

1 **THE SOCIOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF DECLINING INDIGENOUS**
2 **LANGUAGE USE AMONG THE IGALA.**

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6 **ABSTRACT**

7 Language decline within indigenous communities has become an important sociological concern
8 because of its implications for identity continuity, cultural reproduction, and social cohesion in
9 ethnolinguistic societies. This paper examined the sociological consequences of declining
10 indigenous language use among the Igala people of Kogi State, Nigeria, with emphasis on its
11 effects on cultural identity and sense of belonging, intergenerational communication and social
12 relationships, as well as the transmission of indigenous cultural values, oral traditions, and social
13 norms among younger generations. The paper was anchored on Fishman's Language
14 Maintenance and Shift Theory, which explains the relationship between declining
15 intergenerational language transmission and broader social transformation within speech
16 communities. The paper adopted the analytical literature review method through systematic
17 selection and critical interrogation of recent peer-reviewed empirical and conceptual studies
18 published between 2015 and 2026 on indigenous language decline, cultural continuity, and Igala
19 sociocultural realities. Findings revealed that declining use of the Igala language has
20 significantly weakened cultural identity among younger Igalas by limiting active participation in
21 indigenous communicative practices that define communal belonging. The paper further
22 established that reduced language competence has disrupted intergenerational interaction,
23 weakened traditional family bonds, and diminished the effectiveness of indigenous mechanisms
24 of social guidance. It was also found that declining language use has adversely affected the
25 transmission of oral traditions, communal ethics, and indigenous social values. The paper
26 concluded that the decline of Igala language use constitutes a sociological challenge with far-
27 reaching consequences for cultural continuity and social integration. It recommended
28 strengthened mother-tongue education, revitalisation of indigenous family-based language
29 socialisation, and digital preservation initiatives to enhance the relevance and transmission of the
30 Igala language among younger generations.

31 **Keywords:** Indigenous Language Use, Igala Language, Cultural Identity, Intergenerational
32 Communication, Cultural Transmission, Language Shift, Kogi State

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35 **1. INTRODUCTION**

36 Across Africa, indigenous languages are under sustained pressure from the expansion of colonial
37 languages, urban migration, formal education systems built around exogenous linguistic norms,

38 and the growing influence of digital communication. Recent scholarship shows that language
39 shift is no longer restricted to numerically small speech communities; it is increasingly evident
40 among historically stable ethnic groups where younger generations now prefer globally dominant
41 languages for education, employment, and social mobility (Eke & Salawu, 2026; Kalejaiye et al.,
42 2025). This pattern reflects a wider sociological concern because language is not merely a
43 medium of communication but a primary channel through which collective memory, kinship
44 codes, moral instruction, and systems of social belonging are transmitted. Empirical evidence
45 from multilingual societies indicates that where intergenerational transmission declines, social
46 identity becomes weakened and traditional systems of cultural continuity are disrupted (Chukwu
47 & Chima, 2024). Mathematical projections on language extinction in Nigeria further suggest that
48 declining mother-tongue literacy and reduced domestic use place many indigenous languages at
49 risk within a few generations if active transmission is not sustained (Ikoba & Jolayemi, 2020).

50 Nigeria provides a clear case of this challenge. With over 500 indigenous languages, the country
51 is one of the most linguistically diverse nations globally, yet research shows that less than 3 per
52 cent of these languages have meaningful digital or educational resource development
53 (Abdulmusawir et al., 2025; Inuwa-Dutse, 2025). English remains the dominant language of
54 schooling, administration, and upward mobility, while Nigerian Pidgin increasingly occupies
55 informal urban interaction. This dual pressure has contributed to the weakening of indigenous
56 language use among younger populations across many ethnic groups. Recent studies on language
57 decline in Nigeria reveal measurable reductions in mother-tongue competence among school-age
58 children, often linked to parental preference for English as a perceived marker of educational
59 advantage (Mba & Oguadinma, 2025). Evidence from language revitalisation efforts such as
60 BBC News Igbo also shows that where indigenous languages gain digital visibility, public
61 attitudes and language pride improve significantly, suggesting that declining use is socially
62 conditioned rather than inevitable (Eke & Salawu, 2026).

63 Within this national context, the Igala language occupies a significant but increasingly
64 vulnerable position. The Igala people of Kogi State constitute one of the largest ethnic
65 nationalities in North-Central Nigeria, historically bound by a shared linguistic heritage that
66 structures kinship relations, oral traditions, rituals, conflict mediation practices, and indigenous
67 systems of governance. Earlier scholarship emphasised that Igala language served as a central
68 mechanism for transmitting social values and maintaining communal solidarity (Alhassan &
69 Kadiri, 2015). Studies on Igala oral traditions have shown that folktales and proverbs function as
70 repositories of historical consciousness and moral education, shaping social conduct across
71 generations (Ojonugwa & Emah, 2020). More recent analyses of Igala proverbs within speech
72 communities in Ankpa demonstrate that the language still carries context-specific social
73 meanings that are difficult to reproduce through English translation (Emmanuel & Kadiri, 2026).

74 Despite this significance, observable shifts in language practice among younger Igalas point to a
75 decline in indigenous language use. Urbanisation in towns such as Anyigba, Idah, and Lokoja
76 has encouraged bilingual and, increasingly, English-dominant households. Educational
77 aspirations have led many parents to prioritise English from early childhood, often restricting
78 domestic use of Igala. Research conducted among students in Anyigba indicates substantial
79 interference patterns between Igala and English, suggesting weakening mastery of both formal
80 Igala structure and indigenous communicative norms (Idegu, 2025). This decline extends beyond

81 speech competence to reduced familiarity with oral traditions, indigenous naming systems, and
82 culturally grounded forms of interaction. Since language among the Igala has historically
83 regulated respect relations, age hierarchy, and communal ethics, its declining use raises
84 sociological questions about social cohesion, identity continuity, and cultural reproduction.

85 The sociological consequences of this decline therefore deserve scholarly attention. Language
86 loss among the Igala may alter patterns of intergenerational interaction, weaken traditional
87 authority structures, and produce identity dislocation among younger members of the ethnic
88 group. In a setting where language has historically functioned as a marker of belonging and a
89 basis for social integration, its diminishing use has implications for communal attachment and
90 cultural continuity in Kogi State.

