

THE ROLE OF DRAMA, MUSIC, DANCE AND STOREYTELLING IN PRESERVING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AMIDST LANGUAGE SHIFT IN MULTILINGUAL COMMUNITIES OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of drama, music, dance and storytelling in preserving indigenous languages amidst the challenges of language shift in multilingual communities of Cross River state, Nigeria. Two objectives, research questions and hypotheses guided the study. Anchored in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the research employed a mixed-methods sequential exploratory design to capture both the depth and breadth of linguistic and cultural experiences within the study area. The population of the study comprised 22,222 and used 320 participants including teachers, students, and cultural practitioners. Indigenous languages preservation questionnaire (ILPQ) with established 0.85 reliability coefficient was used as the instrument for data collection. PPMC was used to test hypothesis one while, regression analysis was used to test hypothesis two. Findings indicated that drama, music, dance, and storytelling significantly enhances indigenous language preservation ($r = .61, p < .01$). The study concluded that, integrating drama, music, dance and storytelling into formal learning strengthens cultural identity, promotes intergenerational communication and counters the rising dominance of English language and the Nigerian Pidgin. The study recommended embedding indigenous artistic expressions in school curricula to support long-term linguistic sustainability.

Keywords: Indigenous Languages, Language Shift, Multi-lingual Communities.

Introduction

Nigeria's linguistic landscape is among the most diverse in the world, with over 500 indigenous languages reflecting a rich mosaic of ethnic and cultural identities (Eberhard et al., 2023). Within this multilingual context, Cross River state is particularly complex, hosting over 50 languages such as Efik, Ejagham, Bette, Bekwarra, and Lokaa, although some, like Efut, have become extinct. Despite this heritage, the dominance of English as the official language and Nigerian Pidgin in education, media, and commerce has led to a significant language shift, marked by the decline of native language use in both formal and informal contexts, threatening cultural identity and intergenerational knowledge transfer (Ndimele & Okon, 2022).

This shift is most evident among younger generations, who often perceive indigenous languages as less valuable due to the prestige and economic utility of English. Consequently, many children in Cross River State are losing fluency in their mother tongues, weakening the link between language, tradition, and community identity. Although Nigeria's National Policy on Education advocates mother-tongue instruction in early schooling, implementation is

minimal, with classrooms largely Anglophone and indigenous languages limited to cultural events (Ubi, 2025). This policy-practice gap has further marginalized local languages and eroded cultural consciousness.

Amid these challenges, arts education emerges as a powerful, underutilized tool for language preservation. Literature-in-English and other art forms music, drama, dance, visual arts, oral storytelling, and poetry carry the rhythm, idioms, and expressions of indigenous languages, fostering both linguistic and cultural continuity (Ubi, 2025; Okebukola, 2020). Arts-based pedagogy provides culturally resonant and emotionally engaging learning environments that reinforce local languages while nurturing creativity and identity.

Despite this potential, empirical research in Nigeria, particularly in Cross River State, is limited. Existing studies focus on documentation, policy, or curriculum reform, often neglecting the creative and affective dimensions of language learning, which may explain why revitalization efforts struggle to sustain community engagement. Addressing this gap requires investigating how arts education influences indigenous language retention, identifies effective artistic practices, shapes learner attitudes, and predicts language preservation outcomes. By linking arts education to linguistic resilience, this study contributes to cultural sustainability and highlights the transformative role of creative pedagogy in multilingual societies.

Although substantial scholarship exists on language endangerment, mother-tongue education, and cultural identity in Nigeria, several gaps persist within the multilingual context of Cross River state. Previous studies emphasize documentation, legislation, and curriculum reforms as key solutions to language decline (Bamgbose, 2019; Ezenwaji, 2021 & Igboanusi, 2020), yet they often neglect the creative, community-rooted learning embedded in artistic expression. Very few researchers have explored arts education as a tool for revitalizing indigenous languages, despite evidence that drama, music, storytelling, dance, and visual arts naturally transmit linguistic and cultural knowledge (Okebukola, 2020; Nta & Akpan, 2022).

Studies reporting declining mother-tongue proficiency among young people in Cross River state rarely examine pedagogical interventions capable of reversing the trend (Ndimele & Okon, 2022; Etop, 2023). This omission is notable given that African societies have historically relied on oral tradition and artistic performance for cultural transmission (Finnegan, 2012 & Ojarikre, 2021). Additionally, the attitudinal aspects of language preservation remain insufficiently researched, even though positive learner attitudes significantly support language maintenance (Fishman, 2013 & Adegbija, 2019). Little is known about how arts-based engagement influences learners' motivation and identity orientation toward indigenous languages.

Furthermore, no existing study in Cross River state has examined whether arts education predicts indigenous language retention or which arts practices are most linguistically effective. Nigerian literature on arts education predominantly focuses on creativity and cultural awareness (Udoh & Ekanem, 2020; Onwu & Okpara, 2021), leaving a gap regarding its role in linguistic outcomes. This study responds to these gaps by investigating how arts education influences indigenous language preservation in multilingual communities. It identifies the specific artistic activities such as drama, traditional music, oral poetry, and visual storytelling

that best support linguistic continuity, examines how participation shapes attitudes toward indigenous languages, and determines whether arts education significantly predicts language retention.

