**Endangerment of Indigenous Language and Cultural Identity: The Decline of Igbo Language among Secondary School Students in Umuahia, Nigeria**

**By**

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**Abstract**

The global decline of indigenous languages since the advent of globalization has been a central subject of concern and scholarly debate, as it threatens irreplaceable cultural and intellectual heritage. This is exemplified by the precarious state of the Igbo language and the preservation of the cultural identity of the Igbo people in Nigeria. This paper investigates the critical decline in the use and proficiency of the Igbo language among secondary school students in Umuahia, Nigeria, and its profound implications for cultural identity erosion, the effectiveness of government policies, and the role of parents and teachers in language promotion. The study is situated within the global context of indigenous language endangerment, highlighting the specific threat to the Igbo language, which UNESCO classifies as vulnerable. A descriptive survey design was employed, and data was collected from 286 secondary school students and teachers across five public and private secondary schools in Umuahia Abia state, Nigeria. Findings revealed that Igbo speaking skills among students are generally very low, as many students are unable to sustain communication in pure Igbo, instead blending it with English, which signals a disturbing erosion of linguistic competence. This decline has been exacerbated by globalization, particularly through social media and Western cultural influences. Although government policies exist to promote Igbo language education, weak enforcement and inadequate resources have limited their effectiveness. Similarly, many parents and teachers have failed to actively encourage Igbo usage, often resorting to English in daily communication. Based on these findings, the study recommends stronger policy implementation, an interactive teaching method, and an increased parental involvement in promoting Igbo language. Further research is suggested to explore the potential of digital platforms in revitalizing indigenous languages.

***Keywords:*** *Igbo language, Language endangerment, Cultural identity, Globalization, Education policy, Language proficiency.*

**Introduction**

Language is more than a mere tool for communication but a vessel that embodies a people's cultural expression, identity and worldview. With globalization, reshaping societies, the survival of indigenous languages has become a worldwide concern as many languages are at a very critical situation of decline or extinction. Among these is the Igbo language, one of the three major indigenous languages in Nigeria, and which is experiencing a massive decline among the younger generation. The Igbo language, spoken by millions of people in southeastern Nigeria, is a prime example of an indigenous tongue under threat. In 2006, UNESCO classified it as “vulnerable to endangerment,” noting that English language is increasingly dominant across key Nigerian institutions, thereby reducing the functional space for Igbo language and other languages in the country. (UNESCO, 2006). Through globalization, the Igbo language is being replaced as the primary language by the English lingua franca in education, governance and business. The change in linguistic preference is not only a language usage problem but a cultural change that cuts deep into the Igbo identity and the overall Nigerian landscape (Onyemelukwe, 2019).

Beyond communication, language serves as a storehouse of a people’s history, culture, and traditions. A decline in the Igbo language is more than a linguistic concern as it endangers the preservation of Igbo identity and cultural memory. Evidence from recent studies and field surveys shows a growing reluctance among Igbo youth to adopt or consistently use the Igbo language. As the younger generation increasingly turn to English for academic and professional advancement, they gradually drift away from their cultural heritage. Okonkwo (2018) argue that if this trend continues, Igbo has the potential of becoming an endangered language within a few generations thus losing valuable cultural knowledge embedded in this language. With globalization making English spread through education, media and the workplace, languages like Igbo are relegated to a secondary status. This leads to a widening gap between the cultural traditions of the older generations and the identities of the younger generations who may not be able to relate with their cultural roots (Ogbulogo, 2017). This proficiency of the Igbo language has also declined more in urban area where there are more exposures to Western education and media that are revered.

According to Negash (2005), Globalization, which has been the cause of the eroding of indigenous languages, has also been a factor of the marginalization of Igbo use with the spread of digital media platforms and social media platforms, which are predominantly in English. In addition, the Nigerian educational system, which is biased towards English in preference to the indigenous languages, does not promote the use and learning of Igbo. While government policies have directed for the introduction of indigenous languages in the curriculum, the implementation has been fairly poor, at best (Umeasiegbu, 2022). In a few instances, Igbo is treated as an elective subject, and students tend to see the mastery of English being good for their academic and career prospects. A primary manifestation of this endangerment is the noticeable and rapid decline in Igbo language proficiency and usage among the youth, particularly among secondary school students. This generation increasingly prefers English, often exhibiting a more passive (comprehension-only) rather than active (speaking) knowledge of their native tongue. This shift in linguistic preference is driven by a complex interplay of factors. The powerful forces of globalization have made English the lingua franca of international commerce, technology, and popular culture, creating a perception that proficiency in English is synonymous with modernity, economic opportunity, and social mobility.

This perception is heavily reinforced within Nigeria itself, where the influence of English is deeply entrenched across all major institutions. The Nigerian education system, from primary to tertiary level, predominantly uses English as the medium of instruction, often marginalizing indigenous languages to a single subject or extracurricular activity. Furthermore, English is the official language of government, law, and formal business, creating a tangible link between the language and socioeconomic advancement. Consequently, many parents, aiming to secure the best future for their children, consciously encourage English use at home, inadvertently accelerating the intergenerational breakdown of Igbo language transmission.