91 **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

92 The declining use of indigenous languages has become a pressing sociological issue in Nigeria,
93 yet scholarly attention has focused more heavily on larger linguistic groups such as Hausa,
94 Yoruba, and Igbo, leaving minority and middle-sized languages such as Igala under-examined.
95 While available studies acknowledge the importance of preserving the Igala language through
96 formal instruction and documentation (Alhassan & Kadiri, 2015), there remains limited
97 empirical interrogation of the social consequences arising from its gradual decline in everyday
98 use among younger speakers in Kogi State.

99 Among many Igala families, especially in urban and semi-urban areas, English has become the
100 preferred language of parent-child interaction because of its perceived educational and
101 occupational advantages. This shift has reduced opportunities for children to acquire native
102 competence in Igala during the critical stages of language socialisation. The consequence is that
103 many younger Igalas demonstrate restricted fluency, diminished understanding of culturally
104 embedded expressions, and limited access to oral traditions that previously served as instruments
105 of moral and social education. Although this pattern is increasingly visible in social interaction,
106 schools, and digital communication spaces, there is inadequate sociological analysis of how it
107 affects identity formation, family cohesion, intergenerational relations, and cultural continuity.

108 The problem is not simply linguistic attrition. Declining use of Igala raises deeper concerns
109 about weakening communal bonds and the erosion of social structures historically sustained
110 through language-based interaction. Proverbs, praise expressions, kinship address forms, and
111 ritual speech acts carry social meanings that organise respect, obligation, and belonging within
112 Igala society. As younger generations lose familiarity with these forms, there is a growing
113 possibility of cultural discontinuity and weakened attachment to collective identity.

114 Existing studies have examined language preservation strategies and aspects of Igala oral
115 heritage, but there is little recent research that specifically investigates the sociological outcomes
116 of language decline among the Igala people of Kogi State. This creates a gap in knowledge
117 regarding the extent to which declining indigenous language use is reshaping social relationships
118 and cultural identity within the community. It is this gap that necessitates the present study on
119 the sociological consequences of declining indigenous language use among the Igala.

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3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

121 The aim of this paper was to examine the sociological consequences of declining indigenous
122 language use among the Igala people in Kogi State, with particular attention to its effects on
123 cultural identity, social relationships, and the transmission of indigenous values across
124 generations. The specific objectives were to:

- 125 1. Examine the extent to which declining use of the Igala language affects cultural identity
126 and sense of belonging among the Igala people in Kogi State.
- 127 2. Investigate the effects of declining indigenous language use on intergenerational
128 communication and social relationships among Igala families and communities.
- 129 3. Assess how the decline in Igala language use influences the transmission of indigenous
130 cultural values, oral traditions, and social norms among younger generations in Kogi
131 State.

132 4. METHODOLOGY

133 This paper adopted the analytical literature review method, which is a qualitative research
134 approach that involves the systematic identification, selection, critical examination, and synthesis
135 of existing empirical and theoretical studies relevant to a particular subject in order to generate
136 deeper conceptual understanding and identify patterns, inconsistencies, and knowledge gaps.
137 Unlike descriptive reviews that merely summarise previous works, an analytical literature review
138 interrogates existing evidence through comparison, interpretation, and critical evaluation of
139 authors' positions to establish informed conclusions on a research problem. Snyder (2019)
140 explains that analytical literature reviews provide structured synthesis through careful scrutiny of
141 published evidence, thereby enabling the researcher to develop coherent arguments from extant
142 studies. Similarly, Xiao and Watson (2019) maintain that rigorous literature-based studies
143 require clearly defined search procedures, eligibility criteria, and systematic analysis to ensure
144 reliability and transparency. The method was considered suitable for this paper because the study
145 sought to examine the sociological consequences of declining indigenous language use among
146 the Igala people through existing documented evidence rather than through direct field
147 investigation. Since the subject intersects language, culture, identity, and social continuity,
148 analytical review provided an appropriate basis for synthesising findings from linguistic,
149 sociological, and cultural studies relevant to the Igala context.

150 The material selection process followed a structured search and screening procedure designed to
151 ensure relevance and credibility. Relevant materials were identified through searches of peer-
152 reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, doctoral theses, and conference proceedings indexed
153 in recognised academic databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate, Scopus-
154 indexed repositories, and institutional journal archives. Search strings included combinations
155 such as *Igala language decline*, *indigenous language shift in Nigeria*, *language and cultural*
156 *identity among minority ethnic groups*, *Igala oral tradition*, and *language maintenance and*
157 *cultural transmission*. The search focused primarily on publications produced between 2015 and
158 2026 in order to reflect recent empirical and conceptual developments on indigenous language
159 use and sociological transformation. This time frame aligns with current methodological
160 guidance that literature reviews should define temporal boundaries based on relevance to the

161 evolving research context (Page et al., 2021). After the initial search, titles and abstracts were
162 screened for relevance, followed by full-text examination of selected studies.

163 The inclusion criteria for this review were carefully defined to ensure direct alignment with the
164 objectives of the study. Only studies published within the specified period and written in English
165 were considered. Included materials had to focus on indigenous language use, language shift,
166 cultural identity, intergenerational communication, oral tradition, or sociological consequences
167 of language decline, with particular emphasis on Nigerian or African contexts. Priority was given
168 to works directly related to the Igala people, though studies on comparable Nigerian ethnic
169 groups were also considered where they provided useful comparative insight. Only peer-
170 reviewed and academically traceable materials with clearly identifiable authorship and
171 publication details were selected. This approach is consistent with methodological standards that
172 emphasise explicit eligibility criteria as necessary for reducing selection bias and improving
173 review validity (Aromataris & Munn, 2020).

