

Perceptions, supports, and barriers to Yoruba language learning among secondary school students in Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria: a cross-sectional study

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Abstract

Yoruba is one of Nigeria's major indigenous languages and plays an important role in preserving cultural identity, indigenous knowledge, and heritage. However, concerns have emerged regarding declining interest in Yoruba language use and learning among younger generations due to the increasing dominance of English in education and communication. This study assessed secondary school students' perceptions, motivations, instructional experiences, and perceived barriers related to Yoruba language learning in Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria.

A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted among 120 senior secondary school students selected from two secondary schools using a multistage sampling approach involving school selection and systematic random sampling of eligible students. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire assessing students' attitudes, learning experiences, available instructional resources, family and school support, and perceived challenges. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, with non-parametric tests used to examine response patterns.

Most students reported enjoying Yoruba lessons (79.2%) and considered Yoruba important (82.5%). However, only 32.5% indicated an intention to use Yoruba in their future careers, suggesting limited perceived professional relevance. Students reported positive family support (85.0%) and parental encouragement (65.8%), while peer support was comparatively lower (51.7%). Although textbooks were generally considered adequate (81.7%), the use of multimedia resources was limited (32.5%). Key perceived barriers included preference for English (40.8%), peer discouragement (38.3%), and the perception that Yoruba is not compulsory in schools (40.8%). Secondary school students in Ondo West generally value Yoruba culturally but face challenges sustaining long-term engagement with the language. Strengthening learner-centered teaching approaches, integrating digital resources, and improving the perceived relevance of Yoruba beyond the classroom may support continued language learning and preservation.

Key words: perception, influencing factors, learning, Yoruba language, secondary school, students, Nigeria.

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Introduction

Language is an essential vehicle for communication, cultural identity, and social integration. In Nigeria, a country with over 500 indigenous languages, language plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' cognitive, social, and cultural orientation. Among these languages, Yoruba stands out as one of the three major Nigerian languages, spoken predominantly in the South-Western states, including Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti, as well as parts of Kwara and Kogi States.¹ Globally, the Yoruba language has an estimated 40-45 million speakers, including diaspora communities in the Americas and Europe.² Its linguistic richness, oral traditions, and literary heritage make it an invaluable cultural asset, yet concerns have been raised about its continued transmission among younger generations. The Yoruba language serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a repository of indigenous knowledge, cultural values, history, and identity.³

Within the educational system, learning Yoruba provides opportunities for students to appreciate indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practices, and linguistic diversity.⁴ Nevertheless, evidence suggests that active use and proficiency in Yoruba among younger generations are gradually declining.⁵ This trend is particularly important given UNESCO's recognition that languages not consistently transmitted across generations are at increased risk of decline.⁶

Students' engagement with Yoruba language learning is shaped by a range of individual, family, school, and societal influences. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of parental attitudes, peer interactions, and community language practices in shaping students' experiences with indigenous languages.⁷ In many urban households, English increasingly dominates everyday communication because it is perceived as enhancing educational achievement and future opportunities, whereas Yoruba is often reserved for informal or cultural settings.⁸ School-related factors, including curriculum implementa-

tion, instructional approaches, availability of learning resources, and teacher competence, also shape students' experiences of Yoruba language education.⁹ In addition, globalization and increased exposure to international media have expanded young people's interaction with dominant global languages, potentially reducing the everyday use of indigenous languages.¹⁰ Research has shown that engaging instructional methods, culturally relevant learning materials, and supportive classroom environments can promote positive attitudes toward indigenous language education.¹¹ Conversely, negative perceptions of Yoruba, limited instructional resources, and beliefs that the language offers few career opportunities may reduce students' willingness to engage actively in Yoruba language learning.^{8,12}

Although previous studies have examined indigenous language education in Nigeria, relatively few have explored how secondary school students perceive the factors that facilitate or hinder Yoruba language learning within formal school settings. Understanding these perceptions may provide useful evidence for strengthening indigenous language education, informing culturally responsive teaching strategies, and supporting ongoing efforts to preserve Yoruba language and cultural heritage.

Objectives of the study

The study aimed to explore secondary school students' perceptions, motivations, instructional experiences, and perceived barriers related to Yoruba language learning in Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria.

