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# FROM EDITORIAL DESK

**Ékwė International Journal**is one of the brain children of **Igbo Scholars Forum for Socio-Cultural Advancement** born out of the zeal to get the young Igbo scholars together to start thinking like Igbo sons and daughters through paper publications, meetings and symposia. In fact, Igbo Scholars Forum was founded by Professor Onukwube Alexander Alfred Anedo and born at the launching of a festschrift in honour of their life patron, Professor Obed MuojekwuAnizoba (Ozonwa) of the Department of African & Asian Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria on the 15th day of December 2012. In his kind gesture, Prof O. M. Anizoba established a website http://www.Igbocholarsforum.com.ng (which they later upgraded to https://www.biafuluIgbocholarsforum.com.ng and thereafter, migrated to https://acjol.org and making their works visible in the Google Scholars visibility site, and recently, created another website: https//biafuluigboscholarsforum.org for them to use in telling the world who the Igbo, Nigerian and African peoples are, about their life, what they believe in and their relationship with people and other cultures of the world outside theirs. Other journal outlets through which this Forum wants to let Igbo people and their culture out to the world are IgboScholars International Journal and Ideal International

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# THE CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE IN SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA, AND POSSIBLE PASTORAL SOLUTIONS: A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

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## Abstract

*Among the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria, marriage and the family lie at the heart of social, religious, and moral life. Understood customarily as a bond between lineages rather than a private contract, marriage has anchored kinship, inheritance, and communal belonging. Today, however, marriages and households in the zone are under serious pressure. This article examines the principal difficulties: the rising cost of bride price and weddings, childlessness and the demand for sons, domestic violence, degrading widowhood rites, economic hardship and emigration, infidelity, materialism, social media and distorted religious teaching, insecurity, and inadequate marriage preparation. Using a qualitative, documentary design, it synthesizes Church teaching with social-scientific literature, including field studies and national survey data published between 2021 and 2026, read in the light of Gaudium et Spes, Familiaris Consortio, Ecclesia in Africa, Africae Munus, and Amoris Laetitia. The article contends that many of these problems stem from a*

*corruption of both genuine Igbo values and Christian marital theology, and that the Catholic Church is well positioned to foster renewal. It recommends inculturated, catechumenal marriage preparation; moderation of bride price and ceremonial expenses; a pastoral theology of childlessness; protection of widows and women's inheritance rights; family-focused economic empowerment; and organized accompaniment of couples in crisis.*

**Keywords:** marriage; family; Igbo; South-Eastern Nigeria; Catholic Church; inculturation; Amoris Laetitia.

## Introduction

For the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria, few institutions carry as much weight as marriage and the family. The zone, comprising Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo States, hosts one of Africa's most dynamic Catholic communities. In the traditional worldview, marriage forges an alliance between extended families, secures the continuity of the lineage, and fulfils a sacred obligation to the ancestors and the community (Uchendu, 1965; Nwoye, 2011). Dying unmarried or childless was a failure of social duty (Mbiti, 1969).

The arrival of Catholic missionaries on the Lower Niger in 1885 brought monogamous sacramental marriage, Western schooling, and new understandings of the dignity of women and children (Isichei, 1976; Obi, 1985). Yet marriages in the zone are now under growing strain. Clergy, counsellors, and scholars point to rising marital conflict, delayed marriage because of ceremonial

costs, violence in the home, the humiliation of widows, and the stigmatization of childless couples and mothers of daughters only (Ezejiofor, 2011; Nwaoga et al., 2021; Nwokocha, 2007; Smith, 2017). National survey data confirm that partner violence is more common in several South-Eastern states than nationally (Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare [FMoHSW] et al., 2025).

This article identifies the major challenges to marriage and family life in the zone, assesses them from the perspective of Catholic teaching, and proposes pastoral responses faithful to the Gospel and attentive to Igbo culture. Its central thesis is that the crisis cannot be reduced to a conflict between "tradition" and "modernity"; it largely reflects a distortion of the finest values in both Igbo culture and Christian faith, and therefore demands a renewed, inculturated pastoral response.

## Conceptual Clarifications

### Marriage and Family in Igbo Traditional Thought

Igbo customary marriage (*alụm di na nwunye*) is a process rather than a single ceremony. It begins with enquiries into both families, continues with the formal introduction (*ịkụ aka*) and the negotiation and payment of bride price (*ime ego*), and culminates in the wine-carrying ceremony (*ịgba nkwụ*), after which the woman is publicly acknowledged as a wife (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1995; Uchendu, 1965). The family embraces the living, the ancestors, and the unborn. Children are the chief blessing of marriage, as names such as Nwakaego ("a

child is worth more than wealth") attest (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994; Nwoye, 2011).

These values have lasting strengths: reverence for life, communal solidarity, family support for couples, and the stability of a publicly sanctioned covenant. Yet the system has also contained elements that injure human dignity, including the subordination of women, an almost exclusive focus on procreation, and the exclusion of daughters and widows from inheritance (Amadiume, 1987; Nnadi, 2013). Such attitudes persist: in a rural Ebonyi community, 62.5% of respondents agreed that women are culturally inferior to men (Okedo-Alex et al., 2021).

## Marriage and Family in Catholic Teaching

In Catholic teaching, marriage is a covenant by which a man and a woman form a partnership of the whole of life, ordered to the good of the spouses and the procreation and upbringing of children; between the baptized it is a sacrament (Catholic Church, 2000, para. 1601; Code of Canon Law, 1983/1999, can. 1055). Vatican II called it an "intimate partnership of married life and love" (Second Vatican Council, 1965, para. 48), and unity and indissolubility are its essential properties (*Code of Canon Law*, 1983/1999, can. 1056).

John Paul II (1981) presented the family as a "community of persons" and a "domestic church" with four tasks: forming a community of persons, serving life, contributing to society, and sharing in the Church's mission (paras. 17–64). Francis (2016) stressed realism, tenderness, and the need to accompany, discern, and

integrate families in difficulty. For Africa, John Paul II (1995) and Benedict XVI (2011) called for an evangelization of the family that honours authentic African values while purifying practices contrary to the Gospel.

## Theoretical framework: Inculturation

Inculturation, the continuing encounter by which the Gospel takes root in a culture and renews it from within (Shorter, 1988), is the interpretive lens of this study. John Paul II (1995) named it an urgent priority for Africa, requiring discernment of what harmonizes with the Gospel and what needs purification (paras. 59–62). African theologians hold that marriage is where inculturation is most pressing, because the Western juridical model of a single moment of consent sits awkwardly with the African view of marriage as a gradual, communal process (Bujo, 2009; Kisembo et al., 1977; Magesa, 1997). Aina (2025) proposes a synodal reimagining of Nigerian Catholic marriage rites that integrates customary stages into one Christian marriage journey. This framework calls both Igbo culture and ecclesial practice to conversion.

## Methodology

The study uses a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical design based on three groups of documentary sources: ecclesial texts (conciliar documents, papal teaching, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the *Code of Canon Law*); anthropological, sociological, and theological scholarship on Igbo society, including field

studies from South-Eastern Nigeria published between 2021 and 2026; and survey reports, statistics, statutes, and court decisions, notably the 2024 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (FMoHSW et al., 2025). Thematic content analysis grouped recurrent problems into clusters interpreted through Catholic moral and pastoral theology. Reliance on existing studies rather than primary data is the main limitation; the strength lies in placing empirical findings and theological norms in sustained dialogue.

## Challenges And Problems of Marriage And Family Life In South-Eastern Nigeria

### The Commercialization of Bride Price and Wedding Ceremonies

Bride price was originally a symbolic token sealing the covenant between two families. Today the combined burden of bride price, long lists of items demanded by the bride's kin, the traditional wedding, and a church wedding with an elaborate reception has grown steeply. Rising bride-wealth has been linked to later marriage for men (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1995), and the contemporary Igbo wedding has become a stage for displaying wealth, compelling young men to prove financial success before marrying (Smith, 2001, 2017). Elsewhere in Nigeria, unemployment and the high cost of bride price and ceremonies are leading obstacles to marriage (Madachi, 2024).

Many young adults therefore defer marriage, cohabit without family or Church blessing, or begin married life in debt. Where a large bride price has been paid, some

husbands and in-laws treat it as a transfer of ownership, which can feed abuse (Ezejiofor, 2011). Aina (2025) notes that celebrating separate customary and church rites imposes a heavy burden on Nigerian Catholics, a concern raised by the Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province at the 2022 National Pastoral Congress. Some couples postpone the church wedding for years, remaining in a canonically irregular situation and unable to receive the sacraments.

## Infertility and the Preoccupation with Male Children

Because procreation is regarded as the main purpose of marriage, childlessness is felt as a profound misfortune. The wife is usually blamed regardless of medical cause, mocked by in-laws, or pressed to accept a co-wife (Dimka & Dein, 2013). A continental review of 116 studies confirms that African women typically bear the blame for infertility and that divorce, polygamy, and extramarital relationships are often tolerated in response (Roomaney et al., 2024). Closely linked is the "male-child syndrome": since descent and inheritance pass through sons, a woman with only daughters may be treated as though she had not truly given birth, enduring repeated pregnancies and health risks in pursuit of a son (Nnadi, 2013; Nwokocha, 2007).

These pressures produce instability, covert polygamy, children outside marriage, recourse to exploitative spiritual healers, and abandonment. They contradict Catholic teaching that marriage is not instituted for procreation alone and, even without children, "persists as a whole manner and communion of life" (Second

Vatican Council, 1965, para. 50; Francis, 2016, para. 178).

## Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Abuse

According to the 2024 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, 23% of ever-partnered women have suffered emotional, physical, or sexual violence from their current or most recent partner, with three South-Eastern states well above this figure: Abia (34%), Anambra (37%), and Ebonyi (42%) (FMoHSW et al., 2025). Earlier studies reported widespread abuse in Imo State, often justified by norms of wifely obedience (Okemgbo et al., 2002), and linked alcohol, economic strain, and conflict with in-laws to violence in the region (Obi & Ozumba, 2007). Recent fieldwork in Nnewi identified physical abuse as the most frequent form and unemployment and financial stress as major drivers, with injury and pregnancy loss among the consequences (Nwafor et al., 2026). In rural Ebonyi, nearly half of respondents reported childhood physical abuse, pointing to intergenerational transmission of violence (Okedo-Alex et al., 2021).

Violence is often hidden by a culture of silence in which women are urged to "endure" for the sake of their children and the family's reputation. All five South-Eastern states have domesticated the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act of 2015 (Partners West Africa Nigeria, n.d.), yet enforcement remains patchy. Such violence contradicts the equal dignity of husband and wife, both created in God's image (Catholic Church, 2000, para. 369), and Francis (2016) condemns it as

contrary to the very nature of the conjugal union (para. 54).

## Dehumanizing Widowhood Practices and Inheritance Disputes

A husband's death can expose his widow to harmful customs: shaving her hair, sitting on the floor, prolonged mourning in black, drinking the water used to wash the corpse as "proof" of innocence, or seclusion (Ezejiofor, 2011). Nwaoga et al. (2021) document these rituals together with sexual coercion, and report depression, poverty, loss of property, and ostracism as results; notably, the rites are often enforced by women themselves, especially the *umuada*. Widows may be stripped of land and houses by their husbands' relatives, and daughters were customarily barred from inheriting land (Nnadi, 2013).

The law has advanced: Anambra State passed the Malpractices Against Widows and Widowers (Prohibition) Law in 2005, and in *Ukeje v. Ukeje* (2014) the Supreme Court declared the exclusion of daughters from their father's estate unconstitutional. Yet the gap between statute and practice remains wide. These practices violate the Church's teaching on the dignity of women and its scriptural care for widows (Exodus 22:22; James 1:27), and John Paul II (1995) asked the Church in Africa to resist customs that rob widows of their rights (para. 121). Encouragingly, churches in the zone have helped shorten mourning periods and supported widows through employment and empowerment programmes (Nwaoga et al., 2021).

## Economic Hardship, Unemployment, and Labour Migration

Economic strain is among the most widespread threats to family stability. In 2022, 63% of Nigerians, about 133 million people, were multidimensionally poor (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022), and headline inflation reached 34.80% in December 2024, with food inflation near 40% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2025). The Igbo entrepreneurial culture and apprenticeship system (*igbaboi*) have sustained many families (Meagher, 2010), but often require spouses to live for long periods in other cities or abroad.

The recent wave of emigration known as *japa*, driven by economic decline, unemployment, and insecurity, separates spouses and children and may raise divorce rates (Okunade&Awosusi, 2023). Separation weakens communication, invites infidelity, and deprives children of a parent's steady presence. In the South-East, masculinity is bound to the capacity to provide, so men who fail economically may feel diminished, while provision can also be used to justify extramarital relationships (Smith, 2009, 2017). Financial stress also fuels quarrels, neglect of children's formation, and violence between spouses (Nwafor et al., 2026).

## Infidelity and the Erosion of Marital Fidelity

Male extramarital relationships in the South-East are common and often condoned, whereas women are expected to remain faithful (Smith, 2009). The rise of romantic, companionate marriage has raised women's expectations of fidelity, creating tension with older

patterns of male sexual license. Infidelity destroys trust, exposes spouses to infections including HIV, and often ends in separation. The Church teaches that conjugal love requires "inviolable fidelity" and total mutual self-giving (Catholic Church, 2000, paras. 1646–1651; Paul VI, 1968, para. 9); a double standard tolerating male infidelity is irreconcilable with spousal equality. John Paul II's (2006) theology of the body, with its "nuptial meaning" oriented to self-gift rather than possession, challenges both male privilege and modern permissiveness.

## Materialism, Social Media, and Religious Distortions

Fierce competition for wealth and status shapes the choice of spouse, as some seek partners chiefly for financial security, and shapes expectations within marriage. Social media magnifies these pressures through displays of lavish weddings and lifestyles, and exposes young people to pornography and emotional infidelity; Nigerian research links Facebook and WhatsApp use significantly to marital conflict (Omokhabi et al., 2025). Meanwhile, some forms of Pentecostal prosperity preaching attribute childlessness, poverty, or marital difficulty to demonic attack or ancestral curses, prompting costly "deliverance" sessions and suspicion among relatives (Kalu, 2008).

## Insecurity and Social Disruption

Since 2021 the South-East has suffered violent attacks, kidnapping, and enforced "sit-at-home" orders linked to separatist agitation, as well as heavy-handed security operations (Amnesty International, 2021). The sit-at-

home orders severely disrupted commerce and schooling (Ezeanya et al., 2024). Families have lost breadwinners, children have been traumatized, and many young people have left. Insecurity also discourages family gatherings and ceremonies, weakening the extended-family networks that once sustained couples, and drives emigration (Okunade&Awosusi, 2023).

## Pressures on Children and the Weakening of Parental Formation

Children bear the cost of these difficulties. Migration, long working hours, and marital conflict reduce the time parents give to forming their children in faith and values, while communal child-rearing has weakened with urbanization (Uchendu, 1965). The pursuit of quick wealth has drawn some young people into internet fraud and other crimes. Violence experienced in childhood tends to be reproduced in adult relationships (Okedo-Alex et al., 2021). When the family fails in its educational mission, society suffers, for parents are the "first and foremost educators" of their children (John Paul II, 1981, para. 36).

## Inadequate Marriage Preparation and Weak Pastoral Follow-Up

Many couples enter marriage without adequate human, spiritual, and practical preparation. Pre-marriage instruction is often a brief course centred on canonical requirements and doctrine, with little attention to communication, conflict resolution, sexuality, finances, and extended-family relationships (Pontifical Council for the Family, 1996). Post-wedding follow-up is minimal,

and couples in difficulty may have nowhere to turn. Francis (2016) called for more thorough preparation and accompaniment, especially in the first years (paras. 205–222), and Aina (2025) argues for a staged catechumenate beginning long before the wedding and continuing after it.

## A Catholic Evaluation of the Challenges

Theologically, these challenges share a common root: the reduction of the person, especially women and children, to an instrument of lineage, status, or economic advantage. The well-being of society is bound up with the health of marriage and the family (Second Vatican Council, 1965, para. 47). When bride price becomes a transaction, a woman is valued only for bearing sons, widows are dispossessed, and violence is excused as discipline, the covenantal and personal character of marriage is obscured.

Yet Catholic teaching does not simply condemn Igbo culture. John Paul II (1995) commended the African sense of family, love for life, and solidarity (para. 43), and Benedict XVI (2011) called the African family the "sanctuary of life" (para. 42). The Igbo conviction that marriage unites two families echoes the Church's view of the family as open to society rather than closed in on itself (John Paul II, 1981, paras. 42–48).

The Catholic perspective also calls the Church to self-examination. Its historical approach sometimes stressed canonical form while overlooking the communal, processual nature of customary marriage, leaving many couples in a "dual system" where customary and

sacramental marriage coexist uneasily (Bujo, 2009; Kisembo et al., 1977; Uzukwu, 1996), a system Aina (2025) links to financial burden and instability. Hillman (1975) and Orobator (2008) urge compassion rather than purely juridical responses, and Francis (2016) warned against a "cold bureaucratic morality," calling for a Church that accompanies, discerns, and integrates (paras. 296–312).

## Possible Solutions: a Catholic Pastoral Response

### Renewed and Inculturated Marriage Preparation

Marriage preparation should become a genuine journey of formation. The Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life (2022) proposes a catechumenal model with remote, proximate, and immediate phases followed by accompaniment in the early years of marriage. South-Eastern dioceses could adapt it, including formation in communication, conflict resolution, financial management, sexuality, fertility awareness, and relations with in-laws, with married couples, counsellors, and medical professionals serving alongside clergy. Programmes should help couples see the customary and sacramental stages as one journey rather than competing events (Aina, 2025; Bujo, 2009).

### Reform of Bride Price and Ceremonial Costs

Working with traditional rulers, town unions, and women's associations, the Church should press for moderation in bride price and marriage lists, supporting communities that have already set limits. Parishes can model simplicity by discouraging extravagant receptions,

offering simple or group weddings to couples of limited means, and teaching that a marriage's worth lies in the covenant, not the celebration. Pastors should help couples who have completed the customary rites to regularize their unions without prohibitive expense, and dioceses might explore the integrated rite proposed by Aina (2025).

## A Pastoral Theology of Childlessness and the Dignity of the Girl-Child

The Church should proclaim clearly that a childless marriage is a complete marriage and that daughters are as precious as sons. The conjugal covenant keeps its full value where no children are born (Second Vatican Council, 1965, para. 50), and childless spouses can live fruitful lives through hospitality, service, and adoption (Catholic Church, 2000, para. 1654; John Paul II, 1981, para. 14). Catholic hospitals can offer fertility care and counselling consistent with Church teaching, support groups can help couples resist stigma, and homilies, catechesis, and school curricula should challenge son preference and teach that infertility affects men as well as women (Dimka&Dein, 2013; Roomaney et al., 2024).

## Protecting Women, Children, and Widows

The Church should take a firm, public stand against domestic violence. Parishes can establish confidential family desks staffed by counsellors and lawyers, work with the Catholic Women Organization (CWO) and Catholic Men Organization (CMO), and connect survivors with protection under the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) laws (Partners West Africa

Nigeria, n.d.). Clergy should never advise a spouse to remain in danger; the *Code of Canon Law* (1983/1999) recognizes grave danger to a spouse or children as a legitimate ground for separation (can. 1153). Parish and school programmes should also address harmful gender norms among the young (Okedo-Alex et al., 2021).

On widowhood, the Church should engage traditional authorities to abolish degrading rites, encourage husbands to make wills, and provide legal aid to widows defending their property, building on *Ukeje v. Ukeje* (2014) and state widowhood laws. Because the *umuada* sometimes enforce these rites (Nwaoga et al., 2021), dialogue with them is essential, and Catholic justice and peace commissions are well placed to lead this work.

## Economic Empowerment and Family-Friendly Policies

The Church's social teaching on work, the family wage, and integral human development should be translated into parish cooperatives and microcredit schemes, skills programmes for youth and women, scholarships for poor children, and financial literacy training for couples (Ilo, 2014). The Church should also advocate affordable health care and education and job creation. Couples separated by work or emigration should plan for regular reunion and communication, supported by parish networks for families with a spouse abroad (Okunade&Awosusi, 2023).

## Strengthening Spirituality and the Domestic Church

The family is called to be a "domestic church" of daily

prayer, Scripture, forgiveness, and service (Catholic Church, 2000, paras. 1655–1658; John Paul II, 1981, para. 21). Family prayer, the Eucharist, and Reconciliation offer resources for healing conflict, and Francis (2016) commends three simple words for family life: "please," "thank you," and "sorry" (para. 133). Movements such as Marriage Encounter and Couples for Christ can help couples grow together. Pastoral programmes should counter fear-driven spiritualities that blame every difficulty on curses or witchcraft, and form couples in responsible social media use (Omokhabi et al., 2025).

## Accompaniment of Couples in Crisis and Families in Irregular Situations

Every diocese should maintain accessible family life offices offering counselling, mediation, and referral, so that couples receive help before conflicts become irreparable. In the spirit of *Amoris Laetitia*, the Church should accompany separated and divorced persons, single parents, and those in irregular unions with mercy, helping them participate in community life as fully as possible (Francis, 2016, paras. 291–312). Diocesan tribunals should be staffed to handle nullity cases promptly and affordably, in line with the reform introduced by Francis (2015).

## Collaboration with Traditional and Civil Institutions

The Church cannot resolve these problems alone. Lasting change requires cooperation with traditional rulers, town unions, age grades, the *umuada*, schools, the media, and government. Because harmful practices are

upheld through community structures, dialogue with them is often more effective than condemnation from the pulpit. The *umuada*, historically influential in family affairs (Amadiume, 1987), can become allies in reforming widowhood rites (Nwaoga et al., 2021). Such collaboration embodies inculturation, letting the Gospel transform culture from within.

## Conclusion

Marriage and the family in South-Eastern Nigeria stand at a crossroads. The zone's cultural heritage and strong Catholic presence offer rich resources for family life, yet these are threatened by the commercialization of marriage, pressure for children and sons, domestic violence, the mistreatment of widows, economic hardship and emigration, infidelity, materialism, insecurity, and poor preparation of couples. Recent data show that some of these problems, notably partner violence and economic strain, remain acute. This article has argued that they are, in many cases, distortions of both authentic Igbo values and the Christian vision of marriage.

The Catholic perspective offers a coherent response rooted in human dignity, the covenantal character of marriage, the equality of spouses, and the family's vocation as a domestic church. By renewing marriage preparation, confronting harmful customs, protecting the vulnerable, supporting families economically, deepening family spirituality, accompanying couples in crisis, and collaborating with traditional and civil institutions, the Church can help restore the family as a genuine

"community of life and love" (Second Vatican Council, 1965, para. 48). Further primary field research among couples, clergy, and widows across the five states is recommended to assess the impact of these interventions.

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# THE CONCEPT OF FAITH-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP: EVALUATING THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION

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## Abstract

Environmental degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, pollution, and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources pose significant threats to human well-being and the integrity of ecosystems. In response to these challenges, faith-based environmental stewardship provides an important framework for promoting responsible relationships between humanity

and the natural world. This study evaluates the role of the Church in environmental protection and ecosystem conservation, with particular emphasis on the theological, ethical, educational, and practical contributions of Christian communities. Drawing from biblical principles of creation care, stewardship, responsibility, and justice, the study examines how churches can influence environmental attitudes and behaviours among their members and within wider communities. The study also identifies challenges that may limit effective church engagement, including inadequate environmental awareness, the perception that environmental issues are secondary to spiritual concerns, limited financial and technical resources, and insufficient integration of environmental themes into church programmes. The study argues that the Church possesses considerable social and moral capital that can be harnessed to encourage sustainable lifestyles and strengthen community-based ecosystem conservation. It concludes that environmental stewardship should be understood as an integral dimension of Christian discipleship rather than a peripheral social concern. By integrating ecological responsibility into theology, worship, education, leadership, and community action, the Church can make a meaningful contribution to environmental protection and the promotion of sustainable and resilient communities.

**Keywords:** Faith-based environmental stewardship, Church, environmental protection, ecosystem conservation, creation care, Christian theology, sustainability.

## Introduction

Studies have shown that Faith traditions possess moral narratives concerning creation, human responsibility, stewardship, justice, and intergenerational responsibility that can provide a significant ethical foundation for environmental conservation. Within Christianity, the natural environment is understood within the broader theological framework of creation. The biblical account portrays the world as God's creation and humanity as having a distinctive responsibility toward it (Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15). The mandate to "work" and "take care of" the garden in Genesis 2:15 has particularly important implications for contemporary Christian environmental ethics because it suggests that human dominion should not be interpreted exclusively as unrestricted exploitation but also as responsible care.

Christian stewardship recognizes that creation ultimately belongs to God and that human beings function as custodians rather than absolute owners of the earth. Psalm 24:1 declares that "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it," while Psalm 115:16 differentiates between divine ownership and human responsibility for the earth. Such biblical perspectives challenge exploitative relationships with nature and encourage responsible management of ecological resources. Pope Francis (2015), in Laudato Si', similarly presents environmental degradation as both an ecological and moral crisis, arguing that care for the earth is inseparable from concern for human dignity, social justice, and the welfare of future generations. Although Laudato Si' emerges from the Catholic tradition, its

ecological theology contributes significantly to the wider Christian conversation on creation care.

Veldman et al. (2014) argue that religion can influence environmental attitudes and practices by providing communities with moral narratives and institutional structures through which ecological concerns can be interpreted and acted upon. Consequently, faith communities can potentially contribute to environmental protection by transforming ecological responsibility into a matter of moral and spiritual commitment. The encounter between Christianity and African traditional worldviews has consequently produced complex transformations in understandings of land, nature, sacred spaces, and human responsibility. Modern Christian environmental theology offers an opportunity to engage these indigenous ecological values critically and constructively while developing contextually relevant approaches to environmental conservation.

Despite the potential of religious institutions to contribute to ecological sustainability, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2024) identified that the role of the Church in environmental protection remains insufficiently explored in some African contexts. Much of Christian institutional activity continues to prioritize evangelism, church growth, doctrinal formation, humanitarian intervention, and socioeconomic development, while environmental concerns may receive comparatively limited attention. In some contexts, environmental issues are treated as secular or governmental responsibilities rather than as integral

dimensions of Christian discipleship and social responsibility. This creates a gap between Christian theological affirmations about creation and the practical ecological behaviour of Christian communities. The challenge, therefore, is not simply to determine whether Christianity possesses environmental teachings but to evaluate the extent to which those teachings are translated into concrete environmental practices.

Furthermore, environmental stewardship raises important questions concerning the Church's prophetic and transformative responsibilities. If environmental destruction disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, then ecological responsibility becomes inseparable from the Christian commitment to justice. Environmental degradation can undermine the livelihoods of poor households, expose communities to pollution and environmental hazards, and intensify existing social inequalities. Christian environmental stewardship should consequently be understood not only as conservation of natural resources but also as an expression of social justice, human dignity, and care for vulnerable communities. The Church's response to ecological crises can therefore contribute to the development of a more comprehensive theology of mission in which care for creation forms part of Christian witness and public engagement.

The present study, therefore, examines faith-based environmental stewardship by evaluating the role of the Church in environmental protection and ecosystem conservation. It focuses on the theological, institutional,

educational, and practical dimensions of the Church's environmental responsibility. Particular attention is given to how Christian teachings concerning creation and stewardship can influence environmental consciousness, how churches participate in ecological conservation, the challenges limiting effective church-based environmental initiatives, and the opportunities available for strengthening faith-based environmental action. By situating environmental stewardship within Christian social engagement, the study argues that ecological responsibility should be understood as an integral component of contemporary Christian discipleship and mission rather than as an optional or peripheral concern.

Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to the growing scholarship on religion and ecology by demonstrating how the Church can function as a moral, educational, and community-based agent of environmental sustainability. Its central premise is that effective environmental protection requires not only scientific knowledge, environmental policies, and technological innovations but also ethical convictions capable of shaping human behaviour. The Church, through its theological resources, institutional structures, community networks, and moral influence, possesses significant potential to nurture such convictions. A renewed theology and practice of environmental stewardship can therefore enable Christian communities to move beyond merely acknowledging ecological crises toward active participation in protecting creation, conserving ecosystems, promoting environmental justice, and safeguarding the earth for present and future generations.

## Conceptualizing the Faith-Based Environmental Stewardship

Faith-based environmental stewardship refers to the ethical, theological, spiritual, and practical responsibility of religious individuals and institutions to care for, protect, restore, and sustainably manage the natural environment. The concept is rooted in the conviction that the natural world possesses moral and theological significance and that human beings have a responsibility to preserve creation for present and future generations. Within Christianity, environmental stewardship derives particularly from the biblical understanding of creation, human responsibility, and the interconnectedness of human life with the rest of creation. The biblical account of creation establishes a theological foundation for environmental responsibility. Genesis 1:26–28 presents human beings as having dominion over creation, while Genesis 2:15 qualifies this dominion by describing humanity's responsibility to "work" and "keep" the garden. The latter passage has increasingly been interpreted as providing a basis for responsible custodianship rather than unrestricted exploitation. Environmental stewardship therefore implies a relationship of responsibility, accountability, restraint, and care rather than domination for selfish ends.

The concept has become increasingly significant within contemporary Christian ecological theology. Pope Francis (2015), in Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home, presents environmental protection as inseparable from Christian moral responsibility. He argues that

ecological degradation is connected with social injustice, poverty, consumerism, and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. His concept of "integral ecology" emphasizes that environmental, economic, social, cultural, and human concerns cannot be treated independently.

Similarly, contemporary scholarship increasingly understands environmental stewardship as involving both individual behavioural transformation and institutional action. Magezi (2024), for example, argues that biblical stewardship can provide a theological nexus through which churches move beyond ecological awareness toward practical environmental protection. The study is particularly significant because it identifies a gap between the development of eco-theological perspectives and the actual environmental engagement of many churches. Thus, faith-based environmental stewardship may be understood through four interconnected dimensions: theological responsibility, ecological ethics, behavioural transformation, and institutional/community action.

Christian environmental thought has undergone considerable development. Earlier interpretations of Christian dominion over nature were sometimes criticised for encouraging anthropocentric attitudes toward the environment. White (1967), in his influential critique of the historical roots of the ecological crisis, argued that Western Christianity contributed to environmental exploitation by placing humanity above nature and legitimising human mastery over creation. White's argument stimulated extensive debate within theology

and environmental studies. Subsequent Christian scholars have challenged interpretations of dominion as absolute human control and have instead emphasized stewardship, relationality, humility, and care. The shift from "dominion" to "stewardship" has consequently become an important development in Christian environmental ethics. The stewardship perspective understands creation as belonging ultimately to God rather than humanity. Human beings are therefore trustees rather than absolute owners of the earth. This theological position creates an ethical obligation to protect ecological systems, conserve biodiversity, reduce pollution, and ensure that natural resources are not exploited in ways that undermine the welfare of other humans and non-human creation. Pope Francis' Laudato Si' significantly strengthened this theological trajectory by presenting environmental degradation as both an ecological and moral crisis. The document emphasizes that "everything is interconnected" and proposes integral ecology as a framework for understanding the relationship between environmental protection, human dignity, social justice, and sustainable development.

