

IPINS Proposed Language Policy for a Prospective Igbo Nation-State

13 August 2025

Executive Summary

This policy sets out a coherent, rights-respecting and implementation-ready language regime for a prospective autonomous, confederal, or independent Igbo nation-state. It designates **Igbo** and **Nigerian Pidgin (Naija/“Pidgin English”)** as the languages for official governmental business, and **Igbo** and **English** as the languages of education and international engagement. It mandates simultaneous interpretation and high-quality translation between the relevant official working pairs to guarantee universal access, administrative efficiency, and constitutional fairness. The model aligns with continental best practice (African Union/ACALAN), global evidence on mother-tongue-based multilingual education (UNESCO), and proven multilingual governance architectures (e.g., the European Parliament and South Africa).

1. Rationale and Principles

1. **Democratic inclusion.** Language is a gateway to rights. Citizens must be able to access legislation, public services, and courts in a language they command well. Comparative systems demonstrate that multilingual states can guarantee access without sacrificing efficiency when interpretation and translation are properly institutionalised.
2. **Cultural continuity with global reach.** Igbo is a major West African language spoken by many millions; Nigerian Pidgin functions as a broad interethnic lingua franca across urban and rural settings; English remains a principal medium for scholarship, diplomacy and trade. The policy therefore ties constitutional identity to Igbo, mass participation to Pidgin, and external connectivity to English.
3. **Pedagogical evidence.** Robust research shows that learners achieve better outcomes when foundational learning is delivered in the mother tongue and additional languages are added through structured, additive bilingual pathways. The policy therefore embeds Igbo-medium education from early years upwards, while ensuring high, measurable proficiency in English.
4. **Continental norm-compatibility.** The framework advances the African Union’s Language Plan of Action for Africa and ACALAN’s mandate to elevate African languages in official domains, while retaining ex-colonial languages where pragmatically useful.

2. Legal Status and Definitions

2.1 Official Languages (Domestic Governance).

The official languages for governmental business shall be **Igbo** and **Nigerian Pidgin (Naija)**. For the avoidance of doubt:

- “Governmental business” includes legislation, executive communications, administrative forms, public notices, service delivery, and court proceedings.
- **Authoritative legal text:** In case of divergence between language versions of statutes and regulations, the **Igbo** text prevails; certified translations in Pidgin and English shall be issued. (This mirrors comparative practice in multilingual jurisdictions.)

2.2 Languages of Education and International Engagement.

The official languages for **education, science, diplomacy, and international trade** shall be **Igbo** and **English**, with additive bilingual pathways specified in Section 4.

2.3 Working Pairs for Interpretation.

The state guarantees professional simultaneous interpretation and translation between:

- Igbo ↔ Pidgin (domestic governance)
- Igbo ↔ English (education, foreign affairs, treaty work)

Institutions shall be staffed and equipped to standards comparable to those in the European Parliament’s multilingual services.

2.4 Language Codes and Orthography.

For digital and legal clarity, the state adopts BCP-47 tagging for language resources (ig, en, pcm) and uses the **Ọnwụ** orthography for Standard Igbo (Igbo Izugbe) across official publications, while respecting dialectal diversity in cultural domains.

3. Rights, Duties, and Access Guarantees

3.1 Individual Rights.

- Every person has the right to receive state services and to participate in official proceedings in **Igbo** or **Pidgin**.
- Every learner has the right to early and sustained **Igbo-medium** instruction with systematically planned English acquisition, consistent with UNESCO guidance.

3.2 State Duties.

- Ministries, agencies, and sub-national authorities must issue all core documents in **Igbo** and **Pidgin**, with English versions provided where an international audience is envisaged.

- Courts must provide interpretation as of right; no litigant shall be disadvantaged by language choice.
- Public broadcasters and emergency services must provide Igbo and Pidgin channels and alerts.

3.3 Equality and Non-Discrimination.

No person shall suffer disadvantage in employment, education, or justice on language grounds. The equality clause mirrors jurisprudence from multilingual African constitutional orders.