The following research questions were formulated to address the challenges surrounding the decline of Igbo language usage and preservation:

1. What is the level of Igbo language proficiency among secondary school students in Umuahia?
2. How has globalization affected the use and preservation of the Igbo language?
3. How effective are government policies and school curricula in promoting the Igbo language?
4. What role do parents and teachers play in encouraging Igbo language usage among students?

The study therefore sought to investigate this critical issues by examining the decline of the Igbo language among secondary school students in Umuahia, Nigeria. It examined the extent of this decline, the attitudes of students and their families towards the Igbo language, and the role of institutional and global pressures in shaping these attitudes. By drawing attention to the role of education, policy, and societal perceptions in shaping language use, this research contributes to the broader global discourse on safeguarding endangered languages, and more specifically highlights the urgent need to preserve Nigeria’s vulnerable indigenous languages, with particular focus on the Igbo language in this context. The study’s significance lies in providing evidence that without deliberate interventions such as stronger educational policies and community-based initiatives that promote native languages future generations may lose access to the cultural wisdom, identity, and worldview encoded in their local language. Ultimately, the study serves as both a warning and a call to action, emphasizing that protecting the Igbo language and other indigenous languages is essential to sustaining cultural continuity in Nigeria and affirming the value of linguistic diversity in a globalized world.

**Literature Review**

***Linguistic Relativity Theory***

The disposition of the Linguistic Relativity Theory, also known as the Sapir – Whorf Hypothesis, on language and culture and how it influences thought is crucial in any understanding of the relationship between language, thought, and culture. This Sapir–Whorf theory, begun in the first third of this century, proposed that a person’s language influences his or her worldview and cognitive processes. The second hypothesis states that this influence is from the structure and vocabulary of a language on their speakers to perceive and categorize a world according to the structure and vocabulary of the language, indicating that language is not only a means of communication, but also part and parcel of cognitive and cultural identity. The theory is relevant in the case of indigenous language preservation, especially pertaining to the Igbo language, as it explains why language loss can result in a more general loss of cultural identity and worldview.

It was claimed by Sapir (1929) that language is a framework for the perception of the environment and for the understanding and interpretation of experience. The assumption that all humans use the same manner of thinking regardless of spoken language is questioned with the Linguistic Relativity Theory and its focus on this perspective. It proposes that the speakers of different languages are led to pay attention to different facets of the world and develop different cognitive patterns. For example, some languages may have many words to express what other languages express through one word, constituting the source of how speakers conceive of those concepts. Igbo encapsulates practical communication as well as the history, proverbs, folklore and ethical values of the Igbo people and these are part of what constitute the cultural identity of the Igbo people. Therefore, the erosion of Igbo is more than a loss of vocabulary; It is the fading of a cognitive and cultural framework of generations.

Sapir’s ideas were expanded by Benjamin Lee Whorf who stressed that habitual thought and perception are also influenced by language. Whorf made his studies of Native American languages and their structures, and he saw that the difference between their linguistic structure led to differences in the way they can interpret time, space and causality. When we discuss the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis or specific aspects of it, some scholars point to the fact that, for example, in some Native American languages, there is no distinction between past, present, and future tenses (Whorf, 1956) that makes speakers experience time in less linear, or in a more fluid fashion. The cause for this is thought to be that, as languages frame the way concepts are phrased, they can subtly influence how their speakers think. In the Igbo language, the proverbs, idiomatic expressions and metaphors of the language are rich sets that encapsulate wisdom of several centuries, moral teachings and values of the community. If the Igbo language is lost, it would not only cause a language simplification but also, it will cause a fundamental shift in how Igbo speakers interpret and understand the world around them.

Linguistic Relativity Theory is also significant on the importance of language in keeping cultural knowledge and indigenous ways of thinking. According to Fishman (1991), language is a means of cultural continuity, which contains the community’s traditions, values and collective memory. Knowledge too is lost when a language passes away. With the Igbo language, this knowledge includes the ancestral stories, the traditional governance structures, the philosophical beliefs and the deep understanding of the natural world. When the usage of Igbo language decreases, the link to these cultural and cognitive features become weaker, and the younger generation may be deprived of the worldviews handed over from one generation to the other through the language.

Globalization has staggering irretrievable effects on indigenes languages in which English language has become the lingua franca are hard line as Igbo language survives. With English increasingly becoming the medium of choice in education, commerce and digital media, it starts to mould the cognitive and cultural frames of younger generations to the extent that indigenous languages are displaced as the medium through which the world is viewed (Onu & Obianika, 2019). It's not just changing the preference for Igbo to English – it is changing the way they view the world; how Igbo encapsulates a worldview that may be beyond what English can express. Okonkwo (2018) points out that the increasing dominance of English has prompted a lot of young Igbo speakers to value the proficiency in English, even at a cost of learning or maintaining their mother tongue. This is part of a larger loss of cultural identity in that the cognitive structures associated with Igbo language are replaced by the English language.