Specifically, the study sought to: i) describe students' interest and motivation towards Yoruba language learning; ii) examine students' perceptions of teaching methods and instructional resources used during Yoruba language lessons; iii) identify perceived challenges to Yoruba language learning; iv) assess students' perceptions of the roles of the school environment, peer influence, and family support in Yoruba language learning; v) explore students' views on strategies that could improve Yoruba language learning.

Research questions

The following are the research questions: i) what are students' perceptions of their interest and motivation towards Yoruba language learning?; ii) how do students perceive the teaching methods and instructional resources used during Yoruba language lessons?; iii) what challenges do students perceive as affecting Yoruba language learning?; iv) how do students perceive the roles of the school environment, peer influence, and family support in Yoruba language learning?; v) what strategies do students perceive would improve Yoruba language learning?

Materials and Methods

Study design

A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was employed to explore secondary school students' perceptions, motivations, instructional experiences, and perceived barriers related to Yoruba language learning in Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria. The study was designed to describe students' attitudes, experiences, perceived supports, and perceived barriers related to Yoruba language learning rather than to establish causal relationships or measure language proficiency.

Study location

The selection of secondary school students in Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria as the study population is both contextually and strategically relevant. Ondo West is predominantly Yoruba-speaking, making it an ideal setting to explore factors influencing Yoruba language learning. The focus on secondary school students is crucial, as this age group is at a developmental stage where language proficiency, shaped by home environment, teacher quality, peer interactions, and curriculum design, is more established. Additionally, secondary school students have generally formed stable attitudes toward language learning, making them an accessible group for investigating these influences. Studying students in Ondo City, the administrative capital of Ondo West, provides insight into the broader challenges and opportunities within Yoruba-speaking regions of Nigeria. Schools in this area offer diverse academic and extracurricular experiences related to Yoruba language education, enhancing the study's relevance. Studying this demographic thus provides critical insights into sustaining the intergenerational transmission of Yoruba in formal education contexts.

Study population

This study focused on senior secondary school students (SS1-SS3) in Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo City, Ondo State, Nigeria. The samples were taken from both Top Class College, Ondo (private) and St Stephen's Secondary School, Ondo (public). This population was chosen based on the research objectives. This group is essential for obtaining meaningful insights into the factors influencing the learning of the Yoruba language among secondary school students in Ondo West Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria.

Sample size

The sample size consisted of 120 senior secondary school students. The sample size was considered adequate for a descriptive survey aimed at exploring students' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding Yoruba language learning within the selected schools. Participation was voluntary, and students who declined participation or submitted incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the final analysis. No eligible student refused participation during the data collection period.

Sampling procedure

The study employed a multistage sampling technique to select participants from secondary schools in Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria. In the first stage, two secondary schools were purposively selected to represent both public and private educational settings: St. Stephen's Secondary School, Ondo (public school), and Top Class College, Ondo (private school). These schools were selected because they offered Yoruba language as part of the school curriculum and had students across senior secondary school levels (SS1-SS3).

In the second stage, students were selected from the eligible classes using a systematic random sampling approach. A sampling interval was determined based on the number of eligible students available in each school, and students were selected from class registers until the required sample size was achieved. This approach ensured representation of students from SS1, SS2, and SS3 across both school categories.

Data collection and instrument validation

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire developed based on the study objectives and previous literature on indigenous language learning, language attitudes, and educational factors affecting language maintenance. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: i) sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity, class level, and school type); ii) students' interest and motivation towards Yoruba language learning; iii) teaching methods, instructional resources, and learning environment; iv) perceived barriers, social support, and strategies for improving Yoruba language learning.

The instrument was reviewed by experts in Yoruba language education to assess content relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study objectives. A pretest was conducted among students in a secondary school outside the selected study sites, and necessary modifications were made to improve clarity and comprehension before the final administration.

Importantly, the questionnaire assessed students' perceptions, attitudes, reported experiences, and perceived factors related to Yoruba language learning. It did not measure actual Yoruba language proficiency, examination performance, or objective language competence. Therefore, findings should be interpreted as reflecting students' views and experiences rather than direct measures of Yoruba learning outcomes.

