PRESERVING IGBO CULTURE THROUGH ONLINE PLATFORMS IN THIS DIGITAL DISPENSATION

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Abstract

The face significant challenges in the digital era due to globalization, urbanization, and the dominance of English. However, digital platforms have become vital tools for preserving and revitalizing the culture. Initiatives like the Igbo Literacy Project aim to create comprehensive digital and physical repositories of Igbo linguistic and cultural heritage, encompassing traditional practices, oral histories, and community mappings. E-learning platforms offer interactive curricula that blend notes, audio, videos, and games, reaching students globally and fostering fluency in Igbo. outlets such as BBC Igbo have expanded the language's presence in broadcast media, creating viable channels for literacy and oracy in Igbo. Social media platforms, YouTube channels, and podcasts dedicated to teaching and discussing the culture are gaining increasing popularity. These digital endeavours not only counteract the decline of the but also promote cultural pride and identity among younger generations. By leveraging technology, communities are ensuring that their culture remains vibrant and accessible in the digital age. This study will use a Qualitative Research Design. This design would be suitable for exploring the potential of online platforms in preserving the culture. A case study approach or Surveys and interviews could be used to examine specific online platforms or initiatives that promote the culture. It will recommend that the experts get involved in the online promotion of the culture.

Keywords: Preserving, Culture, Online Platforms, Digital Dispensation.

Introduction

Language is a fundamental component of cultural identity and collective memory. For the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria, their language is not merely a means of communication but a vital vessel for transmitting traditions, beliefs, and historical consciousness. This embodies proverbs, folktales, ceremonies, and oral histories that anchor its speakers to a unique worldview. However, in today's globalized society, Igbo language is increasingly endangered. According to UNESCO (2010), many African languages face extinction within this century due to rapid shifts in language preference, particularly among younger populations. The rise of globalization and urbanization, coupled with the dominance of English as the language of education, commerce, and governance, has led to a steady decline in the everyday use of Igbo. Parents often discourage children from speaking Igbo, believing that fluency in English equates to better social and economic mobility (Eme & Mbagwu, 2011). As a result, intergenerational transmission of the language has weakened, placing it at risk of attrition. However, the advent of the digital age offers both challenges and unprecedented opportunities for language preservation.

The Igbo language and Culture

The Igbo language (Asụsụ Igbo) is a tonal, Niger-Congo language spoken predominantly in southeastern Nigeria by over 40 million people (Ohiri-Aniche, 2013). It is one of Nigeria's major Igbo languages and serves not only as a means of communication but also as a vessel for preserving the culture, values, and worldview of the Igbo people. A complex system of tonal distinctions, noun class markers, and numerous dialectal variations characterizes Igbo, distinguishing it from other languages. Despite its rich oral and literary tradition, the language faces challenges of standardization, intergenerational transmission, and digital representation in modern times (Eze & Okeke, 2022). Historically, this has been a key medium for cultural expression, oral literature, and communal identity. Proverbs, folktales, traditional rites, and indigenous philosophies were transmitted through the language, anchoring generations in their heritage.

Igbo culture refers to the customs, beliefs, values, language, social organization, arts, and traditions of the Igbo people, who are one of the largest ethnic groups in southeastern Nigeria. It encompasses various aspects such as traditional religion, music, dance, festivals, clothing, food, and kinship systems. (Mbah, 2014). Central to Igbo culture is the concept of *ọfọ na ogu* 'truth and justice', respect for elders, communal living, and strong ties to ancestral heritage and identity. The Igbo also emphasize hard work, enterprise, and education as cultural virtues that support social progress and identity. According to Nwachukwu-Agbada (2015). These can also be seen as some aspects of Igbo culture: Language and Communication, Religion and Spiritual Beliefs, Social Organization, Festivals and Ceremonies, Arts and Material Culture, Values and Worldview

Online platforms

Online platforms refer to digital infrastructures that enable interactions, communication, collaboration, content sharing, and service delivery between users over the internet. These platforms include websites, mobile applications, and cloud-based systems that host user-generated content or facilitate the exchange of information, goods, or services. Examples include social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), video-sharing platforms (e.g., YouTube), e-learning portals (e.g., Coursera), and language-learning apps (e.g., Duolingo). They serve as interactive digital spaces that foster participation, scalability, and real-time engagement across geographical boundaries (Kenney & Zysman, 2022).