174 The exclusion criteria eliminated sources that lacked scholarly credibility or direct relevance to
175 the research problem. Materials published before 2015 were excluded except where foundational
176 theoretical relevance justified limited reference, as in the case of Fishman's language shift
177 framework. Newspaper reports, blogs, websites without academic review processes, unpublished
178 opinion pieces, and sources with unverifiable authorship were excluded. Studies that focused
179 solely on technical linguistic description without sociological implications were also omitted, as
180 were publications addressing unrelated ethnic groups without analytical transferability to the
181 Igala context. This exclusion process was necessary to maintain conceptual precision and
182 methodological rigour.

183 The adoption of analytical literature review for this paper is justified by the nature of the inquiry.
184 The study aimed to interrogate sociological outcomes such as identity transformation, weakening
185 communal bonds, and disruption in value transmission arising from declining indigenous
186 language use among the Igala. These issues require interpretive synthesis of existing evidence
187 across multiple disciplines rather than purely numerical measurement. The method enabled the
188 integration of empirical findings with theoretical insights, thereby facilitating deeper analysis of
189 the relationship between language decline and social transformation. It also provided the
190 opportunity to identify existing gaps in Igala-focused studies and establish the need for further
191 context-specific investigation. In line with PRISMA-informed evidence selection principles, the
192 structured screening and analytical synthesis adopted in this study enhanced transparency,
193 consistency, and academic reliability of the review process, making it appropriate for examining
194 the sociological dimensions of language decline among the Igala people of Kogi State.

195 **5. LITERATURE REVIEW**

196 **Conceptual Review**

197 **Indigenous Language Use**

198 The concept of indigenous language use has received increasing scholarly attention due to
199 concerns over language attrition and its implications for cultural continuity. Recent studies

200 define indigenous language use as the regular employment of a native community language in
201 communication across domestic, educational, social, and institutional settings where such
202 language functions as a medium for transmitting collective knowledge and social norms. Udoh
203 (2025) conceives indigenous language use as an active process through which linguistic heritage
204 sustains social development and intergenerational continuity, arguing that the vitality of
205 indigenous languages depends on their practical deployment rather than mere symbolic
206 recognition. Similarly, Mba and Oguadinma (2025) view indigenous language use as habitual
207 linguistic practice that sustains ethnic consciousness and preserves culturally embedded systems
208 of thought. Their position emphasises frequency of use as a critical indicator of linguistic
209 survival. Alhassan and Kadiri (2015), in their study of the Igala language, argue that indigenous
210 language use extends beyond communication to include its role in maintaining group interaction,
211 social integration, and value transmission.

212 While these perspectives converge on the communicative and preservative functions of
213 indigenous language use, they differ in emphasis, with some focusing on developmental utility
214 and others on identity maintenance. For this paper, indigenous language use was adopted as the
215 consistent and functional use of Igala in everyday social interaction, family communication, and
216 communal practices through which cultural meanings and social values are transmitted across
217 generations. This definition is appropriate because it captures both the practical and sociological
218 dimensions relevant to the present inquiry.

219 **Igala People**

220 The Igala people are one of the major ethnic nationalities in North-Central Nigeria,
221 predominantly located in the Eastern part of Kogi State, with a social organisation historically
222 rooted in kinship structures, traditional authority systems, and a shared linguistic heritage.
223 Scholarly discussions on the Igala people often situate them within debates on indigenous
224 identity, cultural continuity, and social adaptation. Opara et al. (2025) describe the Igala as a
225 culturally cohesive group whose beliefs, values, and practices continue to shape social behaviour
226 and communal life, particularly through normative systems embedded in language and tradition.
227 Ochimana (2025) presents the Igala as a historically resilient people whose cultural institutions
228 have undergone notable transformation under the influence of formal education, Christianity, and
229 westernisation. His argument highlights cultural adaptation but also raises concerns regarding the
230 weakening of indigenous structures.

231 Ugboja and Dada (2025) further define the Igala people through the lens of indigenous
232 socialisation, stressing that communal institutions such as age grades have historically served as
233 mechanisms for transmitting shared values and maintaining social order. These scholarly
234 positions reveal that definitions of the Igala people extend beyond geographical location to
235 encompass shared language, social institutions, and collective historical consciousness. For the
236 purpose of this paper, the Igala people are understood as an indigenous ethnolinguistic group in
237 Kogi State whose social identity is sustained through common language, cultural practices, and
238 communal systems of socialisation. This definition is suitable because it foregrounds the
239 centrality of language to the sociological life of the group.

240 **Cultural Identity**

241 Cultural identity refers to the sense of belonging derived from shared language, values,
242 traditions, beliefs, and historical experiences that distinguish one social group from another.
243 Recent scholarship has treated cultural identity as a socially constructed but historically
244 grounded phenomenon maintained through recurring cultural practices. Jegede and Arubuola
245 (2025) define cultural identity as the consciousness individuals develop through participation in
246 linguistic and cultural systems that affirm group belonging and self-recognition. Their emphasis
247 is on the role of language in shaping self-esteem and collective awareness. Mba and Oguadinma
248 (2025) approach cultural identity from the standpoint of language preservation, arguing that it is
249 sustained through continued proficiency in indigenous languages, without which ethnic
250 distinctiveness gradually weakens. Asogwa (2026) broadens the discussion by presenting
251 cultural identity as an arena of contestation shaped by resistance to external cultural dominance
252 and by efforts at reclaiming indigenous meaning systems.

253 While these views differ in orientation, they agree that language remains central to cultural self-
254 definition. The debate lies mainly in whether cultural identity is primarily inherited or
255 continuously negotiated through social interaction. This paper adopts cultural identity as the
256 shared sense of belonging and self-definition derived from active participation in Igala linguistic
257 and cultural practices. This definition is preferred because it recognises both continuity and
258 adaptation while retaining language as the principal marker of collective identity within the Igala
259 context.

260 **Transmission of Cultural Values**

261 Transmission of cultural values refers to the process through which a society passes its norms,
262 beliefs, ethics, behavioural expectations, and social meanings from one generation to another.
263 Recent literature treats this process as fundamental to social reproduction and communal
264 continuity. Opara et al. (2025) explain that cultural values are transmitted through repeated social
265 practices, oral instruction, and community-based interaction, particularly within family structures
266 where indigenous expressions encode moral expectations. Ugboja and Dada (2025) argue that
267 indigenous institutions such as age-grade systems remain critical channels through which
268 younger members internalise communal obligations and standards of conduct.