4. Education: An Additive Bilingual Model

4.1 Early Years to Upper Primary (ECCDE–P6).

- **Medium of instruction:** Igbo as the primary language of instruction.
- **English:** Introduced as a subject from the earliest grades; literacy in English is developed without displacing Igbo.
This aligns with Nigeria’s long-standing policy trajectory (mother tongue/“language of the immediate community”) and current global evidence on learning outcomes.

4.2 Lower and Upper Secondary.

- **Medium:** Igbo for core humanities and civic subjects; dual-medium (Igbo and English) for mathematics and sciences, transitioning to increased English in advanced classes while keeping Igbo strong in content mastery.
- **Assessment:** Public examinations offered in Igbo and English, with item equivalence procedures.

4.3 Tertiary and Research.

- Universities and technical institutes shall develop **parallel-medium** programmes (Igbo and English) in selected disciplines, with terminology development and scholarly publishing incentives (see Section 6). This balances global visibility with epistemic sovereignty.

4.4 Teacher Education and Materials.

- Initial Teacher Education programmes must certify Igbo-medium pedagogical competence, continuing professional development to include bilingual methodology, subject-specific terminology, and translanguaging strategies.
- The textbook industry shall be supported to produce high-quality Igbo materials across subjects.

5. Government Communication, Legislation, and Justice

5.1 Legislature.

- Debates may be conducted in Igbo or Pidgin with real-time interpretation. Bills must be introduced with a certified Igbo text and accompanied by Pidgin and English translations before final reading.

5.2 Executive Administration.

- All forms, portals, and notices shall be issued in Igbo and Pidgin; international-facing portals will include English.
- A **Plain Language Standard** shall be promulgated in both Igbo and Pidgin to improve comprehensibility.

5.3 Judiciary and Law Enforcement.

- Proceedings are in Igbo by default, with guaranteed interpretation for parties who prefer Pidgin or English.
- Police cautions, rights notices, and immigration forms shall exist in Igbo, Pidgin, and English.

Comparative feasibility. Large-scale simultaneous interpretation and translation are operationally routine in the European Parliament; a scaled national system is technically feasible with appropriate staffing, workflows, and glossary management.

6. Institutions, Terminology, and Standards

6.1 National Language Service (NLS).

A central agency responsible for interpretation, translation, quality assurance, and language technology. Its functions include:

- Managing interpreter corps and translator cadres.
- Maintaining a national **Terminology Bank** and Translation Memory in Igbo, Pidgin, and English (TBX/ISO-704 compliant).
- Commissioning corpus development, frequency lists, and style guides.
- Accrediting language professionals and vendors.

6.2 Igbo Language and Culture Commission (ILCC).

A statutory body charged with corpus planning (orthography, neologisms), dialect documentation, and support for the creative industries. It collaborates with ACALAN and regional universities.

6.3 Sector Standards.

- **Digital:** BCP-47 tagging; accessibility (WCAG) for multilingual websites; open APIs for NLS glossaries.
- **Publishing:** Mandatory parallel ISBN registration for Igbo and English editions of public documents.
- **Broadcasting:** Public Service Media quota for Igbo and Pidgin programming.

7. Nigerian Pidgin in Public Administration

Recognising Nigerian Pidgin's reach across social strata and regions, the state will:

- Employ Pidgin in frontline service delivery (health briefings, disaster alerts, taxation explainers, voter education), alongside Igbo.
- Produce **Plain Pidgin** style guidance for officials to avoid code-switching drift and to stabilise terminology without over-formalising the register.
- Support literacy materials in Pidgin for adult education and civic mobilisation.

The sociolinguistic justification is compelling: credible surveys and expert resources estimate tens of millions of users in Nigeria; major broadcasters have invested significantly in Pidgin news services, underscoring public demand and viability.

8. Economic and International Dimensions

- **Trade and diplomacy:** English remains indispensable for treaty practice, standards harmonisation, and external markets; certified Igbo texts secure domestic authority and cultural legitimacy.
- **Creative economy:** Incentives for film, music, gaming, and publishing in Igbo and Pidgin expand markets and soft power.
- **Diaspora outreach:** Consular services will operate in Igbo and English, with Pidgin where relevant.