Digital Dispensation

The digital dispensation, characterized by widespread access to the internet, smartphones, and user-generated content, has created new arenas where languages can thrive. Online platforms now provide spaces where marginalized languages can be documented, taught, and revitalized. Social media, podcasts, mobile apps, YouTube channels, and e-learning websites are now being leveraged to promote the and culture (Uche, 2020). The relevance of digital platforms in language revitalization cannot be overstated. These technologies enable communities, particularly the youth and diaspora, to access cultural resources, communicate in their native languages, and participate in artistic discourse. Initiatives such as the Igbo Literacy Project and BBC Igbo are exemplary cases of how online tools can enhance linguistic engagement. Furthermore, social networking platforms like Facebook, Omenka App, WhatsApp, etc. have

become important spaces for informal language practice and cultural expression (Oduche, 2022). This study, therefore, investigates the potential of online platforms in preserving the culture in this digital dispensation. It aims to highlight the successes, limitations, and prospects of digital initiatives and make recommendations on how best to utilize digital resources in promoting the Igbo linguistic heritage. It is moving from a language ecology perspective, which exists within a constantly shifting environment influenced by cultural values, political structures, and technological advancements. Digital platforms, in this context, are not merely neutral tools but active agents shaping how and where Igbo is spoken, taught, and valued. (Onwuejeogwu, 1981). They help shift the perception of Igbo from being a "rural" or "informal" language to one that has a place in global digital discourse.

Some of the Causes of the Decline of Igbo

Several factors contribute to the decline of the:

i. Globalization: English dominates international communication, business, and education.
ii. Urbanization: In urban centres, English or Nigerian Pidgin becomes the lingua franca, even among Igbo families.
iii. Colonial Legacy: The colonial emphasis on English education undermined indigenous (Igbo) language instruction.
iv. Parental Influence: Igbo parents increasingly favour English to give their children a competitive edge.

Literature Review

The preservation of Igbo language in the digital era has become a subject of growing academic and policy interest. Several scholars have examined the factors contributing to language endangerment and the role of digital technologies in reversing these trends. This literature review explores key themes relevant to the Igbo context, e.g. language endangerment, digital revitalization strategies, and indigenous language initiatives on online platforms.

UNESCO (2010) defines a language as endangered when it is no longer transmitted from one generation to the next. Language loss is often accompanied by the erosion of cultural knowledge, oral traditions, and identity. In Nigeria, the shift away from Igbo language toward English is well documented. Eme and Mbagwu (2011) attribute this trend to the prioritization of English in schools, mass media, and employment opportunities. They argue that without intentional efforts to reverse this shift, many Nigerian languages, including Igbo, may face extinction within the next century.

Furthermore, Bamgbose (2000) notes that government language policies, though well-intentioned, often fail in implementation. For example, the National Policy on Education in Nigeria encourages mother-tongue instruction in the early years of schooling, yet the absence of teaching materials, trained personnel, and institutional support undermines this goal. The case of this is emblematic of this broader national issue.

With the global rise of information and communication technologies (ICTs), digital platforms have become essential tools for language revitalization. Crystal (2000) argues that the internet, rather than being a threat, can serve as a powerful medium for minority languages to reassert their visibility and functionality. He identifies digital dictionaries, online communities, and language learning apps as instruments of linguistic survival.

In Africa, scholars like Uche (2020) have studied the intersection between digital technology and language revitalization. Uche's research highlights how online content ranging from blogs and e-books to YouTube channels has allowed African languages to reach wider audiences, especially the youth. He contends that digital learning tools not only enhance access but also allow for the incorporation of multimedia formats (audio, video, and graphics), which are particularly effective for oral-based languages like Igbo.

A growing number of studies have begun to document efforts specifically aimed at promoting the through digital platforms. Nwachukwu-Agbada (2015) emphasizes the importance of preserving Igbo oral literature and how digital archives have become crucial for that task. His research supports the use of multimedia storytelling to capture and disseminate folktales, proverbs, and chants that would otherwise be lost.

Similarly, Oduche (2022) explores how social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp are being used to informally teach, often through memes, short videos, and user-generated lessons. She notes that these informal modes of instruction can foster stronger emotional connections and cultural pride among young users, particularly those in the diaspora. BBC Igbo is another notable initiative. Since its launch in 2018, it has significantly expanded the 's presence in professional media (BBC News Igbo, 2018). By reporting news, features, and interviews in Igbo, it normalizes the language in contemporary discourse and introduces new vocabulary for modern topics, from climate change to politics.