Data analysis

Completed questionnaires were entered into IBM SPSS Statistics version 27 for analysis (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize participant characteristics and questionnaire responses. One-sample binomial tests were performed to determine whether the proportion of affirmative ("yes") responses differed significantly from an equal distribution (50%). Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria

Participants were eligible for inclusion if they met the following criteria.

1. Students enrolled in senior secondary school (SS1-SS3) in selected public and private secondary schools within Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria.
2. Students who had been exposed to Yoruba language teaching as part of the school curriculum.
3. Students who were present in the selected schools during the period of data collection and were available to participate.
4. Students who voluntarily agreed to participate after receiving adequate information about the study and providing informed assent.
5. Students whose parents or guardians provided consent for participation where applicable.

Exclusion criteria

Students were excluded if they met any of the following criteria.

1. Students below senior secondary school level (JSS1-JSS3) or those not enrolled in SS1-SS3.
2. Students who had not been exposed to Yoruba language learning within the school curriculum.
3. Students who were absent from school during the data collection period.
4. Students who declined participation or were unable to provide assent.
5. Students who submitted incomplete questionnaires that could not be included in the final analysis.

Results

Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the 120 secondary school students who participated in the study. The age distribution showed that students aged 16 years constituted the

Table 1. Sociodemographic information of respondents (n=120).

Variables	Observable variables	Frequency (%)
Age (in years)	12 years	2 (1.7)
	13 years	18 (15)
	14 years	22 (18.3)
	15 years	22 (18.3)
	16 years	27 (22.5)
	17 years	16 (13.3)
	18 years	13 (10.8)
Mean $\pm$ standard deviation = 15.28 $\pm$ 1.615		
Gender	Male	53 (44.2)
	Female	67 (55.8)
Tribe	Yoruba	99 (82.5)
	Igbo	10 (8.3)
	Others (Edo, Benue, Delta, Kogi)	11 (9.2)
Class	SS1	40 (33.3)
	SS2	40 (33.3)
	SS3	40 (33.3)
School type	Public	60 (50)
	Private	60 (50)

largest proportion (22.5%), followed by those aged 14 and 15 years (18.3% each). The mean age of respondents was 15.28 ± 1.615 years. Female students represented 55.8% of the participants, while males accounted for 44.2%. Most respondents were Yoruba (82.5%), while 8.3% were Igbo and 9.2% belonged to other ethnic groups, including Edo, Benue, Delta, and Kogi. Students were equally distributed across SS1, SS2, and SS3 classes, with each class contributing 33.3% of the sample. Similarly, half of the respondents attended public schools (50%), while the remaining half attended private schools (50%).

Students' interest and motivation towards Yoruba language learning

Table 2 presents students' attitudes and motivation towards Yoruba language learning. Most students (79.2%) reported that they enjoyed their Yoruba lessons, suggesting a generally positive classroom experience. However, only 32.5% indicated that they intended to use Yoruba language in their future careers, while 67.5% did not consider Yoruba as part of their future professional plans. More than half of the students (58.3%) reported being motivated to learn Yoruba, while 82.5% believed that Yoruba is an

important language. These findings demonstrate a difference between students' appreciation of Yoruba's cultural importance and their perception of its future practical relevance.

Learning methods and instructional resources for the Yoruba language

Table 3 describes students' experiences with Yoruba teaching approaches and available learning resources. More than half of the respondents (58.3%) reported that teachers used stories, songs, or videos during Yoruba lessons. Additionally, 64.2% considered Yoruba textbooks and novels clear and engaging. However, the use of multimedia resources remained limited, with only 32.5% of students reporting exposure to audio-visual materials during Yoruba lessons. Despite this limitation, 81.7% of respondents indicated that available Yoruba textbooks met curriculum requirements.

School environment, peer influence, and family support

Table 4 presents students' perceptions of the support structures surrounding Yoruba language learning. Slightly more than half of the respondents (51.7%) reported receiving encouragement from

Table 2. Interest and motivation for learning the Yoruba language (n=120).