9. Implementation Roadmap (10 Years)

Phase I (Years 1–2): Legal and Institutional Setup

- Enact the Language Act; establish the NLS and ILCC; issue civil-service language requirements; set up interpreter training pipelines in partnership with universities.

Phase II (Years 3–5): Education and Service Rollout

- ECCDE–P6 Igbo-medium fully operational; bilingual teacher deployment targets met; core administrative forms and portals available in Igbo and Pidgin nationwide.

Phase III (Years 6–8): Consolidation and Tertiary Parallel-Medium

- Selected degree programmes run in parallel medium; national terminology bank reaches 100,000 validated entries; courts complete multilingual forms library.

Phase IV (Years 9–10): Evaluation and Optimisation

- Independent evaluation of learning outcomes, access to justice metrics, and cost-effectiveness of language services; refine scope and budgets accordingly.

Comparators suggest that up-front investment in professionalised multilingual services reduces downstream costs by lowering error rates, repeat filings, and litigation over comprehension.

10. Financing and Workforce

- **Financing:** A dedicated Language Services Vote (0.2–0.4% of recurrent expenditure initially), supplemented by donor grants for corpus and ed-tech.
- **Workforce:** Train 500–800 conference-level interpreters and 1,500–2,000 translators over 10 years; create a civil-service language allowance tied to proficiency and domain expertise.
- **Market development:** Framework contracts for localisation, subtitling, and accessibility compliance to stimulate a domestic language-tech ecosystem.

11. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Public Accountability

- **Indicators:** (i) proportion of public documents available in Igbo and Pidgin; (ii) classroom language use fidelity; (iii) reading comprehension rates by P6; (iv) user satisfaction with court and frontline services; (v) interpreter utilisation and accuracy audits.
- **Reporting:** Annual “State of Languages” report to Parliament; external peer review every three years with ACALAN participation.

12. Risk Management and Safeguards

- **Risk of diglossia drift:** Mitigated by investment in high-register Igbo terminology for law, science, and technology, and by plain-language standards for both Igbo and Pidgin.
- **Capacity constraints:** Phased recruitment and scholarships for interpreting/translation, drawing on proven training models from multilingual polities.

- **Political contestation:** Non-discrimination clauses and service guarantees ensure no group is disadvantaged by language policy choices; periodic consultations institutionalised through ILCC town-halls.

13. Transitional Arrangements

- During the first five years, previously English-only legacy instruments remain valid; certified Igbo and Pidgin versions shall be developed on a rolling schedule, with priority to health, justice, and revenue instruments.
- All new primary legislation must be enacted with an Igbo authoritative text from commencement.

14. Communications and Public Engagement

- National campaigns (broadcast, schools, digital) will explain rights and service options in Igbo and Pidgin; diaspora-facing explainer content provided in English and Igbo.
- Annual “**Igbo Languages Week**” to celebrate literary output, orature, and language technology, coordinated with ACALAN calendars.

15. Authorship and Custodianship

This policy is advanced by the **Igbo-Biafra Nationalists and the Indigenous People of Igbo Nation for Self-Determination (IPINS)**. Uche Mefor, Convenor of the Igbo-Biafra Nationalists and the Indigenous People of Igbo Nation for Self-Determination, serves as the principal proponent and public custodian of the policy proposal.

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Annex A: Summary of Language Use by Domain

- **Legislation & Courts:** Igbo (authoritative); certified Pidgin & English versions.
- **Executive Administration:** Igbo and Pidgin; English for international-facing outputs.
- **Education:** Igbo-medium with additive English; dual-medium in upper grades; parallel-medium at tertiary level.
- **Diplomacy & Treaties:** Igbo (domestic authority) and English (external validity).
- **Public Information & Media:** Igbo and Pidgin; English where international audiences are targeted.

Closing Note

This policy does not romanticise language; it operationalises it. By combining **Igbo for identity and authority**, **Pidgin for mass access**, and **English for global reach**, the state can deliver inclusive governance, better learning, and a confident international voice—while meeting African continental norms and international best evidence.