Despite growing scholarly interest, gaps remain. Most studies focus on the presence of Igbo in online spaces without evaluating the effectiveness of these platforms in sustaining long-term language fluency. There is limited empirical research on how users interact with Igbo content online, how much language proficiency is gained, and the socio-economic barriers (e.g., internet access, digital literacy) that may limit participation. This study aims to fill these gaps by evaluating user experiences and the structural strengths and weaknesses of online initiatives.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine the role of online platforms in preserving and revitalizing the culture in the digital era. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows for a comprehensive exploration of social phenomena, particularly the lived experiences, practices, and perceptions of individuals engaged in digital linguistic and cultural activism (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method enables the researcher to gain deep insights into how digital tools influence language use, cultural expression, and identity among Igbo speakers and learners. With a case study approach, the study focuses on selected digital initiatives that aim to preserve and promote cultural values through online content. Yin (2018) emphasizes that case studies are ideal for exploring contemporary issues in real-life contexts,

particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are blurred. In this study, digital projects such as the Igbo Literacy Project, BBC Igbo, and learning platforms (e.g., mobile apps and YouTube channels) are investigated to understand their strategies, scope, impact, and challenges.

The population of this study comprises individuals involved in the promotion and study of the culture via digital means. This includes content creators, language educators, app developers, students, and users, both in Nigeria and the diaspora. A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who are directly engaged with these platforms. This sampling strategy ensures that only those with relevant experience and insight contribute to the findings (Patton, 2015).

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, online surveys, and content/document analysis. Semi-structured interview was used to interview selected content creators, educators, and users of digital Igbo platforms, allowing for flexibility while ensuring that key themes are explored across all interviews. For online surveys, short, structured questionnaires was distributed to a broader audience to gather data on engagement, user satisfaction, and perceived effectiveness of various platforms. Through content/document analysis, the content of selected online platforms (e.g., videos, social media pages, podcasts, mobile apps) was analysed to assess the themes, linguistic quality, cultural relevance, and user interaction. The data are analysed using thematic analysis, a method suitable for identifying patterns and recurring ideas within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interview transcripts, survey responses, and content analysis are coded and categorized into themes such as “linguistic preservation,” “cultural identity”, “user engagement”, and “technological limitations”. Thematic analysis helps to uncover both explicit and implicit meanings, making it suitable for examining cultural and linguistic phenomena.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the study, which explored how online platforms contribute to the preservation and revitalization of the culture. Data obtained through semi-structured interviews with digital content creators and educators, online surveys of language users, and content analysis of selected platforms such as BBC Igbo, the Igbo Literacy Project, and YouTube-based Igbo tutorials were analysed. Findings were made as follow:

1) Increased Accessibility and Reach – A key finding of the study is that online platforms have significantly improved the accessibility of learning materials. Respondents noted that platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp groups, Instagram pages, and mobile apps such as “Speak Igbo” provide convenient, on-demand access to language content. One participant, an instructor based in the United Kingdom, stated: “Before now, I had no idea how to teach my children Igbo. But now, we follow a YouTube channel together and learn songs and folktales. Okonkwo, (2020) supports that it’s helping them understand where they come from.” Survey results showed that 78% of respondents use online platforms at least once a week for engaging with or cultural content, with 62% indicating they rely on these resources due to a lack of local or in-person alternatives.