269 Wada et al. (2026), examining digital communication and African indigenous cultures, contend
270 that the erosion of native linguistic spaces weakens the transmission process because language
271 carries contextual meanings that cannot be fully transferred through dominant foreign linguistic
272 systems. These perspectives indicate broad agreement that language serves as the primary
273 vehicle of cultural transmission, though scholars differ on whether contemporary digital spaces
274 can adequately substitute traditional channels. For this study, transmission of cultural values is
275 defined as the intergenerational communication of Igala norms, moral expectations, customs, and
276 communal ethics through language-mediated interaction within family and community life. This
277 definition is adopted because it aligns directly with the study's concern for how declining
278 indigenous language use affects continuity of social values among the Igala people.

279 **The Extent to which Declining Use of the Igala Language Affects Cultural Identity and**
280 **Sense of Belonging among the Igala People in Kogi State**

281 The relationship between indigenous language retention and cultural identity has attracted
282 sustained academic attention because language functions as a principal medium through which
283 collective identity is constructed and sustained. In ethnolinguistic communities, the weakening of
284 indigenous language competence often corresponds with a weakening of symbolic attachment to
285 communal history, norms, and identity markers. Recent Nigerian studies show that declining
286 mother-tongue use contributes significantly to identity displacement among younger generations
287 who increasingly orient themselves towards English-mediated social identities (Mba &
288 Oguadinma, 2025). This concern is especially relevant among the Igala people of Kogi State,
289 where language has historically served as the basis for social recognition, kinship affiliation,
290 ritual participation, and communal belonging.

291 The Igala language has traditionally occupied a central place in defining what it means to belong
292 to the Igala ethnic group. Beyond verbal communication, it encodes indigenous greetings, praise
293 forms, kinship titles, proverbs, and ritual expressions that affirm communal identity. Emmanuel
294 and Kadiri (2026), in their linguistic analysis of Igala proverbs in Awo speech community,
295 observed that many proverbs contain culturally embedded meanings that lose interpretive force
296 when translated into English. Their study demonstrated that younger respondents who could not
297 fully comprehend such proverbs also showed limited understanding of the social expectations
298 embedded within them. This finding suggests that declining proficiency does not merely indicate
299 linguistic loss but a weakening of cultural cognition.

300 Practical examples across Igala communities illustrate this pattern. In Idah and Ankpa, for
301 instance, ceremonial gatherings such as traditional marriage negotiations and ancestral
302 commemorative rites often require participants to demonstrate competence in formal Igala
303 expressions. Elders frequently report that younger participants struggle to respond appropriately
304 to culturally prescribed verbal exchanges, necessitating translation or simplification into English.
305 This alteration weakens the performative significance of these events because the cultural force
306 of expressions such as kinship salutations and ancestral invocations depends heavily on
307 indigenous linguistic precision. Adofu (2025), examining socio-cultural practices among the
308 Igala, notes that ritual exclusion and inclusion are often mediated through language, with
309 competence functioning as a marker of legitimate participation. Where linguistic competence
310 declines, the symbolic boundary between cultural insiders and outsiders becomes blurred.

311 Evidence from educational settings in Anyigba also reflects this decline. Idegu (2025), studying
312 language interference among Igala students, found that many secondary school students
313 displayed limited mastery of formal Igala lexical structures despite identifying ethnically as
314 Igala. The study reported that over 60 per cent of sampled students regularly preferred English
315 for peer interaction, even within predominantly Igala-speaking environments. Such preference
316 reflects an emerging social orientation in which ethnic affiliation is increasingly detached from
317 linguistic competence. This shift has implications for identity formation because language is one
318 of the most visible markers through which communal belonging is enacted.

319 The erosion of linguistic competence has also affected naming practices among younger Igalas.
320 Traditional Igala names often encode historical memory, family expectations, cosmological
321 beliefs, and social circumstances surrounding birth. However, urban households increasingly
322 adopt English or biblical names as primary identifiers while relegating indigenous names to
323 ceremonial use. This trend reflects changing identity priorities. Ochimana (2025) argues that
324 westernisation has contributed to a gradual redefinition of Igala identity in which external
325 linguistic and cultural forms increasingly displace indigenous expressions of selfhood.

326 Digital communication further illustrates this transformation. Social media interactions among
327 Igala youth are overwhelmingly conducted in English or Nigerian Pidgin, even in online groups
328 dedicated to Igala identity. While this maintains ethnic association at a symbolic level, it often
329 reduces Igala language use to isolated lexical insertions rather than sustained communication.
330 Comparative evidence from other Nigerian languages shows that where indigenous languages
331 retain strong digital visibility, identity attachment tends to remain stronger among younger users
332 (Eke & Salawu, 2026). The relative absence of similar digital revitalisation initiatives for Igala
333 contributes to reduced linguistic prestige among youths.

334 The decline in language use also affects emotional belonging. Interviews reported by Ojonugwa
335 and Emah (2020) revealed that many younger Igala speakers experience discomfort participating
336 in oral storytelling sessions because they lack fluency sufficient for meaningful engagement.
337 This creates subtle social exclusion within family gatherings, where competence in the language
338 historically signified inclusion. Such experiences gradually diminish attachment to communal
339 identity.

340 In all, the evidence indicates that declining use of the Igala language significantly affects cultural
341 identity and sense of belonging among the Igala people. The decline weakens access to
342 indigenous symbolic systems, reduces participation in culturally meaningful interactions, and
343 encourages alternative identity orientations detached from linguistic heritage. Among the Igala,
344 where language historically mediated belonging, its declining use constitutes a measurable
345 sociological shift.

346 **The Effects of Declining Indigenous Language Use on Intergenerational Communication** 347 **and Social Relationships among Igala Families and Communities**

348 Intergenerational communication within indigenous communities depends substantially on
349 shared linguistic competence. Where younger generations lose proficiency in ancestral
350 languages, communication between age groups becomes strained, often weakening family
351 cohesion and altering traditional authority structures. This pattern has been documented across
352 multilingual African societies and is increasingly visible among the Igala of Kogi State.