Variables	Observable variables	Frequency (%)
I enjoy my Yoruba lessons	Yes	95 (79.2)
	No	25 (20.8)
I want to use Yoruba language in my future career	Yes	39 (32.5)
	No	81 (67.5)
I feel motivated to learn Yoruba language	Yes	70 (58.3)
	No	50 (41.7)
I believe Yoruba language is seen as important	Yes	99 (82.5)
	No	21 (17.5)

Table 3. Learning methods and resources for the Yoruba language (n=120).

Variables	Observable variables	Frequency (%)
My teacher uses stories, songs, or videos to teach Yoruba language	Yes	70 (58.3)
	No	50 (41.7)
I find Yoruba textbook and novel clear and engaging	Yes	77 (64.2)
	No	43 (35.8)
Multimedia (audio/visual) are used in teaching and learning the language	Yes	39 (32.5)
	No	81 (67.5)
Available Yoruba language textbooks meet curriculum needs	Yes	98 (81.7)
	No	22 (18.3)

Table 4. Learning environment and support for the Yoruba language (n=120).

Variables	Observable variables	Frequency (%)
My classmates encourage me in learning Yoruba language	Yes	62 (51.7%)
	No	58 (48.3%)
My family speaks/supports learning Yoruba language	Yes	102 (85%)
	No	18 (15%)
School offers regular programs and activities in Yoruba language	Yes	73 (60.8%)
	No	47 (39.2%)
My parents support me in Yoruba study	Yes	79 (65.8%)
	No	41 (34.2%)

classmates to learn Yoruba. Family support was commonly reported, with 85.0% indicating that their families spoke Yoruba or supported its learning. Furthermore, 60.8% of students stated that their schools organized Yoruba-related programs and activities, while 65.8% reported receiving parental support for their Yoruba studies.

Challenges and barriers to Yoruba language learning

Table 5 highlights perceived challenges associated with Yoruba language learning. A minority of students (32.5%) reported that inadequate learning materials affected their ability to learn Yoruba. Preference for English was identified as a challenge by 40.8% of respondents. Similarly, 38.3% reported experiencing peer discouragement from speaking or learning Yoruba. In addition, 40.8% perceived the non-compulsory status of Yoruba within schools and government educational structures as a limitation to its wider acceptance.

Suggested strategies for improving Yoruba language learning

Table 6 presents students' suggestions for improving Yoruba language learning. The use of videos, songs, stories, and games was supported by 58.3% of respondents. A larger proportion (76.7%) recommended increasing practical speaking activities to improve engagement with the language. Cultural clubs and Yoruba language days were supported by 75.0% of students, while 79.2% emphasized the importance of encouragement from parents, teachers, and peers.

Distribution of factors related to students' experiences of Yoruba language learning

Table 7 presents the results of the non-parametric analyses examining whether students' responses regarding Yoruba language

learning experiences differed significantly from an equal distribution. The distribution of respondents' age categories differed significantly ($p<0.001$), reflecting variation in the age structure of participants. Similarly, students' ethnic distribution differed significantly ($p<0.001$), with Yoruba students constituting the majority of respondents.

Students' attitudes towards Yoruba learning demonstrated significant response patterns. Enjoyment of Yoruba lessons differed significantly from an equal distribution ($p<0.001$), with most students reporting positive classroom experiences. Students' perception of Yoruba as an important language also showed a significant difference ($p<0.001$). Although only 32.5% reported plans to use Yoruba in their future careers, this response distribution was significantly different from an equal proportion ($p<0.001$), highlighting differences in students' perceptions of the future relevance of Yoruba.

Regarding instructional resources, significant response patterns were observed for the availability of engaging textbooks ($p<0.003$), use of multimedia resources ($p<0.001$), and adequacy of textbooks in meeting curriculum requirements ($p<0.001$). These findings indicate variation in students' experiences with available learning materials and teaching approaches. Significant differences were also observed in relation to family and school support. Students' reports of family support for Yoruba learning ($p<0.001$), parental encouragement ($p<0.001$), and availability of school-based Yoruba programs ($p<0.022$) showed significant response patterns. Peer encouragement also demonstrated a significant difference ($p<0.014$).