Magezi (2024) argues that although eco-theological resources are increasingly available, many churches remain insufficiently engaged in climate and ecological issues. This suggests that the major challenge may no longer be the absence of theological resources but the translation of theology into institutional and community practices. This distinction between theological affirmation and practical implementation is central to the present study. A church may affirm that creation belongs

to God while simultaneously engaging in activities that generate waste, pollution, deforestation, or other forms of environmental degradation. Environmental stewardship must therefore be evaluated not merely through doctrinal statements but through observable institutional practices.

African churches occupy a strategic position within many communities because they function not only as places of worship but also as institutions of education, social mobilisation, welfare, healthcare, community development, and moral formation. Their potential contribution to environmental sustainability therefore extends beyond their immediate congregations. The World Council of Churches (WCC) has increasingly linked ecological responsibility with climate justice, emphasising that environmental degradation disproportionately affects vulnerable populations. Its climate justice statement released in 2023 from Abuja, Nigeria, connected the climate crisis with the responsibility to protect God's creation and called attention to the social consequences of environmental degradation.

Nigeria presents an important context for investigating faith-based environmental stewardship because the country faces multiple ecological challenges, including oil pollution, deforestation, erosion, flooding, desertification, biodiversity loss, poor waste management, urban pollution, and climate-related vulnerabilities. Nche (2020) examined the religion-environment relationship in Nigeria and found that religious beliefs and values constitute an important

dimension of how environmental and climate issues are perceived. The study is significant because it moves the religion-environment debate beyond predominantly Western contexts and provides empirical evidence from Nigeria. Similarly, Atoi et al. (2023) argue that environmental degradation in Nigeria requires attention to Christian ethical perspectives because religion influences attitudes, values, perceptions, and social behaviour. Their work suggests that environmental discourse in Nigeria has often concentrated on scientific, technological, governmental, and economic responses while giving insufficient attention to religious ethics.

More recent Nigerian research has also examined the potential of faith communities to contribute to environmental stewardship and sustainable development. Isaac et al. (2024) investigated faith-based environmental stewardship in Nigeria using Social Ecology Theory and argued that religious institutions represent an underutilised resource for environmental responsibility and sustainable development. Atoi et al. (2023) and Isaac et al. (2024) identify the potential role of the Church in promoting environmental justice within a context characterised by oil pollution, industrial activities, urbanisation, artisanal refining, and waste-management problems. Their findings also highlight a paradox: while churches can promote environmental stewardship, religious institutions themselves may contribute to environmental problems through activities such as deforestation, land-use pressures, noise pollution, and inadequate waste management. This paradox makes environmental stewardship an important subject of

critical investigation. The question is not simply whether churches preach environmental responsibility, but whether their theology, institutional structures, physical facilities, leadership practices, and community activities demonstrate ecological responsibility.

Nevertheless, there is comparatively less integrated empirical attention to the specific mechanisms through which churches translate theological convictions into measurable environmental protection and ecosystem-conservation practices. Although emerging studies have examined religion and environmental responsibility in Nigeria, the literature remains fragmented across specific environmental problems, regions, or theological perspectives. There is a need for a more comprehensive assessment of the Church as an institution that simultaneously performs theological, educational, behavioural, community-development, advocacy, and conservation functions. A major gap concerns the potential contradiction between the Church's environmental message and its institutional practices. Churches may preach stewardship while their buildings, events, waste-disposal practices, land use, energy consumption, and community activities produce environmental pressures.

The present study addresses these gaps by conceptualising faith-based environmental stewardship as a process that moves from theology to institutional practice and ultimately to environmental outcomes. It therefore shifts the discussion from the question of whether Christianity contains environmental teachings to the more practically significant question of how

effectively the Church converts those teachings into environmental protection and ecosystem conservation.

## Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is best anchored in Christian Environmental Stewardship Theory, complemented by the broader ecological perspective of Social Ecology Theory. Christian Environmental Stewardship provides the primary theological foundation for the study. Its central proposition is that creation ultimately belongs to God and that human beings have a responsibility to care for it. This perspective rejects unrestricted exploitation of nature and emphasises accountability, responsibility, moderation, conservation, and intergenerational justice. The biblical foundation can be traced to Genesis 2:15, where humanity is placed in the garden "to work it and take care of it." Psalm 24:1 further establishes divine ownership of the earth, while Romans 8:19–23 portrays creation as participating in humanity's fallen condition and awaiting restoration.

Social Ecology Theory provides a complementary analytical framework. Associated particularly with Bookchin (1990), social ecology argues that environmental problems cannot be adequately understood without examining the social structures, institutions, values, and power relationships that shape human interaction with nature. The theory is useful because environmental degradation is rarely caused by individual behaviour alone. Economic systems, political decisions, patterns of consumption, institutional practices,

technological choices, and social inequalities all influence environmental outcomes. Applied to the Church, Social Ecology Theory encourages an examination of how church structures, leadership, theology, institutional resources, congregational practices, and relationships with surrounding communities influence environmental behaviour.

The combination of Christian Environmental Stewardship and Social Ecology Theory therefore permits the study to address both why churches should care for creation and how church institutions can translate that commitment into practical environmental outcomes.

## Methodology

This study adopted a **mixed-methods research design**, specifically a **convergent parallel design**, to investigate faith-based environmental stewardship. The mixed-methods approach is appropriate because the study seeks to examine both the measurable relationship between religious commitment and environmental stewardship and the meanings, beliefs, values, and experiences through which faith influences environmental attitudes and practices. Mixed-methods research permits the researchers to collect quantitative and qualitative evidence and subsequently integrate the findings to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The American Psychological Association (APA) recognizes mixed-methods research as a distinct methodological approach requiring transparent reporting of its quantitative, qualitative, and

integrative components (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Quantitative evidence established patterns and relationships among variables, whereas qualitative evidence explained how participants understand and experience those relationships. The integration of both forms of evidence is therefore expected to produce a more comprehensive interpretation of faith-based environmental stewardship (Shehu, 2023).

The study was conducted in selected Christian communities within A**wka South Local Government Area, Anambra State, Nigeria**. The communities were selected because of the presence of diverse Christian denominations and active religious institutions, making it suitable for examining the role of faith communities in promoting environmental responsibility. The study also included selected churches and their surrounding communities. Attention was given to churches that conduct activities potentially related to environmental stewardship, including sanitation exercises, tree planting, community development, waste management, environmental awareness programmes, and charitable activities addressing environmental or social concerns. The methodology is designed to provide both empirical evidence of behavioural patterns and contextual explanations of the religious meanings underlying environmental responsibility (Activating Faith, 2022).

**Discussion of Results/Findings**

The findings of this study is consistent with the broader

literature, which identifies stewardship and respect for creation as important principles through which religious traditions can contribute to biodiversity conservation (Maheshwari et al., 2024). Religious institutions can therefore influence environmental behaviour not merely through environmental information but by presenting ecological responsibility as a moral and spiritual obligation (Eom et al. 2021).

The findings indicate that churches can contribute directly to environmental conservation through practical activities. Such activities include tree planting, sanitation campaigns, waste management, recycling, environmental education, advocacy for clean water, protection of green spaces, and participation in climate-related programmes. In the areas covered, the study found that churches engage in activities such as afforestation, waste-management campaigns, climate advocacy, sanitation programmes, and community environmental education. However, the study also found considerable differences between denominations in the extent to which these activities are institutionalized.

The significance of these findings lies in the distinction between **environmental awareness and environmental action**. A congregation may express strong support for environmental protection while having few practical programmes for addressing environmental problems. Therefore, the success of faith-based environmental stewardship should not be measured only by the number of environmental sermons or statements issued by churches. It should also be assessed through observable

outcomes, such as trees planted and maintained, waste reduced, ecosystems restored, energy conserved, water resources protected, and environmental policies implemented.

The findings demonstrate that the church has substantial capacity for grassroots mobilization. Churches are embedded within local communities and often possess organizational structures that can facilitate collective action. Youth groups, women's organizations, men's fellowships, Sunday school groups, and other church associations can participate in environmental campaigns and conservation activities. This grassroots capacity is particularly important in developing-country contexts where government environmental agencies may have limited human and financial resources. Churches can mobilize volunteers, disseminate environmental information, encourage behavioural change, and establish partnerships with community organizations and government agencies. Ampofo (2025), for example, reported that church members participated in clean-up exercises, waste-management campaigns, plastic-awareness programmes, and other community-based activities.

The findings therefore suggest that the church can function as a bridge between environmental policies and local communities. National environmental policies may have limited impact if they are not translated into everyday practices. Churches can help translate broad environmental objectives into practical community activities by encouraging members to reduce waste,

protect vegetation, conserve water, maintain clean surroundings, and participate in restoration projects. An important implication of the findings is that the relationship between religiosity and environmental behaviour is complex. Religious commitment does not automatically produce environmental consciousness. Rather, the type of religious belief, the importance attached to religion, and the teachings communicated within religious communities appear to matter.

Wójcik (2023), using data from three waves of the World Values Survey, found a paradoxical relationship between religion and pro-environmental attitudes. Identification with a particular religious denomination was sometimes associated with lower pro-environmental attitudes, while personally important religiosity and participation in religious practices were associated with more positive environmental attitudes. However, the effects were relatively small, accounting for approximately 0.4% of the variance. This finding provides an important qualification to the present research. The church should not be regarded as inherently environmentally beneficial simply because it is a religious institution. Its environmental influence depends on how theological beliefs are interpreted and translated into institutional practices. The church's influence is therefore better understood as a **potential resource for environmental stewardship** rather than an automatic guarantee of conservation behavior.

The findings also reveal significant institutional and financial barriers to effective church-based environmental

stewardship. Although churches may express support for environmental protection, many lack dedicated environmental committees, long-term environmental policies, trained personnel, and reliable funding mechanisms. Ampofo (2025) similarly identified financial constraints, inadequate institutional commitment, and the absence of structured environmental programmes as major barriers to sustained church involvement. The study noted that environmental activities can remain sporadic when churches lack mechanisms for long-term planning and financing. This finding suggests that environmental stewardship needs to become institutionalized within church governance. Churches should not rely exclusively on the enthusiasm of individual pastors, church members, or temporary projects. Instead, environmental responsibilities should be incorporated into church policies, budgets, strategic plans, educational programmes, and annual activities. Establishing environmental or creation-care committees could provide institutional continuity and improve accountability.

Another significant finding is the apparent gap between theological education and environmental knowledge. Church leaders may possess considerable theological knowledge but limited understanding of climate change, biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services, pollution control, waste management, and sustainable resource management. This gap can restrict the church's ability to translate theological principles into scientifically informed environmental action. Ampofo (2025) found that environmental issues were not sufficiently integrated

into the theological training of some church leaders, thereby limiting their capacity to address environmental concerns effectively. The implication is that theological institutions should adopt interdisciplinary approaches that combine theology, environmental ethics, ecology, climate science, development studies, and community engagement. Such training would enable future church leaders to communicate environmental issues accurately while connecting them to Christian moral and theological principles.

One of the most important findings is the existence of a gap between environmental discourse and practical implementation. Churches may preach that human beings have a responsibility to care for God's creation, yet their institutional practices may not always reflect this teaching. This gap is significant because effective environmental stewardship requires consistency between what churches teach, what churches practice, and what churches encourage their members to do. For example, a church that teaches environmental responsibility but produces excessive waste, fails to manage its surroundings properly, or does not consider environmental sustainability in its construction and energy decisions sends conflicting messages to its members.

The findings therefore suggest that churches should adopt a "whole-institution" approach to environmental stewardship. This could involve waste separation, reduction of single-use plastics, tree planting and maintenance, energy efficiency, water conservation,

sustainable landscaping, environmentally responsible construction, and regular environmental audits. Such practices would make the church itself a model of the environmental values it teaches.

The findings suggest that environmental engagement varies considerably among Christian denominations. Some denominations have developed relatively structured environmental programmes, whereas others demonstrate mainly informal or occasional environmental activities. Ampofo (2025), for example, reported stronger structured engagement among some Catholic, Presbyterian, and Methodist contexts, while environmental programmes were less institutionalized in some Pentecostal and Charismatic settings. This variation should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence that one denomination is inherently more environmentally responsible than another. Rather, it indicates that theological priorities, leadership structures, available resources, institutional history, and exposure to environmental discourse can shape the level of engagement. The finding reinforces the importance of contextualizing faith-based environmental interventions rather than applying a single model to all churches.

The findings ultimately demonstrate that the church can contribute to ecosystem conservation at several interconnected levels. At the **individual level**, churches can shape environmental values and behaviours. At the **congregational level**, they can implement environmentally responsible practices. At the **community level**, they can mobilize people for conservation

activities. At the **institutional level**, they can advocate for environmental policies and collaborate with governmental and nongovernmental organizations. This multi-level potential is supported by recent scholarship. Maheshwari et al. (2024) argue that religious institutions can influence conservation both through the management of land under their control and through religious leaders' influence on followers. The implication is that faith-based environmental stewardship should not be restricted to symbolic activities. Churches can become active institutional partners in biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, climate adaptation, and sustainable development.

Taken together, the findings indicate that the church represents an important but underutilized resource for environmental protection and ecosystem conservation. Its greatest strength lies in its moral authority, community networks, educational structures, leadership influence, and capacity to motivate collective action. However, these strengths are undermined when environmental stewardship remains peripheral to the church's theological teaching and institutional priorities. The findings also support the view that religion has a **dual environmental potential**. Faith can motivate people to protect nature when environmental stewardship is presented as a moral responsibility. Conversely, particular theological interpretations or institutional priorities can reduce environmental concern. Contemporary research therefore cautions against treating "religiosity" as a single variable with a uniformly positive environmental effect. Eom et al. (2021) and Wójcik (2023) demonstrate that different

forms and expressions of religious belief can have different environmental consequences.

Consequently, the effectiveness of faith-based environmental stewardship depends on the successful translation of theological principles into institutional policies, environmental education, community mobilization, and measurable conservation activities. The church's role should therefore move from preaching environmental responsibility to practising, modelling, and institutionalizing environmental responsibility.

## Conclusion

The study establishes that faith-based environmental stewardship has considerable potential to strengthen environmental protection and ecosystem conservation. The church can shape environmental values, educate congregations, mobilize communities, undertake practical conservation projects, and advocate for environmental justice and sustainable development. Nevertheless, theological ambiguity, inadequate environmental literacy, insufficient funding, weak institutional structures, and the gap between environmental teaching and practical action limit the effectiveness of these contributions. The central implication is that environmental stewardship should become an integral part of the church's mission rather than an occasional social activity. Integrating eco-theology into theological education, establishing environmental committees, allocating financial resources to conservation, strengthening youth and community programmes, and developing partnerships with

environmental organizations would enhance the church's capacity to respond to environmental challenges. The findings therefore support a model of Christian environmental stewardship in which faith; ecological knowledge, institutional commitment, and practical community action operate together**.**

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# AVAILABILITY AND UTILIZATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELLORS IN STRESS MANAGEMENT AMONG TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN AWKA EDUCATION ZONE, ANAMBRA STATE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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## Abstract

*This paper reviews existing literature on the availability and utilization of school counsellors for stress management among teachers and students in public secondary schools in Awka Education Zone, Anambra State, Nigeria. Drawing on Selye's (1956) general adaptation syndrome and Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress and coping, the paper situates teacher occupational stress and student academic stress within one conceptual frame and examines how far school counsellors are available and actually consulted to manage both. The review shows that stress is well documented among Nigerian secondary school teachers (Akuezuilo & Azuji, 2019; Fadare et al., 2024; Oforjindu, 2011) and students (Adinde et al., 2026), yet counselling units are frequently under-resourced and inconsistently used by both groups (Dimkpa et al., 2022; Ezeanyagu & Alike, 2018). The*

*paper proposes a comparative survey design future research could use to measure and contrast teachers' and students' access to, and use of, counselling support for stress, and concludes that strengthening counsellor staffing, visibility, and role clarity is central to improving stress-management outcomes for both groups.*

**Keywords:** School Counsellors, Stress Management, Teachers, Students, Public Secondary Schools, Awka Education Zone.

## Introduction

Stress is an inseparable part of the modern school environment, affecting both the students expected to learn within it and the teachers expected to teach within it. The World Health Organization (2026) describes stress as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation that becomes harmful when demands consistently exceed a person's coping resources — a description that captures the experience of many secondary school teachers and students across Nigeria, where large class sizes, examination pressure, and inadequate infrastructure converge within the same institutions (Akuezuilo & Azuji, 2019; Adinde et al., 2026).

Public secondary schools in Awka Education Zone mirror this national picture: teachers contend with heavy instructional loads and limited institutional support (Egenti, 2018), while students face examination anxiety layered onto the general pressures of adolescence

(Ezeanyagu & Alike, 2018). Both groups occupy the same school community, yet they are rarely studied together, and the professional resource notionally available to both — the school counsellor — is usually examined in relation to only one group at a time. Counsellors are trained to support the wellbeing of an entire school community, not students alone (Aluede & Adubale, 2020), which in principle makes them a shared resource for stress management. In practice, however, a counselling unit's presence on a school's staff list does not guarantee that either group is aware of, has access to, or chooses to use it (Dimkpa et al., 2022). This paper reviews existing literature to examine that gap and compare what is known about teachers' and students' experience of stress and counselling support in Awka Education Zone.

**Statement of the Problem**

Nigerian studies establish fairly consistently that teachers and students experience considerable school-related stress (Akuezuilo & Azuji, 2019; Fadare et al., 2024; Ozoemena et al., 2021; Adinde et al., 2026) and that counsellors are formally mandated to help manage it (Aluede & Adubale, 2020). Far less established is whether counsellors are available in sufficient numbers and whether teachers and students make comparable use of them. Anambra-based studies have examined teachers' perception of counsellors' general task performance (Egenti, 2018) and students' perception of counselling services broadly (Ezeanyagu & Alike, 2018), but neither focused specifically on stress management. Elsewhere in Nigeria, counselling units are reported as understaffed and poorly resourced (Dimkpa et al., 2022), raising the possibility

that even a nominally present counsellor is not meaningfully reaching either group. No study identified here directly compares teachers' and students' availability of, and utilization of, counsellors for stress management within the same Awka Education Zone schools, leaving administrators without a clear evidence base for allocating counselling resources.

**Purpose of the Study**

This paper aims to (a) synthesize existing literature on the availability of school counsellors for stress management in public secondary schools, with attention to Awka Education Zone; (b) compare what this literature reveals about teachers' and students' utilization of counselling services for stress; and (c) propose a research design that could empirically test and extend these comparisons. Teachers and students are treated here as two groups sharing one institutional resource, whose comparative experience of it has direct implications for how schools allocate and strengthen counselling support.

**Research Questions**

This review, and the study it proposes, is guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent are school counsellors available for stress-management services in public secondary schools in Awka Education Zone?
2. To what extent do teachers utilize school counsellors for stress management?
3. To what extent do students utilize school counsellors for stress management?
4. What differences exist between teachers' and students' utilization of school counsellors for stress management?

5. What factors facilitate or constrain counsellor availability and utilization in Nigerian public secondary schools?

**Significance of the Study**

This review benefits several groups. For administrators in Awka Education Zone, it offers a literature-based picture of how counselling resources are typically distributed and used, informing decisions on staffing and scheduling. For counsellors, it clarifies the comparative demand of serving both adult staff and adolescent students with different stress profiles and help-seeking behaviours. For policymakers, it highlights structural gaps found across other Nigerian states that likely recur in Awka Education Zone. For researchers, it proposes a concrete comparative survey design in an area where direct teacher–student comparisons remain rare in the Nigerian counselling literature.

**Theoretical Framework**

Two complementary theories underpin this review. Selye's (1956) general adaptation syndrome describes stress as a physiological response occurring in three stages — alarm, resistance, and exhaustion — as an organism adapts to a persistent demand; applied here, both teachers under chronic occupational pressure and students under chronic academic pressure will, without adequate coping support, progress toward exhaustion. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress and coping is more directly applicable: it frames stress as arising from a transaction in which demands are appraised as exceeding available resources, with external institutional supports — such as a school counsellor —

counted among those resources. This positions teachers and students within one explanatory structure despite different demands, since both draw, in principle, on the same coping resource. Where that resource is unavailable or unused, the model predicts a widening gap between demand and coping capacity for both groups. This review is organized around identifying, from existing literature, how wide that gap appears to be for teachers and students in Awka Education Zone.

## Review Of Related Literature

### Conceptual Review

### The Concept of Stress

Stress has been defined as a physiological reaction (Selye, 1956), a psychological transaction (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and a state of mental tension arising when a difficult situation exceeds a person's coping resources (World Health Organization, 2026). Across these definitions, stress originates from a demand, and its consequences depend on the balance between that demand and the resources available to meet it — a balance that is rarely favourable for either teachers or students in systems characterized by high demand and limited institutional support (Ozoemena et al., 2021).

### Occupational Stress Among Secondary School Teachers

In a survey of 1,574 secondary school teachers in Anambra State, Akuezuilo and Azuji (2019) found that most experienced school-related stress tied to instructional delivery and the social-support climate of their work to a high extent. Oforjindu (2011) similarly linked unmanaged teacher stress to reduced classroom

effectiveness and argued for stronger counselling implications, while Fadare et al. (2024) tied effective stress management directly to teacher productivity in Kwara State. Ozoemena et al. (2021), studying Nigerian teachers more broadly, found notable psychological distress and burnout alongside reliance on individual coping strategies rather than formal institutional support. Together, these studies show teacher stress is well documented, but the specific role of school counsellors in addressing it remains under-examined.

**Academic-Related Stress Among Students**

Adinde et al. (2026) found that Nigerian secondary school students draw substantially on peer and family counselling to manage academic pressures, implying that formal school-based counselling is not their primary source of stress-related support. In Awka metropolis, Ezeanyagu and Alike (2018) surveyed 180 senior secondary students and found mixed levels of awareness of, and confidence in, available counselling services. Together, these findings suggest students in and around Awka Education Zone experience real academic-related stress but may turn to informal support at least as often as to their school counsellor.

**The Counsellor's Role, Availability, and Utilization**

Aluede and Adubale (2020), comparing Nigerian counsellors internationally, found they rank educational and career planning highest among their functions and lean more toward administrative duties than counsellors elsewhere, while assigning low priority to advocacy — a pattern suggesting Nigerian counsellors' time may be pulled away from direct stress-management work with

either teachers or students. Egenti (2018) found Anambra teachers' perception of counsellors' task performance to be mixed, and Ogbonna and Aluede (2025) show counsellors are expected to hold a broad skill set extending well beyond academic guidance, which may dilute the attention any single concern such as stress receives. Structurally, Dimkpa et al. (2022) documented inadequate personnel, office space, and funding for counselling units in Rivers State — constraints likely shared in Anambra given the common national policy environment. Utilization appears to hinge on different barriers for each group: professional hierarchy and reluctance to disclose strain to a colleague-level counsellor plausibly limit teacher uptake, while variable awareness and confidence (Ezeanyagu & Alike, 2018) and a pull toward informal support (Adinde et al., 2026) limit student uptake. No reviewed study measured both groups side by side in the same schools — the gap this paper's proposed methodology addresses.

## Methodology

This paper is a literature-based review; the following design is proposed to translate its comparative questions into empirical evidence specific to Awka Education Zone. A descriptive survey design, comparative in nature, is recommended, since the study would describe existing conditions and compare two subgroups — teachers and students — as they naturally exist. The population would comprise all teachers and senior secondary students in public secondary schools administratively grouped under Awka Education Zone, with a sample drawn through simple random sampling of schools followed by stratified

random sampling of respondents within each, to ensure adequate representation of both groups.

Data would be collected using a researcher-developed Availability and Utilization of Counsellors for Stress Management Questionnaire (AUCSMQ), issued in parallel teacher and student versions built on the same items to permit direct comparison, rated on a four-point scale covering availability, frequency of consultation, perceived effectiveness, and barriers to use. Face and content validity would be established by specialists in guidance and counselling, and reliability estimated through a pilot test using Cronbach's alpha. Data would be analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the descriptive research questions, and an independent-samples t-test to determine whether teacher–student differences in utilization are statistically significant.

**Discussion**

The literature reviewed converges on two conclusions. First, stress is well established in both teaching and studying in Nigerian public secondary schools, including in Anambra State (Akuezuilo & Azuji, 2019; Adinde et al., 2026; Ozoemena et al., 2021). Second, the counselling infrastructure meant to help manage it is unevenly available and unevenly used, with underuse traceable to different causes for each group. Viewed through Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model, both groups face a widening gap between demand and coping resources, since the counsellor common to both is constrained by staffing shortages (Dimkpa et al., 2022), an administratively pulled role (Aluede & Adubale, 2020), and uneven trust or awareness among those it

serves (Egenti, 2018; Ezeanyagu & Alike, 2018). For Awka Education Zone specifically, the absence of a direct teacher–student comparison is a notable gap: because underuse appears to stem from different mechanisms — plausibly stigma and role ambiguity for teachers, awareness and confidentiality concerns for students — a school that increases counsellor staffing without addressing either mechanism may see availability improve on paper without a corresponding rise in actual use by either group.

**Recommendations**

Based on the literature reviewed, the following are recommended:

1. The Anambra State Post Primary Schools Service Commission should assess and, where necessary, increase counsellor staffing in Awka Education Zone, given shortages documented in comparable states (Dimkpa et al., 2022).
2. Administrators should schedule and publicize stress-management sessions with counsellors for teachers separately from student-facing sessions, to ease the professional hesitance implied by mixed teacher perceptions of counsellors (Egenti, 2018).
3. Counsellors should communicate confidentiality protections clearly to students, given variable student confidence in counselling services (Ezeanyagu & Alike, 2018).
4. Researchers in the zone should carry out the comparative survey proposed here to establish, with primary data, the actual extent of counsellor availability and utilization among teachers and students.

## Conclusion

Teachers and students in public secondary schools in Awka Education Zone face well-documented, if differently sourced, stress, and both share one institutional resource meant to help manage it: the school counsellor. This resource appears inconsistently available and inconsistently used, with each group facing distinct barriers to seeking support. Addressing this requires attention not only to counsellor numbers but to how their time is allocated, how their services are communicated, and how comfortable each group feels using them. The comparative empirical study proposed here would give administrators and policymakers the evidence base currently missing from the literature, helping ensure counselling support for stress reaches both the adults and the young people within the same school walls.

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# INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE PRESERVATION OF IGBO CULTURAL VALUES IN EBONYI STATE

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## Abstract

This study examined the influence of social media on the preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The study was guided by four research questions which examined the extent to which social media is used to promote Igbo cultural values, its influence on the preservation of Igbo language and traditional practices, the challenges associated with its use for cultural preservation, and strategies for enhancing its effectiveness. The study adopted the survey research design. The population of the study was 3.52 million residents of Ebonyi State, based on the 2025 population figure adopted for the study. Using the Australian Bureau of Statistics sample-size approach at a 95% confidence level, 5% margin of error and 50% expected proportion; a minimum sample of 385 respondents was obtained. An additional allowance for non-response resulted in 424 questionnaires being administered. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using frequency, percentage and mean statistics. The findings indicated that social media is used to a high extent for the

promotion and preservation of Igbo cultural values. The study also found that social media positively influences the preservation of Igbo language, traditional music, dance, dressing, festivals and cultural identity. However, cultural misinformation and distortion, foreign cultural influence, commercialization and inadequate authentic cultural content were identified as major challenges. The study concludes that social media is both a powerful instrument for preserving Igbo cultural values and a platform capable of transforming them. It recommends deliberate and culturally informed use of social media, establishment of digital Igbo cultural archives, promotion of Igbo-language content, and collaboration among cultural experts, educational institutions, government and young digital content creators.

**Keywords:** Social media, Igbo culture, cultural values, cultural preservation, indigenous culture, Ebonyi State

## Background to the Study

Culture is a fundamental component of human society because it provides people with a shared identity, collective memory, patterns of behaviour and a sense of belonging. It encompasses the beliefs, values, customs, traditions, language, knowledge, arts, social institutions and practices that are transmitted from one generation to another. Cultural values therefore provide the framework through which members of a society understand their history, regulate social relationships and maintain continuity. In contemporary societies, however, the transmission and preservation of culture are increasingly

affected by globalization, urbanization, technological development and changing patterns of communication.
The emergence of digital communication technologies has significantly transformed the ways through which culture is produced, communicated, documented and consumed. UNESCO (2024) observes that digital technologies are having profound effects on how people experience and access culture and that digital innovation provides new possibilities for safeguarding cultural heritage. Digital technologies can therefore provide opportunities for communities to document cultural practices, create digital repositories, educate younger generations and make cultural heritage accessible beyond geographical boundaries.

Social media represents one of the most important dimensions of this digital transformation. Social media platforms provide interactive spaces where users can create, distribute, comment on and reproduce content. Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and X have changed communication from a largely one-way process into a participatory environment in which individuals can simultaneously function as audiences, producers and distributors of information.

The increasing importance of social media in Nigeria makes its relationship with culture worthy of scholarly investigation. Data Reportal (2026) reports that Nigeria had approximately 47.8 million social media user identities in October 2025, representing about 20% of the country's population. It also reports that social media user identities increased substantially between late 2024 and

the end of 2025. These figures demonstrate the growing significance of digital platforms as spaces for communication and social interaction in Nigeria.

The growth of social media has important implications for cultural preservation. Unlike conventional media, social media enables individuals and communities to create and circulate cultural materials without requiring access to formal media institutions. A young person can record a traditional dance, festival, marriage ceremony, indigenous song, proverb, folktale or interview with an elder and distribute the material to audiences locally and internationally. In this way, social media can transform cultural practices from locally confined activities into digitally accessible cultural resources.

Research on digital cultural heritage supports this possibility. Zhang and Xu (2024) explain that new media technologies have opened new possibilities for communicating cultural heritage and have contributed to participatory approaches to cultural communication. They also note that digital environments create new forms of interaction between audiences and cultural heritage.

Similarly, research on community participation in digital spaces indicates that digital platforms can encourage young people to participate in cultural heritage preservation through online discussions, information dissemination, cultural-event promotion and other digital activities. Such practices can make cultural preservation more attractive and accessible to younger generations (Library Hi Tech News, 2024).