353 Within traditional Igala society, communication between elders and younger persons is governed
354 by culturally prescribed speech forms. Respectful interaction often requires specialised address
355 systems, indirect expressions, and context-sensitive responses. These forms communicate not
356 only information but also social hierarchy and moral positioning. Emmanuel and Kadiri (2026)
357 note that Igala proverbs frequently function as indirect corrective tools through which elders

358 guide behaviour. Their effectiveness depends on the younger listener's linguistic and cultural
359 competence.

360 As fluency declines, this communicative system is weakened. In many urban Igala households in
361 Anyigba and Lokoja, parents increasingly use English as the primary language of interaction
362 with children. Alhassan and Kadiri (2015) observed that this shift often begins in early
363 childhood, driven by parental belief that English competence confers educational advantage.
364 While this may enhance school performance, it simultaneously reduces opportunities for
365 indigenous language socialisation.

366 The implications for family relationships are significant. Ojonugwa and Emah (2020)
367 documented that traditional evening storytelling sessions, once central to family interaction in
368 many Igala homes, have become increasingly rare. Even where such gatherings occur, younger
369 participants often require interpretation, interrupting narrative flow and reducing engagement.
370 Since these sessions historically functioned as spaces for moral instruction and emotional
371 bonding, their decline weakens intergenerational relational depth.

372 A practical example can be observed during funeral rites in Idah and Dekina communities, where
373 elders deliver culturally encoded speeches requiring nuanced comprehension. Younger attendees
374 often rely on whispered translations from relatives, limiting direct engagement with communal
375 meanings. Such dependence alters the relational dynamic between elders and youths. Rather than
376 active participants, younger members become passive observers. Recent evidence from
377 educational research reinforces this concern. Idegü (2025) found notable interference patterns
378 among Igala-speaking students, indicating incomplete mastery of both Igala and English
379 structures. This linguistic instability affects confidence in communicating with elders, many of
380 whom remain more comfortable in indigenous forms. The resulting communicative hesitation
381 often leads younger people to avoid extended interaction with older relatives.

382 This decline also affects communal solidarity beyond the household. In many Igala communities,
383 conflict mediation, dispute settlement, and communal deliberation traditionally occur through
384 indigenous speech forms rich in metaphor and customary references. Udaa et al. (2026),
385 examining inter-group relations in Kogi State, found that language remains central to local
386 peace-building processes. Reduced competence among younger participants limits their effective
387 participation in such communal forums. Age-grade associations provide another useful case
388 study. Ugboja and Dada (2025) demonstrate that age-grade institutions among the Igala rely
389 heavily on indigenous language for instruction, ritual induction, and social regulation. Where
390 younger members lack sufficient fluency, their participation becomes superficial. This weakens
391 the institution's capacity to sustain social cohesion.

392 Statistical trends from broader Nigerian studies support these observations. Mba and Oguadinma
393 (2025) reported that approximately 68 per cent of urban secondary school respondents preferred
394 English over their indigenous language for domestic communication. Although their study
395 focused on Igbo-speaking communities, the pattern mirrors evidence emerging from urban Igala
396 settings. Social relationships are also affected at the peer level. Younger Igalas who lack
397 proficiency often experience subtle exclusion during culturally grounded interactions.

398 Conversely, fluent speakers may be regarded as excessively traditional in urban contexts. This
399 creates linguistic stratification within the youth population itself.

400 Digital communication intensifies this shift. Most online interaction among Igala youths occurs
401 in English or pidgin, reducing opportunities for intergenerational linguistic exchange. Elders,
402 often excluded from these spaces, become further distanced from younger family
403 members. These evidence therefore shows that declining indigenous language use significantly
404 disrupts intergenerational communication and social relationships among Igala families and
405 communities. It weakens traditional channels of moral instruction, reduces communicative
406 intimacy, and diminishes younger people's participation in communal processes essential for
407 social continuity.

408 **How the Decline in Igala Language Use Influences the Transmission of Indigenous Cultural** 409 **Values, Oral Traditions, and Social Norms among Younger Generations in Kogi State**

410 The transmission of cultural values in indigenous societies depends fundamentally on language
411 because social norms are embedded within verbal forms, narratives, proverbs, songs, ritual
412 expressions, and oral instruction. Where language competence declines, the transmission process
413 becomes fragmented. This concern is particularly pronounced among the Igala, whose cultural
414 heritage has historically been preserved through oral mechanisms.

415 Igala oral tradition includes folktales, praise poetry, ancestral narratives, dirges, initiation chants,
416 and proverbial instruction. These forms serve as repositories of moral values such as respect for
417 elders, communal responsibility, honesty, diligence, and kinship loyalty. Ojonugwa and Emah
418 (2020) found that Igala folktales traditionally functioned as pedagogical tools through which
419 children learned acceptable conduct. Their study observed that many younger respondents had
420 minimal familiarity with canonical folktales previously regarded as foundational to socialisation.

421 A practical consequence of declining language use is reduced understanding of culturally
422 embedded moral lessons. For instance, many Igala proverbs rely on symbolic references drawn
423 from indigenous ecological and historical experiences. Emmanuel and Kadiri (2026)
424 demonstrated that younger speakers often understand literal translations but fail to grasp
425 normative implications. This weakens the pedagogical value of proverb-based instruction.

426 Traditional marriage rites offer another clear example. Negotiation processes involve specialised
427 expressions that communicate respect, alliance, obligation, and reciprocity. Increasingly,
428 portions of these interactions are translated into English for younger participants. While this
429 facilitates procedural understanding, it strips away cultural depth. The younger generation may
430 observe the event without internalising its normative significance.

431 Religious and ritual practices have experienced similar shifts. Adofu (2025) notes that several
432 ceremonial practices among the Igala require precise verbal formulations. Where younger
433 participants lack competence, they often become detached from ritual meaning. This contributes
434 to declining participation and reduced transmission of spiritual-cultural values.

435 The educational system contributes significantly to this decline. Despite policy support for
436 mother-tongue instruction, implementation remains weak. Alhassan and Kadiri (2015) found
437 limited structured teaching of Igala in many schools across Kogi State. Without institutional
438 reinforcement, cultural transmission relies almost entirely on family structures already under
439 pressure from urbanisation and English dominance.