Moreover, the Linguistic Relativity Theory justifies the intergenerational language transmission to preserve the cultural identity. Fishman (1991) points out that if the language is being spoken in the home, the community, and the educational setting, then the language will be transmitted from one generation to the next. The transmission of Igbo is increasingly threatened in the case of Igbo, as parents and educators are increasingly turning to English because they believe it will give their children better economic and social opportunities. So it becomes a cycle, younger generations grow up not very proficient in Igbo and it becomes more difficult to pass on the knowledge that is embedded in the language. The outcome is not only a loss in spoken proficiency but also a degradation of the cultural connectivity between the Igbo community.

**The Igbo Language and Its Cultural Significance**

Igbo language is a language belonging to Niger Congo language family, it is not only a means of communication but also an important part of Igbo’s cultural identity. Igbo is spoken chiefly in southeastern Nigeria and is central to the upkeep of the community’s history, traditions, and worldviews. Negash (2005) seems to emphasize that language is a repository of cultural knowledge, it reflects the values, norms and the collective memory of the speakers of the language. The Igbo language is full of oral traditions like proverbs, folktales, and songs each of which contains the philosophical and ethical teachings from generations past.

The system of proverbs in the Igbo language is one of the cultural aspects embedded in the language which is very important in conveying wisdom and moral lessons. As proverbs are famously described by Achebe (1958) as “the palm oil with which words are eaten” their importance is evident to Igbo discourse. Igbo proverbs are not just decorative expressions but a way of teaching life lessons, settling disputes and generally preserving societal values. These reflect the Igbo worldview in which language is interwoven with the community’s interpretation of nature, morality and socio relationality (Okafor & Eneh, 2023).

And also, the identity of the community is highly connected to the Igbo language. Speaking Igbo is a link to one's ethnic roots and heritage, to one's past, something that ties one to his roots, to his people and, above all, to himself. Nwachukwu (2019) argues that language has a major influence in shaping group identity and to the Igbo people, speaking their language fluently is an affirmation of their cultural and ethnic identity. With younger generations putting more emphasis on English, the risk of losing this connection gets bigger, as a result raising the alarm on the potential disappearance of cultural heritage (Ezeh, 2021). Consequently, the Igbo language is not only a means of communication but an important part of the Igbo culture and identity, and the shrink in its usage has a bearing on linguistic and cultural heritages.

**Challenges of Indigenous Language Preservation**

However, preserving indigenous languages like Igbo is fraught with several serious challenges that are worsened by globalization, sociopolitical factors and changing cultural values. First, the institutional support to the indigenous languages in the formal education is one of the primary challenges. While policies have been put in place to require that indigenous languages be taught in schools, they have been poorly implemented and not very effective, even when they have been applied. Ezeh (2021) further explains that in most Nigerian schools, English and other global languages are given priority over indigenous languages such that they become subjects of secondary concern instead of core areas of learning. The marginalization of indigenous languages in education has large role in decline of indigenous languages, because younger generations of indigenous people rarely growstatics up speaking their native tongues.

A second important challenge is the feeling that indigenous languages are not as prestigious as global languages. Parents in a lot of Nigerian families teach their children to speak English, not their indigenous language, because they think that being able to speak English will give them better educational and economic opportunities (Onwuegbuchulam, 2021). In particular, this attitude is found in urban areas where English is considered the language that represents modernity and social mobility. Consequently, many children, especially in urban Igbo speaking households, grow up speaking English fluently and struggling to learn their native language.

The digital media and technology have also contributed to the erosion of indigenous languages. Social media platforms, television and online content especially are English language or other global dominant languages based, which further marginalizes indigenous languages as Okafor and Eneh (2023) put it. The fact that Igbo has no digital content is limiting the language to a younger generation that is very much driven by global digital trends. Unless deliberate attempts to incorporate indigenous languages into digital spaces are taken, indigenous languages are at the ever-increasing risk of dying out in everyday communication, to be replaced by global languages.

**Globalization and Its Impact on Local Languages**

The dynamics of language have been significantly impacted by globalization all over the world, which has in most cases led to marginalization of indigenous languages. Globalization is a process of increased interconnectedness via trade, technology, culture, and English has been dominant global language at the expense of the local language. As this trend has unfolded, it has essentially been a cause for the low status in Igbo varieties in the realms of formal and informal language use, especially when the majority of global languages dominate (Negash, 2005).

In general, globalization has affected the local languages especially the dominance of the educational, media and professional spheres by the English. English is the official language in Nigeria and also the language of instruction in schools, business and government. As a result of this preference of English over indigenous languages like Igbo, language proficiency among the younger generations is on the decline such that they are more fluent in English than in their native tongue (Okafor & Eneh, 2023). Okonkwo (2018) points out that, added to this, it is believed that fluency in English will give one social mobility as well an opportunity to advance career wise; as such parents and teachers often give more preference for one to learn English than Igbo.