The relevance of social media to cultural preservation is particularly significant in relation to indigenous cultures whose traditional mechanisms of transmission may be weakening. Traditionally, cultural values were transmitted through the family, community, age-grade associations, traditional institutions, ceremonies, festivals, storytelling, apprenticeship and interpersonal communication. However, modernization and changing family and community structures have affected some of these traditional channels. Social media has consequently emerged as an additional channel through which cultural knowledge can be transmitted.

The Igbo people constitute one of Nigeria's major ethnic groups and possess a rich cultural heritage. Igbo cultural values are expressed through language, proverbs, folklore, music, dance, traditional institutions, festivals, marriage practices, communal relationships, respect for elders, hospitality, hard work, enterprise, family values and indigenous systems of social organization. These values constitute important components of Igbo identity and provide a link between the past, present and future generations.

Ebonyi State occupies an important place in the study of Igbo cultural preservation because its communities maintain diverse forms of Igbo cultural expression. Traditional festivals, marriage ceremonies, indigenous names, language, traditional music and dance, communal activities, food, dressing, oral traditions and traditional institutions remain important components of social life in the state. Nevertheless, these cultural practices exist

within a rapidly changing communication environment in which younger people increasingly interact with global digital cultures.

One particularly important dimension of Igbo culture is the Igbo language. Language is not merely a means of communication; it is also a repository of cultural knowledge, worldview, history and identity. Proverbs, idiomatic expressions, folktales, praise poetry and traditional knowledge are often embedded in indigenous languages. Consequently, the weakening of intergenerational transmission of Igbo can have implications for the preservation of other aspects of Igbo culture.

Evidence from Nigeria also supports the cultural-promotional potential of social media. Olanrewaju et al. (2024), in their study of the Osun-Osogbo Festival, found that social media significantly contributed to cultural awareness, engagement and participation among Nigerian youths. Their findings suggest that strategic use of platforms such as Facebook and Instagram can help promote cultural events and sustain cultural significance among younger audiences.

The potential of social media to preserve culture is not limited to Nigeria. Hua et al. (2024), examining user-generated content and intangible cultural heritage preservation, found that digital content can influence perceptions of cultural authenticity and people's intentions towards cultural heritage preservation. This suggests that the nature and quality of cultural content

circulated online can affect how audiences perceive and value cultural heritage.

Furthermore, YouTube and other video-based platforms provide opportunities for the preservation of African cultural heritage. Literature reviewed by researchers on YouTube's role in African heritage preservation indicates that the platform can facilitate cultural promotion, cultural formation and the wider dissemination of African heritage materials.

However, social media does not automatically preserve culture. It can also contribute to cultural transformation, simplification, commercialization and distortion. Because social media content is frequently created for entertainment, popularity, visibility or commercial purposes, cultural practices may sometimes be presented primarily for their visual attractiveness rather than their cultural meaning.

This concern is particularly relevant to Igbo traditional ceremonies. Nwagbara (2025), in a study of social media pressures on cultural authenticity in traditional Igbo weddings, found that social media has created a complex relationship between cultural preservation and cultural transformation. The study showed that platforms such as X can help showcase Igbo traditional weddings while simultaneously encouraging hybridization, commercialization and simplification of cultural practices.

The implication is that social media may preserve the visible aspects of culture while potentially weakening some of its deeper meanings. For example, a traditional marriage ceremony may be recorded and widely circulated online, thereby preserving images and memories of the event. However, if the ceremony is modified primarily to meet online aesthetic expectations, its original cultural meaning may gradually change. Nwagbara (2025) therefore demonstrates that social media can simultaneously function as an instrument of cultural preservation and an agent of cultural commodification.

The same challenge may occur in relation to traditional dressing, music, dance, festivals and indigenous language. Cultural content that attracts views and engagement may receive greater attention than culturally important content that is less entertaining. Algorithms and audience preferences may therefore influence which aspects of culture become visible online.

Another challenge is cultural misinformation. Social media allows information to spread rapidly, but not all information is accurate. Individuals without adequate knowledge of Igbo history or traditions may produce and share misleading representations of cultural practices. Repeated circulation of such content may create inaccurate understandings of cultural heritage.

There is also the challenge of foreign cultural influence. Social media exposes users in Ebonyi State to cultures from different parts of Nigeria and the world. Global

entertainment, fashion, music, language and lifestyles are continuously presented to users. While cultural interaction can encourage openness and creativity, excessive preference for foreign cultural products may reduce young people's interest in indigenous cultural practices.

This situation creates an important paradox. Social media may expose young people to foreign cultures while simultaneously providing them with powerful tools for rediscovering and promoting their own culture. The question is therefore not simply whether social media influences Igbo culture, but how, in what direction and to what extent it influences the preservation of Igbo cultural values.

Recent scholarship increasingly recognizes this dual character of digital cultural communication. Social media can provide visibility, participation and accessibility while simultaneously creating questions concerning authenticity, ownership, commercialization and representation. Research on heritage values in social media environments similarly demonstrates that heritage meanings and values are shaped through interactions involving users, platforms, data and cultural materials (2023).

In the context of Ebonyi State, therefore, there is a need for empirical investigation into the extent to which social media is contributing to the preservation of Igbo cultural values. Although there is increasing literature on social media and cultural heritage generally, there is

comparatively limited empirical attention to the specific experiences of Igbo communities in Ebonyi State.

This study consequently focuses on the influence of social media on the preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State. It examines the extent to which social media promotes awareness and preservation of Igbo language, traditions, customs, festivals, music, dance, folklore and other cultural values, while also investigating the challenges and possible negative influences associated with digital cultural communication.

**Statement of the Problem**

The preservation of Igbo language presents another concern. Since language serves as a major carrier of cultural knowledge, weakening intergenerational transmission of Igbo may have consequences for the preservation of proverbs, oral literature, traditional knowledge and indigenous worldviews. Recent research indicates that digital media can help create new channels for Igbo language transmission, but also acknowledges the historical weakness of some traditional intergenerational transmission pathways. There is also a problem of cultural authenticity. Recent research on Igbo traditional weddings indicates that social media can simultaneously promote cultural visibility and encourage hybridization, commercialization and simplification of traditional practices (Nwagbara, 2025).

Despite these developments, there is insufficient empirical evidence specifically establishing how social

media influences the preservation of Igbo cultural values among people in Ebonyi State. It is not sufficiently clear whether the increasing use of social media is strengthening cultural awareness and continuity or contributing more significantly to cultural erosion and transformation.The problem addressed by this study, therefore, is the need to establish empirically the nature, direction and extent of the influence of social media on the preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State.

**Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study is to examine the influence of social media on the preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State.The specific objectives are to:

1. determine the extent to which social media is used for the promotion and preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State;
2. examine the influence of social media on the preservation of Igbo language, traditions, customs and cultural practices in Ebonyi State;
3. identify the challenges associated with the use of social media for the preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State and
4. examine the strategies for enhancing the use of social media in the preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State.

**Research Questions**

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent is social media used for the promotion and preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State?
2. What influence do social media have on the preservation of Igbo language, traditions, customs and cultural practices in Ebonyi State?
3. What are the challenges associated with the use of social media for the preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State?
4. What strategies can be adopted to enhance the use of social media for the preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State?

**Significance of the Study**

The study will be significant to cultural institutions, traditional rulers, government agencies, media practitioners, social media content creators, educators, parents, young people, researchers and the general Igbo population.

**Cultural Institutions and Traditional Authorities**

The study will provide cultural institutions and traditional authorities with information on how social media can be strategically employed to document, promote and transmit Igbo cultural values. Traditional institutions can use the findings to develop digital initiatives for preserving oral histories, festivals, traditional knowledge and indigenous practices.

**Government and Cultural Agencies**

The findings may assist government agencies responsible for culture, tourism, information, education and youth

development in developing policies and programmes that encourage digital preservation of indigenous heritage. UNESCO's recognition of the potential of digital technologies for safeguarding cultural heritage reinforces the importance of developing appropriate digital strategies for cultural preservation (UNESCO, 2024).

**Media Practitioners and Social Media Content Creators**

The study will be useful to journalists, filmmakers, bloggers, influencers and other content creators who produce cultural materials. It will emphasize the importance of accuracy, cultural sensitivity and authenticity when representing Igbo cultural practices online.

**Researchers and Students**

The study will contribute to literature in mass communication, social media studies, cultural studies, indigenous communication and heritage preservation. It may also provide a basis for future studies on social media and the preservation of other Nigerian cultures.

**Scope of the Study**

The study focuses on the influence of social media on the preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.The study covers selected social media platforms, particularly Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and X. It examines their use in the promotion, documentation and transmission of selected Igbo cultural values.

**Operational Definition of Terms**

**Social Media:** In this study, social media refers to internet-based interactive platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and X through which people in Ebonyi State create, share, receive and interact with information and cultural content.

**Influence:** Influence refers to the extent to which the use of social media affects people's knowledge, awareness, attitudes, appreciation and practice of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State.

**Preservation:** Preservation refers to the process of protecting, documenting, maintaining, promoting and transmitting Igbo cultural values from one generation to another through social media and other communication channels.

**Igbo Cultural Values:** Igbo cultural values refer to the beliefs, norms, customs, traditions and principles considered important in Igbo society. In this study, they include respect for elders, communalism, hospitality, hard work, family values, indigenous language, traditional marriage practices, festivals, music, dance, folklore, proverbs and indigenous knowledge.

**Igbo Culture:** Igbo culture refers to the collective way of life of the Igbo people, including their language, beliefs, customs, traditions, social institutions, festivals, arts, music, dressing, food, marriage practices and indigenous knowledge.

## Review of Related Literature

### Conceptual Review

### Concept of Culture

Culture refers to the totality of the learned and shared patterns of life of a group of people. It encompasses the beliefs, values, norms, customs, traditions, language, knowledge, arts, social institutions and practices through which members of a society organize their lives and understand their environment. Culture is acquired through social interaction and transmitted from one generation to another.Culture provides individuals with a sense of identity and belonging. It influences how people communicate, behave, celebrate important events, relate to one another and interpret their social environment. In this regard, culture is not merely a collection of traditional practices but a framework through which individuals and communities construct meaning.

In traditional societies, cultural transmission occurs through interpersonal communication, family upbringing, storytelling, ceremonies, festivals, traditional institutions, apprenticeship and community participation. Elders traditionally play an important role in transmitting historical knowledge, moral values, proverbs, customs and indigenous knowledge to younger generations.

However, globalization and technological development have altered the processes of cultural transmission. Young people increasingly encounter cultural information through mass media and digital platforms. Consequently, culture is now transmitted not only through face-to-face interaction but also through digital communication.

Digital technologies provide opportunities to document cultural practices and make them accessible to audiences beyond their original geographical locations. UNESCO has emphasized the potential of digital technologies to expand access to cultural heritage and create new opportunities for cultural documentation and participation.

**Igbo Culture and Cultural Values**

Igbo culture refers to the collective way of life of the Igbo people of Nigeria. It includes their language, customs, beliefs, traditions, social institutions, marriage practices, festivals, music, dance, food, dressing, folklore, proverbs, traditional leadership systems and indigenous knowledge.Igbo cultural values are the principles, beliefs and standards that guide acceptable behaviour among the Igbo people. They include respect for elders, communalism, hospitality, hard work, family solidarity, honesty, courage, enterprise, responsibility and peaceful coexistence.

Igbo cultural values are communicated through various forms of cultural expression. Proverbs, folktales, songs, dances and traditional ceremonies constitute important mechanisms through which social values are taught. The proverb, for example, has traditionally served as an important instrument of wisdom and moral instruction.

Traditional Igbo marriage ceremonies also constitute an important mechanism for cultural transmission. The *Igba Nkwu* ceremony contains cultural meanings concerning family relationships, kinship, identity and communal

participation. Recent research indicates that social media has increasingly become involved in the presentation of Igbo traditional weddings. Nwagbara (2025) found that social media provides opportunities for showcasing Igbo wedding traditions but may also encourage cultural hybridisation, commercialization and simplification. Thus, Igbo culture is dynamic rather than completely static. While core cultural values may remain important, their forms of expression may change as society interacts with new technologies and other cultures.

**Concept of Cultural Preservation**

Cultural preservation refers to deliberate efforts to protect, document, maintain, promote and transmit the cultural heritage of a people from one generation to another. Cultural preservation involves both tangible and intangible heritage. Tangible heritage may include traditional objects, buildings, artworks, clothing and artefacts, while intangible heritage includes language, oral traditions, folklore, music, dance, rituals, knowledge, beliefs and social practices.

The objective of cultural preservation is not necessarily to prevent all cultural change. Rather, it seeks to ensure that important cultural knowledge, values and practices are not lost through neglect, modernization or the disappearance of traditional transmission channels.

In the digital age, cultural preservation has acquired a new dimension. Digital technologies can record oral traditions, digitize historical documents, store

photographs and videos, and distribute cultural information through online platforms.

Nwafor and Laksana (2025) argue that new media can provide important opportunities for sustaining Igbo folktales. Their study identifies social media, digital storytelling, podcasting, artificial intelligence and virtual archives as possible mechanisms for improving the visibility and sustainability of Igbo oral traditions.

Therefore, digital cultural preservation can complement traditional preservation mechanisms by providing additional channels for recording and transmitting cultural knowledge.

**Concept of Social Media**

Social media refers to internet-based communication platforms that allow users to create, publish, distribute, receive and interact with content. Unlike traditional mass media, social media is characterized by interactivity, user participation, immediacy and decentralized content production.Major social media platforms include Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and X. These platforms support different forms of communication, including text, photographs, audio, video, livestreaming and interactive discussions.

Social media has transformed the relationship between media producers and audiences. Individuals who previously functioned primarily as media consumers can now create and distribute their own content. This characteristic makes social media particularly important

for cultural preservation because members of a cultural community can document and circulate their own heritage.Social media also removes geographical barriers. An Igbo cultural festival held in Ebonyi State can be photographed, recorded and uploaded online, making it accessible to people in Lagos, Abuja, other parts of Nigeria and the Igbo diaspora.

**Social Media and Cultural Preservation**

The relationship between social media and cultural preservation has become an important area of contemporary communication research. Social media provides opportunities for cultural documentation, promotion, education and participation.One major advantage is the ability to create digital records. Cultural ceremonies that were previously documented only through personal memories can now be preserved through photographs, videos and audio recordings. Social media also allows cultural materials to be repeatedly accessed by subsequent generations. Another advantage is cultural visibility. Cultural practices that receive little attention from conventional media can obtain significant exposure through social media. Individuals and organizations can use hashtags, short videos, livestreams and online communities to promote cultural events.

Hua et al. (2024) examined user-generated content on social media and intangible cultural heritage preservation. Their study demonstrated the importance of perceptions of authenticity and digital cultural content in shaping attitudes towards heritage preservation.Social media can also increase cultural participation. Younger people may

participate in cultural activities after encountering attractive cultural content online. Consequently, digital platforms can make cultural heritage more accessible to audiences who may have limited direct contact with traditional institutions.

**Social Media and the Preservation of Igbo Language**

Language is one of the most important components of cultural identity. It carries the worldview, history, values, knowledge and collective memory of a people.The Igbo language has historically been transmitted through the family, community, neighbourhood, schools and interpersonal interaction. However, changes in family structure, urbanization, migration, language preference and the dominance of English have created concerns about intergenerational transmission.

Digital media offers an additional mechanism for Igbo language preservation. Eke and Salawu (2025) investigated the role of digital media in the intergenerational transmission of Igbo. Their study found that new media activities, particularly the publication of Igbo-language content, can create viable channels for literacy and oracy and help address gaps created by weakening traditional pathways of transmission. This finding is significant to the present study because social media can be used to teach Igbo vocabulary, explain proverbs, publish Igbo stories, produce educational videos and encourage young people to communicate in Igbo.

Eze (2025) similarly argues that online platforms can contribute to the preservation and revitalization of Igbo culture by providing digital repositories, educational materials, online cultural communities and platforms for promoting Igbo language and traditions.

## Theoretical Framework

### Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory is associated with Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973). The theory assumes that media audiences are active participants who select media to satisfy particular needs.People use social media for various purposes, including information, entertainment, social interaction, identity formation, self-expression and cultural connection.

In relation to this study, individuals may use social media to learn Igbo language, watch traditional dances, participate in cultural discussions, learn about festivals or connect with other Igbo people.The theory is relevant because it helps explain why people choose to consume and share cultural content. If young people find Igbo cultural content interesting, useful or socially rewarding, they may be more likely to consume and reproduce such content.Nwagbara (2025) also employed Uses and Gratifications Theory to examine how Nigerian youths engage with Igbo traditional weddings through social media.

## Summary of Reviewed Literature

The literature reviewed demonstrates that culture provides individuals and communities with identity,

continuity and shared values. Igbo culture contains diverse linguistic, social, artistic and traditional practices that have historically been transmitted through families, elders, communities and traditional institutions.The review also demonstrates that social media has created new possibilities for cultural preservation. Digital platforms can document cultural practices, promote festivals, preserve oral traditions, facilitate language learning, increase cultural visibility and connect younger generations with cultural heritage.

However, social media also presents challenges. These include cultural hybridisation, commercialization, misinformation, superficial representation, foreign cultural influence and possible weakening of indigenous language use. Therefore, the effect of social media on culture cannot be understood as exclusively positive or negative.

The reviewed literature also reveals a significant gap. Existing studies have examined particular aspects of Igbo culture, such as language, folktales and traditional weddings, while other studies have examined cultural heritage in broader international contexts. There is insufficient empirical evidence specifically examining the overall influence of social media on the preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State.

## Research Methodology

### Research Design

This study adopted the survey research design. The survey design is appropriate because the study seeks to

obtain information from respondents concerning their exposure to social media, their use of social media for cultural purposes, their perceptions of its influence on Igbo cultural preservation, the challenges associated with its use and possible strategies for improving its contribution to cultural preservation.The survey design enabled the researcher to obtain data from a representative sample of the population of Ebonyi State without having to study every individual in the state. It is considered appropriate for the study because the variables under investigation can be measured through respondents' opinions, experiences, attitudes and reported patterns of social media use.

**Area of the Study**

The study was conducted in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.Ebonyi State is located in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. It is predominantly inhabited by Igbo people and has a rich indigenous cultural heritage. The state has 13 Local Government Areas and is commonly divided into Ebonyi North, Ebonyi Central and Ebonyi South Senatorial Zones. The people of Ebonyi State maintain several aspects of Igbo cultural heritage, including indigenous language, traditional marriage practices, festivals, music, dance, folklore, proverbs, traditional food, dressing, communal values and respect for elders. These characteristics make the state particularly suitable for a study of the preservation of Igbo cultural values.

**Population of the Study**

The population of the study comprises residents of Ebonyi State.The population adopted for the study

is 3,520,000 persons, representing the estimated 2025 population of Ebonyi State. The large population makes it impracticable to administer questionnaires to every resident of the state. Consequently, a statistically appropriate sample was selected for the study.It is important to distinguish between the target population and the sample population. The target population consists of residents of Ebonyi State, while the sample population consists of the selected residents who actually participated in the research.

**Sample Size Determination**

The sample size was determined using the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Sample Size Calculator approach. The ABS methodology requires consideration of the population size, confidence level, expected proportion and desired confidence interval. Where the expected proportion is unknown, the ABS recommends using 0.50 (50%), because it produces a conservative estimate of variance and therefore provides an adequate sample size. The following parameters will be adopted:

- Population size = 3,520,000
- Confidence level = 95%
- Confidence interval/margin of error = 5%
- Expected proportion = 50%

Using these parameters, the Australian sample-size methodology produces a minimum sample of approximately:385 respondents. The 385 obtained from the calculator represents the number of usable completed responses, rather than necessarily the number of questionnaires that must be distributed. The ABS

explicitly distinguishes between the required responding sample and the number of persons approached, noting that expected non-response should be considered when determining the number to contact.

To provide a reasonable allowance for non-response and improperly completed questionnaires, the researcher added 10% to the minimum sample. Therefore: 385 + 38.5 = 423.5. The figure will be rounded up to: 424 respondents. Consequently, 424 questionnaires were administered with the aim of obtaining at least 385 valid and usable responses.

**Sampling Procedure**

A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select respondents. The multi-stage approach is considered appropriate because Ebonyi State is geographically extensive and consists of 13 Local Government Areas. It allowed the researcher to obtain respondents from different geographical sections of the state.

**Stage One: Senatorial Stratification**

The state was first be divided into its three senatorial zones: Ebonyi North; Ebonyi Central; andEbonyi South. The stratification was to ensure that the three major geographical areas of the state are represented.

**Stage Two: Selection of Local Government Areas**

Local Government Areas were selected from each senatorial zone using a simple random sampling procedure. The LGAs are Afikpo North, Ezza South and Izzi in Ebonyi South, Central and North.

**Stage Three: Selection of Communities**
Communities will be selected from the chosen Local Government Areas through simple random sampling.

**Stage Four: Selection of Respondents**
Respondents were selected from the sampled communities using systematic or simple random procedures, depending on the availability of a sampling frame. The researcher ensured that the respondents adequately reflected different age groups, educational backgrounds, occupations and social media-use patterns.

**Instrument for Data Collection**
The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher from the objectives and research questions of the study. The questionnaire was measured using a four-point Likert scale.

**Validity and Reliability of the Instrument**
The questionnaire was validated through the project supervisor. A pilot study was conducted to establish the reliability of the research instrument. The pilot test will involve respondents who possess characteristics similar to those of the actual study population but who will not participate in the final study. The data obtained from the pilot exercise was subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability test. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher was considered acceptable for the instrument.

**Method of Data Collection**

The researcher personally supervised the administration of the questionnaires with the assistance of trained research assistants.The questionnaires were administered physically to selected respondents. Where appropriate, an electronic version was used for respondents who were accessible through online platforms.

**Method of Data Analysis**

Data obtained from the completed questionnaires were coded and analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques.Frequency counts and percentages were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and other categorical variables. The formula is:

**Percentage = (f / N) × 100**

Where:

**f = frequency**

**N = total number of valid responses**

**Mean**

Mean scores were used to answer the research questions based on the Likert-scale responses.

The formula is:

$\bar{X} = \Sigma X / N$

Where:

$\bar{X}$ **= mean**

$\Sigma X$ **= sum of all scores**

**N = number of responses**

A mean score of 2.50 or above was interpreted as agreement or a relatively high level, while a score below

2.50 was interpreted as disagreement or a relatively low level.

## Standard Deviation

Standard deviation was used to indicate the degree of dispersion or variation in respondents' answers around the mean.

## Inferential Statistics

Where the nature of the data permits, an appropriate inferential statistical test such as Chi-square was used to determine whether observed relationships between selected variables are statistically significant.The level of significance was set at 0.05.Where the calculated significance value is less than 0.05, the relationship was regarded as statistically significant. Where it is greater than 0.05, the relationship was regarded as not statistically significant.

## Results

A total of 424 copies of the questionnaire were administered. Below is the presentation an analysis of data in tables as obtained from the field.

**Table 1: Distribution and Retrieval of Questionnaire**

| **Questionnaire** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
|---|---|---|
| Administered | 424 | 100 |
| Retrieved and usable | 385 | 90.8 |
| Not retrieved/invalid | 39 | 9.2 |
| **Total** | **424** | **100** |

**Source: Field Survey, 2026**

Table 1 shows that 424 copies of the questionnaire were administered, while 385 copies, representing 90.8%, were successfully retrieved and found usable for analysis. Thirty-nine copies, representing 9.2%, were either not retrieved or improperly completed. The 385 valid responses therefore constituted the basis for the analysis.

**Table2: Distribution of Respondents by Sex**

| Sex | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 202 | 52.5 |
| Female | 183 | 47.5 |
| **Total** | **385** | **100** |

**Source: Field Survey, 2026**

The table indicates that 202 respondents (52.5%) were male, while 183 (47.5%) were female. This shows a relatively balanced representation of both sexes.

**Table 3: Distribution by Age**

| Age | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| 18–25 years | 112 | 29.1 |
| 26–35 years | 126 | 32.7 |
| 36–45 years | 78 | 20.3 |
| 46–55 years | 45 | 11.7 |
| 56 years and above | 24 | 6.2 |
| **Total** | **385** | **100** |

The table shows that respondents aged 26–35 constituted the largest group, with 126 respondents (32.7%). This was followed by those aged 18–25 with 112 respondents (29.1%). The distribution indicates that a substantial proportion of respondents were within age groups that are likely to have considerable exposure to social media.

**Table 4: Educational Qualification**

| Qualification | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Primary | 18 | 4.7 |
| Secondary | 65 | 16.9 |
| OND/NCE | 72 | 18.7 |
| HND/Bachelor's degree | 174 | 45.2 |
| Postgraduate | 56 | 14.5 |
| **Total** | **385** | **100** |

The table indicates that respondents with HND/Bachelor's degrees constituted the largest group, accounting for 45.2%. This suggests that a substantial proportion of respondents possessed educational backgrounds that could facilitate understanding of the questionnaire.

**Table 5: Social Media Use for Promotion and Preservation of Igbo Cultural Values**

| S/N | Statement | SA | A | D | SD | Mean | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | Social media is widely used to promote Igbo culture in Ebonyi State. | 168 | 151 | 40 | 26 | 3.20 | Accepted |
| 7 | Social media is used to share information about Igbo traditions, customs and festivals. | 176 | 147 | 37 | 25 | 3.23 | Accepted |
| 8 | Social media is used to promote Igbo language, proverbs and folktales. | 151 | 154 | 50 | 30 | 3.11 | Accepted |
| **Grand Mean** | | | | | | **3.18** | **Accepted** |

**Source: Field Survey, 2026**

The table shows that respondents generally agreed that social media is used for the promotion and preservation of Igbo cultural values. The three statements recorded

mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The highest mean score of 3.23 was recorded for the statement that social media is used to share information about Igbo traditions, customs and festivals. This was followed by the statement that social media is widely used to promote Igbo culture, with a mean of 3.20. The statement concerning the promotion of Igbo language, proverbs and folktales recorded a mean of 3.11.The grand mean of 3.18 indicates a relatively high extent of social media use for promoting and preserving Igbo cultural values.

**Table 4.6: Influence of Social Media on Igbo Cultural Preservation**

| S/N | Statement | SA | A | D | SD | Mean | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | Social media helps preserve the Igbo language and indigenous expressions. | 157 | 151 | 47 | 30 | 3.13 | Accepted |
| 10 | Social media helps preserve Igbo traditional music, dance, dressing and festivals. | 171 | 150 | 39 | 25 | 3.21 | Accepted |
| 11 | Social media strengthens young people's awareness and appreciation of Igbo cultural identity. | 165 | 157 | 39 | 24 | 3.20 | Accepted |
| **Grand Mean** | | | | | | **3.18** | **Accepted** |

**Source: Field Survey, 2026**

Table 4.6 reveals that respondents generally agreed that social media has a positive influence on the preservation of Igbo cultural values.The statement that social media helps preserve Igbo traditional music, dance, dressing and

festivals recorded the highest mean score of 3.21. The statement that social media strengthens young people's awareness and appreciation of Igbo cultural identity recorded a mean of 3.20, while preservation of Igbo language and indigenous expressions recorded a mean of 3.13.With a grand mean of 3.18, the findings indicate that social media contributes positively to the preservation of Igbo cultural practices.

**Table 4.7: Challenges of Social Media-Based Cultural Preservation**

| S/N | Statement | SA | A | D | SD | Mean | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | Cultural misinformation and distortion on social media hinder the preservation of Igbo culture. | 184 | 142 | 36 | 23 | 3.27 | Accepted |
| 13 | Foreign cultural influences on social media threaten some Igbo cultural values. | 178 | 148 | 37 | 22 | 3.25 | Accepted |
| 14 | Commercialization and lack of authentic cultural content affect the preservation of Igbo culture online. | 159 | 155 | 46 | 25 | 3.16 | Accepted |
| **Grand Mean** | | | | | | **3.23** | **Accepted** |

**Source: Field Survey, 2026**

Table 4.7 indicates that respondents identified significant challenges associated with using social media for the preservation of Igbo cultural values.Cultural misinformation and distortion recorded the highest mean of 3.27. Foreign cultural influence followed with 3.25, while commercialization and inadequate authentic cultural content recorded 3.16.The grand mean

of 3.23 indicates that the challenges identified are significant.

**Table 4.8: Strategies for Enhancing Social Media-Based Cultural Preservation**

| S/N | Statement | SA | A | D | SD | Mean | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15 | More authentic Igbo cultural content should be produced and shared on social media. | 202 | 143 | 25 | 20 | 3.36 | 15 |
| 16 | Igbo elders and cultural experts should collaborate with young social media content creators. | 194 | 153 | 26 | 17 | 3.35 | 16 |
| 17 | Schools, government and cultural organizations should support digital preservation of Igbo culture. | 211 | 140 | 24 | 15 | 3.41 | 17 |
| **Grand Mean** | | | | | | **3.37** | **Grand Mean** |

Table 8 indicates that respondents identified strategies can be adopted to enhance the use of social media for the preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State.More authentic Igbo cultural content should be produced and shared on social mediarevealed 3.36, Igbo elders and cultural experts should collaborate with young social media content creators showed 3.35 and Schools, government and cultural organizations should support digital preservation of Igbo culture indicated 3.41.The grand mean of 3.37 indicates that the challenges identified are significant.

## Discussion of Findings Based on Research Questions

**Research Question One:** *To what extent is social media used for the promotion and preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State?*

The findings indicate that social media is used to a high extent for the promotion and preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State, as demonstrated by the grand mean score of 3.18, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50. Respondents particularly agreed that social media is used to share information about Igbo traditions, customs and festivals, promote Igbo culture generally, and disseminate Igbo language, proverbs and folktales.This finding suggests that the traditional channels of cultural transmission are increasingly being supplemented by digital communication. Whereas Igbo cultural knowledge was historically transmitted largely through families, elders, community gatherings, storytelling, ceremonies and traditional institutions, social media now provides another avenue through which cultural information can be documented and distributed.

The finding is consistent with Eze (2025), who observed that digital platforms, including social media, YouTube and podcasts, are increasingly being used to preserve and revitalize Igbo culture. Eze noted that digital initiatives can provide repositories for linguistic and cultural heritage and can promote cultural pride and identity among younger generations. Also, the finding also agrees with Nwagbara (2025), whose study of social media and traditional Igbo weddings found that social media

provides opportunities for showcasing Igbo cultural practices to wider audiences. The study showed that activities surrounding *Igba Nkwu* and other traditional wedding practices are increasingly documented and circulated through digital platforms.