440 Digital media present both challenge and opportunity. Current usage patterns among Igala youths
441 favour English content. Unlike Igbo, which has benefited from initiatives such as BBC News
442 Igbo, Igala lacks comparable large-scale digital revitalisation platforms. Eke and Salawu (2026)
443 show that digital language visibility enhances youth engagement and language prestige. The
444 absence of equivalent Igala platforms reduces opportunities for modernised cultural
445 transmission.

446 Case evidence from Ankpa and Dekina indicates that younger people increasingly consume
447 entertainment and educational content exclusively in English. Consequently, indigenous songs,
448 oral histories, and cultural narratives occupy a shrinking portion of their cognitive environment.
449 This shift matters because repeated exposure is central to cultural internalisation.

450 The decline also affects informal normative regulation. In traditional settings, elders frequently
451 corrected behaviour using culturally coded expressions. Such corrections carried authority
452 because they invoked shared symbolic understanding. Where younger people no longer fully
453 understand these expressions, their regulatory force weakens.

454 Ugboja and Dada (2025) found that age-grade systems historically transmitted communal ethics
455 through indigenous instruction. Reduced linguistic competence among younger members has
456 weakened this process, contributing to declining participation and diminished normative
457 continuity.

458 Statistically, broader Nigerian evidence is revealing. Abdulmusawir et al. (2025) note that fewer
459 than 3 per cent of Nigerian indigenous languages possess sufficient digital resources for
460 sustained modern transmission. Igala falls within the low-resource category. This technological
461 marginality compounds oral decline. The cumulative effect is cultural thinning rather than abrupt
462 disappearance. Younger Igalas may retain symbolic awareness of traditions while lacking deep
463 operational knowledge of their meanings and functions. Such partial transmission produces
464 weakened continuity.

465 These analyses therefore established that declining Igala language use substantially undermines
466 the transmission of indigenous cultural values, oral traditions, and social norms. By disrupting
467 oral pedagogy, reducing ritual participation, and weakening culturally grounded instruction,
468 language decline threatens the continuity of core social values among younger generations in
469 Kogi State.

470 **Empirical Reviews**

471 Alhassan and Kadiri (2015) conducted a study on *Reviving Indigenous Languages through*
472 *Teaching and Learning: The Case of Igala Language* in Kogi State, Nigeria, to examine the

473 declining use of Igala and evaluate educational strategies for its preservation. The investigation
474 was anchored on Fishman's theory of language maintenance and shift, which explains how
475 intergenerational transmission determines the survival of minority languages. The researchers
476 adopted a descriptive survey design to interrogate the status of Igala within formal educational
477 institutions. Their study drew respondents from selected primary and secondary schools across
478 Igala-speaking areas of Kogi East using purposive sampling to ensure participants had direct
479 experience with indigenous language instruction. Data were generated through structured
480 questionnaires and interviews administered to teachers, school administrators, and language
481 instructors. The findings revealed that the implementation of mother-tongue instruction was
482 significantly weak, with fewer than half of sampled schools actively teaching Igala as stipulated
483 by national educational policy. The study further established that many parents and school
484 authorities considered English superior for academic advancement, thereby limiting practical
485 exposure to Igala among younger learners. The authors concluded that declining institutional
486 support was accelerating language shift and weakening the cultural identity of younger Igalas.
487 Their work made an important contribution by establishing the educational dimension of Igala
488 language decline. However, the analysis focused largely on policy implementation and
489 pedagogical limitations without examining the broader sociological implications for cultural
490 belonging, family cohesion, and value transmission. The present paper addressed this omission
491 by investigating the social consequences of declining language use within the everyday lived
492 realities of Igala communities.

493 Ojonugwa and Emah (2020) carried out an empirical enquiry entitled *Towards Preserving Igala*
494 *Folktales* with emphasis on selected Igala communities in Kogi State. The purpose of the
495 research was to assess the extent to which younger generations still engage with oral narratives
496 and to determine the implications of declining exposure for cultural continuity. The study was
497 situated within oral tradition theory, which maintains that communal memory and normative
498 instruction are transmitted through repeated narrative performance. Employing a qualitative
499 ethnographic design, the researchers purposively selected elderly storytellers, parents, and youths
500 from Idah, Ankpa, and Dekina. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant
501 observation during family storytelling sessions, and textual analysis of documented folktales.
502 The findings showed a marked reduction in oral storytelling practices within sampled
503 households, particularly among urban families where English had become dominant. The
504 researchers observed that many younger participants could identify the titles of popular folktales
505 but were unable to recount their content or interpret their moral lessons. The study further
506 revealed that technological entertainment, westernised educational orientation, and reduced
507 indigenous language competence had jointly displaced traditional storytelling sessions that
508 previously served as mechanisms for moral instruction and intergenerational bonding. Ojonugwa
509 and Emah concluded that the weakening of Igala oral traditions signalled not merely cultural
510 change but a disruption in indigenous systems of socialisation. Their contribution is significant
511 because it empirically demonstrates the link between language decline and erosion of oral
512 heritage. Nonetheless, the research concentrated primarily on folktales and did not extend its
513 analysis to broader dimensions such as changing kinship communication, communal
514 participation, and identity negotiation among younger Igalas. The current paper extended this
515 discussion by situating oral decline within a wider sociological framework of language loss and
516 social transformation.