With respect to barriers, students' perceptions regarding inadequate materials ($p<0.001$) and peer discouragement ($p<0.014$) showed significant differences. Students also identified practical speaking activities, cultural programs, and encouragement from parents, teachers, and peers as important strategies for strengthening Yoruba language learning ($p<0.001$).

Table 5. Challenges and barriers to learning of the Yoruba language (n=120).

Variables	Observable variables	Frequency (%)
Lack of materials affects my learning Yoruba language	Yes	39 (32.5)
	No	81 (67.5)
Preference for English affects my learning Yoruba language	Yes	49 (40.8)
	No	71 (59.2)
My peers discouraged me from speaking and learning Yoruba language	Yes	46 (38.3)
	No	74 (61.7)
Learning Yoruba language is not mandatory by government and schools	Yes	49 (40.8)
	No	71 (59.2)

Table 6. Strategies for improving learning of the Yoruba language (n=120).

Variables	Observable variables	Frequency (%)
Use of videos, songs, stories, and games to learn Yoruba language	Yes	70 (58.3)
	No	50 (41.7)
More practical speaking activities in Yoruba language	Yes	92 (76.7)
	No	28 (23.3)
Cultural clubs and days	Yes	90 (75)
	No	30 (25)
Encouragement from parents, teachers, and peers	Yes	95 (79.2)
	No	25 (20.8)

Table 7. Distribution of factors related to students' experiences of Yoruba language learning.

Nonparametric Test Hypothesis Test Summary			
Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.a	Decision
The distribution of Age (in years). is normal with mean 15 and standard deviation 1.615.	One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	0.000^b	Reject the null hypothesis.
The categories of Tribe occur with equal probabilities.	One-Sample Chi-Square Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
The categories defined by I enjoy my Yoruba lessons. = Yes and No occur with probabilities 0.500 and 0.500.	One-Sample Binomial Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
The categories defined by I want to use Yoruba in my future career. = Yes and No occur with probabilities 0.500 and 0.500.	One-Sample Binomial Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
The categories defined by I believe Yoruba language is seen as important. = Yes and No occur with probabilities 0.500 and 0.500.	One-Sample Binomial Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
The categories defined by I find Yoruba textbook and novel clear and engaging. = Yes and No occur with probabilities 0.500 and 0.500.	One-Sample Binomial Test	0.003	Reject the null hypothesis.
The categories defined by Multimedia (audio/visual) are used in class for teaching and learning. = Yes and No occur with probabilities 0.500 and 0.500.	One-Sample Binomial Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
The categories defined by Available textbooks meet curriculum needs. = Yes and No occur with probabilities 0.500 and 0.500.	One-Sample Binomial Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
The categories defined by My family speaks/supports learning Yoruba. = Yes and No occur with probabilities 0.500 and 0.500.	One-Sample Binomial Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
The categories defined by My school offers regular programmes and activities in Yoruba. = No and Yes occur with probabilities 0.500 and 0.500.	One-Sample Binomial Test	0.022	Reject the null hypothesis.
The categories defined by My parents support me in Yoruba study. = Yes and No occur with probabilities 0.500 and 0.500.	One-Sample Binomial Test	0.001	Reject the null hypothesis.
The categories defined by Lack of materials affects my learning Yoruba. = Yes and No occur with probabilities 0.500 and 0.500.	One-Sample Binomial Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
The categories defined by My peers discouraged me from speaking and learning Yoruba. = No and Yes occur with probabilities 0.500 and 0.500.	One-Sample Binomial Test	0.014	Reject the null hypothesis.
The categories defined by More practical speaking activities. = Yes and No occur with probabilities 0.500 and 0.500.	One-Sample Binomial Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
The categories defined by Cultural clubs and days. = Yes and No occur with probabilities 0.500 and 0.500.	One-Sample Binomial Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.
The categories defined by Encouragement from parents, teachers, and peers. = No and Yes occur with probabilities 0.500 and 0.500.	One-Sample Binomial Test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

The significance level is 0.050.b. Lilliefors Corrected. Asymptotic significance is displayed.

