curriculum develops positive identity awareness in students as confirmed by Majebi, & Oduolowu (2021) who discovered in their study that culturally-based instructional Strategy (CBIS) significantly improved the social competence of pre-primary school children. Similarly, Dike, Aneke & Nweke (2023) established among other things that the integration of indigenous knowledge and practices into early childhood education has the potential to foster a sense of cultural identity and sustainability the children.

The culturally relevant curriculum also reduces achievement gaps particularly between minority and Indigenous students through a differentiated instruction approach which focuses on academic success for all students, cultural competencies, and sociopolitical concerns (Hernandez & Burrows, 2021). It also promotes critical thinking and helps learners to become more thoughtful, informed, and socially responsible since it enables its teachers to provide their students with the skill of analyzing how power and privilege operate in society and how they can challenge injustice and promote equity. Furthermore, a culturally relevant curriculum helps create a better relationship between teachers and their students because the teachers who use its related approaches create a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment which improves their relationship with students and enhances the students' success (Ifarajimi, 2022).

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### Conclusion

In conclusion, proper integration of the Hausa language and culture into Nigeria's basic education curriculum will not only ensure the preservation of the Hausa culture but also improve learning outcomes by enhancing students' engagement and motivation, developing students' positive identity awareness, reducing achievement gaps among students through differentiated instruction approach, promoting critical thinking and creating a better relationship between teachers and their students. The use of the Hausa mother tongue in instruction, intellectual and moral benefits of some Hausa cultural elements like proverbs and folktales and the pedagogical benefit of storytelling strategy also improve learning.

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### Recommendations

The following recommendations should be considered:

1. Nigeria's government should undertake periodic curriculum review with the view of enhancing the representation of Hausa language and culture into the BEC to benefit from the immense advantages associated with culturally integrated curricula.
2. Nigeria's government should develop educational policies that formally recognize and support the inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems and sufficient financing in the areas of resources and teacher training.
3. Partnerships should be established between schools, local communities, and cultural institutions for the proper development of the curriculum with Hausa properly integrated culture as well as its implementation.
4. Emphasis should be given to the training of teachers not only in pedagogical content knowledge but also in Hausa cultural competence and knowledge in the classroom since many of the teachers currently teaching in Nigeria's basic education schools were only trained in the Western system.

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