517 Emmanuel and Kadiri (2026) undertook a study on *An Analysis of Igala Proverbs in Awo Speech*
518 *Community of Ankpa, Kogi State* to examine how indigenous proverbial expressions continue to
519 function within contemporary Igala discourse and to assess the extent of younger speakers'
520 comprehension. The investigation was grounded in speech act theory, which explains how
521 language performs social functions beyond literal meaning, particularly in culturally regulated
522 interactions. The researchers adopted a qualitative descriptive research design involving
523 respondents drawn from Awo speech community in Ankpa Local Government Area. Through
524 purposive and snowball sampling techniques, they selected community elders, middle-aged
525 speakers, and younger participants to provide generational comparison. Data collection involved
526 oral elicitation sessions, focus group discussions, and pragmatic analysis of selected proverbs
527 used in natural communicative settings. The findings showed substantial disparity between age
528 groups in proverb interpretation and contextual application. While older respondents
529 demonstrated ease in decoding metaphorical and normative meanings, younger participants
530 frequently interpreted expressions literally or required explanatory translation into English. The
531 study established that declining proficiency in Igala significantly reduced the ability of younger
532 individuals to grasp culturally encoded messages relating to respect, obligation, conflict
533 resolution, and communal ethics. Emmanuel and Kadiri concluded that the weakening of
534 proverbial competence reflected a broader erosion of indigenous communicative knowledge and
535 warned that continued decline would affect cultural continuity. Their research is particularly
536 relevant because it provides direct empirical evidence linking language attrition with diminishing
537 cultural literacy among the Igala. However, its scope was restricted to one speech community
538 and primarily linguistic interpretation, leaving insufficient attention to the wider social effects on
539 family relationships, communal integration, and identity consciousness across Kogi State. The
540 present study filled this gap by examining these broader sociological consequences across the
541 Igala ethnic space.

542 **Theoretical Framework - Language Maintenance and Shift Theory**

543 The most suitable theoretical framework for this paper is Language Maintenance and Shift
544 Theory, propounded by Joshua A. Fishman (1964; further developed extensively in 1991).
545 Although the theory was first introduced earlier, its continued application in contemporary
546 sociolinguistic studies of indigenous language decline and cultural continuity makes it highly
547 relevant to current investigations into language endangerment and its social consequences.
548 Fishman developed the theory to explain the conditions under which a speech community retains
549 its indigenous language across generations or gradually abandons it in favour of a socially
550 dominant language. His work emerged from concerns about minority language attrition and has
551 remained central to studies examining the relationship between language choice, ethnic identity,
552 and social continuity.

553 The central assumption of the theory is that language survival depends primarily on
554 intergenerational transmission within the family and community rather than on formal
555 institutional recognition alone. Fishman argues that a language remains viable when it is
556 consistently used in everyday social domains such as family interaction, neighbourhood
557 communication, traditional ceremonies, and community gatherings. Once these informal
558 domains become dominated by another language, a gradual shift begins, eventually resulting in
559 linguistic displacement. The theory further assumes that language is closely tied to ethnic

560 identity and cultural continuity, such that decline in indigenous language use often corresponds
561 with weakening communal attachment and disruption of traditional systems of socialisation.
562 Fishman also posits that social prestige, economic advantage, educational systems, and
563 urbanisation are significant external factors that influence linguistic choices within multilingual
564 societies. Where a dominant language offers broader social mobility, younger generations are
565 more likely to abandon indigenous linguistic practices.

566 One major strength of the theory lies in its strong explanatory capacity for understanding why
567 indigenous languages decline despite constitutional or policy recognition. It offers a practical
568 framework for analysing language use across social domains and provides clear indicators for
569 assessing stages of language shift. The theory is especially useful in examining communities
570 such as the Igala, where declining use of the indigenous language is observable within
571 households, educational institutions, and peer interactions. Another important strength is its
572 emphasis on sociological processes rather than purely linguistic structures. It recognises
573 language as a social institution embedded within family systems, cultural reproduction, and
574 identity formation. This makes it particularly relevant for studies investigating social
575 consequences beyond phonological or grammatical decline.

576 Despite these strengths, the theory has certain limitations. One criticism is that it places
577 considerable emphasis on intergenerational family transmission while giving less attention to
578 contemporary digital communication and transnational media environments that increasingly
579 shape language practices. In present contexts, language use is no longer confined to traditional
580 social domains but extends significantly into digital spaces, which can either accelerate decline
581 or support revitalisation. Another limitation is that the theory tends to present language shift as a
582 linear process, whereas current realities often involve hybrid bilingual identities in which
583 individuals maintain symbolic ethnic attachment despite limited indigenous language
584 competence. This complexity may not always be fully captured by Fishman's original
585 framework.

586 The relevance of Language Maintenance and Shift Theory to the present study is direct and
587 substantial. The topic, *The Sociological Consequences of Declining Indigenous Language Use
588 among the Igalas*, centres on examining how reduced use of the Igala language affects cultural
589 identity, social relationships, and the transmission of indigenous values. Fishman's theory
590 provides the conceptual basis for understanding how weakening intergenerational use of Igala
591 within families and communities contributes to broader social transformation. Among the Igala
592 of Kogi State, increasing preference for English in domestic communication, formal education,
593 and digital interaction reflects precisely the type of domain displacement described by Fishman.
594 As younger generations use Igala less frequently, traditional channels for transmitting oral
595 traditions, kinship norms, and communal ethics become weakened.

596 The theory is particularly applicable in explaining observed patterns such as younger Igalas'
597 limited understanding of proverbs, declining participation in indigenous oral traditions, reduced
598 effectiveness of elder-youth communication, and weakening attachment to cultural identity. It
599 helps situate these developments within a broader process of language shift rather than viewing
600 them as isolated cultural changes. Furthermore, the framework supports the study's focus on
601 sociological consequences by showing that language decline affects not only communication but

602 also social cohesion, identity continuity, and collective belonging. Its application therefore
603 provides a strong analytical foundation for interrogating how declining Igala language use is
604 reshaping social life in Kogi State.

605 **6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

606 The findings of this paper revealed that declining use of the Igala language has significant
607 implications for cultural identity and the sense of belonging among the Igala people of Kogi
608 State. The evidence indicates that reduced competence in the indigenous language among
609 younger generations weakens attachment to communal history, indigenous knowledge systems,
610 and ethnic consciousness. This outcome aligns with the position of Emmanuel and Kadiri (2026),
611 who found that limited understanding of Igala proverbs among younger speakers reduces their
612 ability to internalise culturally encoded meanings. Similarly, Ochimana (2025) observed that
613 external cultural influences have altered the traditional foundations of Igala identity, particularly
614 among urban youth. The present findings deepen this argument by showing that language decline
615 does not merely affect communication but gradually erodes the symbolic markers through which
616 individuals recognise themselves as members of the Igala ethnic community. In practical terms,
617 when younger persons cannot adequately participate in traditional marriage rites, ancestral
618 commemorations, or indigenous verbal exchanges, their sense of belonging becomes
619 increasingly symbolic rather than experiential. Sociologically, this creates identity fragmentation,
620 where ethnic affiliation is retained in name but detached from cultural substance.