Discussion

Students' interest, motivation, and perceived value of Yoruba language

This study revealed generally positive attitudes toward Yoruba language learning among secondary school students in Ondo West Local Government Area. Most students reported enjoying Yoruba lessons (79.2%) and considered the language important (82.5%). The significant response patterns observed in the non-parametric analyses ($p < 0.001$) indicate that these positive perceptions were substantially different from an equal distribution of positive and negative responses. However, despite this favorable attitude, only 32.5% of students expressed willingness

to use Yoruba in their future careers, suggesting a gap between cultural appreciation and perceived practical relevance.

This finding highlights the distinction between valuing Yoruba as an element of identity and perceiving it as a language that provides future economic or professional opportunities. Similar observations have been reported in Nigeria, where indigenous languages are often associated with cultural belonging but are perceived as having limited socioeconomic value compared with English. Adegbija noted that societal attitudes strongly shape language preference,¹³ while Bamgbose emphasized that the reduced status of indigenous languages is partly linked to their limited use in formal and professional domains.¹⁴ Adeyinka also reported that students' perception of future relevance influences their willingness to engage with indigenous lan-

guages.⁹ Therefore, although students demonstrated interest in Yoruba learning, improving its perceived relevance beyond classroom settings remains essential for sustaining engagement.

Learning resources and instructional approaches

The findings demonstrated that students generally perceived available Yoruba learning resources positively. A large proportion (81.7%) reported that available textbooks met curriculum requirements, while 64.2% found Yoruba textbooks and novels clear and engaging. These response patterns were statistically significant in the non-parametric analysis ($p < 0.01$), indicating that positive perceptions of instructional materials were predominant among respondents.

However, the use of modern instructional technologies remained limited, with only 32.5% reporting exposure to multimedia resources such as audio and visual materials. The significant difference in responses regarding multimedia use ($p < 0.001$) suggests a notable gap between traditional teaching resources and contemporary approaches preferred by learners. Previous studies have highlighted that participatory and technology-supported teaching methods can improve language engagement and retention. Fakeye and Aiyede emphasized the importance of interactive teaching approaches,¹⁵ while Ajayi and Olabode reported that inadequate or ineffective instructional strategies may reduce students' motivation toward indigenous language learning.^{16,17}

Family, school, and peer support for Yoruba learning

The study identified strong family and school-based support for Yoruba language learning. Most students reported that their families speak or support Yoruba learning (85.0%), while 65.8% indicated receiving parental support for their Yoruba studies. These findings were supported by significant non-parametric test results ($p < 0.001$), demonstrating that supportive responses were substantially higher than negative responses. Similarly, 60.8% of students reported that their schools organize Yoruba-related programs and activities, with the response pattern reaching statistical significance ($p < 0.022$). These findings reinforce the importance of social environments in maintaining indigenous language exposure. Previous research has emphasized that home language practices and institutional support contribute significantly to language preservation and transmission. Olagbaju, Egbokhare, Akinsola, Myers-Scotton, and Oyetade all highlighted the role of political, social and structural factors, mass media, policies, and family-based language exposure in sustaining competence among younger generations.¹⁸⁻²² Adegbiya and Akinsola highlighted the role of youth identity, social interactions, and media exposure in shaping language choices among young people.^{13,20} Myers-Scotton further explained that code-switching practices in multilingual societies influence how speakers negotiate language use across different social settings.²¹ Peer support, however, was comparatively weaker, with only 51.7% of students reporting encouragement from classmates. The significant response pattern related to peer influence ($p < 0.014$) suggests that peer environments represent an important area for intervention. Negative peer attitudes may discourage active use of Yoruba, particularly among adolescents who are influenced by social identity and acceptance.

Challenges and barriers to Yoruba language learning

Several perceived barriers to Yoruba learning were identified. Preference for English was reported by 40.8% of students, while 38.3% experienced peer discouragement from speaking or learning Yoruba. Additionally, 40.8% perceived that Yoruba was not sufficiently supported through compulsory educational policies. The significant response patterns observed for barriers such as lack of materials ($p < 0.001$) and peer discouragement ($p < 0.014$) indicate that these concerns were not randomly distributed among respondents. The findings reflect broader challenges facing indigenous language education in Nigeria, where English remains dominant in academic, economic, and professional settings. Egbokhare noted that the prestige associated with English contributes to language shift among younger populations,¹⁹ while Olagbaju and Akinsowon highlighted the gap between indigenous language policy intentions and implementation.¹⁸

Overall, the findings suggest that students' relationship with Yoruba is characterized by strong cultural appreciation but reduced perception of its future utility. Sustainable Yoruba language education will therefore require approaches that strengthen classroom engagement, increase practical use, integrate modern teaching tools, and reposition Yoruba as both a cultural asset and a relevant skill in contemporary society.