2) Revival of Cultural Identity and Pride – Interviews revealed a growing sense of cultural pride among young Igbo speakers who engage with these platforms. Content creators frequently reported receiving messages from diaspora youth expressing gratitude for helping them reconnect with their heritage. Online storytelling, digital proverbs, and cultural discussions were particularly popular, with many users citing them as instrumental in boosting their sense of identity. For example, a podcast host noted: "We get feedback from listeners in Canada and South Africa who say they now call their parents to clarify the meanings of proverbs we discuss. It's rebuilding bonds." This supports Oduche's (2022) assertion that informal digital tools can reawaken cultural consciousness among younger generations.
3) Community and Peer Learning – Digital platforms have fostered collaborative and community-based learning. Survey respondents reported that social media challenges, comment threads, and WhatsApp discussion groups often evolve into informal learning communities. One striking example was the IgboWordChallenge on Instagram, where users post new Igbo words they've learned each day, prompting discussion and corrections from more fluent speakers. 71% of survey respondents agreed that learning Igbo online was more engaging because of peer interactions and multimedia content.
4) Challenges of Standardization and Dialectal Diversity – Despite these gains, several challenges were identified. Eze, & Okeke (2022). Content creators and educators face difficulties in standardizing vocabulary and grammar, particularly when addressing diverse dialects. This has multiple dialects, and choosing one over another sometimes alienates segments of the audience. One app developer explained: "We struggled with deciding whether to use Central Igbo or include multiple dialects. Users wanted a mix, but that created confusion in the lessons." This linguistic diversity, while culturally rich, complicates the development of unified digital curricula and reduces consistency in user experience.
5) Resource and Technical Limitations – Another major theme was the lack of adequate funding and technical support. Most digital initiatives analysed in this study were created and maintained by individuals or small teams without institutional backing. This affects content quality, updates, and outreach. Interviewees highlighted the absence of government grants, professional training, or collaborations with academic linguists. Moreover, survey participants from rural Nigeria pointed out barriers such as poor internet connectivity, limited access to smartphones, and low digital literacy, which prevent broader engagement with online Igbo resources.
6) Effectiveness and Impact – Despite these challenges, the majority of participants viewed online platforms as effective tools for language learning and cultural promotion. Many reported improvements in vocabulary, pronunciation, and cultural knowledge. While some users admitted that online learning lacked the depth of traditional instruction, they acknowledged its value in raising awareness and sparking interest.

Summary of Key Findings

Theme	Positive Outcomes	Challenges Identified
Accessibility	Global reach, especially in diaspora communities	Digital divide in rural areas
Cultural Identity	Boost in pride, reconnection with heritage	Need for authentic, high-quality content
Community Learning	Peer interaction and informal mentorship	Misinformation and inconsistency in user-generated content
Standardization	Encourages the use of Central Igbo	Dialectical conflicts and exclusion
Resource Limitations	Grassroots innovation and passion	Limited funding, lack of institutional support

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that online platforms have become pivotal in the preservation and revitalization of the language and culture, particularly in the face of globalization, urbanization, and the declining use of Igbo language in formal settings. By applying the framework of language ecology, which views language as part of a dynamic sociocultural system (Haugen, 1972), this study illustrates that digital technologies are increasingly embedded in the survival ecosystem of endangered languages like Igbo, through:

a) Digital Media as Agents of Revitalization

As noted in the literature (Crystal, 2000; Uche, 2020), the digital environment provides a fertile ground for Igbo language to thrive through multimedia content, remote accessibility, and user interactivity. The findings of this study echo this view, with most participants reporting that digital tools helped them access and engage with the in ways previously unavailable.

This digital access, particularly through platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and dedicated language-learning apps, facilitates a bottom-up approach to language preservation. Unlike traditional top-down educational reforms, these initiatives are largely community-driven, responding to the needs and interests of users, especially among diaspora youth. This supports Oduche's (2022) conclusion that informal platforms can ignite cultural curiosity and restore linguistic confidence.

b) Cultural Identity and Emotional Reconnection

A prominent theme across interviews was the emotional and identity-based connection users experienced through digital engagement with Igbo culture. Users felt that learning Igbo proverbs, folktales, and songs helped them reconnect with family and community heritage. This reinforces Nwachukwu-Agbada's (2015) argument that oral literature

plays a significant role in cultural identity. The emotional aspect of language learning cannot be overlooked, especially for second-generation Igbo speakers abroad, who often feel culturally dislocated.

c) Challenges of Dialectal Diversity and Standardization
However, the findings also highlight the complexities of dialectal variation in Igbo, which present significant challenges to content creators. While standard or Central Igbo is taught in schools and used in formal media, many users prefer their native dialects for emotional and cultural authenticity. This tension mirrors the concerns raised in Eme and Mbagwu's (2011) study, where they warned that overemphasis on one dialect could lead to alienation and linguistic fragmentation.