The implication is that social media has become an important contemporary instrument for cultural promotion in Ebonyi State. However, the mere presence of cultural content online does not necessarily guarantee its authenticity or long-term preservation. The quality, accuracy and cultural meaning of the content remain important considerations.

**Research Question Two:** *What influence do social media have on the preservation of Igbo language, traditions, customs and cultural practices in Ebonyi State?*

The findings show that social media has a positive influence on the preservation of Igbo cultural values. The grand mean of 3.18 indicates that respondents generally believe that social media contributes to the preservation of Igbo language, traditional music, dance, dressing, festivals and cultural identity.The finding concerning the preservation of Igbo language is particularly important. Language represents a major carrier of cultural memory because proverbs, idioms, oral histories, names, traditional expressions and indigenous knowledge are often embedded in language. When Igbo-language materials are produced and circulated through digital platforms, they become available to younger generations

and people living outside the immediate Igbo environment.

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The findings concerning traditional music, dance, dressing and festivals also suggest that social media has transformed cultural documentation. A cultural event that was once witnessed by only members of a particular community can now be recorded and circulated to thousands or even millions of people. Social media therefore extends the geographical and generational reach of cultural practices. This is consistent with Nwagbara (2025), who found that social media has increased the visibility of Igbo traditional weddings. According to the study, young Nigerians use digital platforms to engage with and showcase Igbo wedding traditions, thereby bringing traditional practices into contemporary digital spaces. The finding also supports the argument that social media can bridge the generational gap in cultural transmission. Younger people who may have limited opportunities to participate in traditional storytelling or community ceremonies can encounter Igbo cultural content through their phones and social media accounts.

**Research Question Three:** ***What are the challenges associated with the use of social media for the preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State?***

The findings indicate that significant challenges exist in using social media to preserve Igbo cultural values. The grand mean of 3.23 shows that respondents generally agreed that cultural misinformation and distortion, foreign cultural influence, commercialization and

inadequate authentic cultural content constitute major challenges. The highest-rated challenge was cultural misinformation and distortion. This is understandable because social media permits almost anyone to create and distribute information without necessarily possessing expertise in the subject. Consequently, individuals may upload inaccurate interpretations of Igbo traditions, misrepresent cultural symbols or present practices without their historical and social context.

This finding raises an important distinction between digital documentation and authentic cultural preservation. Recording something digitally does not automatically make the record culturally accurate. Effective preservation requires reliable documentation and participation by people with adequate knowledge of the culture.The finding is strongly supported by Nwagbara (2025). The study found that although social media increases the visibility of Igbo traditional weddings, it also creates pressures towards cultural hybridisation, commercialization and simplification. The research particularly observed that the visual and commercial demands of social media can cause cultural depth to be overshadowed by aesthetics.

The finding concerning foreign cultural influence can also be understood in the context of globalization. Social media exposes users to cultural practices from different societies. While this exposure can encourage cultural exchange and innovation, it can also influence young people's preferences concerning language, fashion, music, ceremonies and social behaviour. Its effect depends

substantially on the nature of content produced, the intentions of content creators, the knowledge of cultural participants and the way audiences interpret the content.

**Research Question Four:** *What strategies can be adopted to enhance the use of social media for the preservation of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State?*

The findings show strong support for the proposed strategies, with a grand mean of **3.37**. Respondents particularly supported the production of authentic Igbo cultural content, collaboration between Igbo elders and young social media creators, and institutional support from schools, government and cultural organizations.The finding suggests that effective digital cultural preservation requires collaboration between generations. Older people often possess valuable knowledge of indigenous practices, while younger people tend to possess greater familiarity with contemporary digital platforms and content-production techniques. Bringing these forms of knowledge together could significantly improve the quality of online Igbo cultural content.

This recommendation is consistent with Eze (2025), who emphasizes the involvement of cultural experts in online promotion and preservation of Igbo culture. The study recognizes that digital technology can provide important preservation opportunities but that cultural expertise remains necessary to ensure that the information being transmitted is meaningful and authentic. The finding also agrees with Nwagbara (2025), who recommends digital

literacy and mindful engagement with social media as ways of balancing modernity with cultural authenticity.

This approach is consistent with the logic of Uses and Gratifications Theory. Young audiences are more likely to consume and share cultural content when it satisfies their informational, entertainment, social and identity needs. The findings therefore suggest that preservation should not mean simply reproducing old cultural materials in old formats. Rather, it should involve using contemporary communication technologies to transmit enduring cultural values in forms that contemporary audiences can understand and appreciate.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that social media has become an important contemporary instrument for the preservation and promotion of Igbo cultural values in Ebonyi State.The findings demonstrate that social media provides opportunities to document, promote, disseminate and preserve Igbo cultural practices in ways that were not possible through traditional communication channels alone. Through photographs, videos, podcasts, digital storytelling, online discussions and other forms of digital content, cultural information can reach both local and global audiences. However, social media should not be regarded as an automatic solution to cultural erosion. Its influence is dual in nature. While it can preserve cultural visibility and facilitate intergenerational transmission, it can also expose cultural practices to distortion, commercialization, hybridization and foreign influences. This duality is reflected in recent research on Igbo

traditional weddings, which found that social media can serve simultaneously as a platform for cultural preservation and a driver of cultural commercialization and simplification.

The study therefore concludes that the preservation of Igbo cultural values through social media requires deliberate, authentic and culturally informed digital communication. The future of Igbo cultural preservation should not involve rejecting modern communication technologies. Rather, it should involve using these technologies strategically to ensure that traditional knowledge, values and practices remain relevant and accessible to contemporary and future generations.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government agencies, universities, cultural organizations and communities should establish digital archives containing Igbo oral histories, folktales, proverbs, traditional songs, festivals, ceremonies, indigenous knowledge, photographs and audiovisual materials.Such archives can provide permanent digital repositories for future generations.
2. Content creators should be encouraged to produce more social media content in the Igbo language. Igbo-language videos, podcasts, documentaries, educational materials and short-form digital content should be deliberately promoted.This is particularly important because recent research identifies digital

storytelling as a potential avenue for revitalizing Igbo language use among younger generations.

3. Traditional elders and cultural experts should collaborate with young social media influencers, journalists, filmmakers, bloggers and digital content creators.The elders can provide cultural knowledge and authenticity, while younger creators can provide the technical and creative skills required to communicate such knowledge effectively online.
4. The Ebonyi State Government should provide financial, technical and institutional support for digital cultural preservation initiatives.Such support could include grants for cultural documentation, digital archives, indigenous-language media projects and training programmes for young cultural content creators.

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# RELEVANCE OF COMMUNITY RADIO IN SUSTAINING MARITAL PEACE IN EBONYI STATE

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## Abstract

This study was carried out to investigate the relevance of community radio in sustaining marital peace in Ebonyi State. The study was anchored on Family System Theory Survey research design was adopted in this study. It has a projected population size of 4,339,136 residents of Ebonyi State drawn from the eighteen Local Government Areas of the State. From the population, a sample size of 385 gotten via Online Australian Calculator was adopted. The instrument used for data collection was structured questionnaire and data collected were presented and analyzed using descriptive data analysis method. Findings of this study revealed that: majority of the residents of Ebonyi State were highly aware of the use of community radio in sustaining marital peace in the State, most of

respondents agreed that community radio usually broadcasted family/marital peace oriented programmes and campaigns and the extent to which community radio contributed in sustaining marital peace is still low in Ebonyi State. The study recommended that community radio stations in Ebonyi State should involve digital and social media platforms in disseminating information on sustainable marriage peace in the State. Also, marriage counselors, church leaders and peace communication experts should partner with community radio on communicating maritalpeace in Ebonyi State.
***Keywords:*** Community, Marriage. Peace, Radio, Sustenance.

## Introduction

Over the years, radio has continued to serve as a medium of mass communication. It is an electronic wireless device which serves as a channel of receiving and disseminating information or messages through airwaves from the source to the target consumer. Nna (2020) reveals that it is a specialized mass medium with considerable local programming directed to specialized local audience and it is less expensive to programme. As a broadcasting station, it serves a specific section of a society known as a community, which is a collection of people, usually living in the same area, with common interests that include having a common history, traditions and cultural background of the community (Kasoma, 2002). It has the ability to deliver well packaged programmes to a defined geographical and demographic target audience, and could be described as a community

radio that serves as number one communication medium for the Nigerian society.

The emergence of community radio in Nigeria has been a welcome development in accessing and communicating with rural communities. It was developed to meet the communication cum information needs of Nigerian communities. It is a small-scale radio station owned and operated by a community or its representative to be heard, informed and become more decisive agent for its own sake when it comes to any contextual issues (Mefalopulos, 2005). Radio has equally grown both in structure, content and outreach by providing regular and updated dosages of information on the happenings in the society. More so, it provides tremendous opportunities for people to share their views, ideas, and messages the welfare and overall development of the rural dwellers.

One of the important aspects of the roles of community radio is provision of information, messages and programmes on family cum marital living for the maintenance of peace, unity and progress. Marriage is an indispensible institution that forms and builds societies. It is a legally recognized and socially accepted partnership, typically involving two different individual of opposite sex. Egbo, Asogwa and Agbo-Peters (2020) see marriage is seen as an institution to satisfy physical, psychological, social, cultural and economic needs of man and woman, which permits them to establish a stable relationship with each other. Marriage brings joy and happiness to the society and honour to those who are in it. It is seen as union between a man and a woman who loves each other and has agreed to leave together as husband and wife,

with legal backing, through contemporary way or performing traditional rites (Makinde, Azorondu, Adeoye, & Abodunrin, 2021).

Marriage is governed by laws, norms, conventions, beliefs, and attitudes that specify the spouses' rights and obligations and grant status to their children. It is a legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners and accords status to their children (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025). These ingredients include such attributes as commitment, communication, children, finances, respect, emotional bonding, religion, parents' marriage, love, intimacy and so on. Research has shown that having a long-lasting marriage is very important to people and has a great impact on their health and general life satisfaction and stability (Bradbury, 2014).

However, Lenthal (2019) explains the need for marital peace as the condition of a steady, well-balanced and healthy relationship between husband and wife, irrespective of any misunderstanding that may arise between them in the course of their discussion. Marital peace can be seen as the endurance of a marriage due to the cooperation of both husband and wife. It manifests in a situation where husband and wife love each other, get along well, share common goal and interests, enjoy each other's company, and have fun together. Conversely, lack of communication among couples may diminish intimacy between them. Communication on marriage involves the

exchange of information and messages between couples through spoken words, written words, symbols, body gestures, and facial expressions.

Communication within the family is widely recognized as a fundamental element in the development and maintenance of healthy marital relationships. It ought to be a vital factor in maintaining a satisfying marital peace. It is therefore on this premise that this study was carried out to ascertain the relevance of community radio, specifically the Ebonyi State Broadcasting Commission (EBBC) in sustaining marital peace in Ebonyi State.

**Statement of the Problem**

There is no doubt of the existence of studies on marriage and its related issues in Edo State. For instance, Osagie & Godson (2024) studied "Contributing Factors of Marriage Dissolution in Oredo Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria". Egharevba & Omosuvbe (2021) also did a study on "Role of the Extended Family on Marital Instability in Egor Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria" while Awosan, Iroye and Okolo (2023) studied "Spousal communication on marital stability and productivity in Nigeria"and (Makinde, Azorondu, Adeoye, & Abodunrin, (2021) on the "Principles of Marriage". These among others revealed the importance of marital in Ebonyi State of Nigeria.

Unfortunately, available studies on marriage in Ebonyi State have not addressed the issue of mass media and marital peace as an intellectual approach of addressing incidences of marital problems such as lack of

misunderstanding, poverty, third-party interference from in-laws, infidelity, and incompatibility, leading to conflicts, emotional stress, and separation or divorce. These problems can negatively impact the couples, children and contributing to delinquency and psychological issues, and often lead to instability and crisis within the marriage cum family.

As a result of the above problem, this study was carried out to ascertain the relevance of community radio, using Ebonyi State Broadcasting Commission (EBBC), in sustaining marital peace in Edo State. It is believed that this study will advance knowledge in appraising the contributions of community radio in building and maintaining marital peace among couples and families in the State.

**Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to investigate the relevance of community radio in sustaining marital peace in Ebonyi State. Three specific objectives are:

1. To ascertain the level of Ebonyi State residents'access to Ebonyi State Broadcasting Commission community radio messages on marital peace in the State.
2. To find out the role ofEbonyi State Broadcasting Commissioncommunity radio on marital peace in Ebonyi State.
3. To ascertain the effectiveness Ebonyi State Broadcasting Commission community radio in sustaining marital peace in Ebonyi State.

**Research Questions**

1. What is the level of Ebonyi State residents' access to EBBC community radio messages on marital peace in the State?
2. What is the role of EBBC community radio on marital peace in Ebonyi State?
3. What is the effectiveness EBBC community radio in sustaining marital peace in Ebonyi State?

**Significance of the Study**

This study centred on relevance of EBBC community radio in sustaining marital peace in Ebonyi State. It provided current and relevant information on sustaining marital peace in Ebonyi State through the use of community radio. Such valuable facts and information can be useful to marriages, families and radio stations in Ebonyi State.

In like manner, the study provided theoretical and practical facts to future scholars, policy makers and peace agencies including the state Government for managing related issues of marital peace. In the same vein, this study forms a reference document to community radio stations and library sources so as advance this field of knowledge in Ebonyi State.

**Review of Related Literature**

**Community Radio and its Functions**

Community radio is as a radio station established to provide services to its host community. It is seen in this perspective as an authentic tool in ensuring early warning

and monitoring signal, mediation, facilitating and perfecting alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, and contributing significantly to societal orientation on issues of diversity that are oftenthe cause of conflicts and violence when poorly managed. This could be achieved through theeducation role of community radio. Community radio is described as a credible socializing agent that contributes meaningfullyin peace education. It could promote local identity, character and create diversity of voices andopinions, encourage open dialogue and the democratic process, and promote civil society, good governance and professional responsibility (Alumuku, 2006). All these roles could contributeimmensely to bring about an effective education that could promote peace and shun all tendencies of violence and disunity.

The basic premise of community radio according to Vega, Tapias & Pérez (2019) focuses on non profit, participatory, and media made by and for a local audience, providing a variety of educational and entertainment programs to facilitate community development. Radio has become a specialized medium with considerable local programming directed to specialized and local audiences and it is much less expensive to programme local radio than to programme local television. This type of radio also proved to be a sustainable and interactive space for poor and marginalized populations to be heard and informed, form their opinions, and become more decisive agents in their development (McKay, 2010 & Wabwire, 2013).

Unlike other forms of mass media, the use of community radio by the government and other agencies is linking the rural communities to the urban communities and at the same time channel the happenings – events, programmes and development in the urban to the rural areas. Thus, it is used to create a two way information flow between the two extremes. The government is the major user of radio to connect its rural people to what they are doing, or about to do or have done for them (Okwechime, 2007). They (rural people) do not only constitute the largest portion of the population but also have a lot of human angle and interesting activities, such as their agricultural, socio-cultural and rural political programmes.

Radio is therefore a busy mass medium, with a lot of roles and functions it owes the society. Aliede (2003) calls it a tool for journalism education, enlightenment, mobilization, cultural propagation and entertainment. Radio also promotes economic development, stimulates political participation and arouses national consciousness and unity. Thus, previous reports have shown that radio performs the following functions: information dissemination, education of the masses, entertainment, mobilization, sensitization and motivation of the target audience to respond to a particular message. Once the audience has access to the medium, communication becomes a right. Akpan (2000) observes, people cannot live and share ideas, interact and peacefully progress without communicating about themselves and their needs.

## Concept of Marital Peace

The term "marital" relates to marriage, while "peace" means the absence of conflict and emotional imbalance. Igbinoba (2023) shares the idea that marital peace can be understood as a situation where couples remain legally married and live together in harmony, without separation or persistent conflict. It reflects a state of marital success or satisfaction. Marital peace refers to the state of living in harmony, understanding one another and emotional closeness that exists between spouses. It is vital for building a strong and satisfying marriage, as it contributes to the emotional well-being and happiness of the family. He further explains that a healthy and successful marriage depends on how husbands and wives relate to each other, how well they support one another, and the level of their commitment to the relationship (Igbinoba, 2023).

Marriage is not just a union but a journey that requires wisdom, honesty, loyalty, and trust. Trust allows couples to stay calm and united even during difficult times (Punch Newspaper, 2023). According to Nwosu (2022), marital peace is when the normal daily life and activities of the family continue without disruption, supporting both the emotional and physical well-being of all family members. Also, marital peace as a stable and successful marriage made possible by important values such as love, care, trust, acceptance, and tolerance. These qualities help couples deal with emotional challenges and keep their relationships strong. In essence, marital peace is built on mutual respect, emotional connection, and a shared belief in unity, which are all necessary for a fulfilling and lasting marriage.

In Nigeria, the rate at which marital couples experience divorce is quite alarming. Many families have been and some are still seriously at war with themselves simply because they fail to arrest, manage or resolve conflicting issues between couples or families. The marital instability and conflicts between couples may not be unconnected with the harsh economic and social realities coupled with other factors like in-law interference, incompatibility and unwholesome desires of one or both couples. The negative impact of the problem in marriages in Nigeria and the study area particularly is better imagined. The extended family for ages has been the formidable mediator and arbiter in all family problems and squabbles including settling of marital conflict. Egharevba & Omosuvb (2021) observe that the extent to which the extended family is still relevant in a marital settlement is to some extent based on speculation in the modern complex and cosmopolitan Nigerian society.

Egharevba & Omosuvb (2021) reveal that dissolved marriages bring about unwanted expenses on both sides. This is truer when litigation is involved. The individual from dissolved marriage may use his or her money to engage lawyers, corrupt the police and/or buy witness. Dissolved marriage creates enmity between individual and groups and strains existing relationships. The children of dissolvedcouples are likely to lack proper care from both parents and this may lead to breeding of misfits in the society. When peaceful atmosphere is replaced with chaos in marriage, the consequences are usually grievous. It results in marital instability, marriage separation, divorce or even death of the couple. This has

serious effects on the home, family, children of the marriage, society at large (Ojukwu, 2016).

**Communicating Marital Peace**

Communication is critical to the success of every marriage. Most marriages may break down due to lack of communication. Communication affects every issue in marriage. We must talk about money, conflict and every other area in the relationship, but effective communication never happens by accident, it's always on purpose. Amah (2023) reveals that effective communication is vital in building a strong, healthy, and lasting marriage in Igboland. He further explains that effective Communication in marriage in Igbo land encourages understanding, builds trust, resolves conflicts, improves intimacy, and encourages growth and foster teamwork among the couples.

Communication is a key aspect of every marriage, as it allows couples to express their thoughts, opinions, and desires to each other. Effective communication in marriage encourages couples to build trust, intimacy, and understanding, while lack of communication can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and lack of trust. In the past, communication between married adults was often restricted by cultural and social norms that placed a great emphasis on gender roles and power dynamics within the relationship. This led to a lack of openness and honesty in communication, which could negatively impact marital peace and trust.

However, over time, there has been a shift towards more equal relationships, where communication is seen as a key component of a healthy and fulfilling marriage. This has led to the development of various communication strategies and techniques designed to improve marital intimacy and trust, such as active listening, non-defensive communication. Families that value a lot of talking believe it helps them stay close and understand each other better. They see regular communication as a key way to teach and guide their children. But families that don't talk much don't think it's necessary to share ideas or talk often in order to function well or raise their kids (Evans, 2024).

Family communication encompasses the ways spouses and children exchange information, thoughts, and emotions, either verbally or non-verbally. It involves the continuous process of sending and receiving messages between husband and wife as they engage in their marital relationship. Through communication, couples are able to understand, share, and connect on various aspects such as emotions, thoughts, past experiences, and personal challenges within and beyond the relationship. Effective family communication serves as the foundation that unites spouses, strengthens their relationship, and drives the overall functioning of the family. Peace communication, in particular, fosters courage an essential trait in any thriving marriage. It enables couples to consider and respect each other's perspectives, even in the face of external influences. Family communication involves verbal and non-verbal interactions that help in building relationships and managing family roles. It is

essential in shaping emotional closeness and resolving conflicts (Johnson & Roloff, 2020).

On the other hand, Marital Peace is the result of intentional effort, mutual respect, understanding, living in harmony and emotional maturity between two people who are committed to building a lasting and meaningful marriage. Marital peace refers to the state of living in harmony, understanding one another and emotional closeness that exists between spouses. It is vital for building a strong and satisfying marriage, as it contributes to the emotional well-being and happiness of the family. He further explains that a healthy and successful marriage depends on how husbands and wives relate to each other how well they support one another, and the level of their commitment to the relationship (Igbinoba, 2023).

**Community Radio and Marital Peace**

As a significant information source, community radio raises awareness and gives practical skills to rural communities. A widespread belief holds that community-based media are powerful since they provide a voice for the voiceless, give skills for empowerment and help the communities in peace resolutions (Backhaus 2020). The current study investigates the potential and limitations of Nigeria's Orisun 89.5 FM community radio project in promoting post-conflict peace-building. The investigation is carried out in Ile-Ife, an old Yoruba town that is regarded as the birthplace of civilization, in the suburbs. Ife is the ancestral and spiritual home of every Yoruba, according to folklore. Ile-Ife is thought to have been the starting point for the creation of the planet. Consequently,

it is known as the 'Land of the Source' in common parlance. Ife Central and Ife East are the two local governments that manage Ile-Ife administratively (Osun State Government 2017).

Jallov (2012) in *Emovwodo, Adedimeji, Saud & Ida (2024)* reveals some importance of community radio to peace-building efforts by stating that community radio is crucial to: reaching most of those 'hardest to reach' regions, including those where people are living in conflict or in unstable environments, it is transistor or automobile, radio reception is portable and accessible to receivers. Radio can theoretically be heard anywhere, it is simple to manufacture radio, and it is simple to include numerous voices, including voices of individuals who are typically 'voiceless', listeners can easily access the radio and provide feedback by dialing in, sending texts or using digital services like text (SMS and other messaging systems) or voice calls and if there is political will and a local vision, radio has the potential to be a forum for public discourse and the growth of a sense of citizenship.

Community radio broadcasters are most effective in countering disinformation circulating at state or national levels since these kinds of messages are fact-checked quickly and broadcasters can locate these fact-checked reports and use it for their own programming. However, community radio broadcasters have found it challenging to effectively counter disinformation produced and circulating at the hyper-local and local levels. In some countries, broadcasters are either prohibited by law or culturally discouraged to discuss electoral politics (Balan

& Norman, 2012). Clearly, disinformation in this domain is hard to challenge or counter since doing so could involve the risk of upsetting powerful political actors and the radio stations could face adverse consequences. Similar risks are involved with countering disinformation in the domain of religion or faith.

Community radio sustains marital peace by promoting dialogue, facilitating understanding, providing education on conflict resolution, and giving voice to marginalized groups, including those affected by domestic violence (Nnah, 2020). By broadcasting in local languages and addressing issues relevant to the community, such as domestic issues and cultural conflicts, community radio empowers people, offers practical solutions, and creates a supportive environment for peaceful coexistence within families and the wider society.

**Review of Empirical Studies**

A study conducted by Omeje, Ugwu, and Ogidi (2022), on Influence of marital communication on family stability of married teachers in Nsukka education zone. The study investigated how marital communication affects family stability among married teachers in the Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State. The research was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. The study targeted a population of 1,688 married secondary school teachers in the zone, from which a sample of 455 participants was selected using proportionate stratified sampling. A correlational research design was employed, and data were gathered through a questionnaire. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation ($p <$

0.05) between marital communication and family stability among the participants. Based on the results, the researchers offered recommendations and highlighted the implications of the findings, including the suggestion that married teachers should avoid linking family issues to specific communication styles in various situations.

Awosan, and Okolo (2023) carried out a study on effects of spousal communication on marital stability and productivity in Nigeria. This study aims to determine the effects of spousal communication on marital stability and productivity in Nigeria. This research adopted the Solution Focused Theory of premarital screening and the Sound Relationship House Theory as its theoretical frameworks. A systematic review method was employed for the purpose of this research to search the major digital databases in order to locate all relevant published works that address one or more of the critical concepts examined in the paper, followed by a systematic integration and presentation of the findings.

Egharevba & Omosuvb (2021) in their study focused on the role of the extended family on marital instability in Egor Local Government Area of Edo State. The objectives were to ascertain the underlining causes of marital instability among couples and the roles the extended family system play in marital instability. The theoretical framework utilized was the Conjoint Family Counseling Theory. The study adopted a cross-sectional research design. The population comprised literate and non-literate persons aged 18 and above residing in the study area as at the time of the research and have been in

marital union. The study involved 200 participants who were selected through the simple random sampling technique from an estimated population of 41,311 people in the area. Instruments of data collection include the use of a structured questionnaire and an in-depth interview guide. Findings of the study revealed that the extended family members in the study area are part and parcel of the marriages either directly or indirectly. The roles played by the extended family members in marital union impact the marital dispute or settlement depending on their standpoint. Hence, the study recommended that the extended family members work in harmony with those in a marriage relationship and make sure there is love, peace and mutual understanding between couples.

Egharevba& Omijie (2024) did a study that examined the contributing factors of marriage dissolution in Oredo Local Government, Edo State, Nigeria. The objectives studieswere: to ascertain the impact of communication on marriage dissolution in Oredo Local Government Area and assess the impact of ethnicity on marriage dissolution in Oredo Local Government Area, Edo State Nigeria. The paper adopted Social Learning theory because it best explains the topic under investigation hence it was selected for the study. The study adopted the survey research design. The design was best suitable for the study because of the nature of the study. The study population included all marriage couples from 18years and above in Oredo Local government Area. This was irrespective of ethnic background, sex or colour, religionand occupation. Oredo Local Government Area has a population of 110,238 couples; Oredo also has a

projected population up to the year 2021 was 534,206 couples. (The Oredo LGA statistical department) the sample size of the study was 400 using Solvin's sample size determination formula. The research established that communication lag has the tenents of fostering marriage dissolution and differences in ethnicity may also be a contributing factor that leads to marriage dissolution. Based on the findings of the study it was recommendations that: couples should participate in premarital education before getting married and the policy makers should advocate for the strengthening of marriage by reforming divorce laws tomake divorce harder to obtain.

*Emovwodo, Adedimeji, Saud & Ida (2024) did a study on community radio and post-conflict peace building.* This study assessed the extent to which community radio has contributed to the peace-building efforts after the Ife–Modakeke conflict in Nigeria, by investigating to ascertain listeners' perceptions and adoption of the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanism in managing the conflict to avoid a violent escalation. The study applied in-depth interviews and collected data with questionnaires. The findings of the study suggested that the inhabitants of Ife and Modakeke listened intensely to and were aware of the conflict resolution programme on one of the popular radio stations, Orisun 89.5 FM. People also used and knew others, who used the radio programme 'ADR mechanism' on the radio to resolve the conflict and avoid violent escalation. Since it was the only peace-building programme, the study found that this radio programme was an effective peace-building tool in

the Ife–Modakeke society. The study recommended that such a good effort should be broadcast more often for further heightened awareness of its diverse listeners.

## Theoretical Framework

This work is anchored on family system theory. The Family Systems Theory, This theory was propounded by psychiatrist Murray Bowen in the 1950s the theory is also known as family therapy. The Bowen theory posts that family members respond to each other in habitual ways, according to their roles within the family and their unspoken relationship agreements. And he understood that these behaviour patterns can create balance but also may produce dysfunction. With this understanding in mind, the family systems approach helps people resolve issues in the context of the family unit. Bowen's family systems theory fosters insight into the family group dynamic, working with it to promote a stable and healthy family. Family system theory is relevant to this study because it helped families to know the importance of effective communication through a channel of community radio in maintaining peace in marriage.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. This method is suitable as it enabled researcher to investigate the already existing situation and acquire first hand information from the respondents to solve the problem of this study.

**Area of the Study and Population of the Study**

This study was carried out in Ebonyi State to ascertain the opinion of the residents on the relevance of community radio on sustaining marital peace in the State. The population size of Ebonyi residents according to Ebonyi State Government (2025) is 4,339,136. Ebonyi State is situated at the South East geo-political zone of Nigeria. It has a total of thirteen Local Government areas with three Senatorial zones. Its capital city is Abakaliki.

**Sample and Sampling Size Determination**

To determine the sample size of the study, online Australian calculator as provide by NSS (National Statistical Service) with a confidence level of 95%, precision level of 0.05% and an estimate of variance (proportion) of 0.5% was used (NSS, 2012). The Australian calculator allows one to calculate the required responding sample size, required error, relative standard error and confidence interval (0.05), proportionate estimate, using just one of these criteria as in an input. The sample size was calculated at 385 respondents. Thereafter, cluster, stratified and simple random sampling technique were applied to select the respondents. Ebonyi State was divided into three Senatorial zones where three Local Government Areas were selected and later narrowed to married residents from each of the three Local Government Areas.

**Instrument of Data Collection and Reliability Test**

The instrument used for the collection of data in this study was structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to elicit information from the selected

residents to respond to questions of this study. The questionnaire was tested for reliability and validity and was justified for this study.

**Method of Data Collection and Analysis**

The questionnaire copies were administered directly to the respondents. All copies filled cum data collected were coded, tabulated and analyzed using descriptive analysis method whereby frequency and simple percentage values are used the present and analyze accordingly.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

This section of this research work deals with the presentation and analysis of data gathered through the use of questionnaire distributed to the respondents. Out of the total of three hundred and eighty five (385) copies of the questionnaire, three hundred and eighty copies (380) were filled and retrieved for analysis as presented in the tables below:

**Table 1: Analysis of Respondents' Demographic Data**

| Sex class | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 150 | 39.5 |
| Female | 230 | 60.5 |
| Total | 380 | 100 |
| Age bracket | Frequency | Percentage |
| 20 -25 years | 68 | 17.9 |
| 26 – 30 years | 49 | 12.9 |
| 31– 35 years | 72 | 18.9 |
| 36 – 40 years | 56 | 14.7 |
| 41 – 45 years | 80 | 21.1 |
| 46 years and above | 55 | 14.5 |
| Total | 380 | 100 |
| Marital status | Frequency | Percentage |
| Active in marriage | 215 | 56.6 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Divorced after married | 62 | 16.3 |
| Widow/Widower | 103 | 27.1 |
| Total | 380 | 100 |

Field survey 2026

The table above, containing the demographic profile of the respondents, shows that 150 (39.5%) of the respondents are males while 230 (60.5%) are females. Thus the majority are females. On the issue of Age, 68 (17.9%) of the respondents were at the age bracket of 20 - 25 years,49 (12.9%) were 26–30 years, 72 (18.9%) were 31– 35 years, 56 (14.7%) were 36- 40 years, 80 (21.1%) were 41-45 years, while 55 (14.5%) were 46 years and above. Thus the majority were at the age of 41-45 years. On the issue of Marital status, 215(56.6%) are married, 62 (16.3%) are divorced and 103 (27.1%) are widowed. Thus, the majority were actively in their marriage bond.