Suggested strategies for strengthening Yoruba language learning

Students identified several strategies that could improve Yoruba learning experiences. Most respondents supported increased practical speaking activities (76.7%), cultural clubs and Yoruba language days (75.0%), and encouragement from parents, teachers, and peers (79.2%). These response patterns were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), demonstrating strong agreement among students regarding possible improvement strategies. The findings suggest that students favor more interactive and socially embedded approaches to Yoruba learning rather than relying exclusively on classroom instruction. Integrating cultural activities, digital resources, and practical communication opportunities may increase students' engagement and strengthen the relevance of Yoruba in contemporary settings.

Similar recommendations have been proposed by Bamgbose,¹⁴ Adeyinka,⁹ Alamu,²³ and Akinsola,²⁰ who advocate combining educational reforms with cultural and technological approaches for indigenous language revitalization.

Overall interpretation of the findings

Although the study identified statistically significant response patterns across several domains, these findings should be interpreted as indicators of students' perceptions and experiences rather than causal determinants of Yoruba language learning. The descriptive evidence suggests that students generally appreciate Yoruba's cultural importance, but face challenges related to career relevance, peer influence, limited digital integration, and broader societal preference for English. Future studies using analytical approaches such as ordinal logistic regression or multivariable modelling could further examine predictors of Yoruba learning outcomes or proficiency.

Conclusions

This study provides a descriptive overview of secondary school students' perceptions, motivations, instructional experiences, and perceived barriers related to Yoruba language learning in two schools in Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria. Overall, the findings indicate that students generally enjoy Yoruba lessons, consider the language important, and receive support from their families and schools. However, relatively few students reported that they would like to use Yoruba in their future careers, suggesting a distinction between cultural appreciation of the language and its perceived occupational relevance.

The study also found that conventional instructional resources such as textbooks are generally available, although multimedia teaching resources are used less frequently. Students further identified societal preference for English, peer discouragement, and the perception that Yoruba is not compulsory as important challenges. They also expressed support for more interactive teaching approaches, practical speaking activities, cultural programs, and stronger encouragement from parents, teachers, and peers. Given the descriptive cross-sectional design and the inclusion of only 120 students from two secondary schools, the findings should be interpreted within this context and should not be generalized beyond similar settings. Nevertheless, the study provides useful insights that may inform future research and educational initiatives aimed at supporting indigenous language education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this descriptive survey, the following recommendations are proposed.

1. Policy and curriculum: educational authorities should continue to strengthen the implementation of existing indigenous language policies and consider strategies that promote sustained Yoruba language learning within the school curriculum.
2. Teaching and learning: schools should complement traditional instructional approaches with multimedia resources, interactive classroom activities, storytelling, games, and practical speaking exercises to enhance students' learning experiences.
3. Family and community support: parents and communities should continue to encourage the use of Yoruba in everyday communication and support cultural activities such as language clubs, competitions, and cultural festivals that promote continued engagement with the language.
4. Career awareness: schools should increase students' awareness of educational and professional opportunities where Yoruba language proficiency may be beneficial, including teaching, translation, broadcasting, publishing, cultural tourism, media, and creative industries.
5. School environment: schools should foster supportive learning environments that encourage the use of Yoruba through debates, drama, literary activities, cultural events, and peer-led initiatives that promote positive attitudes toward indigenous languages.
6. Future research: future studies should include larger and more representative samples across multiple schools and regions. Research should also incorporate objective measures of Yoruba language proficiency and employ appropriate analytical methods to examine associations between student characteristics, learning environments, and language outcomes rather than relying solely on students' perceptions.

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Participant consent for publication: all participants provided informed consent for the anonymized data to be published as part of this study.

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