Moreover, as digital media and the global communication platforms rise other local languages are further marginalized. English is by far the dominant language in digital spaces such as social media, entertainment and the internet, with most of the content produced in the language. Their digital dominance makes indigenous languages such as Igbo less visible and relevant to the younger generation who are increasingly English language content (Umeasiegbu, 2022).

In addition, globalization has caused an increase in migration and urbanization, requiring people to use a dominant language in order to integrate in diverse linguistic regions. For Igbo, the change is prominent in cities where non Igbo speakers contribute to the use of language to the extent of eroding their usage in daily conversation (Ezeh, 2021).

**Role of Education in Language Sustainability**

The biggest channel of intergenerational language transmission is education. Fishman (1991) argues that language is best kept if it is included in formal education systems, especially at the beginning of the school education. For the Igbo, the inclusion of the language in school curricula can greatly improve the language proficiency of the young learners and guarantee that the language is not lost to posterity. However, the success of this method is greatly dependent on the quality and consistency of educational policies and practices (Maikanti et al, 2021).

The story of Nigeria is that there are policies that support inclusion of indigenous languages in the school curriculum, but the implementation has been so weak. Ezeh (2021) states that most of the schools place more emphasis on subjects taught in English and consequently place indigenous languages like Igbo on the backseat as elective or secondary subjects. As a result, students are not exposed to Igbo enough to actually develop language proficiency. Moreover, there is a shortage of qualified Igbo language teachers and inadequate teaching materials that take away from an efficient teaching of Igbo in schools (Umeasiegbu, 2022).

Educators should know that the role of education in language sustainability also goes beyond the classrooms of formal schools. According to Obika (2022), researchers propose additional ways of engaging students in their indigenous language such as language immersion programs, cultural festivals as well as extracurricular activities. Even such programs will help make the language more appealing to young people and foster a sense of pride and cultural identity. Further, technology can modernize the teaching of Igbo and make it more accessible to younger generation through language learning apps, online course, digital storytelling, etc (Okafor & Eneh, 2023).

**Government and Institutional Efforts in Language Preservation**

The preservation of indigenous languages such as Igbo is a very important aspect and it requires government and institutional efforts. In many countries such as Nigeria, the government has a great influence in language policies that can either help or hinder the survival of the indigenous languages. According to Ezeh (2021) the National Policy on Education (NPE) requires indigenous languages to be taught in the school curriculum, especially in the early stages of education in Nigeria. The policy, however is not implemented in a consistent manner and many schools prefer to teach the English language instead of indigenous languages because of the societal perception that English is the language of modernity and success. This is because, as Okonkwo (2018) notes, the policies lack enforcement and resources to guarantee the protection of languages like Igbo.

To promote teaching and research of indigenous languages, institutional bodies such as National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) were set up. However, NINLAN has been faced with several challenges like limited funding, poor public awareness and unwholesome support by the education sector (Umeasiegbu, 2022). Due to these challenges, it does not stand to significantly affect language preservation. Moreover, in order to promote the sustenance of indigenous languages, the Nigerian government has also begun cultural programs, Igbo language festivals and media campaigns. Although these efforts have not been enough to turn around the decrease in the use of the Igbo language, especially among the younger generation (Obika, 2022).

Efforts to include Igbo in radio, television and digital platforms in terms of media and cultural institutions have been partially successful but limited. The need for revitalizing the language, as Umeasiegbu (2022) proposes, will be felt if Igbo is integrated with modern communication platforms and the digital space in the wake of the global dominance of English. This calls for stronger institutional collaboration, funding and policy enforcement to achieve an effective government and institutional effort in the preservation of Igbo and other indigenous languages..

**Empirical Reviews**

Research into the empirical studies of Igbo language preservation gives insight into the real world challenges and strategies of the Igbo language preservation and was based on various contexts.

Okeke and Nwafor (2019) conducted a study to ascertain the declining usage of Igbo language by the secondary school students in southeastern Nigeria. The researchers surveyed 500 students from five states, and 75 per cent of the respondents said they prefer speaking English in informal conversation rather than Igbo. This trend was attributed to the power of English over the educational institutions, media and in urban interactions. The authors suggested policy driven interventions including making Igbo a compulsory language in schools and increasing its use in the digital media.

This was a qualitative study by Negash (2005) on the effect of globalization on the use of indigenous language in Nigeria, especially the Igbo speaking communities. The study further discovered through in-depth interviews with language experts and educators, that the economic factors, migration and the Western cultural influences were some of the major factors that have also driven language shift. Many participants added that there has been a change in the way English has been prioritised over Igbo in child upbringing, by many parents, because English is perceived to have greater socioeconomic advantages. It was emphasized that family based language reinforcement strategies are needed to promote Igbo usage from childhood.