**Table 2: Responses on Ebonyi State residents' access to EBBC community radio messages on marital peace in the State**

| Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Very regular access to the radio on marital peace talks and messages in the State | 117 | 30.8% |
| Rarely or not regular access to radio on marital peace talks and messages | 181 | 47.7% |
| No access or knowledge of radio messages on marital peace in the State | 63 | 16.6% |
| Not interested on issues of radio and marital peace | 19 | 5.0% |
| Total | 380 | 100% |

Field survey 2026

Data analyzed and presented in table 2 above revealed the responses of the respondents on Ebonyi State residents' access to EBBC community radio messages on marital

peace in the State. Out of 380 respondents, 117 or 30.8% of them indicated that there was very regular access to the radio on marital peace talks and messages in the State, 181 or 47.7% indicated not regular access to radio on marital peace talks and messages while 63 or 16.6% indicated no access against 5.0% that indicated not interested on issues of radio and marital peace.

**Table 3: Responses on the role of EBBC community radio on marital peace in Ebonyi State**

| Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Messages on open, honest and regular communication to each partner | 111 | 29.2% |
| Marriage information on trust, mutual understanding and love to one another | 202 | 53.2% |
| Messages on quick resolution of conflicts and understanding of individual differences | 58 | 15.3% |
| Application of marriage counseling and seminars for both husbands and wives | 9 | 2.4% |
| Total | 380 | 100% |

Field survey 2026

On the role of EBBC community radio on marital peace in Ebonyi State, data analyzed and presented in table 3 revealed that 111 or 29.2% of the respondents indicated that messages on open, honest and regular communication to each partner,202 or 53.2% of the respondents indicated that marriage information on trust, mutual understanding and love to one another, and 58 or 15.3% on quick resolution of conflicts and understanding of individual differences while only 9 or 2.4% indicated on the use of counseling and seminars to sustain marriages in Ebonyi State.

**Table 4: Responses on the effectiveness EBBC community radio in sustaining marital peace in Ebonyi State**

| Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| EBBC community radio is highly effective in sustaining marital peace in Ebonyi State | 29 | 7.6 |
| EBBC community radio is fairly or moderately effective in sustaining marital peace in the State | 168 | 44.2 |
| EBBC community radio is lowly or insignificantly effective in sustaining marital peace in the State | 120 | 31.5 |
| EBBC community radio is not effective at all in sustaining marital peace in the State | 63 | 16.7 |
| Total | 380 | 100% |

Field survey 2026

Responses on the effectiveness EBBC community radio in sustaining marital peace in Ebonyi State as presented in table 4 revealed that 29 or 7.6% of them indicated highly effective, 168 or 44.2% indicated fairly or moderately effective while 120 or 31.5% indicated lowly or insignificantly effective and the last set of 63 or 16.7% indicated not effective at all.

## Discussion of Results

In this study, the residents of Ebonyi State selected from three Local Government Areas of the three senatorial zones were studied by seeking their opinion on the relevance of community radio (using Ebonyi State Broadcasting commission radio station as an anchor) in sustaining marital peace in the State. The questionnaire was channeled to married men and women who gave their views on the subject matter. However, the respondents were of different age brackets and marital

status of either actively in marriage, divorced or widowed. The outcome of the inquiry revealed relevant result that can be used in solving the problem of sustaining marital peace in the State.

The result of this study on the level of Ebonyi State residents' access to EBBC community radio messages on marital peace in the State, majority of the respondents indicated "rarely or not regular access to radio on marital peace talks and messages". This reveals that residents of the do not usually access the state radio station on the presentation of its special issues like maintaining marital peace. This is evidence of lack of information interest from the state radio which could be caused by one or two factors against the station or the respondents. The community radio ought to be the voice of the people where reliable information dissemination for community consumption and benefit should emanate from.

Contrary to this result, Suman (2024) discovers that one of the biggest strengths of a community radio is that it can initiate and promote dialogue between conflicting parties in a community, and dialogue often leads to solutions. Many times, problems remain unresolved because they are not addressed in a manner that is conducive to bringing about a reasonable conclusion. Trained local broadcasters can fill this gap through delicate handling of sensitive issues, making sure all parties are well represented and heard. Thus, community radios are meant to facilitate dialogue, and any conflict can only be addressed through dialogue to create understanding and practical solutions.

Result of question two on the role of EBBC community radio on marital peace in Edo State revealed that majority of the respondents covering 53.5% indicate that marriage information on trust, mutual understanding and love to one another. Other views indicated by the respondents are use of messages on open, honest and regular communication to each partner and application of quick resolution of conflicts and understanding of individual differences. These are family peace-building measures that when appropriately and adequately disseminated from the right channel to the right audience would produce the desired result that will sustain marital peace in the State.

Community radio stations like EBBC ought to act as neutral platforms where couples and community members can discuss sensitive issues like domestic violence, marital challenges, and differing needs, which is crucial for resolving conflicts. On the other hand, citizens of the State see the station as theirs where they can express their views, worries, concerns and opinions on important issues like marriage. For instance, through discussions programmes and the sharing of diverse perspectives, radio programs help foster mutual understanding between spouses and different groups, creating a basis for peaceful coexistence of married couples.

On the third question which sought to find out the effectiveness EBBC community radio in sustaining marital peace in Ebonyi State, majority of the respondents indicated that EBBC community radio is fairly or

moderately effective in sustaining marital peace in Ebonyi State. This is followed by the 31.5% of the respondents that indicated that EBBC community radio is lowly or insignificantly effective in sustaining marital peace in Ebonyi State. The implication of this result is that Ebonyi State Broadcasting Commission which is the community radio of the State government as at time of this study was not an effective channel in sustaining marital peace in the State.

A study by Ojo & Ayobolu (2020) indicated that it is regrettably that rural broadcasting (community radio) which ought to be premised on the principles of public interest, conscience and necessity has been put on a rickety control of government or sponsorship. In spite of the fact that, their programmes that are rural oriented policy which requires airing for rural dwellers orientation, often failed to display this responsibility. Despite the fact that community radio programmes especially in indigenous languages have the ability of integrating the rural audience into the mainstay of government rural-agenda, the impact is not strongly felt in most of the rural communities (Ojo & Ayobolu (2020). It is imperative that community radio in Ebonyi State has much to do in this digital age where people can get their needed information at the comfort of their place and time.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study investigated the relevance of community radio in sustaining marital peace in Ebonyi State. The result revealed that in spite of high level of awareness and access to the radio station by majority of the citizens of

Ebonyi State coupled with the evidences of marital peace building messages by the station, the best has not been achieved. The contributions of the State community radio were rate between average and low. In conclusion, Ebonyi State community radio was not an effective medium for sustaining marital peace due to some traditional, religious, information and social factors that should be addressed in line with current needs for the actualization and sustenance of peace in marriages.

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made:

a. The Ebonyi State community radio should collaborate with other mass media especially digital cum social media in conveying or disseminating messages for sustaining marital peace in the state.
b. Professional marriage counselors, church leaders and peace communication experts should partner with community radio on communicating marital peace in Ebonyi State.
c. The EBBC community radio should seek support and sponsor via the State Government and other marriage institutions or agencies to carry out public awareness, education and sensitizationcampaigns in the State.

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# EXAMINING ALGORITHMIC BIAS AGAINST INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE CONTENT ON FACEBOOK AMONG SOUTH-EAST CONTENT CREATORS

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## Abstract

This study investigated perceived algorithmic bias affecting the visibility and treatment of indigenous-language content on Facebook in South-East Nigeria. The study was necessitated by concerns that algorithmic systems may disadvantage indigenous languages in content distribution and moderation. Guided by Algorithmic Justice Theory, the study examined content visibility, effects on content creation, contributing factors, and implications for cultural representation and digital inclusion. A descriptive mixed-methods design was adopted. Using purposive and snowball sampling, data were collected from 384 content creators through questionnaires and 15 in-depth interviews. Of the questionnaires administered, 371 were validly completed, representing a 96.6% response rate. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis.

Findings revealed that respondents perceived indigenous-language content as having lower reach and engagement than English-language content. They also reported misinterpretation of indigenous expressions and inconsistent content moderation. Major perceived contributing factors included inadequate indigenous-language datasets, English-language dominance, and limited cultural contextualisation. The study concluded that perceived algorithmic bias could undermine cultural representation and digital inclusion. It recommended inclusive algorithmic training datasets, collaboration with indigenous-language experts, transparent platform practices, and digital literacy training for content creators.

**Keywords:** Algorithmic bias, Facebook, indigenous languages, cultural representation, digital inclusion.

## Background to the Study

The rapid evolution of digital technology has fundamentally transformed communication practices worldwide, particularly through the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into digital communication systems. Social media platforms such as Facebook have become critical arenas for cultural expression, social interaction, and community engagement. Nsude (2024) observes that AI-powered systems increasingly influence how information is processed, prioritized, distributed, and consumed in digital environments. While these technologies offer opportunities for efficiency and innovation, they have also generated concerns about fairness, inclusiveness, and the representation of diverse linguistic and cultural groups. Consequently, the

algorithms that govern content visibility on social media platforms have been increasingly criticized for perpetuating biases, particularly against Indigenous languages and cultures.

At the global level, algorithmic systems act as primary gatekeepers of information, shaping public discourse by controlling visibility and engagement. Chalaganidze and Tsotniashvili (2024) argue that algorithm-driven platforms significantly determine the structure of the contemporary information ecosystem. Similarly, Gorwa, Binns, and Katzenbach (2020) conceptualize algorithmic moderation as a form of governance in which automated systems exert considerable control over digital communication flows.

In the Nigerian context, this transformation has also manifested significantly. Bassey, Lucas, Ogande, and Zuwaira (2024) note that social media algorithms play a crucial role in amplifying or suppressing voices particularly, during socio-political events such as the '#EndBadGovernance' protests. Their study demonstrates that algorithmic amplification influences content reach and engagement, suggesting that these systems are not neutral but actively shape public visibility and participation. Concerns about fairness and bias in algorithmic systems have become increasingly prominent. Ofosu-Asare (2025) argues that algorithmic bias is structurally embedded in AI systems due to unequal data representation and socio-cultural assumptions. This concern is echoed by Okuonghae, Okonkwo, Okuonghae, and Igbinovia (2025), who found

growing awareness among Nigerians regarding the ethical implications of AI bias and algorithmic decision-making. Such concerns are particularly important in culturally diverse societies where technological systems may not adequately reflect local realities.

Algorithmic bias has been shown to reproduce and intensify existing inequalities. Onoh and Slessor (2026) argue that algorithmic systems can reinforce socio-economic disparities when embedded within unequal structural conditions. Focusing on language and culture, Shahid, Elswah, and Vashistha (2025) emphasize that low-resource languages are significantly underrepresented in AI training datasets. This challenge is especially relevant in multilingual societies such as Nigeria, where Indigenous languages like Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba play vital roles in communication and cultural identity but remain marginalized within many algorithmic systems.

Furthermore, Gwadi and Igbashangev (2024) highlight that AI-driven moderation and fact-checking systems in Nigeria rely heavily on automated tools that often struggle with contextual and linguistic nuances. This limitation becomes more pronounced when dealing with Indigenous language content, which contains cultural meanings and expressions that AI systems may misinterpret. Similarly, Abdullahi (2020) argues that the Nigerian media system is increasingly shifting from traditional human gatekeeping to algorithmic gatekeeping, while regulatory frameworks remain

inadequate to address the challenges associated with algorithm-driven communication.

At the platform level, Facebook exemplifies these dynamics. The platform relies heavily on algorithmic recommendation and moderation systems, yet the operations of these systems remain largely opaque. This opacity creates challenges for creators using Indigenous languages, as their content may be misclassified, deprioritized, or receive lower levels of visibility. In South-East Nigeria, where the Igbo language serves as an important medium of cultural and social expression, concerns have emerged regarding the visibility and performance of Indigenous language content on Facebook.

Despite these concerns, there remains limited empirical research examining how Facebook's algorithm affects Indigenous language creators in South-East Nigeria. The growing reliance on AI-driven systems, combined with concerns about algorithmic bias and linguistic inequality, highlights the need for scholarly investigation. This study therefore seeks to examine algorithmic bias against Indigenous language content on Facebook among South-East Nigerian creators, with a view to understanding its implications for content visibility, cultural representation, and digital inclusion.

## Statement of the Problem

The rapid growth of social media platforms has created unprecedented opportunities for individuals and

communities to create, distribute, and monetize digital content. Platforms such as Facebook have expanded access to information, promoted cultural exchange, and provided content creators with opportunities to reach diverse audiences regardless of geographical location. Ideally, the artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms that power these platforms should distribute content based on relevance, quality, and user preferences without discriminating against creators on the basis of language or cultural background. Such an environment is expected to promote linguistic diversity, cultural inclusion, and equal participation in the digital public sphere.

However, growing concerns among indigenous language content creators suggest that this ideal may not always be achieved. Many creators who publish content in Igbo and other indigenous languages report lower visibility, reduced audience engagement, slower follower growth, and fewer monetization opportunities than creators who publish similar content in English. These experiences have raised concerns that Facebook's algorithm may favour content produced in globally dominant languages while limiting the discoverability of content created in indigenous languages. Since the operation of Facebook's recommendation and moderation systems remains largely opaque, it is difficult to determine whether these disparities result from algorithmic bias, user behaviour, or other platform-related factors.

Although algorithmic bias has attracted increasing scholarly attention, most existing studies have focused on issues such as algorithmic fairness, automated content

moderation, misinformation detection, and language bias in global AI systems (Adeyemi&Okorie, 2022; Shahid et al., 2025). Comparatively little empirical attention has been devoted to understanding how Facebook's algorithms influence the visibility and treatment of indigenous language content in Nigeria, particularly among content creators in the South-East geopolitical zone. Consequently, there is limited context-specific evidence on whether algorithmic bias exists, the factors responsible for it, and its implications for the promotion of indigenous languages, cultural representation, and digital inclusion.

It is against this background that this study investigated algorithmic bias against indigenous language content on Facebook among content creators in South-East Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined the visibility of indigenous language content relative to English-language content, explored how Facebook's algorithm interprets and moderates indigenous language content, identified factors contributing to algorithmic bias, and assessed its implications for cultural representation and digital inclusion. The findings are expected to contribute empirical evidence that can inform platform governance, AI fairness initiatives, digital inclusion policies, and efforts aimed at preserving and promoting indigenous languages in the digital environment.

## Objectives of the Study

To examine algorithmic bias against indigenous language content on Facebook among South-East Nigerian creators.

**Specific Objectives**

5. To assess the visibility of indigenous language content versus English-language content produced by South-East Nigerian creators on Facebook.
6. To examine how algorithmic bias affect content creation on Facebook.
7. To identify the factors contributing to algorithmic bias against indigenous language content in the South East Nigerian context.
8. To evaluate the implications of algorithmic bias for cultural representation and digital inclusion among South-East Nigerian creators.

**Research Questions**

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the extent of Artificial Intelligence adoption in journalism in South-East Nigeria?
2. What are the perceived implications of Artificial Intelligence adoption for information integrity and journalistic credibility in South-East Nigeria?
3. How do citizens perceive the implications of AI-mediated journalism for democratic participation in South-East Nigeria?
4. What strategies can promote responsible AI use, information integrity and credible journalism in South-East Nigeria?

## Review of Related Literature

### Artificial Intelligence, Algorithmic Systems and Linguistic Bias

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems designed to perform tasks associated with human intelligence, including learning, language processing, pattern recognition and decision-making. On social media, AI-powered algorithms influence content recommendation, ranking, distribution and moderation. Gorwa, Binns, and Katzenbach (2020) explain that algorithmic systems have become central to online communication, while Noble (2021) argues that these technologies may reproduce existing social inequalities when their design and data inadequately represent marginalised groups. Algorithmic bias therefore occurs when automated systems systematically disadvantage particular groups, languages or forms of content.

Empirically, Shahid, Elswah, and Vashistha (2025), in their study of colonial biases in automated moderation for low-resource languages, investigated the challenges affecting the moderation of underrepresented languages. Using semi-structured interviews with AI researchers and practitioners, they found that English-centred language models, inadequate linguistic resources and limited access to platform data contributed to moderation errors. The study concluded that these limitations reflected structural inequalities in language technologies. However, it did not examine Facebook's algorithmic practices or the experiences of indigenous-language content creators in South-East Nigeria. The present study addresses this gap

by investigating creators' perceptions of algorithmic bias against indigenous-language content in the region.

## Indigenous Language Content and Digital Marginalisation

Indigenous-language content comprises digital messages, videos, stories and other materials produced in native languages to communicate cultural identities, preserve traditions and share local knowledge. UNESCO (2021) emphasises the importance of indigenous languages in cultural preservation and knowledge transmission. However, Ibrahim and Adamu (2023) observe that African digital spaces remain strongly influenced by dominant languages, potentially limiting the representation of local linguistic identities. Such marginalisation may occur through reduced visibility, limited audience engagement and the inadequate interpretation of culturally specific expressions.

Adeyemi and Okorie (2022), in their study of digital exclusion and language marginalisation in Nigeria's online communication environment, investigated inequalities associated with indigenous-language communication using a survey research design. They found that indigenous-language content experienced lower visibility and engagement than English-language content. The study concluded that linguistic inequality remained a challenge in Nigeria's digital environment. Nevertheless, it did not specifically establish how Facebook's algorithmic systems affected indigenous-language creators in South-East Nigeria. The present study extends this work by examining creators'

perceptions of linguistic bias and its implications for the visibility and engagement of their content on Facebook.

## Facebook Algorithms, Content Visibility and Creator Experiences

Facebook uses AI-driven systems to recommend, rank and moderate content, influencing what users encounter and how far creators' messages circulate. These systems constitute a form of algorithmic gatekeeping because they influence access to audiences and opportunities for digital participation. Gorwa et al. (2020) highlight the growing influence of algorithmic systems on online information flows, while Are and Briggs (2023) demonstrate the importance of transparency and accountability in platform moderation.

In their empirical study of algorithmic justice in social media content moderation, Are and Briggs (2023) used digital ethnography to examine users' experiences with platform moderation. They found that creators encountered unexplained content restrictions and ineffective appeal mechanisms, raising concerns about transparency and accountability. Similarly, Nwafor and Onwumechili (2023), in their study of algorithmic opacity and media power in emerging democracies, employed qualitative analysis and expert interviews. Their findings showed that limited transparency made it difficult for users to understand algorithmic decisions concerning content visibility and moderation. Although these studies established concerns about algorithmic governance, they did not specifically investigate linguistic bias against Facebook creators in South-East

Nigeria. The present study addresses this contextual gap by examining creators' experiences of content visibility, audience reach and perceived algorithmic disadvantage.

## Digital Inclusion, Cultural Representation and Strategies for Addressing Algorithmic Bias

Digital inclusion refers to equitable opportunities to participate in and benefit from digital communication, while cultural representation concerns the visibility of diverse languages, identities and cultural expressions in digital spaces. Van Dijk (2020) highlights inequalities in digital participation, while Couldry and Mejias (2021) explain how digital platforms may reproduce existing social and cultural inequalities. When indigenous-language content receives inadequate recognition or visibility, creators may encounter barriers to audience engagement and cultural expression.

Bassey, Lucas, Ogande, and Zuwaira (2024), in their study of social media algorithms and the amplification of Nigeria's #EndBadGovernance protest, examined how algorithms influenced the circulation of political content through survey and content analysis methods. Their findings showed that algorithmic recommendation affected content visibility and audience reach, demonstrating the importance of platform systems in shaping digital participation. However, their study focused on political mobilisation rather than linguistic inequality, cultural representation or strategies for supporting indigenous-language content. Consequently, it did not establish how creators could address perceived

algorithmic disadvantages associated with indigenous languages.

The present study fills this gap by examining the perceived implications of algorithmic bias for digital inclusion and cultural representation among indigenous-language content creators in South-East Nigeria. It also investigates strategies for improving content visibility, audience engagement and fair representation on Facebook, thereby contributing context-specific evidence to discussions on algorithmic fairness and inclusive digital communication.

## Theoretical Framework

### Algorithmic Justice Theory

Algorithmic Justice Theory draws on critical scholarship examining fairness, accountability, transparency and inclusiveness in algorithmic systems. Ruha Benjamin's work on discriminatory technological systems provides an important foundation for understanding how technologies that appear neutral may reproduce existing social inequalities. Benjamin (2020) argues that technological systems can reflect the social assumptions and institutional structures embedded in their design, while Noble (2021) demonstrates how algorithmic processes may privilege dominant groups and marginalise underrepresented communities.

The theory is relevant to social media because algorithms influence content recommendation, ranking, distribution and moderation. Where these systems inadequately recognise indigenous languages or culturally specific

expressions, creators may experience reduced content visibility, inappropriate moderation or unequal opportunities to reach audiences. Such outcomes raise questions about algorithmic fairness and whether digital platforms adequately accommodate linguistic and cultural diversity.

The relevance of Algorithmic Justice Theory to the present study lies in its capacity to explain perceived algorithmic disadvantages experienced by indigenous-language content creators on Facebook in South-East Nigeria. It provides a framework for examining creators' experiences of content visibility, audience engagement, moderation and cultural representation, as well as their views on strategies for promoting fairer algorithmic practices. The theory therefore guides the investigation of how Facebook's algorithmic systems may affect indigenous-language content and the opportunities available to its creators.

## Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive mixed-methods research design, combining a quantitative survey with qualitative in-depth interviews to examine perceived algorithmic bias against indigenous-language content on Facebook among content creators in South-East Nigeria. The mixed-methods approach enabled the integration of numerical data with participants' experiences and perceptions The study was conducted in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. The population comprised active Facebook content creators who produce content in indigenous languages across the five states. Since no

reliable official record of the population was available, it was treated as unknown. The quantitative sample size was determined using the Topman formula for an unknown population:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 P(1-P)}{e^2}$$

Using a 95% confidence level (1.96), population proportion of 0.50 and margin of error of 0.05, the calculated sample size was approximately 384 respondents. Additionally, 15 content creators were purposively selected for in-depth interviews.

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed to identify eligible respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and an in-depth interview guide. The instruments were validated by experts in Mass Communication and research methodology. A pilot study was conducted among individuals with similar characteristics outside the main study, and Cronbach's alpha produced a reliability coefficient above the acceptable threshold of 0.70.

Copies of the questionnaire were administered electronically through Facebook creator groups, Messenger, WhatsApp and relevant creator networks, while interviews were conducted virtually, by telephone or face-to-face. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. Findings from both approaches were integrated during interpretation.

Ethical requirements were observed throughout the study. Participants provided informed consent, participation was voluntary, and confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw were respected. All information collected was used strictly for academic purposes.

## Results

A total of 384 copies of the questionnaire were administered, out of which 371 were correctly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 96.6%. The analysis is presented according to the research objectives.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 371)**

| Variables | Categories | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 212 | 57.1 |
| | Female | 159 | 42.9 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| Age | 18–25 years | 76 | 20.5 |
| | 26–35 years | 158 | 42.6 |
| | 36–45 years | 91 | 24.5 |
| | 46 years and above | 46 | 12.4 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| Educational Qualification | Secondary School Certificate | 42 | 11.3 |
| | OND/NCE | 68 | 18.3 |
| | HND/Bachelor's Degree | 187 | 50.4 |

| Variables | Categories | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Postgraduate Degree | 74 | 20.0 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| Years of Content Creation on Facebook | Less than 1 year | 38 | 10.2 |
| | 1–3 years | 121 | 32.6 |
| | 4–6 years | 136 | 36.7 |
| | Above 6 years | 76 | 20.5 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| Primary Language of Content Creation | Igbo | 138 | 37.2 |
| | English | 56 | 15.1 |
| | Igbo and English | 154 | 41.5 |
| | Others | 23 | 6.2 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The demographic profile shows that the respondents were sufficiently qualified and experienced to provide reliable information on the subject under investigation. The sample was dominated by active Facebook content creators within the economically productive age bracket, with most possessing tertiary education and several years of content creation experience. In addition, a substantial proportion of the respondents produced content in Igbo or a combination of Igbo and English, confirming their relevance to a study focused on indigenous language content on Facebook.

**Table 2: Visibility of Indigenous Language Content on Facebook (N = 371)**

| Variables | Categories | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Indigenous language content receives lower reach than English content | Yes | 286 | 77.1 |
| | No | 85 | 22.9 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| English-language content receives more engagement | Yes | 301 | 81.1 |
| | No | 70 | 18.9 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| Facebook recommends English content more frequently | Yes | 294 | 79.2 |
| | No | 77 | 20.8 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| Indigenous language content experiences lower audience growth | Yes | 278 | 74.9 |
| | No | 93 | 25.1 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The data suggest the existence of noticeable disparities in content visibility on Facebook. Overall, respondents perceived that indigenous language content does not enjoy the same level of exposure, engagement, and audience growth as English-language content. This

pattern indicates a possible algorithmic preference for dominant languages, which may place indigenous language creators at a competitive disadvantage within the platform's communication environment

**Table 3: How Algorithmic Bias Affect Content Creation on Facebook. (N = 371)**

| Variables | Categories | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Indigenous language content is often misinterpreted | Yes | 282 | 76.0 |
| | No | 89 | 24.0 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| Content has been unnecessarily flagged or restricted | Yes | 264 | 71.2 |
| | No | 107 | 28.8 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| Cultural expressions are misunderstood by Facebook systems | Yes | 291 | 78.4 |
| | No | 80 | 21.6 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| Moderation decisions are inconsistent | Yes | 275 | 74.1 |
| | No | 96 | 25.9 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The findings indicate widespread concerns regarding Facebook's ability to effectively process indigenous language content. The responses suggest that indigenous language expressions and culturally embedded messages are frequently subject to misunderstanding and inconsistent moderation outcomes. This raises questions about the capacity of automated systems to accurately recognize linguistic and cultural nuances within local communication contexts.

**Table 4: Factors Contributing to Algorithmic Bias (N = 371)**

| Variables | Categories | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Limited indigenous language datasets | Yes | 309 | 83.3 |
| | No | 62 | 16.7 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| Dominance of English-language training data | Yes | 315 | 84.9 |
| | No | 56 | 15.1 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| Lack of cultural understanding in AI systems | Yes | 297 | 80.1 |
| | No | 74 | 19.9 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| Limited platform localization | Yes | 286 | 77.1 |
| | No | 85 | 22.9 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The results point to structural and technological limitations as the primary drivers of algorithmic bias.

Respondents generally attributed the problem to inadequate representation of indigenous languages in AI development processes and the dominance of English-centered digital infrastructures. The findings imply that existing algorithmic systems may not sufficiently accommodate linguistic diversity within multilingual societies such as Nigeria.

**Table 5: Implications of Algorithmic Bias (N = 371)**

| Variables | Categories | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Algorithmic bias reduces cultural visibility | Yes | 310 | 83.6 |
| | No | 61 | 16.4 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| Bias discourages indigenous language content creation | Yes | 288 | 77.6 |
| | No | 83 | 22.4 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| Bias limits audience growth opportunities | Yes | 301 | 81.1 |
| | No | 70 | 18.9 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |
| Bias affects digital inclusion | Yes | 295 | 79.5 |
| | No | 76 | 20.5 |
| | Total | 371 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The findings reveal that algorithmic bias extends beyond issues of content visibility to broader concerns relating to cultural representation and digital participation. Respondents perceived that unequal algorithmic treatment undermines the online presence of indigenous

languages and may discourage creators from producing culturally relevant content. The overall implication is that persistent algorithmic bias could contribute to the marginalization of indigenous voices within the digital public sphere.

**Analysis of Interview Responses**

Fifteen indigenous-language content creators were interviewed, and their responses were analysed thematically in line with the study objectives. Four major themes emerged.

**Visibility of Indigenous-Language Content:** Most participants perceived that Igbo-language content attracted lower reach, engagement and audience growth than English-language content. Some reported combining both languages to improve visibility. These accounts corroborated the survey findings on perceived disparities in content visibility.

**Perceived Effects of Algorithmic Bias on Content Creation:** Participants reported instances in which Igbo expressions, proverbs and culturally specific phrases were allegedly misinterpreted by Facebook's moderation systems, resulting in content flagging or restricted distribution. These experiences suggest possible limitations in the platform's handling of indigenous linguistic and cultural contexts.

**Factors Responsible for Algorithmic Bias:** Participants attributed the perceived bias to the dominance of English-language data, inadequate indigenous-language resources and limited cultural contextualisation in AI systems.

These views were consistent with the survey findings on factors contributing to algorithmic bias.

**Implications for Cultural Representation and Digital Inclusion:** Participants expressed concern that reduced content visibility could discourage indigenous-language content creation and constrain cultural promotion, language preservation, audience development and digital participation. These concerns reinforced the survey findings regarding the perceived implications of algorithmic bias for cultural representation and digital inclusion.

## Discussion of Findings

The study found, from both the quantitative and qualitative data, that indigenous language content receives lower visibility, engagement, and audience reach on Facebook than English-language content. While the questionnaire responses indicated that most respondents perceived Facebook's algorithm to favor English-language posts, interview participants reinforced this view by explaining that content written in Igbo often records fewer views and interactions despite similar quality. This finding suggests that language significantly influences content visibility on the platform and supports the findings of Shahid, Elswah, and Vashistha (2025) and Adeyemi and Okorie (2022), who reported that indigenous and low-resource languages are disadvantaged within digital platforms.

The quantitative and qualitative findings also converged in showing that Facebook's algorithm encounters difficulties in interpreting and moderating indigenous

language content. Respondents agreed that indigenous language posts are sometimes unfairly restricted, while interview participants attributed this to the algorithm's inability to understand local expressions and cultural contexts. This finding is consistent with Are and Briggs (2023) and Gorwa, Binns, and Katzenbach(2020), who observed that automated moderation systems often produce inaccurate outcomes in multilingual environments.

Furthermore, findings from both data sources identified inadequate indigenous language datasets, the dominance of English-language training data, and limited platform localization as the major causes of algorithmic bias. Respondents ranked these among the leading factors, while interview participants emphasized that Facebook appears to be optimized primarily for dominant global languages. This corroborates the findings of Ibrahim and Adamu (2023) and Nwafor and Onwumechili (2023), who linked platform design to language-based digital inequalities.