Digital content creators must therefore strike a balance between accessibility and authenticity. One potential solution is the inclusion of **multi-dialectal options** in language-learning tools, where users can select their preferred dialects without undermining the standardized core.

d) Digital Divide and Infrastructure Limitations
Although the internet has expanded access, it has not done so equitably. The study reveals that participants from rural areas face technological and infrastructural barriers such as poor internet connectivity, limited smartphone penetration, and digital illiteracy. These challenges are consistent with Patton's (2015) assertion that qualitative research must account for contextual and systemic barriers that influence participation. Without addressing these disparities, digital preservation efforts may inadvertently favour urban and diaspora populations while neglecting rural native speakers who are central to maintaining cultural fluency.

e) Lack of Institutional Support
Another significant finding was the lack of institutional and governmental support for digital initiatives. Most projects were sustained by passionate individuals or grassroots groups, often without funding or collaboration with linguistic experts. This aligns with Bamgbose's (2000) argument that the failure of language policy implementation in Nigeria is not due to a lack of policy itself, but due to poor institutional commitment. For long-term success, there is a pressing need for universities, cultural organizations, and government bodies to partner with digital creators. Such partnerships could ensure content accuracy, curriculum integration, and broader outreach.

f) Theoretical Implications
From a language ecology perspective, the existence within a constantly shifting environment is influenced by cultural values, political structures, and technological advancements. Digital platforms, in this context, are not merely neutral tools but active agents shaping how and where Igbo is spoken, taught, and valued. They help shift the perception of Igbo from being a "rural" or "informal" language to one that has a place in global digital discourse.

Conclusion

The digital age, though initially seen as a threat, has emerged as a vital ally in the fight to preserve and revitalize the. Through e-learning, social media, online communities, and global broadcasting, this is finding new audiences and renewed relevance. With concerted effort from linguists, educators, policymakers, and families, technology can transform what was once a story of decline into a narrative of resurgence. In this digital dispensation, the preservation of culture through online platforms has emerged as a viable and transformative strategy for sustaining indigenous identity in the face of globalization and technological advancement. The increasing penetration of the internet, mobile technology, and digital media provides unprecedented opportunities to document, teach, and disseminate Igbo linguistic and cultural heritage to a global audience. Social media, language learning apps, YouTube channels, online dictionaries, and virtual communities have become critical tools in engaging younger generations and reversing the decline in the active use of the Igbo language.

However, while these platforms present great promise, they also demand intentionality and innovation from stakeholders: government agencies, educators, content creators, linguists, and cultural custodians to develop high-quality, interactive, and culturally relevant digital resources. More importantly, the community-driven nature of Igbo culture must be preserved even in digital spaces, fostering participation, collaboration, and shared ownership of cultural content.

Ultimately, leveraging digital technology not only aids in language revitalization but also ensures that Igbo cultural values, worldviews, and identity continue to thrive amidst modernity. The future of culture, therefore, depends on the ability to integrate tradition with innovation, heritage with technology, and oral legacy with digital fluency.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussions, the following recommendations are made in order to promote effective digital preservation and revitalization:

1) Government Policy and Support: Federal and state governments, particularly in the Southeast, should enact and implement language preservation policies that fund the development of digital Igbo content. Incentives should be provided for tech developers and educators who create Igbo learning platforms, apps, and audiovisual content.

2) Curriculum Integration: Educational institutions should integrate the use of digital tools in teaching and culture at all levels. Schools should adopt digital textbooks, e-learning modules, and culturally relevant multimedia to make Igbo studies more engaging for students.

3) Community and Diaspora Engagement: Igbo communities, both in Nigeria and the diaspora, should participate actively in creating and curating online cultural content. Social media campaigns, virtual cultural festivals, and podcasts can be used to share proverbs, folktales, traditional practices, and language lessons.

4) Technology-Driven Language Learning: Developers should be encouraged to build user-friendly apps and websites for learning Igbo, incorporating gamified features, AI

tutors, and voice recognition. These platforms should accommodate dialectical differences while promoting standard Igbo.

5) Digital Archiving and Documentation: Linguists and cultural experts should collaborate to create comprehensive digital archives of Igbo oral literature, traditional music, historical records, and rituals. These archives should be made accessible online through open-source platforms for educational and cultural research.

6) Youth Involvement and Digital Literacy: Young people should be empowered to take active roles in preserving their linguistic and cultural heritage. Digital literacy programs in Igbo should be promoted through youth clubs, online contests, and influencer-led initiatives on platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram.

However, there should be trained Digital Educators that will equip language experts with content creation and social media skills. There shall be Fund Content Development to encourage government and private sector investment. Centralized Platforms should be created: A hub that aggregates verified Igbo content that will be incorporated into Schools. This will promote digital Igbo learning in primary schools. It will also boost Diaspora Engagement which will tailor tools to children of migrants abroad.

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