Uzochukwu and Okafor (2021) studied the role of mass media in the preservation of Igbo Language in another study. However, their research showed that only 15 per cent of programs on major television and radio stations in southeastern Nigeria are broadcast in Igbo. They argued that the media plays a great role in molding the preferred language and increased Igbo language content for entertainment, news and educational programs would assist in keeping the language alive amongst the younger generation. The researchers argue that media regulations should be introduced which would require higher percentage of indigenous language broadcasts.

Nwachukwu (2022) studied the effectiveness of using indigenous language learning in the school curriculum. In his research, which made use of data from 50 secondary schools in Abia State, the writer found out that students who were exposed to immersive Igbo language learning – “through storytelling, drama and local proverbs, for instance,” were able to retain the linguistic better, better, compared to those who learned only through traditional grammar lessons. According to the study, interactive and culturally relevant teaching methods are necessary to develop Igbo language competence in the students.

Olaniyan (2022) conducted a comparative study on language preservation strategies in Nigeria and Ghana from Yoruba, Twi and Igbo perspective. It was found that Ghana’s policy of compulsory indigenous language education in primary and secondary schools had resulted in higher level of indigenous language fluency among young people in the country compared to Nigeria. Similarly, the authors recommended that Igbo follow the same approach by mandating standardized assessments and offering incentives to the government for teachers who are specialized in indigenous language instruction.

Samuel et al (2025) investigated the part of digital technology in revitalizing the Igbo language. In their study, they studied the availability of Igbo language content in today's mobile applications, online dictionaries, social media etc. In addition, the analysis revealed a rising number of Igbo spaces in digital sphere, but especially through social media influencers who advocate the Igbo culture and language. While the study also showed that there are challenges like a lack of investment in technology, and the reluctance of the big technology companies to support the integration of the indigenous language. In terms of expansion, the authors suggested that Igbo language resources be funded more, and that partnerships be made with global tech companies.

Nduka (2022) conducted a sociolinguistic study in which he evaluated the perception of Igbo language usage among young professionals in urban centers. The study revealed that although several young adults had a strong attachment to Igbo as a part of their cultural heritage, they hardly employed it in their professional engagements because English has become the language of business world. In conclusion, the study suggested that workplace policies be put in place to promote bilingual communication and that corporations sponsor indigenous language initiatives to enhance Igbo’s overall status in today’s business environment.

A study on Nnewi City. (2025) highlighted how Igbo language festivals, festivals and cultural events affect language preservation. Such events were very important to rekindle the interest in Igbo among the younger generation, as they provided engaging and interactive ways to learn the language, their research showed. But, according to the study, the government and private sponsorships can expand the scope of these festivals to further enhance Igbo language sustainability efforts.

**Methodology**

The research was carried out across five selected secondary schools in Umuahia Abia state, which includes Government College Umuahia, Ibeku High School, Federal Government Girls’ College, Umuahia, Christland Mission School International, and Premier International Secondary School. The study adopted a descriptive survey design because it is effective for collecting information on the attitudes, perceptions, and challenges that secondary-school students and teachers face in Igbo language preservation. This design allowed a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon without manipulating variables, which was appropriate for the study. The population comprised secondary-school students and teachers in the selected Umuahia schools, a locality with a considerable Igbo-speaking population. According to the Abia State Ministry of Education (2023), the total population of students and teachers in the relevant public and private schools was about 25,000 students and 2,000 teachers. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation of both public and private schools; proportionately, 300 respondents were selected 250 students and 50 teachers distributed across the five schools. A structured, closed-ended questionnaire served as the primary data-collection instrument, enabling the collection of quantitative data on respondents’ views regarding the challenges and strategies for preserving the Igbo language.

**Analysis and Discussion**

Data collected from the five selected secondary schools in Umuahia (Government College Umuahia, Ibeku High School, Federal Government Girls’ College Umuahia, Christland Mission School International, and Premier International Secondary School) provide valuable insight into the current state of Igbo language preservation among students and teachers. Descriptive statistics for key demographic variables gender, age, educational qualification, and years of teaching experience are presented below to show the diversity of perspectives captured in the survey. These demographic characteristics shape respondents’ attitudes and experiences and therefore help contextualize the findings on challenges and strategies for preserving the Igbo language. The table shown below is summarizing the demographic information of the respondents which includes gender, age, educational qualification and years of teaching experience for teachers.

***Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents***

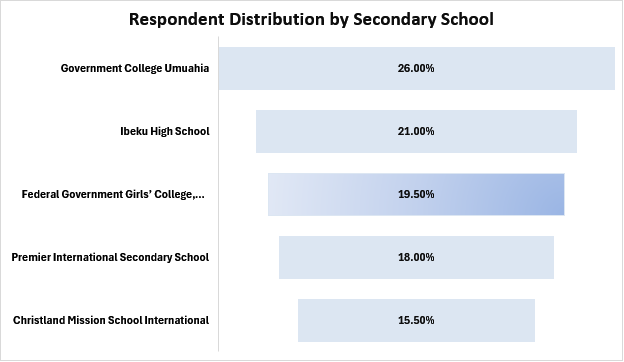
|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Demographic Factor | Category | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
| Gender | Male | 132 | 46.2 |
|  | Female | 154 | 53.8 |
| Age Range | 10 - 15 years | 89 | 31.1 |
|  | 16 - 20 years | 122 | 42.7 |
|  | 21 - 25 years | 45 | 15.7 |
|  | 26 years and above | 30 | 10.5 |
| Educational Qualification | SSCE (Students) | 221 | 77.3 |
|  | NCE/Diploma | 35 | 12.2 |
|  | Bachelor's Degree | 24 | 8.4 |
|  | Postgraduate | 6 | 2.1 |
| Years of Teaching Experience | 1 - 5 years | 18 | 36.0 |
| (Teachers) | 6 - 10 years | 12 | 24.0 |
|  | 11 - 15 years | 9 | 18.0 |
|  | 16 years and above | 11 | 22.0 |
| Total |  | **50** | **100** |

As shown in the table, Respondents were fairly balanced by gender (46.2% male, 53.8% female). Most were aged 16–20 (42.7%), followed by 10–15 (31.1%), showing the study focused on younger students at a key stage for language learning. With 77.3% holding SSCE and many teachers (36%) having 1–5 years’ experience, the sample offered a strong basis for analyzing factors influencing Igbo-language preservation in Umuahia schools.

***Table 2: Demographic Distribution of Respondents by Secondary Schools***

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Secondary School | Students | Teachers | Students and Teachers Total | % of Respondents |
| Government College Umuahia | 57 | 17 | 74 | 26.0% |
| Ibeku High School | 46 | 14 | 60 | 21.0% |
| Federal Government Girls’ College, Umuahia | 43 | 13 | 56 | 19.5% |
| Premier International Secondary School | 40 | 12 | 52 | 18.0% |
| Christland Mission School International | 35 | 9 | 44 | 15.5% |
| Total | **221** | **65** | **286** | **100.0%** |

Table 2 above presents the distribution of students and teachers who participated in the study across the five selected secondary schools in Umuahia. It shows both the absolute numbers and the percentage contribution of each school to the overall sample.



***Figure 1*:** Demographic Distribution of Students and Teachers Across Selected Secondary Schools in Umuahia.

The bar chart above illustrates the distribution of respondents across the five(5) selected secondary schools in Umuahia. Which includes, Government College Umuahia, a public school, contributed the largest share of respondents (26%), followed by Ibeku High School (21%) and Federal Government Girls’ College, Umuahia (19.5%). The two (2) private schools, Premier International Secondary School (18%) and Christland Mission School International (15.5%) accounted for smaller proportions. This difference reflects the larger student and teacher populations typically found in public schools compared to private institutions. Public schools often enroll more students and employ more teachers due to their broader access and government funding, while private schools are smaller and more selective. Consequently, the higher percentages from public schools ensure the survey adequately captures the experiences and perspectives of the majority of secondary-school students and teachers in the area, which is important for producing a representative analysis of Igbo-language preservation.

**Analysis of Research Questions**

It analyzes the research questions using the data collected from the respondents in terms of the level of Igbo language proficiency, the effect of globalization, the efficacy of government policies and the role of parents and teachers in promoting Igbo language use. The findings are presented and interpreted from the analysis.

**Research Question One:**

**What is the level of Igbo language proficiency among secondary school students in Umuahia?**

***Table 3: Igbo Language Proficiency Among Students***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Response Options** | **SA** | **A** | **D** | **SD** | **Total** |
| Students can fluently speak Igbo | 50 (17.5%) | 81 (28.3%) | 95 (33.1%) | 60 (21.1%) | 286 (100.0%) |
| Students can read and write in Igbo | 45 (15.7%) | 77 (26.9%) | 102 (35.7%) | 62 (21.7%) | 286 (100.0%) |
| Students prefer speaking Igbo to English | 38 (13.3%) | 69 (24.1%) | 110 (38.5%) | 69 (24.1%) | 286 (100.0%) |

*Source: Field Survey, 2025*

The results indicate that Igbo language proficiency among secondary school students in Umuahia is low. A significant proportion of respondents disagreed (33.1% and 35.7%) that students can fluently speak, read, or write in Igbo, while only 17.5% and 15.7% strongly agreed. The results also show that students generally prefer speaking English, as only 13.3% strongly agreed that they prefer speaking Igbo. This suggests a decline in Igbo language use among students, which may be attributed to globalization and the dominance of English in formal settings.