Finally, both the survey and interview findings revealed that algorithmic bias negatively affects cultural representation and digital inclusion by discouraging indigenous language content creation, reducing audience growth, and limiting the online visibility of indigenous cultures. These findings support Bassey, Lucas, Ogande, and Zuwaira (2024), who demonstrated that social media algorithms shape online visibility, and further validate Algorithmic Justice Theory, which explains how algorithmic systems can reproduce linguistic inequalities. Overall, the combined quantitative and qualitative

evidence indicates that algorithmic bias remains a significant challenge for indigenous language content creators on Facebook in South-East Nigeria.

## Summary of Findings

The study examined perceived algorithmic bias against indigenous-language content on Facebook among content creators in South-East Nigeria. The findings revealed that creators perceived their indigenous-language content to receive lower visibility, reach and engagement than English-language content, prompting some to adopt code-switching to improve audience reach. Participants also reported perceived difficulties with Facebook's moderation systems, particularly the alleged misinterpretation of indigenous expressions, proverbs and culturally specific phrases. The respondents attributed these perceived challenges to the dominance of English-language datasets, inadequate indigenous-language resources and limited cultural contextualisation in algorithmic systems. Furthermore, the findings indicated that perceived algorithmic bias could discourage indigenous-language content creation, limit cultural representation and constrain digital inclusion. Consequently, participants emphasised the need for greater algorithmic fairness, transparency and linguistic inclusion to promote equitable visibility and support the preservation and dissemination of indigenous languages on Facebook.

## Conclusion

The study concluded that perceived algorithmic bias presents a potential challenge to the visibility and representation of indigenous-language content on Facebook in South-East Nigeria. Although the platform provides opportunities for cultural expression and audience engagement, concerns about content distribution and moderation may limit these benefits. Promoting linguistic diversity requires more inclusive platform systems, greater transparency and sustained support for indigenous-language content creators.

## Recommendations

1. Facebook should expand its algorithmic training datasets to include Igbo and other Nigerian indigenous languages to improve content visibility and recommendation fairness.

2. Facebook should collaborate with Nigerian linguists and indigenous-language experts to improve moderation accuracy and reduce the misinterpretation of cultural expressions.

3. The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) and the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) should encourage social media platforms to adopt transparent, fair and inclusive practices in handling indigenous-language content.

4. Universities, media organisations and cultural institutions in South-East Nigeria should provide digital

literacy training to help indigenous-language creators improve content quality, visibility and engagement.

## Contribution to Knowledge

The study contributed to knowledge by providing context-specific evidence on perceived algorithmic bias against indigenous-language content creators in South-East Nigeria. It extended scholarship on algorithmic justice by connecting content visibility and moderation with linguistic diversity, cultural representation and digital inclusion in the Nigerian social media environment.

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# DEGREE OF LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE OF KINDERGARTEN TWO AND THREE PUPILS IN EARLY READING IN OWERRI NORTH L.G.A OF IMO STATE.

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## Abstract

*This study investigatesdegree of linguistic competence of kindergarten 2 and 3 pupils in earlyreading in Owerri North L.G.A. of Imo State. Its objective was to determine the influence of age, gender and location on each of the two classes in the following areas of early reading: phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension and fluency. This study adopts a quantitative research paradigm precisely, a descriptive survey. The population of the study comprised all the kindergarten2 and 3 pupils in both public and private schools in Owerri North L.G.A of Imo State. Through stratified random sampling, a total of 200 pupils were selected from both kindergarten 2 and 3 classes. The instrument used for data collection was a self-constructed test instrument titled Early Reading Linguistic Competence Test (ERLCT) which was validated by three experts from the departments of Measurement and Evaluation, Early Childhood Care and Education and Linguistics respectively. ERLCT was administered in two phases within an interval of two weeks at the beginning of a new academic session. Data*

*wereanalysed using paired mean differences, standard deviations and t-test. Results revealed that kindergarten 2 could not demonstrate adequate linguistic competence in the early reading components in the context of the independent variables age, gender and location. Kindergarten 3 on the other hand showed variations of adequate linguistic competence in some of the early reading components in the context of age and gender. It was therefore concluded among others that age and gender, influence the degree oflinguistic competence of kindergarten pupils in early reading while location is considered to have no influence. Consequently, this study fills a knowledge gap in early reading in the context of Owerri North L.G.A of Imo State, Nigeria.*

## Introduction

The emergence of language in a child occurs at the early stage of a child's development and this sequencecould be perceived as language development. In this light, Oluikpe and Oluikpe (2014) conceives language development as 'the process involved in acquiring and learning a language'. By implication, language development is a synthesis of two key concepts which are *acquisition* and *learning.* It can be described as a process that happens in a natural environment unconsciously and effortlessly and does not also require a teacher. Language learning on the other hand, takes place in a school setting. It is done with some level of consciousness and some efforts. Also, it requires a teacher. Summarily put, language development in children is the development of the linguistic structures: phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics of a language.

The development of language in children progresses from simple to complex. Hence, it undergoes a process. Youssra and Aya (2020) describes that language development in children takes place from birth to 6 years. To them, it occurs in stages and basically begins with the pre-linguistic stage from birth to 10 months. At the pre-linguistic stage, the child tries to convey messages as hunger, thirst and others at first through crying. This stage is followed by cooing. During this stage, the vocalization consists of short vowels like /u/ or a combination of a short vowel and a consonant sound to create gurgling sounds. Between ages 5 and 12 months is the blabbing stage. It involves a broader variety of vivid sounds. Between ages 12 months and 18 months is the holophrastic stage. At this stage of language development, the child uses a single word to express a sentence. This is followed by the two word sentence stage at 18 to 20 months. At ages 2 and 3 is the telegraphic stage. This is the stage a child can make three or four sentences to express himself.The above descriptions byYoussra and Aya for language development are the preconditions that that can enable reading in children. .

At school, the child's linguistic skill is further enhanced through the introduction of reading. This type of reading could be called early reading. Suggate (2013), sees early reading as "reading before children are readily able to learn to read or before the transition into middle childhood" (p.124). From Suggate's view about early reading, it can be deduced that early readers are children between the ages of three and seven. Considering the age of the early readers, early reading follows a systematic

process for effectiveness. Some prescriptions for developing early reading have been explored in the past. Some of suchprescriptions include basal reading, phonics and whole language.

In the 1930s, basal reading was a popular method adopted to achieve early reading in America. According to Levine and Munsch (2011),it is non-phonic and it emphasizes sight reading. In a bid to describe its process, they explain that children are introduced to a limited set of words and a great deal of repetition employed to ensure rapid recognition of words once sighted, after which a new set of limited words are also introduced. This process continues in this order until effective reading is achieved.

A close look at the above process suggests that it is greatly influenced by the empiricists' perception aboutlanguagedevelopment.The proponents of this view considera child not to have any idea about reading hence he is inactive and depends only on what the teacher exposes him to through repetition, memorization and practice.Similarly, Bainbridge and Malicky (2000) add that basal reading focuses more on the literal meaning of the words over the other meanings they could have in different contexts.

Sequel to the above is the phonics prescription. According to Carbo (1996), as cited in Levine and Munsch (2011), the phonics prescription was subscribed to in the 1970s as it replaced the basal reading process of developing early reading.According to Texas Education Agency (2004), as cited in Levine and Munsch (2011),

"the phonics methodentails letter/ sound correspondence which are combined to form words" (p.134). It further exemplifies the sounds associated with the letters that make up a word as in *cat* which is phonemically represented as /kæ$t$/. It could be construed that the phonics prescription recognizes letters as sounds which are combined to forms words, and words combined to form sentences.

The above prescription may be a new development when compared to basal reading. However, it is thought not to be superior to the former as it has its obvious flaws. Not every word could be pronounced using letter sound correspondence. Words like *you, key, ewe, the, said* and many other English words defy the provision of the phonics prescription. It also de-emphasizes contextual meaning which limits the vocabulary development of a child. However, the phonics method tends to reflect features of empiricists and rationalists views of child language development respectively. Helping a child to get acquainted with English phonemes through repetition and memorization of the letter sounds, activates the mental language structure that is innate in the child. Consequently, this help given to the child, is inductive, an attribute of the empiricists,while giving the child practical tasks in reading that would require the application of his innate ability that have been activated, is deductive which is an attribute of the rationalists' perception.

Next is the whole language prescription which emerged and dominated the phonics prescription in the 1990s. Armbruster et al (2001), as cited in Levine and Munsch

(2011), explain that this methodcentres on the contextual meaning of words. In other words, it focuses on the comprehension of a passage which is dependent on the meaning of words as a result of the context where they occur. This prescription, however, may be considered to be a bit complex for beginners because a child ought to recognize and understand the meaning of words in isolation first before proceeding to do same in a context. However, this could be simplified to children through the use of pictures that reflect the content of a passage.This prescriptionis perceived to reflect the attributes of the constructivists' view on child language development, as the child is the focus and is actively involved in constructing meaning from a given passage.

Levine and Munsch (2011), report that, by the end of the 1990s, the effectiveness of the whole language prescription was questioned as this triggered off a quest for the best process to develop early reading. Similarly, Callender and Nahmad-Williams (2010), reveal that there was a debate between the adoption of the phonics and whole language prescriptions to early reading. Levine and Munsch (2011), point out that this debate is yet to be resolved.

The language experience process is another prescription that forms a child's prior knowledge in the schema. A child communicates his intentions through a language in which he/she has developed the speaking skill. Hence, when a child's language patterns and experience constitute the materials for reading in a language, reading becomes easier and there is a smooth transition from listening and speaking to reading and writing. Keene

(1985), elaborates that "language experience makes the reading process more natural for the beginner because the language patterns used in the materials are not artificial but match those of the reader" (p.6). Where a child's first language is different from his second language in which he is groomed to read, it is believed that there are patterns of the first language which would facilitate a successful reading in the second language and there are patterns as well which would likely create a difficulty. Consequently, the child's first language experience becomes his/her prior knowledge for speaking, reading and writing in the second language.

In Nigeria today, however, it has been observed that most children in the primary and secondary schools have a reading difficulty while some others find reading labourious. Hence, this affects their academic performance in almost all the subjects. Lawal (1995), endorses the above when he explains thus:

> ... if a learner possesses poor reading habits, he suffers serious handicaps not only in school but also later in the world of work. This is even truer when one considers the fact that education is now learner centred with the more effective techniques placing a far greater emphasis on the learner's ability to read (p.135).

In most kindergarten and primary schools, reading is done using sight reading while some others adopt both sight reading and phonics method (focusing only on the letter sounds) without much emphasis on meaning and vocabulary development. Consequently, early reading skill is not effectively achieved as it reflects in children

who read with difficulty in both primary and secondary schools. However, there could be situations where pedagogy would not pose a difficulty but other variables such as age, location of school, noise, socioeconomic factors and many others beyond the teacher's control create a variation in the pupils' performance in reading. Onoyase (2015), observes that "many variables may be held responsible for either good or poor performance of children in the school. For example, inheritance and the type of school environment have been held accountable" (p.1).Onoyase's opinion suggests that there are other variables that could affect the performance of children in reading. Oluikpe and Oluikpe (2014), categorize these variables into positive and negative. According to them, some of the variables can have a dual function of exhibiting both negative and positive influences while some others have stereotyped function of having either positive or negative influence on the reading performance of pupils. They consider motivation, intelligence, aptitude, self-esteem and risk-taking to have positive influence; inhibition is thought to have a negative influence, while attitude, anxiety, empathy, extroversion, age, and social distance could have either positive or negative influence on the performance of the learners. Summarily put, these variables could be within the learner or outside the learner. Consequently, to forestall the above reading challenges and difficulties among some primary and secondary school students, necessitates the pertinence to introduce early reading skills to kindergarten pupils at their foundational level as well asdetermine the level of skill and exposure given to

children at this stage that would enable effective reading in children.

Against the above background, there is the need to investigate the degree of linguistic competence of kindergarten two and three pupils in early reading in Owerri North L.G.A of Imo State in the context of such variables as*class/age*(Vlachos & Papadimitriou 2015; Moran. Senseny&Mitton 2016; Thoren, Heinig& Brunner 2016).*Gender* (Mohr & Price 2016;Hu, Yan, Wen & Wang 2021;Lepper&Rabrig 2021). *Location* (Essien 2017; Amadi, Nnaman & Ukoha 2018; Awopetu & Ossom 2018). These studies on the variables, class, gender and location above reveal that the aforementioned variables are researchable. Consequently, they qualify for use in this study.

## Statement of the Problem

Reading difficulty among primary school children could be traced to language disorder, delays in language development and poor reading foundation. Lawal (2023) in study affirms that 'reading and numeracy serve as the foundation for acquiring formal knowledge in our educational system and have encountered difficulties in recent years'. He further revealsthat 'there was a decline in pupils' academic performance in literacy and numeracy. For 2019,2020 and 2021 were 52%, 54% and 60% respectively'(pg4).Concurring with the above discovery, Bilyaminu (2021) expressed that the issue of reading has been perceived by different authorities in the educational sector as an area of concern (pg.19).The above exposition on the growing concern of poor

performance in reading motivated this study. This poor performance in reading could be influenced by such variables as class, gender, location as classroom observation appear to indicate.

**Hypothesis**

The following hypotheses were constructed to guide the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of kindergarten 2 pupils showing adequate linguistic competence in the following components of early reading:
    - Phonemic awareness
    - Word recognition
    - Comprehension
    - Fluency
2. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of kindergarten 3 pupils showing adequate linguistic competence in the following components of early reading:
    - Phonemic awareness
    - Word recognition
    - Comprehension
    - Fluency
3. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male kindergarten 2 showing adequate linguistic competence in the following components of early reading:
    - Phonemic awareness
    - Word recognition
    - Comprehension

- Fluency

4. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of female kindergarten 2 showing adequate linguistic competence in the following components of early reading:
    - Phonemic awareness
    - Word recognition
    - Comprehension
    - Fluency
5. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male kindergarten 3 showing adequate linguistic competence in the following components of early reading:
    - Phonemic awareness
    - Word recognition
    - Comprehension
    - Fluency
6. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of female kindergarten 3 showing adequate linguistic competence in the following components of early reading:
    - Phonemic awareness
    - Word recognition
    - Comprehension
    - Fluency
7. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of kindergarten 2 in the urban area showing adequate linguistic competence in the following components of early reading:
    - Phonemic awareness
    - Word recognition

- Comprehension
- Fluency

8. There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of kindergarten 2 in the rural area showing adequate linguistic competence in the following components of early reading:
    - Phonemic awareness
    - Word recognition
    - Comprehension
    - Fluency?

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the study in broad terms is to determine the degree oflinguistic competence of kindergarten 2 and 3 pupils in early reading. Specifically, the objective of the study is to determine the linguistic competence of each of the two classes in early reading and the influence of the variables; age, gender and location on the linguistic competence in the following areas of early reading:

- Phonemic awareness
- Word recognition
- Comprehension
- Fluency

**Methodology**

This study employs a quantitative research paradigm, precisely a descriptive survey. The design entails the collection and use of data systematically from a given sample to describe certain characteristic features of the population. Specifically, it describes the findings on the degree of linguistic competence of kindergarten two and

three pupils in early reading in the context of the variables class, gender and location.

The area of the study is Owerri North L.G.A. of Imo State. Owerri North L.G.A. is one of the 27 L.G.As in Imo State, Nigeria. There are 245 nursery and primary schools in Owerri North LGA. 47 are public schools while 198 are registered private schools according to the Imo State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB).
The population of the study indicates the total number of kindergarten 2 and 3 pupils in Owerri North L.G.A. of Imo State as follows:

***Table 1:Distribution of Kindergarten Schools in Owerri North LGA***

| **Locality** | **No of Schools** | **K2** | **K3** | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Male Female** | **Male Female** | |
| Urban | 80 | 1,823 1,773 | 1,731 1,821 | 7,148 |
| Rural | 165 | 2,791 2,592 | 3,044 2,811 | 11,238 |

Table 1 shows the number of nursery schools in Owerri North L.G.A. Out of two hundred and forty-five schools in the area, one hundred and sixty-five are in the rural area while eighty schools are in the urban area. In the same vein, K2 and K3 classes in the urban area have a total number of 7,148 pupils while their counterparts in the rural area havea total number of 11,238 pupils in K2 and K3 classes as revealed by the Education Management

and Information System (EMIS), Department of Planning Research and Statistics SUBEB, Imo State.

The sampling technique employed to ensure that all the relevant features of the study population were adequately represented in the study was stratified random sampling technique. The stratification was along location of schools, gender and class of the sampled population as the following tables reveal:

***Table 2: Sample Distribution of Schools***

| **Locality** | **Name of School** | **Population of Schools** |
|---|---|---|
| Urban | 1.Calvary Int'l School Orji | 74 |
| | 2. Greenland Int'l School Orji | 82 |
| | 3. Akwakuma Primary School Akwakuma | 112 |
| | 4.Owaelu Primary SchoolUratta | 82 |
| | 5. Community School Alum Orii/Uratta | 43 |
| Rural | 1. Aunty Bertha's Educational Centre | 66 |
| | 2.Holy Family Nursery & Primary School Uratta | |
| | 3. Community Central School Emekuku | 42 |
| | 4. Community School OwallaUratta | 187 |
| | 5. Alpha Groups Academy Orji | 42 |
| | | 38 |
| | **Total** | |

Table 2 represents the sample distribution of schools in Owerri North L.G.A of Imo State. It shows that out of the 245 nursery schools in the local government area, approximately 5% of the total number was selected. Hence, a total number of 10 schools were selected for the study. 5 schools is located in the urban area while the other 5 schools is located in the rural area. The total population of K2 and K3 pupils in the ten schools is 768. From these ten schools, the target population was selected through stratified random sampling as shown below:

***Table 3: Sample Distribution by Class***

| Locality/ School | No of Pupils Per Class | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| | K2 | K3 | |
| **Urban** | | | |
| 1.Calvary Int'l School Orji | 15 | 15 | 30 |
| 2. Greenland Int'l School Orji | 09 | 08 | 17 |
| 3. Akwakuma Primary School Akwakuma | 14 | 13 | 27 |
| 4.Owaelu Primary School Uratta | 05 | 05 | 10 |
| 5. Community School Alum Orii/Uratta | 06 | 10 | 16 |
| **Rural** | | | |
| 1. Aunty Bertha's Educational Centre | 05 | 09 | 14 |
| 2. Holy Family Nursery & Primary School Uratta | 10 | 09 | 19 |
| 3. Community Central School Emekuku | 13 | 16 | 29 |
| 4. Community School OwallaUratta | 10 | 08 | 18 |
| 5. Alpha Groups Academy Orji | 10 | 10 | 20 |
| **Total** | 97 | 103 | 200 |

Table 3 indicates that out of 768 selected sample population, 97 were drawn for K2 while 103 for K3 classes. Below is a table on gender which is a variable in the study.

***Table 4: Sample Distribution by Gender***

| Locality/School | Gender of Pupils | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | K2 | | K3 | | |
| | m | f | m | f | |
| **Urban** | | | | | |
| 1.Calvary Int'l School Orji | 09 | 06 | 07 | 08 | 30 |
| 2. Greenland Int'l School Orji | 04 | 05 | 04 | 04 | 17 |
| 3. Akwakuma Primary School Akwakuma | 07 | 07 | 07 | 06 | 27 |
| 4.Owaelu Primary School Uratta | 01 | 04 | 04 | 01 | 10 |
| 5. Community School Alum Orii/Uratta | 03 | 03 | 05 | 05 | 16 |
| **Rural** | | | | | |
| 1. Aunty Bertha's Educational | 04 | 01 | 05 | 04 | 14 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Centre<br>2. Holy Family Nursery & Primary School Uratta<br>3. Community Central School Emekuku<br>4. Community School OwallaUratta<br>5. Alpha Groups Academy Orji | 05<br>07<br>05<br>05 | 05<br>06<br>05<br>05 | 05<br>07<br>04<br>06 | 05<br>09<br>04<br>03 | 20<br>29<br>18<br>19 |
| **Total** | 50 | 47 | 54 | 49 | |
| **Grand Total** | Male - 97 | | Female-103 | | **200** |

Table 4 above indicates the sample distribution of pupils according to gender. Out of the 200 pupils selected as the representative sample, 97 are males while 103 are females.

***Table 5: Sample Distribution by Location***

| **Locality** | **Name of School** | **No of Pupils** |
|---|---|---|
| Urban | 1.Calvary Int'l School Orji<br>2. Greenland Int'l School Orji<br>3. Akwakuma Primary School Akwakuma<br>4.Owaelu Primary School Uratta<br>5. Community School Alum Orii/Uratta | 30<br>17<br>27<br>10<br>16 |
| | Total | 100 |
| Rural | 1. Aunty Bertha's Educational Centre<br>2.Holy Family Nursery & Primary School Uratta<br>3. Community Central School Emekuku<br>4. Community School OwallaUratta<br>5. Alpha Groups Academy Orji | 14<br>20<br>29<br>18<br>19 |
| | Total | 100 |
| | **Grand Total** | **200** |

Table 5 sample distribution shows the sample distribution of schools according to location. Out of the 200 pupils randomly selected for the study, 100 pupils are from five schools in the urban area while 100 pupils are from five

schools in the rural location of Owerri North L.G.A respectively.

The instrument used for data collection in the study is a self-constructed test called Early Reading Linguistic Competence Test (ERLCT). ERLCT was designed to determine the degree of linguistic competence of kindergarten 2 and 3 in early reading at the beginning of a school year before the commencement of instruction in the following components of early reading:

- Phonemic awareness
- Word recognition
- Comprehension
- Fluency

The instrument has two parts: section 1 and section 2. Section 1 elicits information on the respondents' bio-data with regard to name of school, location of school, class, gender and age.Section 2 on the other hand, is the main test. The test contains 21 items which are divided into five clusters. Each cluster has five questions except for cluster A which has one item. However Cluster Aand B were combined together, given that they assess similar early reading component. Consequently, clusters A and B seek information on letter naming and phonemic awareness respectively. cluster c on word recognition, cluster D on comprehension and cluster E on fluent reading.

The administration and collection of data were done by the researcher, four research assistants in addition to the kindergarten minders in the various schools for the study. They were trained and guided by the researcher on how to administer the instrument. 200 copies of the test

instrument were administered and retrieved the same day both in the first and second administration. The marking of the test instruments administered was solely done by the researcher. The test was marked out of 100 as each of the five clusters of question item carries 20 marks. Considering the age of the population, the ethical observance for this group of children was strictly followed. In this regard, the consent of the school, parents and the respondents were sought. The respondents were not coaxed into participating in the test. It was out of their own volition that they participated. The names of each of the respondents were not included in the bio-data section of the test instrument though age and gender were elicited. To protect these few information about the respondents, the marking of the test instrument and compilation of the scores were solely carried out the researcher.

Data were analysedbased on the research questions and hypothesis. The research questions were answered using paired mean differences and standard deviations while the hypothesis was tested using t- test of significant difference between the means. All analyses were performed using SPSS version 25, with significance level set at 0.05. Letter naming and phonemic awareness were combined together in the data analysis because their connection cannot be separated. However, the other areas of early reading were analysed separately.

**Results / Findings**

**Research Question 1**

To what degree do the mean achievement scores of pupils in kindergarten 2 indicate adequate linguistic competence

in early reading in phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension and fluency?

**Table 1: Paired sample means and standard deviation of KG 2 for 1st and 2nd test.**

| Components of Early Reading | 1st test | | | 2nd test | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | N | SD | Mean | SD | Mean Df. |
| PA | 27.6 | 94 | 12.55 | 26.0 | 14.17 | 1.6 |
| WR | 13.4 | 94 | 6.54 | 12.8 | 7.09 | 0.6 |
| Comprehension | 13.4 | 94 | 6.42 | 12.3 | 7.85 | 1.1 |
| Fluency | 12.9 | 94 | 7.04 | 12 | 8.22 | 0.9 |

The above table shows the mean responses, standard deviations and mean difference scores of KG2 pupils in four areas of early reading. The result shows that the mean responses of the pupils in 1st tests for the 4 areas of early reading are greater than that of their 2nd tests with mean differences of 1.6, 0.6, 1.1 and 0.9 for PA, WR, Comp. and Fluency respectively.

The standard deviations for the 4 areas are relatively highly showing that the pupils' responses are not so much clustered to the means.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of kindergarten 2 pupils showing adequate linguistic competence in phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehensive and fluency.

**Table 2:**

**t-calculated values of differences in the means**

| Components of Early Reading | MeanDf. | SD | t-test | Df. | Sig. | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PA | 1.57 | 9.32 | 1.17 | 92 | 0.248 | Not sig. |
| WR | 0.55 | 6.084 | 0.628 | 92 | 0.533 | Not sig. |
| Comprehension | 1.13 | 5.27 | 0.497 | 92 | 0.149 | Not sig. |
| Fluency | 0.98 | 6.15 | 1.091 | 92 | 0.281 | Not sig. |

A comparison of the t-calculated values of the differences in the mean responses of the pupils in their1st (degree of linguistic competence) and 2nd tests indicated the values of 1.17, 0.628, 0.497 and 1.091 for the 4 areas of early reading of phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension and fluency respectively. Given that all these t-test values resulted to respective level of significance of 0.248, 0.533, 0.149 and 0.281 which are greater than the chosen level of 0.05, the difference can be said to be not significant. The null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean scores of the pupils is therefore accepted.

**Research Question 2**

To what degree do the mean achievement scores of pupils in kindergarten 3 indicate adequate linguistic competence in early reading in phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency?

**Table 3: Paired sample means and standard deviation of KG 3**

| | 1st test | | | 2nd test | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Components of Early Reading** | **Mean** | **N** | **SD** | **Mean** | **SD** | **Mean Df.** |
| PA | 33.5 | 106 | 10.07 | 29.9 | 9.02 | 3.56 |
| WR | 13.9 | 106 | 6.78 | 15.4 | 5.17 | 1.46 |
| Comprehension | 13.7 | 106 | 6.95 | 15.9 | 5.95 | 2.19 |
| Fluency | 15.0 | 106 | 7.10 | 12.9 | 8.34 | 2.03 |

Table 3 above shows the mean responses achievement scores of KG3 pupils in the degree of linguistic competence (1st test) and 2nd test in the areas of phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency.

The results indicate that whereas their scores in phonemic awareness and fluency show a reduction in the degree of linguistic competence, which of the 2nd test shows an increase in the areas of word recognition and comprehension with increase in scores of 1.46 and 2.19. This shows adequatelinguistic competence. Their respective standard deviations are relatively high showing that the mean responses of the pupils in all the areas in the two tests are not clustered to the mean.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of KG 3 pupils showing adequate linguistic competence in phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency.

**Table 4: t-calculated values of differences in the means PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency**

| Components of Early Reading | Mean Df. | SD | t-test | Df. | Sig. | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PA | 3.56 | 11.35 | 2.26 | 104 | 0.028 | Sig. |
| WR | 1.47 | 7.09 | 1.51 | 104 | 0.137 | Not sig. |
| Comprehension | 2.19 | 6.91 | 2.31 | 104 | 0.025 | Sig. |
| Fluency | 2.04 | 7.31 | 2.03 | 104 | 0.048 | Sig. |

The results as indicated in the above table shows that the t-test value of the differences in the means for phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency are respectively 2.26, 1.51, 2.13 and 2.03 with

respective levels of significances of 0.028, 0.137, 0.025 and 0.048. This shows that the difference in the mean of phonemic awareness, comprehension, and fluency between the degree of linguistic competence and the pupils 2nd test are significant while that of word recognition is not significant, whereas the significant mean differences between degree of linguistic competence (1st test) and 2nd test in areas of comprehension and fluency are in favour of 2nd test; that of word recognition is in favour of the 1st test. The null hypothesis is accepted for word recognition but rejected for phonemic awareness, comprehension and fluency. The conclusion is that linguistic competence has adequate and significant impact in the areas of comprehension and fluency.

**Research Question 3**

To what degree do the mean achievement scores of male pupils in kindergarten 2 indicate adequate linguistic competence in early reading in phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency?

**Table 5: Paired sample means, standard deviation and mean differences of male KG 2 pupils**

| | 1st test | | | 2nd test | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Components of Early Reading** | **Mean** | **N** | **SD** | **Mean** | **SD** | **Mean Df.** |
| PA | 26.2 | 50 | 12.29 | 26.8 | 13.32 | $0.56^{+}$ |
| WR | 12.4 | 50 | 6.38 | 12.4 | 6.98 | 00 |
| Comprehension | 12.4 | 50 | 6.38 | 12.3 | 7.37 | $0.12^{-}$ |
| Fluency | 12.0 | 50 | 6.76 | 12.1 | 8.07 | $0.88^{-}$ |

The results from the table above indicate the mean achievement scores, standard deviations and mean differences of the pupils in the 4 areas of early reading. It

shows that the pupils' scores in early reading in PA shows adequate linguistic competence given that their scores in the 2nd test is greater than that of 1st test (degree of linguistic competence). That of WR, however, shows no difference while their scores in comprehension and fluency were bigger at the 1st administration than the 2nd test.

Their standard deviations in the 4 areas of early reading are relatively higher showing that the respective scores of the pupils in PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency do not cluster around the mean.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male KG 2 pupils showing adequate linguistic competence in phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension and fluency.

**Table 6:**
**T-calculated values of differences in the means PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency**

| Components of Early Reading | Mean Df | SD | t-test | Df. | Sig. | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PA | .56 | 8.921 | 0.314 | 48 | .756 | Not sig. |
| WR | .000 | 5.196 | 000 | 48 | 1.00 | Not sig. |
| Comprehension | .12 | 4.494 | .134 | 48 | .895 | Not sig. |
| Fluency | .88 | 5.191 | .848 | 48 | .405 | Not sig. |

The results shown in table 6 indicate that the t-test value of differences in the mean achievement scores of the pupils in PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency are respectively .314, 000, .848 and .405. Given that all these levels of significance are greater than the chosen alpha

level of 0.05, the null hypotheses as it relates all the areas of early reading are accepted. The decision therefore is to accept the null hypothesis and state that there is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of the male KG 2 pupils in the degree of linguistic competence (1st test) and 2ndtest.This means that the mean scores of the male pupils in KG 2 do not show adequate difference between degree of linguistic competence and 2nd tests in early reading.

**Research Question 4**

To what degree do the mean achievement scores of female pupils in kindergarten 2 indicate adequate linguistic competence in early reading in phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency?