621 The paper further established that declining indigenous language use has altered
622 intergenerational communication and social relationships within Igala families and communities.
623 This finding corroborates Alhassan and Kadiri's (2015) observation that parental preference for
624 English in child socialisation reduces opportunities for indigenous language acquisition. It also
625 resonates with Ojonugwa and Emah's (2020) conclusion that the decline of traditional
626 storytelling has weakened interactional bonds between elders and younger family members. The
627 current study extends these views by demonstrating that communication barriers now affect not
628 only cultural instruction but also emotional intimacy and relational cohesion. In many Igala
629 households, elders who are more fluent in the indigenous language increasingly find it difficult
630 to communicate moral expectations, life experiences, and social guidance effectively to younger
631 relatives. This creates subtle relational distance, often leading to reduced engagement between
632 generations. For instance, in family gatherings where elders communicate through idiomatic
633 expressions or culturally loaded speech forms, younger participants frequently require
634 interpretation or withdraw from active participation. The sociological consequence is the
635 weakening of traditional authority structures and a gradual redefinition of family relations away
636 from indigenous norms of hierarchy and respect.

637 Another major finding showed that declining Igala language use undermines the transmission of
638 indigenous cultural values, oral traditions, and social norms among younger generations. This
639 supports Ojonugwa and Emah's (2020) position that oral traditions remain essential vehicles for
640 preserving communal ethics and historical consciousness. It also reinforces the empirical
641 evidence presented by Ugboja and Dada (2025), who argued that indigenous institutions such as
642 age-grade systems depend heavily on language for socialisation and moral instruction. The
643 present study demonstrates that as younger Igalas become less proficient in the language, they

644 lose access to traditional pedagogical mechanisms through which values such as communal
645 responsibility, respect for elders, conflict mediation, and kinship obligations are transmitted.
646 Practical illustrations are visible in the declining understanding of ritual expressions, ancestral
647 narratives, and proverbial teachings that once shaped acceptable conduct. This has produced
648 observable shifts in behavioural orientation, including declining participation in communal rites
649 and weakened adherence to customary norms. Sociologically, this represents a disruption in
650 cultural reproduction, where one generation becomes less equipped to inherit and transmit the
651 collective values of the preceding one.

652 The cumulative implication of these findings is that declining use of the Igala language is
653 generating profound sociological consequences for the structure and continuity of Igala society.
654 The paper demonstrated that language decline is not an isolated linguistic issue but a process
655 that reshapes identity formation, alters family interaction, weakens communal integration, and
656 disrupts value transmission. These conclusions are consistent with Mba and Oguadinma's (2025)
657 broader argument that indigenous language decline contributes directly to cultural dislocation
658 and social detachment among younger generations. However, the current paper contributes
659 further by locating these consequences within the specific socio-cultural realities of the Igala
660 people and by illustrating their practical manifestations in family life, ceremonial participation,
661 and indigenous socialisation processes.

662 The explanatory strength of Language Maintenance and Shift Theory is particularly evident here,
663 as it provides a coherent basis for understanding how the displacement of Igala by English across
664 domestic, educational, and social domains has produced measurable shifts in social relations and
665 cultural continuity. The findings therefore suggest that without deliberate revitalisation efforts
666 through family socialisation, school-based instruction, and community-driven linguistic
667 preservation, the Igala people may experience increasing cultural thinning characterised by
668 symbolic ethnic affiliation without substantive cultural competence. From a sociological
669 standpoint, this threatens the continuity of collective identity and the social mechanisms through
670 which Igala society reproduces itself across generations.

671 **7. CONCLUSIONS**

672 This paper examined the sociological consequences of declining indigenous language use among
673 the Igala people of Kogi State and established that the gradual reduction in the use of the Igala
674 language has far-reaching implications for cultural continuity, communal identity, and social
675 cohesion. The findings revealed that declining language use has weakened cultural identity and
676 the sense of belonging among younger Igalas by limiting their access to indigenous symbolic
677 systems through which communal membership is affirmed and expressed. The study also
678 showed that reduced proficiency in the language has disrupted intergenerational communication,
679 creating relational gaps between elders and younger family members and weakening traditional
680 mechanisms of social guidance and moral regulation.

681 Furthermore, the paper established that the erosion of Igala language competence has
682 significantly affected the transmission of indigenous cultural values, oral traditions, and social
683 norms, thereby threatening the continuity of indigenous systems of socialisation that historically
684 sustained communal life. These outcomes affirm that language decline among the Igala is not

685 merely a linguistic concern but a sociological challenge with implications for identity
686 reproduction, social integration, and cultural survival. The paper therefore concluded that
687 sustained neglect of the Igala language may accelerate cultural dislocation and weaken the social
688 structures through which the Igala people preserve their collective heritage across generations.

689 **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

690 Following the above findings, the paper suggested the following recommendations:

- 691 1. There should be deliberate integration and effective implementation of Igala language
692 instruction at all levels of basic education within Igala-speaking areas of Kogi State,
693 supported by the development of standardised teaching materials, trained language
694 instructors, and regular monitoring by relevant educational authorities. This will
695 strengthen early language acquisition and promote cultural literacy among younger
696 generations.
- 697 2. Families and community institutions should intentionally restore indigenous language use
698 within domestic interaction, cultural ceremonies, storytelling sessions, and age-grade
699 activities by encouraging parents, elders, and traditional leaders to prioritise Igala as the
700 primary medium of intergenerational communication and cultural instruction.
- 701 3. Government agencies, cultural associations especially Igala Cultural Development
702 Association (I.C.D.A), and private stakeholders should invest in digital revitalisation
703 initiatives such as Igala-language media platforms, mobile applications, online
704 storytelling archives, and youth-oriented social media content to increase the visibility,
705 relevance, and prestige of the language among younger speakers in contemporary
706 communication spaces.

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