**Research Question Two:**

**How has globalization affected the use and preservation of the Igbo language?**

***Table 4: Effects of Globalization on Igbo Language***

| **Response Options** | **SA** | **A** | **D** | **SD** | **Total** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Social media and technology discourage Igbo usage | 115 (40.2%) | 92 (32.2%) | 43 (15.0%) | 36 (12.6%) | 286 (100.0%) |
| Western culture has influenced students’ preference for English | 134 (46.9%) | 98 (34.3%) | 37 (12.9%) | 17 (5.9%) | 286 (100.0%) |
| Igbo language is being replaced by English in schools | 120 (42.0%) | 104 (36.4%) | 40 (14.0%) | 22 (7.7%) | 286 (100.0%) |

*Source: Field Survey, 2025*

The findings show that globalization has significantly affected the use and preservation of the Igbo language. A combined 72.4% of respondents agreed that social media and technology discourage the use of Igbo, while 81.2% agreed that Western culture has influenced students’ preference for English. Additionally, 78.4% of respondents agreed that Igbo language is being replaced by English in schools. These results highlight the challenges faced in preserving the Igbo language in a rapidly globalizing world.

**Research Question Three:**

**How effective are government policies and school curricula in promoting the Igbo language?**

***Table 5: Effectiveness of Government Policies and School Curriculum***

| **Response Options** | **SA** | **A** | **D** | **SD** | **Total** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Igbo language is well incorporated into the school curriculum | 67 (23.4%) | 82 (28.7%) | 79 (27.6%) | 58 (20.3%) | 286 (100.0%) |
| Government supports Igbo language education through policies | 59 (20.6%) | 77 (26.9%) | 95 (33.2%) | 55 (19.2%) | 286 (100.0%) |
| The enforcement of Igbo language teaching is weak | 112 (39.2%) | 98 (34.3%) | 50 (17.5%) | 26 (9.1%) | 286 (100.0%) |

*Source: Field Survey, 2025*

The responses indicate that government policies and school curricula are not very effective in promoting the Igbo language. Only 52.1% agreed that Igbo is well incorporated into the school curriculum, while 46.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Similarly, only 47.5% agreed that the government supports Igbo language education, whereas 52.4% disagreed. However, a majority (73.5%) agreed that the enforcement of Igbo language teaching is weak. This suggests that although policies may exist, they are not effectively implemented to ensure the active promotion of Igbo language learning in schools.

**Research Question Four:**

**What role do parents and teachers play in encouraging Igbo language usage among students?**

***Table 6: Role of Parents and Teachers in Igbo Language Promotion***

| **Response Options** | **SA** | **A** | **D** | **SD** | **Total** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Parents encourage children to speak Igbo at home | 55 (19.2%) | 78 (27.3%) | 102 (35.7%) | 51 (17.8%) | 286 (100.0%) |
| Teachers actively engage students in Igbo language lessons | 62 (21.7%) | 88 (30.8%) | 90 (31.5%) | 46 (16.1%) | 286 (100.0%) |
| Parents and teachers prefer English for communication | 113 (39.5%) | 91 (31.8%) | 45 (15.7%) | 37 (12.9%) | 286 (100.0%) |

*Source: Field Survey, 2025*

The results show that parents and teachers are not actively promoting the Igbo language. While 46.5% agreed that parents encourage Igbo usage at home, 53.5% disagreed, suggesting that many parents do not prioritize Igbo communication. Additionally, only 52.5% agreed that teachers actively engage students in Igbo lessons, while 47.6% disagreed. However, 71.3% agreed that parents and teachers prefer English for communication. This implies that parents and teachers may be contributing to the decline of the Igbo language by favoring English in daily interactions.

**Summary of Findings**

The findings of this study reveal several critical insights into the state of Igbo language preservation among secondary school students in Umuahia. Through the analysis of the research questions results we evaluated that Igbo language proficiency among secondary school students in Umuahia is generally low. As ***Table 3*** indicates, only 17.5% and 15.7% of students strongly agreed that they can fluently speak or write Igbo, while a larger proportion disagreed. Students also tend to prefer English over Igbo, suggesting that language use is increasingly shifting toward English in both school and home settings. Whilst the study sought to find out the level of proficiency in the Igbo language, effect of globalization, the effectiveness of government policies, the role of parents and teachers in language use. The obtained results indicated that Igbo language proficiency has decreased significantly, and English has become the first-choice language for the students instead of their mother tongue. The most notable of these findings is that the students’ proficiency in Igbo language is very low. A huge percentage of the respondents had problems speaking, reading or writing in Igbo and only 35.7 percent of the students could not read and write in the language. This observation is similar to that of Okeke & Nwafor (2019) in southeastern Nigeria that there was a similar decline in Igbo language proficiency of secondary school students in the region because of the dominance of English in educational and social settings.