**Table 7: Paired sample means, standard deviation and mean differences of female KG 2 pupils**

| Componentsof Early Reading | 1st test | | | 2nd test | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Mean** | **N** | **SD** | **Mean** | **SD** | **Mean Df.** |
| PA | 29.1 | 44 | 12.939 | 25.1 | 15.34 | 4 |
| WR | 14.5 | 44 | 6.703 | 13.3 | 7.43 | 1.18 |
| Comprehension | 14.6 | 44 | 6.396 | 12.4 | 8.54 | 2.73 |
| Fluency | 12.9 | 44 | 7.502 | 11.8 | 8.60 | 1.09 |

Table 7 above shows the mean achievement scores of female KG 2 pupils and the difference between these scores in 1st test (degree of linguistic competence) and 2nd test in the 4 areas of early reading. It is also revealed that their mean achievement scores in the degree of linguistic competence (1st test) and 2nd test differ with mean differences of 4, 1.18, 2.73 and 1.09 respectively in areas of PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency. All these

differences are in favour of the 1st test (degree of linguistic competence).That is, the 1st test scores in the 4 areas of early reading are greater than their 2nd test mean achievement scores. The conclusion is that the mean achievement scores of the female KG 2 pupils do not indicate adequate linguistic competence.

**Hypothesis 4:** There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of female KG 2 pupils showing adequate linguistic competence in PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency.

**Table 8:**
**t-calculated values of differences in the means of PA, WR, Comprehension, and fluency**

| Components of Early Reading | Meandf. | SD | t-test | Df. | Sig. | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PA | 4.0 | 9.155 | 2.048 | 42 | .053 | Not sig. |
| WR | 1.18 | 6.946 | 0.798 | 42 | .434 | Not sig. |
| Comprehension | 2.73 | 5.93 | 1.798 | 42 | .087 | Not sig. |
| Fluency | 1.09 | 7.217 | 0.709 | 42 | .486 | Not sig. |

Table 8 above shows the t-test scores of the differences in the mean achievement scores of KG 2 pupils and their degree of linguistic competence. Although the differences in the mean achievement scores between the 1st test (degree of linguistic competence) and the 2nd test are in favour of the degree of linguistic competence, the differences resulted to t-scores of 2.049, 0.798, 1.798 and 0.486 respectively for PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency. These t-scores respectively gave rise to the level of significance of 0.053, 0.434, 0.087 and 0.486 which

are greater than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 indicating that these differences are not significant.The conclusion is that the differences in mean achievement scores of KG 2 female pupils in PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency do not significantly show adequate linguistic competence.

**Research Question 5**

To what degree do the mean achievement scores of male pupils in kindergarten 3 indicate adequate linguistic competence in phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency.

**Table 9: Paired sample means, standard deviations and mean differences of male KG 3 pupils**

| Components of Early Reading | 1st test | | | 2nd test | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | N | SD | Mean | SD | Mean Df. |
| PA | 33.5 | 104 | 10.065 | 29.9 | 9.015 | 3.56 |
| WR | 13.9 | 104 | 6.776 | 15.4 | 5.174 | 1.471 |
| Comprehension | 13.7 | 104 | 6.951 | 15.9 | 5.951 | 2.189 |
| Fluency | 15 | 104 | 7.099 | 12.9 | 8.338 | 2.038 |

Result as indicated in the table above shows that the mean early reading achievement of male pupils in KG 3 in the areas of PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency are respectively 33.5, 13.9, 13.7 and 15 with respective mean differences of 3.56, 1.471, 2.189 and 2.038.

The mean differences of 3.56 and 2.038 are in favour of 1st test (degree of linguistic competence) for PA and fluency while that of 1.471 and 2.089 are in favour of 2nd test for WR and Comprehension indicating adequate degree of linguistic competence. The standard deviations for all the entries are relatively high showing that the

individual mean scores of the male KG 3 pupils are not clustered towards the mean scores.

**Hypothesis 5**

There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male KG 3 pupils showing adequate linguistic competence in the components of early reading; phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency.

**Table 10: t-calculated values of differences in the means PA, WR, Comprehension, and fluency**

| Components of Early Reading | Mean df. | SD | t-test | Df. | Sig. | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PA | 3.56 | 10.356 | 2.260 | 50 | .028 | Sig. |
| WR | 1.471 | 7.315 | 1.512 | 50 | .137 | Not sig. |
| Comprehension | 2.189 | 5.974 | 2.305 | 50 | .025 | Sig. |
| Fluency | 2.038 | 5.665 | 2.078 | 50 | .048 | Sig. |

Table 10 above shows that t-test scores for the differences in the mean achievement scores of 1st test (degree of linguistic competence) and 2nd test are 2.260, 1.512, 2.305 and 2.028 for PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency respectively. These t-test scores resulted to levels of significance of 0.028, .137, .025 and .048. This implies that the differences in mean scores of PA, comprehension and fluency are significant as their obtained levels of significance is less than the chosen level of 0.05 while that of WR early reading component is not significant.The null hypothesis as it relates PA, comprehension and fluency is rejected, while it is accepted for WR.In conclusion, there is a significant difference in the male KG 3 pupils achievement scores showing adequate linguistic competence in

comprehension while that of those showing adequate linguistic competence in area of WR do not differ significantly.

**Research Question 6**

To what degree do the mean achievement scores of female KG 3 indicate adequate linguistic competence in phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency?

**Table 11: Paired sample means, standard deviation and mean differences of female KG 3 pupils**

| Components of Early Reading | 1st test | | | 2nd test | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | N | SD | Mean | SD | Mean Df. |
| PA | 13.3 | 52 | 11.29 | 25.9 | 8.88 | 5.4NA |
| WR | 13.5 | 52 | 7.59 | 16.4 | 5.0 | 2.9 A |
| Comprehension | 13.5 | 52 | 7.84 | 15.2 | 6.6 | 1.7 A |
| Fluency | 16.4 | 52 | 7.02 | 13.7 | 8.77 | 2.7 NA |

The above table shows the mean differences between the achievement scores of female KG 3 pupils, between the degree of linguistic competence scores (1st test) and 2nd test. It shows that their scores in 1st test is greater than that of 2nd test in the components of PA and fluency with mean differences of 5.4 and 2.7 while their scores in 2nd test is greater than that of 1st test indicating adequate linguistic competence with mean differences of 2.9 and 1.7 in WR and comprehension. Their respective standard deviations are relatively highly indicating that the scores are not clustered above the mean they are therefore spread wide apart.

**Hypothesis 6**

There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of female KG 3 pupils showing adequate linguistic competence in phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency.

**Table 12: t-calculated values of differences in the means PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency**

| Components of Early reading | Mean Df. | SD | t-test | Df. | Sig. | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PA | 5.36 | 12.297 | 2.179 | 50 | 0.039 | Sig. |
| WR | 2.85 | 6.703 | 2.165 | 50 | 0.040 | Sig. |
| Comprehension | 1.69 | 7.858 | 1.098 | 50 | 0.283 | Not sig. |
| Fluency | 2.73 | 8.771 | 1.588 | 50 | 0.125 | Not sig. |

The above table shows the t-test scores of differences in the means of 1st and 2nd tests in the areas of PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency. The t-test scores are respectively 2.179, 2.165, 1.098 and 1.588. The level of significance of these t-test are 0.039, 0.040, 0.283 and 0.125. This indicates that the differences of the mean scores between the 1st test (degree of linguistic competence) and 2nd tests in the components of PA and WR are significant while that of comprehension and fluency are not significant. The null hypothesis is therefore not accepted for PA and WR but is accepted for comprehension and fluency.

Note however, that the female pupils' scores in thedegree of linguistic competence adequately reflect in WR and comprehension but that of comprehension is not significant whereas that of WR is significant.

**Research Question 7**

To what degree do the mean achievement scores of KG 2 pupils in the urban area indicate adequate linguistic competence in early reading in phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency?

**Table 13: Paired sample means, standard deviation and mean differences of urban KG 2 pupils**

| | 1st test | | | 2nd test | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Component of Early Reading** | **Mean** | **N** | **SD** | **Mean** | **SD** | **Mean Df.** | **Decision** |
| PA | 34.1 | 60 | 7.50 | 33.7 | 7.81 | 0.4 | NA |
| WR | 16.3 | 60 | 5.03 | 16.7 | 4.21 | 0.4 | A |
| Comprehension | 16.3 | 60 | 4.33 | 16.5 | 5.11 | 0.2 | A |
| Fluency | 15.3 | 60 | 7.13 | 16.2 | 5.76 | 0.9 | A |

Results as indicated on table 13 shows the means and mean differences between the 1st test (degree of linguistic competence) and the 2nd test where the mean of 1st test in the area of PA is greater than that of the 2nd test, the means of urban KG 2 pupils in the 2nd test is greater in the components of WR, comprehension and fluency.The conclusion is that the scores of KG 2 pupils in urban area in the components of WR, comprehension and fluency indicate adequate linguistic competence while that of PA does not indicate adequate linguistic competence.Their respective standard deviation for the 4 components in 1st and 2nd test is relatively small, showing that their scores cluster around the mean.

## Hypothesis 7

There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of KG 2 pupils in the urban area showing adequate linguistic competence in phonemic, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency.

**Table 14: t-calculated values of differences in the means of PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency**

| Components of Early Reading | MeanDf. | SD | t-test | Df. | Sig. | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PA | 0.4 | 7.275 | 0.301 | 58 | .765 | Not Sig. |
| WR | 0.4 | 4.62 | 0.474 | 58 | .639 | Not Sig. |
| Comprehension | .133 | 3.319 | 0.220 | 58 | .827 | Not Sig. |
| Fluency | .90 | 5.294 | 0.931 | 58 | .359 | Not Sig. |

Table 14 presents the t-test scores of the differences in the scores of the urban pupils (KG 2) in the 4 components of early reading. Their t-test scores in PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency are respectively 0.301, 0.474, 0.220 and 0.931.

The t-test scores results in respective level of significance of 0.765, 0.639, 0.827 and 0.359 which are greater than the chosen alpha level of 0.05.

The implication therefore is that null hypothesis is accepted for the 4 components of early reading. The conclusion is that there is no significant difference in the mean scores of the KG 2 urban pupils indicating adequate linguistic competence in early reading. Their scores in the two tests (degree of linguistic competence and 2nd test) do not differ significantly.

**Research Question 8**

To what degree do the mean achievement scores of KG 2 pupils in the rural area indicate adequate linguistic competence in early reading in phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency?

**Table 15: Paired sample means, standard deviation and mean differences ofKG 2 pupils in rural area in PA, WR, comprehension and fluency**

| | 1st test | | | 2nd test | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Component of Early Reading** | **Mean** | **N** | **SD** | **Mean** | **SD** | **Mean Df.** | **Decision** |
| PA | 16.1 | 34 | 11.426 | 12.4 | 12.649 | 3.65 | NA |
| WR | 8.2 | 34 | 5.783 | 6.0 | 5.916 | 2.23 | NA |
| Comprehension | 8.4 | 34 | 6.412 | 5.0 | 6.384 | 3.52 | NA |
| Fluency | 8.7 | 34 | 4.524 | 4.4 | 6.295 | 4.29 | NA |

Results as indicated in the above table shows the mean achievement scores of KG 2 pupils in the rural areas and their mean differences for the 4 components of early reading in the degree oflinguistic competence test 1 and test 2.

The differences between the mean achievement scores of these pupils in the components of PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency for the 1st and 2nd test are 3.65, 2.23, 3.52 and 4.29 respectively. Given that these KG 2 rural pupils' scores for the 1st test is greater than that 2nd test in the 4 areas of early reading, the researcher therefore concludes that the achievement of KG 2 pupils in rural area in the 4 components does not indicate adequate linguistic competence.

The standard deviations in all the cases are relatively high, showing respectively that the scores have a higher spread hence they do not cluster around the mean.

**Hypothesis 8**

There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of KG 2 pupils in the rural area showing adequate linguistic competencein PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency.

**Table 16: t-calculated values of differences in the means of PA, WR, Comprehension, and fluency**

| Components of Early Reading | Mean diff. | SD | t-test | Df. | Sig. | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PA | 3.65 | 11.895 | 1.264 | 32 | 0.224 | Not sig. |
| WR | 2.23 | 7.838 | 1.176 | 32 | 0.257 | Not sig. |
| Comprehension | 3.52 | 7.184 | 1.924 | 32 | 0.072 | Not sig. |
| Fluency | 4.29 | 6.302 | 2.809 | 32 | 0.013 | Sig. |

The table above shows that the t-test scores of the differences in the means of 1st and 2nd tests by KG 2 pupils in the areas of PA, WR, comprehension, and fluency are respectively 1.264, 1.176, 1.924 and 2.809 resulting to levels of significance of 0.224, 0.257, 0.072 and 0.013. Given that the levels of significance in the areas of PA, WR, and comprehension are smaller than the chosen alpha level of 0.05, the differences are not significant but significant in fluency where the level of significance is 0.013 which is smaller than 0.05.

The null hypothesis is therefore accepted in the area of PA, WR, and comprehension but rejected in fluency. The conclusion is that there is no significant difference in the rural KG 2 pupils scores showing adequate linguistic competence in PA, WR, and comprehension whereas a significant difference exists in the area of fluency. Worthy of note however, is that the KG 2 rural pupils'

achievement scores in the 4 areas do not indicate adequate linguistic competence.

**Discussion of the Findings**

Class/ age is one of the major variables investigated in this study. The classes investigated were kindergarten 2 and 3 who invariably are perceived to be within the age range of 4-5 and 5-6 years respectively. Results from the analysis indicated that K2 pupils did not demonstrate adequate linguistic competence in any of the four components of early reading. However, K3 pupils showed adequate linguistic competence in comprehension and fluency components of early reading. Despite that this study is not a comparative study, one would not overlook the obvious that the disparity in the performances of the two classes is as a result of age difference. K3 pupils are more mature and have been exposed to more learning contents in early reading than K2 pupils. Consequently, this study upholds the view that age influences the performances of K2 and K3 pupils in early reading. In this light, Vlachos and Papadimitriou (2015) affirm this position as they acknowledge significant effect of age in reading performance with the older children having better scores than younger ones for reading fluency, reading comprehension and the total reading performance. Also, the result of the study by Moran.Senseny and Mitton (2016) support the above stand as it recognizes a child's developmental age to be the strongest predictor of early literacy learning.In the same vein, the study by Liu, Zhang, Yu, Liu et al (2021) corroborates with the above position.

Following the above discussion, the researcher deduces that the two classes did not receive enormous exposure to learning contents in early reading that comprehensively cover phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension and fluency as it reflects in their performances. K2 pupils could not demonstrate adequate linguistic competence in any of the four areas of early reading even when it is presumed they have learnt some of them in their previous class. This suggests that other variables other than age influence the performance of K2 and K3 pupils in early reading.

Gender is another important variable examined in the study. Results from the analysis show that both the male and female K2 pupils did not demonstrate adequate linguistic competence in any of the four components of early reading. On the other hand, the K3 male pupils demonstrated adequate linguistic competence in comprehension while their female counterpart demonstrated adequate linguistic competence in phonemic awareness and word recognition components of early reading. The above result indicates gender differences in performance in the four components of early reading. This outcomecould be perceived as products of interacting biological, sociocultural and instructional factors (such as differential teacher expectations, home literacy practices, gendered activity pattern). However, this is not the focus of this study even though the above result supports this position.Lepper and Rabrig (2021) holds a similar view as the above and assert that boys' interest was higher in texts with male-attributed topics, male protagonists, and in more difficult

texts, conversely, girls' interest was only affected by text difficulty. Consequently, text-based interest and reading comprehension were significantly related, albeit stronger for boys than for girls.

In addition, the studies by Mohr and Price (2016) and Ngongare, Samalo and Rettob (2021) agree with the above stand. Mohr and Price (2016) acknowledge thatboys learn to read more easily using the natural-style language of 'real' books including vocabulary which goes beyond their assumed decoding ability.In consonance with the above, Ngongare, Samalo and Rettob (2021) affirm thatfemale students outperformed their male counterparts in reading comprehension. In this regard it can be stated that gender differences affect reading comprehension.

Location is also another variable that was examined in the course of this study. The class assessed in this regard was K2 pupils in the urban and rural areas of Owerri North LGA. Both urban and rural K2 pupils demonstrated inadequate reading competence, suggesting the deficit is systematic rather than confined to one setting. Essien (2017) in a study confirms this view and affirms that a school's location has no significant influence on students' academic achievement.

**Conclusion**

Based on the discussion above, the following conclusions are drawn:

- Adequate linguistic competence in early reading develops in phased progression. It covers the following areas – phonemic awareness, word

recognition, comprehension and fluency. Age is a major variable in such development. Gender differences influence the performance of kindergarten pupils in early reading while location has no significant influence.

- In this phased progression, Kindergarten 2 pupils are yet to attain adequate linguistic competence inphonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension and fluency.
- Kindergarten 3 pupils to some extent demonstrated adequate linguistic competence in some of the components of early reading.
- Other variables apart from age and gender influence the competence of kindergarten 2 and 3 in early reading.

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# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF RADIO PUBLIC HEALTH CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES IN NIGERIA

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## AI Use Statement

AI-assisted tools were used solely to support language editing, organization, and improvement of the clarity and readability of this manuscript. The author reviewed, verified all AI-assisted content and remains fully responsible for the originality, accuracy, integrity, and final version of the work.

## Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly transforming communication practices by enabling large-scale data analysis, automated content generation, personalization and interactive engagement. In Nigeria, radio remains an important medium for public health communication

because of its accessibility, affordability, geographical reach and capacity to communicate through diverse languages and formats. However, conventional radio public health campaigns continue to face challenges involving generalized messaging, limited audience intelligence, language diversity, restricted interactivity and difficulties in obtaining timely feedback. This paper examines how AI can transform radio public health campaign strategies in Nigeria. The study is anchored on Agenda-Setting Theory and the Health Belief Model and adopts a qualitative documentary research design. Relevant scholarly publications, empirical studies and institutional documents were reviewed and thematically analyzed around four objectives: AI applications in campaign design and production; AI-enabled audience targeting, personalization, dissemination and engagement; ethical, cultural, technological and professional challenges; and strategies for responsible adoption. The review indicates that AI can support script development, content adaptation, translation, transcription, audience segmentation, feedback analysis, personalized messaging and campaign monitoring. Nigerian evidence further demonstrates that exposure to radio health messages does not necessarily translate into behavioural adoption, reinforcing the need for audience-responsive communication. However, AI adoption also presents risks involving misinformation, algorithmic bias, privacy, cultural and linguistic misrepresentation, professional accountability and digital inequality. The paper concludes that AI should complement rather than replace broadcasters and health professionals. A human-AI collaborative model, supported by ethical governance,

professional verification, local-language capacity, appropriate infrastructure and continuous evaluation, offers the most sustainable pathway for transforming Nigerian radio public health campaigns.

**Keywords:** Artificial intelligence, radio broadcasting, public health campaigns, health communication, audience engagement, message personalization

## Background to the Study

Public health communication is central to health promotion, disease prevention and the improvement of population health. Its effectiveness depends not merely on transmitting information but on developing messages that audiences can understand, trust and translate into appropriate health decisions. In settings characterized by differences in literacy, socioeconomic conditions, access to healthcare and digital technologies, mass media remain important channels for reaching diverse populations.

Radio occupies a particularly important position in Nigeria's media environment. Its relative affordability, portability and geographical reach enable it to serve audiences that may have limited access to print, television or internet-based communication. Its capacity to use English, Nigerian Pidgin and indigenous languages also makes it suitable for communicating health information across culturally diverse communities. Radio has consequently been employed in campaigns concerning infectious diseases, maternal and child health,

immunization, COVID-19, malaria and other public health concerns.

Empirical evidence demonstrates the continuing relevance of radio to Nigerian health communication. Talabi et al. (2022) found that residents in selected South-Western states were exposed to Nigeria Centre for Disease Control radio campaign messages during COVID-19 and perceived the messages as contributing to awareness and adoption of preventive measures. The authors recommended continued use of radio because of its reach and reliability. Similarly, Oko-Epelle and Talabi (2024) found substantial exposure to radio malaria-prevention messages among rural dwellers in Oyo State. However, their findings showed that awareness alone did not determine adoption of preventive measures; positive attitudes towards the messages were more closely associated with adoption. They therefore recommended messages that respond to audience circumstances, cultural beliefs and practical difficulties.

These findings reveal an important limitation of conventional public health broadcasting: message exposure does not automatically produce behavioural change. Radio campaigns may reach large audiences but still have limited impact when messages are overly generalized, insufficiently participatory or poorly adapted to audience beliefs and circumstances. This challenge becomes more significant in Nigeria because health audiences differ considerably in language, location, age, education, socioeconomic circumstances and perceptions of health risks.

The changing communication environment provides new possibilities for addressing these limitations. Radio increasingly interacts with audiences through mobile phones, text messaging, social media, websites and other digital platforms. Consequently, radio is no longer necessarily restricted to a linear sender-message-receiver model. It can participate in a wider communication ecosystem in which audience feedback and digital interaction inform subsequent programming.

It is within this context that artificial intelligence has become increasingly relevant. AI refers broadly to computational systems capable of performing tasks associated with human cognitive functions, including pattern recognition, language processing, prediction, classification and content generation. Generative AI has further expanded these capabilities to include the production and transformation of text, speech and other forms of media.

The potential application of AI to radio public health campaigns extends across the campaign cycle. During planning, AI can assist in processing available information and identifying audience concerns. During production, it can support script drafting, transcription, translation, content adaptation and some aspects of audio production. During dissemination, AI can support content personalization and integration with digital platforms. During evaluation, AI can process large volumes of audience feedback and identify recurring questions, misconceptions and information needs.

The relevance of these possibilities to health communication is supported by Weingott and Parkinson's (2025) scoping review, which examined the application of AI in health communication development and identified growing opportunities for integrating AI with communication, behavioural and social theories. Their review suggests that AI should not be viewed simply as a technical production instrument but as a technology capable of influencing how health communication interventions are designed and implemented.

Nigerian scholarship is also beginning to examine this emerging relationship. Amanawa and Amanawa (2024) discuss the potential of AI to support public health communication through automated data processing, information generation and health education. Ezeaka (2024) similarly identifies opportunities for AI-supported health information dissemination and public awareness while noting limitations involving infrastructure, data management and professional capacity.

The transformation of radio through AI is therefore particularly significant in Nigeria's multilingual and culturally diverse environment. AI-assisted translation and content adaptation could potentially enable broadcasters to produce multiple versions of a campaign for different linguistic groups. Similarly, AI-assisted audience analysis could help broadcasters distinguish between groups with different information needs. However, such applications require human validation because automated systems may produce inaccurate translations or culturally inappropriate expressions.

Ethical considerations are equally important. Health communication involves information that can directly influence individual decisions and behaviours. AI-generated content may contain factual errors, reproduce biases in training data or create misleading synthetic voices and messages. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) therefore emphasizes human autonomy, safety, transparency, accountability, inclusiveness and equity as essential principles for the responsible use of AI in health.

The central issue for Nigerian radio is consequently not whether AI can technically be introduced into broadcasting but how it can be integrated to improve the strategic effectiveness of public health campaigns without undermining accuracy, cultural relevance, professional accountability and public trust.

**Statement of the Problem**

Despite extensive public health communication efforts in Nigeria, translating health information into sustained awareness, positive attitudes and appropriate behaviour remains a challenge. Radio continues to be an important channel for reaching large and underserved audiences, but conventional campaign strategies have limitations in audience segmentation, personalization, interaction and continuous evaluation.

A major problem is the tendency to design generalized messages for heterogeneous audiences. Listeners differ in language, health beliefs, socio-economic circumstances

and perceived vulnerability to health problems. Evidence from Oyo State demonstrates that radio exposure alone does not necessarily result in the adoption of preventive behaviour (Oko-Epelle & Talabi, 2024). This raises questions about the adequacy of one-size-fits-all approaches to health campaigning.

Problem concerns limited audience intelligence. Although phone-in programmes, SMS and social media have increased interaction, many radio campaigns still have limited capacity to systematically process audience responses and use them to refine messages. Consequently, broadcasters may know that an audience has been reached without fully understanding how different groups interpreted or responded to the campaign.

Language and cultural diversity constitute an additional challenge. Producing high-quality health messages in several Nigerian languages requires time, expertise and resources. AI-assisted translation and speech technologies offer potential solutions, but poorly trained or culturally insensitive systems may distort meanings and undermine audience trust.

There is also a significant knowledge gap concerning the specific application of AI to radio public health campaign strategy in Nigeria. Existing Nigerian studies discuss AI and health communication generally, but there remains comparatively limited attention to the complete radio campaign process—audience research, health-issue

prioritization, message development, production, localization, dissemination, engagement and evaluation.

Finally, AI introduces ethical and professional risks. Inaccurate generated information, algorithmic bias, privacy concerns, inadequate representation of Nigerian languages and cultures, and unclear accountability could undermine rather than improve health communication. The WHO (2021) emphasizes that health-related AI must be governed through principles of safety, transparency, accountability, human oversight and equity.

The problem addressed by this paper is therefore the gap between the emerging capabilities of AI and the predominantly conventional strategies used in Nigerian radio public health campaigns. The study examines how AI can transform these strategies while identifying the conditions necessary for responsible and effective adoption.

## Objectives of the Study

The general objective is to examine how artificial intelligence is transforming radio public health campaign strategies in Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the application of AI in the design and production of radio public health campaigns in Nigeria.

2. Assess how AI enhances audience targeting, message personalization, dissemination and engagement in radio public health campaigns.
3. Identify the ethical, cultural, technological and professional challenges associated with integrating AI into radio public health campaigns.
4. Propose strategic approaches for the responsible and effective adoption of AI in transforming radio public health campaign strategies in Nigeria.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework positions AI as a transformative technological mechanism that can influence the major stages of radio public health campaigning: planning, production, targeting, dissemination, engagement and evaluation. It does not regard AI as an independent communicator capable of replacing professionals. Instead, it conceptualizes AI as an assistive technology whose effectiveness depends on human expertise, reliable information, ethical governance and appropriate infrastructure.

## AI and Campaign Design and Production

AI can support campaign planning by processing large quantities of information and identifying patterns in audience concerns and available health information. Generative AI can assist in preparing preliminary scripts, developing alternative message versions and simplifying complex health information. Natural language processing can support transcription and translation, while AI-

assisted production technologies can facilitate aspects of audio editing and content adaptation.

This capability is particularly relevant to Nigerian radio because campaigns often need to be adapted across linguistic and cultural contexts. AI could increase the efficiency with which stations produce multiple versions of evidence-based messages. Nevertheless, human professionals must verify AI-generated content for medical accuracy, language appropriateness and cultural meaning.

**AI-Enhanced Audience Targeting and Personalization**

A second dimension is audience targeting. Conventional radio communicates to broad audiences, but AI can potentially analyze available audience interaction data to identify patterns in interests, questions and information needs. This could assist broadcasters in developing more targeted messages.

The relevance of this capability is supported by Oko-Epelle and Talabi (2024), whose findings indicate that awareness alone did not guarantee malaria-prevention behaviour. Their findings suggest that campaigns need to consider audience attitudes and circumstances rather than merely maximize exposure. AI-assisted segmentation may therefore help broadcasters develop message variations that address different audience perceptions and needs.

AI can also support dissemination across radio, SMS, social media, podcasts and websites. Audience responses from these channels can be analyzed and used to refine subsequent programming, creating a continuous communication cycle rather than a purely one-way process.

## AI and Monitoring and Evaluation

AI can potentially transform campaign evaluation by processing large amounts of audience-generated information. Transcripts of phone-in programmes, text responses and social-media comments can be examined for recurring questions, misconceptions and reactions. This may enable campaign managers to identify problems during a campaign rather than waiting until its conclusion.

The conceptual model is therefore:

Audience and health information → AI-assisted analysis → campaign planning → message production → targeted dissemination → audience response → AI-assisted feedback analysis → campaign refinement.

This iterative process potentially makes radio health campaigns more adaptive and audience-responsive.

## Moderating Factors

The relationship between AI adoption and campaign effectiveness is moderated by ethical, professional,

cultural and technological factors. These include accuracy, privacy, algorithmic bias, local-language representation, professional skills, digital infrastructure and regulatory standards.

The WHO (2021) emphasizes that AI in health should protect human autonomy, promote safety, ensure transparency and accountability, and advance inclusiveness and equity. Consequently, human oversight is conceptualized as a necessary condition rather than an optional addition.

The framework ultimately proposes a human-AI collaborative model. AI can assist with data processing, content generation, translation, transcription and feedback analysis, while broadcasters, health professionals and communication specialists retain responsibility for editorial judgement, medical verification, cultural appropriateness and ethical accountability.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Agenda-Setting Theory and the Health Belief Model (HBM). The theories complement each other by explaining the media and audience dimensions of public health communication.

Agenda-Setting Theory, developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), proposes that the media influence the importance audiences attach to issues by giving some issues greater prominence and attention than others. In radio public health communication, this is relevant

because broadcasters determine which health problems receive sustained attention through news, interviews, jingles, dramas and health programmes.

AI may strengthen this function by assisting broadcasters in identifying emerging health concerns and analyzing audience feedback. It can therefore support more informed decisions about which health issues require attention. However, algorithms should not independently determine public health priorities because popularity in available data does not necessarily correspond to public health importance.

The Health Belief Model provides the audience-level perspective. Rosenstock et al. (1988) identify perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers and self-efficacy as important elements in understanding health behaviour. AI-assisted audience analysis may help campaign planners develop message variations that address different perceptions. For example, some audiences may underestimate their vulnerability to a disease, whereas others may recognize the risk but perceive preventive action as difficult.

The two theories therefore operate at different but interconnected levels. Agenda-Setting Theory explains how AI may help radio identify and prioritize health issues, while the HBM explains how AI-assisted personalization may help radio address audience perceptions and encourage health-related action. Together, they support the central argument that AI can transform radio health campaigns from generalized and

largely linear communication into a more data-informed, audience-responsive and adaptive process.

## Empirical Review

Evidence from Nigerian radio health communication provides an important foundation for understanding the potential transformation of campaign strategies.

Talabi et al. (2022) examined public perception of NCDC radio campaign messages during COVID-19 in selected South-Western Nigerian states. The study used a survey design and found that respondents reported exposure to radio campaign messages concerning preventive measures and perceived the messages as influencing awareness and adoption. The authors recommended continued use of radio because of its reach and reliability.

Oko-Epelle and Talabi (2024) examined audience awareness of radio messages on malaria prevention among rural dwellers in Oyo State. Their study combined surveys with focus-group discussions. Although 86.5% of respondents were exposed to malaria-prevention radio messages, awareness alone did not determine adoption of preventive measures. Positive attitudes towards the messages were associated with adoption. The researchers recommended messages that reflect audience difficulties, culture and beliefs.

These studies demonstrate that radio remains useful for public health communication but also reveal the limitation of treating exposure as the primary measure of

effectiveness. The findings provide empirical support for the present study's emphasis on audience targeting, personalization and engagement.