This study is anchored on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which explains that learning occurs through social interaction, cultural tools, and community participation. Language, in Vygotsky's view, is the most powerful cultural tool through which individuals construct meaning and transmit cultural knowledge. Within Cross River state, indigenous languages and artistic expressions operate as interconnected cultural tools that shape identity and learning. Arts-based activities such as storytelling, music, dance, drama, and visual symbolism serve as social practices through which linguistic structures, cultural values, and communal worldviews are communicated and preserved. Thus, integrating indigenous arts into education aligns with Vygotsky's claim that culturally grounded tools support cognitive and linguistic development. A central component of the theory, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), emphasizes that learners progress when guided by more knowledgeable others. In language preservation, arts educators, community elders, and cultural practitioners act as mediators who scaffold learners' engagement with indigenous languages through creative and collaborative artistic tasks. These guided interactions help learners move from mere exposure to active use and mastery of indigenous linguistic forms. Grounding this study in sociocultural theory underscores that meaningful language preservation must be socially mediated and embedded within authentic cultural experiences. Arts education naturally provides such environments, making it a culturally aligned pathway for sustaining indigenous languages in multilingual African communities.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. to determine the correlation between drama, music, dance, storytelling and promotion of indigenous languages in Cross rivers state.
2. to ascertain the correlation between drama, music, dance, storytelling for indigenous languages preservation in Cross rivers state.

Research Questions

The research raised the following questions:

1. How is drama, music, dance and storytelling being utilized to promote indigenous languages in Cross River state?
2. What relationship exists amongst drama, music, dance and storytelling in indigenous language preservation in Cross River state?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated:

H₀₁: There is no significant correlation between drama, music, dance, storytelling and promotion of indigenous languages in Cross rivers state.

H₀₂: There is no significant correlation between drama, music, dance, storytelling and indigenous languages preservation in Cross rivers state.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods sequential exploratory research design, combining qualitative insights with quantitative validation to provide a comprehensive understanding of how arts education influences indigenous language preservation in Cross River state. The first phase involved qualitative inquiry through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, which allowed participants to describe their experiences, cultural practices, and perceptions regarding the use of artistic expressions in sustaining indigenous languages. Insights from this phase informed the development of the quantitative instrument used in the second phase, where a structured questionnaire was administered to a larger sample to statistically test relationships identified during the exploratory stage.

The study was carried out across four multilingual Local Government Areas: Boki, Yakurr, Ogoja, and Calabar South which represent the northern, central, and Calabar coastal linguistic zones of Cross River State. These areas were selected to capture diversity in arts practices, indigenous language use, and cultural transmission patterns. The population for the study consisted of 22,222 secondary school teachers' in the arts and languages, students, and community-based artists who regularly engage in indigenous artistic practices. Through stratified random sampling, a total of 320 respondents were selected: 120 students, 150 teachers, and 50 community artists. For the qualitative phase, 20 key informants were purposively selected based on their cultural knowledge and involvement in local arts, while four focus groups comprising eight participants each were formed to provide collective perspectives on language shift and creative pedagogy.

The indigenous languages preservation questionnaire (ILPQ) consisted of 30 Likert-scale items designed to measure respondents' exposure to arts education, attitudes toward indigenous languages, and observable patterns of language use. An observation checklist was also used to document arts-based activities involving indigenous languages in schools and communities. Content validity of the instrument was ensured through expert review, and a pilot test with 30 respondents confirmed good reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86.

Pearson's correlation was used to examine relationships between arts education and indigenous language preservation, while simple linear regression tested the predictive influence of drama, music, dance and storytelling at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

Results

Hypothesis one: There is no significant correlation between drama, music, dance, storytelling and promotion of indigenous languages in Cross rivers state.

Table 1: PPMC on indigenous languages promotion

Variables	r	p	Decision
Drama, Music, Dance, Storytelling	.61	.000	Significant
Indigenous Language Promotion			

Table 1 revealed an R-value of .61 and p-value of .000. Since $p < 0.05$, this implies that the hypothesis which states that there is no significant correlation between drama, music, dance,

storytelling and indigenous languages promotion in Cross rivers state was rejected. This means that arts education correlates positively with indigenous language promotion.

Hypothesis two: There is no significant correlation between drama, music, dance, storytelling and indigenous languages preservation in Cross rivers state.

Table 2: Regression analysis on indigenous languages preservation

Variables	R	R ²	F	β	t	P
Drama, Music, Dance, Storytelling	.617	.381	52.46	0.44	7.24	000

Indigenous Language Promotion

Table 2 revealed the regression analysis on indigenous languages preservation with $r=.617$ and $p=.000$. This implies that the hypothesis which states that there is no significant correlation between drama, music, dance, storytelling and indigenous languages preservation in Cross rivers state was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The significant relationship between arts education and indigenous language preservation underscores the cultural efficacy of creative pedagogies. Consistent with Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, artistic collaboration mediates linguistic learning through shared cultural artifacts. Teachers and artists reported that songs and dramatizations using Efik or Ejagham phrases promote vocabulary retention more effectively than conventional rote methods. These findings align with Adebayo (2021) and Otu and Abang (2022), who observed that integrating local art forms enhances students’ linguistic pride and communicative competence. The regression coefficient indicates that as schools intensify arts-based instruction, indigenous language use increases correspondingly. However, challenges persist: inadequate teacher training in creative pedagogy, limited instructional materials in indigenous languages, and policy neglect.

Conclusion

Arts education remains a potent, under-utilized instrument for preserving Nigeria’s linguistic diversity. In Cross River State, where English and Pidgin increasingly dominate, integrating indigenous art forms into classroom practice reinforces both language and cultural continuity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were made:

1. Curriculum Integration: incorporate indigenous arts into language and cultural studies at all educational levels.
2. Teacher Training: organize professional-development workshops on arts-based pedagogies for language preservation. Collaborate with cultural troupes and elders to document and perform local art forms in schools.

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