The study showed that Igbo language erosion is driven by globalization. About 72.4% of respondents agreed that social media and technology favor English over Igbo in digital spaces, aligning with Ezeh (2021) who linked Western media to the decline of indigenous languages among youths. Similarly, 78.4% noted that schools replace Igbo with English, supporting Okonkwo’s (2018) view of English dominance in education. Despite policies mandating indigenous languages in the curriculum, 52.4% of respondents felt government support for Igbo education is ineffective, echoing Umeasiegbu’s (2022) claim of weak enforcement due to poor resources and training. The study also found limited parental and teacher involvement in Igbo preservation. Respondents indicated that parents promote the use of Igbo language at home (46.5%) whereas (53.5%) disagreed and said that parents speak English to their children because they believe that it provides a better social or economic opportunity. With regards to this finding, it is in line with Nwachukwu (2019) who observed that parent's attitude towards language use basically influences language retention, and most parents generally prefer English for their children's success. A clear sign of declining Igbo use among youths is the hybridization or mispronunciation of Igbo words, often mixing English phonetics or using shortened forms. Subsequently, we conducted a brief pilot survey to assess students’ Igbo language use and proficiency, which corroborated these observed patterns. The obtained examples is illustrated in ***table 7*** below.

***Table 7: Hybridized or Mispronounced Igbo Words by Surveyed Secondary School Students.***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S/N | Correct Igbo Word | Student Wrong Usage /  Hybridized Form |  | Correct Igbo Word | Student Wrong Usage /  Hybridized Form |
| 1 | Obi dị m ụtọ | Adim happy |  | Leruo ya anya | Checkie ya |
| 2 | Daalụ | Tankiu |  | O were la isi oche | O tekiela over |
| 3 | Ò nwetara ya | Ò dị correct |  | Kwagharia ya | Shekie ya |
| 4 | Biko hapụ m | Biko, free me |  | Kpọrọ m nne gị | Kpoo mummy gi |
| 5 | Biko nyere m aka | Biko helpuo m |  | Kedu ebe nwanne nna gị no? | Kedu uncle gi? |
| 6 | Ka ọ dịwa | Ka ọ di later |  | Nne gị apụla? | Mummy gi o puola? |
| 7 | |  | | --- | |  |   Anyị ga-ezukọ echi | Anyị ga emeet echi |  | Nwanne gị nyere gị mkpịsị m? | Nwanne gi o nyere gi pen m? |
| 8 | A na m aga ụlọ akwụkwọ | A na m aga skul |  | Mechie ọnụ ụzọ na windo | Kwachie the door na window |
| 9 | Ọ bụ ezigbo nwata | Ọwu beta pikin |  | Chekwaa foto ahụ na ekwentị m | Sevuoro m picture ahu na phone m |
| 10 | Ọ bịara mgbe e mesịrị | Ọ bịara late |  | Ọma esi nri nke ọma | Ọma esi nri well well |

The above examples from ***table 7*** showcased the anglicized spelling, truncated forms, or phonetic simplifications of the igbo language by the surveyed secondary school students, reflecting that the younger generation struggle to maintain accurate Igbo pronunciation and word usage. Such patterns highlighted a worrying trend of poor adaptation and potential language attrition among secondary-school students reinforcing evidence of decline in Igbo language by the younger people. The prevalence of these hybridized forms signals a concerning shift away from standard Igbo, suggesting that the language is losing its functional and cultural relevance in the daily lives of young people. If these trends continue unchecked, they point to potential language attrition, weakening intergenerational transmission and threatening the survival of Igbo as a vibrant medium of communication, cultural identity, and heritage among future generations.

**Conclusion**

The findings of the study help in understanding the current situation of Igbo language preservation among secondary school students, and also the challenges the language faces in surviving in a globalised world. The results show that Igbo is in a very poor state among the students and many students opt for English instead of their own language. This trend is all the more exacerbated by the fact that globalization is increasingly permeating the use of indigenous languages, especially through digital media and Western culture. Also, the study reveals that Igbo language education has not been adequately supported by government policies because of poor implementation and lack of resources. It was also clear that parents and teachers had limited roles to play in promoting the use of Igbo at home and in schools as most of them used English in their daily communications.

Based on these findings, some recommendations will be made on how to conserve the Igbo language. Secondly, there is need for stronger enforcement of government policies which demand that an indigenous language be incorporated in the curriculum and that, alongside, resources and teachers must be provided to effectively teach Igbo. If Igbo is to be taught in schools, teaching methods should be more interactive and culturally relevant like storytelling, using drama and incorporating technology to make the language more engaging to the students. In addition to that, parents must be involved in the process by encouraging them to advocate the use of Igbo in the home environment. In addition, there should be support for community-based initiatives such as Igbo language festivals, and media campaign to promote public awareness of the significance of ensuring the survival of the language.

Further research should focus on the effectiveness of digital platforms and social media to be used in revitalizing the indigenous languages to understand the dynamics of Igbo language preservation. A study involving the effect of digital storytelling, online language courses, and the usage of social media influencers in promoting Igbo would go a long way in indicating the place of technology in language preservation. Future studies will help develop more innovative ways to safeguard the Igbo language for the upcoming generations by addressing these areas.

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