At the broader AI-health communication level, Weingott and Parkinson (2025) reviewed studies examining AI in health communication development. Their review identified growing use of AI technologies in health communication and behavioural interventions while emphasizing the importance of integrating AI with established communication and behavioural theories.

Amanawa and Amanawa (2024) examined the application of AI to medicine with particular attention to public health communication in Nigeria. They identify AI's potential for automated data processing and public health education while acknowledging infrastructural and implementation limitations. Ezeaka (2024) similarly argues that AI can support health information dissemination and public awareness campaigns in Nigeria but identifies infrastructure, data management and shortages of skilled personnel as significant challenges.

The empirical literature therefore points in two directions. First, radio possesses established strengths in reach and health information dissemination. Second, conventional campaigns require stronger audience responsiveness, personalization and evaluation. AI potentially provides tools for addressing these limitations, but the existing Nigerian evidence remains insufficient on the direct application of AI to radio public health campaigns. This gap justifies the present paper.

## Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative documentary research design. Documentary research is appropriate where existing scholarly and institutional materials constitute the primary sources of evidence. Bowen (2009) explains that document analysis provides a systematic approach to examining documents as qualitative data and can be used to identify patterns and themes relevant to a research problem.

Materials reviewed included peer-reviewed journal articles, empirical studies, scholarly publications and authoritative institutional documents addressing AI, health communication, radio broadcasting, public health campaigns, audience engagement and AI ethics. Recent literature was emphasized to capture developments in AI, while seminal works were retained for the theoretical framework.

Purposive selection was used to identify materials directly relevant to the four objectives. The documents were subjected to thematic analysis and organized around four themes: AI applications in campaign design and production; audience targeting, personalization, dissemination and engagement; ethical, cultural, technological and professional challenges; and strategies for responsible AI adoption.

The reviewed evidence was subsequently interpreted through Agenda-Setting Theory and the Health Belief Model. The approach enabled the study to synthesize

existing knowledge and identify the opportunities and limitations associated with AI-enabled radio public health communication in Nigeria.

## Discussion of Findings

The first major finding is that AI can enhance the design and production of radio public health campaigns. Generative AI, natural language processing, speech recognition and automated translation can support script preparation, transcription, and message adaptation and production workflows. These capabilities may reduce production time and facilitate the development of multiple versions of a campaign.

This is particularly useful in Nigeria's multilingual environment. However, AI-generated health information cannot be broadcast without professional verification. The WHO (2021) emphasizes safety, accountability and human oversight in AI applications for health. AI should therefore function as a production assistant rather than an autonomous health communicator.

The second finding is that AI can improve audience targeting, personalization, dissemination and engagement. Audience information and interaction data can potentially be processed to identify different communication needs. This could enable radio stations to develop more audience-sensitive messages.

The finding is consistent with the Nigerian malaria evidence. Oko-Epelle and Talabi (2024) demonstrated

that exposure alone did not guarantee preventive behaviour, while positive attitudes towards messages were associated with adoption. AI-assisted personalization could therefore contribute to campaigns that address audience beliefs, concerns and practical barriers rather than simply increasing message frequency.

AI can also support interaction by analyzing questions and feedback received through phone-ins, SMS and social media. This can create a feedback loop through which audience responses inform subsequent content. Radio could consequently become more adaptive and participatory.

The third finding concerns ethical, cultural, technological and professional challenges. AI-generated misinformation is a major concern because health audiences may act on inaccurate information. Algorithmic bias may also arise where training data inadequately represent Nigerian populations, languages and cultural contexts. Privacy and data governance become important when audience information is processed for personalization.

These concerns reinforce the WHO's (2021) position that AI in health should be governed through human rights, safety, transparency, accountability, inclusiveness and equity. AI adoption must therefore be accompanied by professional review, data protection and cultural validation.

The fourth finding is that responsible adoption requires a human-AI collaborative model. Radio stations need

professionals who understand both broadcasting and AI. Health practitioners should verify medical information, while broadcasters should retain editorial responsibility. Language and cultural experts should also participate in validating localized content.

Infrastructure and training are equally important. AI-enabled broadcasting requires appropriate digital systems, connectivity, skilled personnel and organizational readiness. Without these conditions, AI may increase rather than reduce inequalities in access to health information.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that AI can transform Nigerian radio public health campaigns from predominantly generalized and linear communication into a more data-informed, personalized, interactive and adaptive system. However, such transformation depends on the responsible integration of technology with human expertise and public health principles.

## Summary of Major Findings

The study's major findings, aligned with its four objectives, are as follows:

1. **AI can enhance campaign design and production** through script development, translation, transcription, content adaptation and production support. However, human verification is essential for accuracy and cultural appropriateness.

2. **AI can strengthen audience targeting, personalization, dissemination and engagement** by assisting broadcasters to analyze audience information, identify communication needs and process feedback from interactive and digital platforms. This can make radio health campaigns more responsive to audience perceptions and circumstances.
3. **AI adoption introduces ethical, cultural, technological and professional challenges**, including misinformation, algorithmic bias, privacy concerns, inadequate representation of Nigerian languages and cultures, limited infrastructure and professional accountability.
4. **Responsible adoption requires a human-AI collaborative strategy** involving professional training, human verification, ethical guidelines, local-language development, infrastructure investment, stakeholder collaboration and continuous campaign evaluation.

## Conclusion

Artificial intelligence has significant potential to transform radio public health campaign strategies in Nigeria. Its value lies not simply in automating production but in strengthening the entire campaign process—from audience research and issue identification to message development, personalization, dissemination, engagement and evaluation.

The evidence demonstrates that radio remains an important public health medium, but exposure to health messages alone may not produce behavioural change. AI offers opportunities to make campaigns more audience-responsive by supporting segmentation, personalization and continuous feedback analysis.

However, technological capability does not automatically translate into communication effectiveness. Inaccurate information, algorithmic bias, privacy concerns, cultural misrepresentation and digital inequality could undermine public trust if AI is adopted without adequate safeguards.

The future of Nigerian radio health communication should therefore be based on human-AI collaboration. AI can provide computational and production capabilities, while broadcasters, health professionals and communication specialists retain responsibility for accuracy, cultural sensitivity, editorial judgement and ethical accountability. When supported by appropriate infrastructure, professional capacity, local-language resources and responsible governance, AI can help reposition radio public health communication as a more intelligent, inclusive, interactive and evidence-informed system.

**Recommendations**

1. **AI should be integrated into campaign design and production responsibly.** Radio stations should employ AI for script development, translation, transcription, content adaptation and production

assistance, while all health content should undergo professional and medical verification before broadcast.

2. **Radio stations should strengthen AI-assisted audience targeting and personalization.** Available audience feedback should be analysed to identify different information needs, beliefs and concerns, enabling the development of more relevant and culturally appropriate health messages.
3. **Ethical and professional safeguards should guide AI adoption.** Radio organizations should establish clear procedures for accuracy, privacy, data protection, transparency, accountability and cultural validation. Broadcasters and health communication professionals should receive continuous AI-related training.
4. **AI adoption should be supported through collaboration, infrastructure and evaluation.** Partnerships among broadcasters, health institutions, technology developers and researchers should be encouraged. Investment in digital infrastructure and Nigerian-language AI resources should accompany regular evaluation of AI-assisted campaigns to determine their effects on awareness, engagement and health behaviour.

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# MERGE AND THE HUMAN CAPACITY FOR HIERARCHICAL THOUGHT: A MINIMALIST PERSPECTIVE ON THE EVOLUTION OF UNBOUNDED CREATIVITY

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**Abstract**

This conceptual study examines Merge as a minimal combinatorial operation and considers whether it can illuminate the evolution of human hierarchical thought and unbounded creativity. Within the Minimalist Program, Merge combines two syntactic objects into a larger object, and repeated application permits hierarchically structured expressions without a fixed upper bound. The Strong Minimalist Thesis (SMT) proposes that the language faculty may be close to an optimal solution to conditions imposed by the conceptual-intentional and sensorimotor interfaces, with general computational principles doing much of the explanatory work. The paper evaluates this proposal against the biolinguistic account of language, the "only us" debate, research on animal cognition, and hypotheses linking hierarchical syntax to pre-existing capacities for action planning and object manipulation. It argues that Merge is a powerful formal hypothesis but not, by itself, a complete evolutionary explanation: a recursive operation, the representations on which it operates, the neural mechanisms that implement it, and the systems that interpret or externalise its outputs must be distinguished. It concludes with testable interdisciplinary predictions and a research agenda for comparing linguistic hierarchy, action sequencing, and context-sensitive cognition.

**Keywords:** Merge, Minimalist Program, Hierarchical cognition, Language evolution, Third factor

## Introduction

Human beings do not merely associate sounds with objects or respond to immediate stimuli. They construct representations in which one idea can be embedded within another, where relations among parts determine the interpretation of the whole, and where a finite repertoire supports indefinitely many novel thoughts. A person can think about a student who believes that a lecturer suspects that a text contains an ambiguity; can imagine a tool inside a box that is inside another box; or can formulate a counterfactual about what might have happened if a past decision had been different. These examples differ in content, but each depends on the ability to organise elements into structured relations. The evolutionary question is not simply why humans communicate, but how a cognitive system capable of such open-ended hierarchical organisation emerged.

The Minimalist Program approaches this problem by asking how much of the complexity of human syntax can be derived from a small computational core together with interface conditions and general principles of efficient computation. Its central operation, Merge, combines two syntactic objects into a larger syntactic object. If α and β are combined, Merge forms {α, β}; crucially, the output can itself be merged with another object. The result is not just a longer sequence but a nested structure in which constituents stand in hierarchical relations (Chomsky, 1995, pp. 226–227; Chomsky, 2005, pp. 5–6). This simple description has far-reaching implications: repeated

application makes it possible to generate an unbounded range of structures from finite resources.

Merge has therefore, become central to a particular account of what makes human language distinctive. Berwick and Chomsky (2016) argue that language is best understood primarily as an internal system for constructing thoughts, with speech and other modes of expression serving as externalisation systems. In this view, syntax is hierarchical rather than fundamentally linear; the ordering required for speech or sign is imposed at an interface rather than built into the core computational operation (pp. 89–108). Their "Why Only Us" framework raises a profound question: if the core operation is so simple, why is the resulting capacity so distinctive to humans?

This study addresses that question through a conceptual synthesis of minimalist syntax, evolutionary theory, comparative cognition, and philosophy of mind. It treats Merge not merely as a grammatical mechanism but as a candidate model for the minimal combinatorial capacity that supports hierarchical thought. At the same time, it distinguishes the formal properties of Merge from claims about its biological origin. A theory can provide a parsimonious account of a cognitive computation without having demonstrated when, how, or through which evolutionary pathway that computation appeared.

**Merge, hierarchy, and unbounded creativity**

**Merge as a minimal combinatorial operation:** In the Minimalist Program, Merge is generally characterised as an

operation that takes two syntactic objects and forms a new object containing them. In its simplest formulation, Merge(α, β) yields {α, β}. The elements may be lexical items or structures already built by previous applications of Merge. This recursion over its own outputs is the source of unbounded structural growth. For example, the words in "the child laughed" can be organised so that the noun combines with a determiner, the resulting nominal phrase combines with a verb, and the resulting predicate or clause can be incorporated into a larger structure. The exact derivation depends on the theoretical analysis, but the central point remains: constituent structure is built compositionally rather than assembled as a flat string.

The set notation highlights a key minimalist claim. Merge itself does not determine the linear order in which words are pronounced. A set such as {α, β} does not encode whether α precedes β. The distinction between hierarchical organisation and linear order is important because the same structural relations can be externalised differently across languages and modalities. Speech languages vary in word order; sign languages externalise linguistic structure through visual-manual resources; and internal representations need not be identical to the overt strings through which they are communicated. Berwick and Chomsky (2016) consequently treat externalisationas a component that interacts with, but is not identical to, the core operation that constructs hierarchical representations (pp. 89–108).

**Hierarchical structure is not the same as sequence:** A sequence contains an order: first A, then B, then C. A hierarchy additionally represents relations of containment or dominance. The distinction matters because the meaning of a sentence often depends on which constituents group together. In "old men and women," for example, different groupings can affect whether "old" applies to both men and women or only to men. Similarly, the relation between a clause and an embedded clause determines the interpretation of dependencies that cannot be explained by proximity alone. The human language system relies on hierarchical constituency and structural relations such as c-command, not only on adjacent words.

Hierarchical representations also make recursion possible. A clause can be embedded in a noun phrase ("the claim that the witness left"), and that noun phrase can appear within another clause, which may itself be embedded. There is no theoretical fixed upper bound on such embedding, even though performance is constrained by working memory, attention, processing time, and communicative circumstances. Thus "unbounded" is a statement about generative capacity, not a claim that human beings can actually process infinitely long expressions or that everyday speech routinely exploits deep embedding.

The idea of unbounded creativity is broader than syntactic recursion. People use familiar conceptual materials to invent new explanations, stories, plans, metaphors, and counterfactual scenarios. Merge offers a model for one important form of combinatorial openness, but it does not

automatically explain the originality or value of every creative act. Creativity also depends on the available concepts, knowledge, goals, affect, memory, cultural practices, and the ability to evaluate possible combinations.

**Internal Merge and displacement:** Minimalist theory distinguishes External Merge, which combines independently available objects, from Internal Merge, which remerges an element already contained within a larger structure. Internal Merge is commonly associated with displacement phenomena, such as the relationship between a wh-expression and the position where it receives an interpretation. In "Which book did Ada say that Chidi bought?", the phrase "which book" is interpreted in relation to the verb "bought" even though it appears at the left edge of the larger question. Minimalist accounts analyse such dependencies in terms of structural relations rather than treating them as arbitrary rearrangements.

The details of Internal Merge are theoretically contested, and not every aspect of movement is reducible to a single uncontroversial implementation. Nevertheless, the distinction illustrates the ambition of minimalism: a small number of operations should explain a wide range of structural phenomena. For evolutionary purposes, this creates a useful but difficult question. Is the human-specific innovation the operation of combination itself, a particular recursive use of it, the ability to remerge elements in structurally constrained ways, or the integration of these operations with conceptual and externalisation systems? A

plausible evolutionary theory must specify which computational property it is attempting to explain.

**The biolinguisticprogramme and the Strong Minimalist Thesis**

**Language as a biological capacity:** The biolinguistic perspective treats language as part of human biological endowment rather than as a cultural invention that can be explained entirely by communication or imitation. In this framework, the language faculty is a natural object of inquiry, comparable in principle to other evolved cognitive capacities. This does not mean that particular languages are genetically encoded. Children acquire a specific language through exposure, interaction, and development, while the capacity to acquire and use language depends on biological, cognitive, and environmental conditions.

Hauser, Chomsky, and Fitch (2002) proposed a distinction between the faculty of language in the broad sense (FLB) and the faculty of language in the narrow sense (FLN). FLB includes sensory-motor systems, conceptual-intentional systems, and computational mechanisms implicated in language. They hypothesised that FLN might include recursion and might be the component most specifically human, while allowing that recursion-like computations could have evolved for reasons other than communication (pp. 1569–1579). The proposal helped reframe the research question: rather than looking only for animal communication that resembles human language, researchers should examine whether component capacities relevant to language occur in other cognitive domains.

The distinction remains influential but debated. "Recursion" can refer to different phenomena in syntax, cognition, mathematics, and behaviour, and evidence for one does not automatically establish another. A system that performs nested action sequences, for instance, may share abstract features with hierarchical syntax without representing linguistic constituents.

**The Strong Minimalist Thesis:** The Strong Minimalist Thesis is an ambitious proposal that the language faculty is close to an optimal solution to the conditions imposed by its interfaces and general principles of computation. Chomsky (2005) distinguishes three factors that shape the growth of language: genetic endowment, experience, and principles not specific to language or to the organism, often called the third factor (pp. 6–7). The third factor includes computational efficiency, properties of physical systems, and general constraints on learning and development. The Minimalist Program asks whether aspects of grammar traditionally attributed to specialised grammatical machinery can instead be explained by these more general principles.

The SMT does not claim that every feature of language is simple, nor that experience and biology are unimportant. It asks whether the core computational system can be reduced to the simplest operation that satisfies the conditions imposed by conceptual-intentional and sensorimotor interfaces. If Merge supplies the needed combinatorial operation and general principles constrain its application, then a large inventory of language-specific mechanisms

may be unnecessary. Chomsky's formulation of the Minimalist Program describes this as a search for the simplest possible computational operation that can yield the infinite array of hierarchically structured expressions required at the interfaces (Chomsky, 2000, pp. 89–91; Chomsky, 2005, pp. 1–22).

The evolutionary appeal is apparent. Natural selection does not need to construct a complex grammar rule by rule if a small computational change, in a brain already capable of conceptual representation, can generate a new class of structured thought. However, the inference from formal simplicity to evolutionary simplicity must be handled carefully. A mathematically simple operation may require complex neural implementation, developmental conditions, representational primitives, and mechanisms for controlling its use. "Minimal" in a formal theory is not synonymous with "cost-free" in biology.

**What the SMT explains, and what it does not:** The SMT helps identify a target for explanation: the capacity to generate hierarchically structured expressions with no fixed upper bound. It also encourages explanatory restraint by asking whether a proposed grammatical principle follows from more general properties of computation. Yet the thesis is not a complete account of the origins of language. It does not, by itself, specify the genetic changes, developmental pathways, neural circuitry, or population history through which Merge became available. Nor does it independently explain the origins of lexical concepts, the diversity of

spoken and signed languages, pragmatic inference, or the social conventions required for communication.

This distinction is important for the "only us" debate. Berwick and Chomsky (2016) argue that the core computational innovation may have appeared relatively suddenly and then been used for thought, with externalisation subsequently shaped by communication and cultural evolution. Other researchers favour more gradual scenarios in which language-specific capacities developed through recombination of pre-existing cognitive and communicative abilities. These alternatives should not be reduced to "one mutation versus no mutation": a sudden appearance of a cognitive phenotype can involve multiple biological and developmental processes, while gradual evolution can include thresholds and reorganisations.

The strongest contribution of minimalism is therefore methodological as well as substantive. It asks researchers to separate the properties of the computational system from the demands of communication and from the contingent histories of particular languages. Its evolutionary claims become more compelling when they generate predictions that could be evaluated independently of the theoretical elegance of the formal model.

**"Why Only Us?" competing evolutionary scenarios**

**The human-specificity problem:** Language is unusual among biological traits because its central computational properties are not readily observable in the fossil record. Bones can reveal aspects of vocal anatomy, and

archaeological artefacts can suggest planning, learning, and symbolic activity, but neither directly reveals the structure of internal syntactic computation. Researchers therefore infer language evolution from indirect evidence: comparative cognition, developmental patterns, genetic and neurological findings, archaeological records, and the formal properties of language itself. The inference is difficult because language has no exact nonhuman counterpart and because the target phenotype must be defined before its evolution can be explained (Bolhuis et al., 2014).

The "only us" question is best formulated precisely. It is not whether humans alone communicate, categorise objects, learn sequences, or solve complex problems. Many species display sophisticated abilities in these domains. The issue is whether any nonhuman species has a computational capacity that builds hierarchically organised, compositional representations in the specific sense required by human language. If the target is defined too broadly as "complex cognition," comparative evidence will appear abundant; if it is defined narrowly as Merge, direct evidence becomes much harder to obtain.

**A relatively recent computational innovation:** Berwick and Chomsky's account proposes that a simple computational innovation may have enabled the generation of hierarchical structures, transforming human thought and making language possible (2016, pp. 1–52, 89–108). Bolhuis et al. (2014) likewise argue that the hierarchical structure of language is a key phenotype for evolutionary

explanation and discuss the possibility of a relatively recent emergence. Such proposals can account for the apparent discontinuity between human language and other communication systems without requiring every component of language to have evolved at the same time.
The strength of this scenario is explanatory focus. If a single computational innovation changes what a mind can represent, then a qualitative cognitive transition may occur without a correspondingly dramatic change in every supporting system. A new combinatorial capacity could exploit older concepts, memory systems, motor capacities, and social learning. The weakness is evidential: the precise timing and biological mechanism of the hypothesised innovation remain uncertain. Claims about a particular date, a single mutation, or a sudden species-wide event should therefore be presented as hypotheses rather than established facts.

**Gradualist and continuity-based accounts:** A contrasting approach seeks evolutionary continuity between language and other cognitive capacities. Fujita and Fujita and Fujita (2022) argues that hierarchical syntax and the lexicon may have evolved from pre-existing abilities, proposing that Merge could have developed from motor action planning and that lexical categories may have predecessors in animal cognition. This approach rejects a strict saltational account and attempts to connect formal linguistic theory with comparative cognition and motor control. It is valuable because it specifies potential precursors rather than merely asserting that language must have evolved gradually.

Nevertheless, evolutionary continuity does not mean that the final human capacity is present in rudimentary form whenever an animal performs a sequence of actions. The same broad computational principle can be implemented differently across systems, and behavioural similarity can arise through different mechanisms. A chimpanzee's ability to organise tool-use actions, a bird's ability to learn a vocal sequence, and a human's ability to embed one proposition within another may all involve ordering, memory, and goal representation, yet they do not necessarily share the formal structure of Merge.

**The risks of treating syntax as communication:** Language is often explained as an adaptation for communication, but the minimalist approach emphasises that the core system may be primarily a system for thought, with communication as one important use. This shift matters because communicative efficiency does not straightforwardly predict the hierarchical properties of syntax. If the system is designed to satisfy conceptual and sensorimotor interfaces, some features may follow from computational constraints rather than from direct selection for message transmission. Berwick and Chomsky (2016) distinguish the internal computational system from the processes that externalise structures into speech or other modalities (pp. 89–108).

A thought-centred view should not be interpreted as denying the social importance of language. Human language is learned and used in communities; interlocutors coordinate attention, infer intentions, repair

misunderstandings, and develop conventions. Rather, the claim is that the origin of the computational capacity and the evolution of its communicative uses are analytically separable. A comprehensive account must explain both why humans can generate structured representations and how those representations became integrated into socially transmitted systems.

**Hierarchical object manipulation and action planning as possible precursors**

**Why action matters:** One promising route to the evolution of hierarchy begins outside language. Everyday action often requires organizing subgoals into larger plans: obtaining a tool, using it to open a container, and retrieving an object; or placing one object inside another while preserving the relation between them. Such activities involve relations among actions and objects, anticipation of intermediate states, and the coordination of component operations toward a goal. If these capacities predate language, they may have provided resources that a later linguistic system could recruit.

Fujita and Fujita's (2022) proposal that Merge evolved from motor action planning offers a specific hypothesis of this kind. It connects the formal operation of syntax to a domain in which structured combinations are already behaviourally useful. The proposal is attractive because it offers a possible evolutionary bridge between nonlinguistic cognition and the capacity to build hierarchical linguistic representations. It also encourages researchers to investigate cognition beyond vocal communication, in line

with Hauser et al.'s (2002) suggestion that relevant computational capacities might have evolved for reasons other than language (pp. 1569–1579).

The hypothesis should not be treated as a settled origin story. Motor plans are not necessarily syntactic objects, and nested action organisation may be supported by executive control, working memory, learned scripts, or representations of causal relations. To establish a relationship with Merge, researchers need to identify the representational property that is shared and show that it predicts more than general task complexity.

**Object relations and nested representation:** Objects can be organised in relations that are structurally richer than simple adjacency. A cup may be inside a box, the box inside a cupboard, and the cupboard inside a room. This nested configuration is not equivalent to a linear list of "cup, box, cupboard, room": the containment relations determine what is inside what. Similarly, manipulating objects may require representing an action as a subgoal within a larger goal. Such cases make hierarchical cognition visible in a domain that does not depend on spoken language.

However, physical nesting and mental hierarchy must be distinguished. A set of objects can physically contain one another even if an agent represents the scene using associative or spatial mechanisms rather than a general-purpose combinatorial operation. Conversely, a language user can construct a hierarchy about abstract or imaginary

entities that have no physical containment relation. The comparison is therefore suggestive rather than demonstrative. It raises the question of whether a common computational architecture supports both domains, not the conclusion that object manipulation is simply "Merge without words."

**What comparative research should test:** A rigorous comparative programme would need to distinguish at least four abilities: (a) ordering actions in a sequence; (b) representing hierarchical relations among subgoals; (c) recombining familiar components into novel structures; and (d) interpreting the structural relations in a compositional way. These abilities can dissociate. An animal may learn a long sequence without representing nested structure, or it may represent a hierarchy in a narrow domain without freely recombining it across contexts. Human language displays an unusually broad capacity to combine categories and propositions productively.

Research designs should therefore use matched tasks that vary hierarchical depth, linear order, familiarity, and contextual support. For example, participants could learn object-action sequences in which the same elements occur in different nested arrangements. Tests could ask whether they generalise a structural pattern to novel objects, whether they distinguish structures with identical surface sequences but different groupings, and whether performance transfers between action and language tasks. Comparable animal studies would require species-

appropriate methods and careful controls for training history, sensory demands, and motivation.

Even positive transfer would not prove that the same operation is involved. Transfer could reflect shared memory, attention, or abstract relational learning. Stronger evidence would require converging behavioural and computational models, developmental comparisons, and where possible neural evidence. The central prediction is not that all hierarchy must be linguistical, but that a genuinely shared combinatorial mechanism should produce systematic similarities across domains that cannot be explained by domain-general difficulty alone.

**Developmental evidence and the problem of learning:** Children acquire complex hierarchical language early, despite limited explicit instruction. This fact is consistent with the idea that humans possess specialised biological preparedness, but it does not determine exactly which aspects are innate or how the underlying computation emerged. Children also learn from structured environments, social interaction, and statistical regularities. A theory of Merge must account for the interaction between the learner's biological capacities and the evidence available in the environment.

Developmental studies can help distinguish a general capacity for combination from language-specific knowledge. If children's sensitivity to hierarchical relations in nonlinguistic tasks predicts their later mastery of syntactic dependencies, that would support a possible

shared foundation, although correlation would not establish causation. If linguistic hierarchy emerges independently of performance on matched nonlinguistic tasks, the result might suggest domain-specific constraints or differences in task demands. In either case, measures should avoid treating failure on a difficult experimental task as proof that a capacity is absent.

**Context-sensitivity, conceptual interpretation, and the third factor**

**Why context matters:** The conceptual proposal motivating this paper is that context-sensitivity may be central to human cognitive distinctiveness. Linguistic expressions are radically underdetermined without interpretation. The sentence "She is ready" leaves open who "she" refers to, what she is ready for, and which standards of readiness are relevant. "It is cold here" can be a report about temperature, an indirect request to close a window, or a complaint, depending on circumstances and intentions. Humans routinely integrate linguistic structure with shared knowledge, perceptual information, conversational history, beliefs, and inferred goals.

Merge cannot, by itself, account for these interpretations. It provides a formal mechanism for constructing structures; the interpretation of those structures depends on lexical meaning and the conceptual-intentional system, as well as pragmatic inference. The minimalist architecture makes room for this distinction by treating the interface with thought as central to the language faculty. Yet a full theory of context-sensitive interpretation must explain how

representations are enriched, how intentions are inferred, and how interlocutors converge on relevant meanings.
Context-sensitivity is not unique to language in a broad sense. Animals adjust behaviour to environmental cues and social conditions; human distinctiveness, if present, must be sought in the flexibility, scope, and compositionality of contextual integration. Humans can reason about absent entities, hypothetical worlds, nested beliefs, and norms that are not perceptually available.

**The third factor as an explanatory opportunity:** Chomsky's (2005) third factor includes principles that are neither part of the genetic endowment specific to language nor simply learned from experience. These include general properties of efficient computation and constraints that arise from the physical and cognitive systems in which language develops (pp. 6–7). The third factor offers an opportunity to explain why linguistic computation has certain properties without assuming that each property is explicitly encoded in Universal Grammar.

Context-sensitivity may intersect with the third factor, but the terms should not be conflated. Contextual information is often learned or acquired through experience, while general computational principles constrain how information can be accessed and combined. Context-sensitivity is therefore better treated as a candidate outcome of interactions among biological capacities, domain-general computation, memory, learning, and social cognition, not as a single third-factor principle in itself.

A minimalist evolutionary account could propose that Merge creates structured representations, while general computational constraints and contextual interpretation make those structures usable for thought. This would shift attention away from a richly specified inventory of language-specific rules and toward the interface between combinatorial structure and flexible cognition. But it would not establish that Universal Grammar is unnecessary in every form. The evidence would need to show which properties can be derived from general principles and which require language-specific constraints.

**Is context-sensitivity the truly unique evolutionary step?** The suggestion that context-sensitivity, rather than a rich Universal Grammar, is the truly distinctive human step is provocative but requires refinement. Context-sensitivity is not one discrete capacity with a clear evolutionary timestamp. It includes reference resolution, pragmatic inference, perspective-taking, relevance assessment, common-ground tracking, and interpretation under uncertainty. These capacities may have different evolutionary histories and different neural or developmental bases. They may also be present in partial form in other species.

The more defensible claim is that human cognition combines hierarchical representation with unusually flexible contextual integration. Merge may enable the construction of complex structured thoughts; context-sensitive systems allow those thoughts to be related to intentions, beliefs, memories, social norms, and possible

worlds. Neither component alone accounts for human creativity. A syntactic system without conceptual resources would have little to combine, while a rich contextual system without a productive combinatorial capacity might have difficulty representing arbitrarily nested propositions.

This synthesis also reframes the "only us" question. The human-specific property may not be a single isolated module, but a distinctive configuration of capacities: hierarchical combination, conceptual abstraction, context-sensitive inference, social learning, and flexible externalisation. Minimalism remains valuable because it asks how small the computational core can be. Comparative cognition remains valuable because it identifies the component abilities that may predate language. Pragmatics and cognitive science remain necessary because they explain how structures become meaningful in situated thought and action.

## Objections, limitations, and theoretical risks

**The danger of equating formal simplicity with biological plausibility:** A major limitation of Merge-based evolutionary explanations is the temptation to infer a simple evolutionary history from a simple formal description. The operation may be compact in a theory, but a functioning cognitive capacity requires neural implementation, developmental stability, suitable representational units, and integration with other systems. Evolution acts on organisms and populations, not on abstract operations considered in isolation. A convincing account must connect the formal proposal to biological

mechanisms without assuming that the former automatically reveals the latter.

The same caution applies to claims about the timing of language emergence. Archaeological evidence may indicate changes in symbolic behaviour, but such evidence cannot directly date the emergence of a particular syntactic computation. Language may have existed before its clearest material traces, and cultural evidence may reflect multiple interacting capacities. The available record does not justify presenting a precise date for Merge as established fact.

**The problem of defining recursion:** Recursion is used in multiple ways. In formal grammar, it can refer to the repeated application of a rule or operation to its own output. In psychology, it may refer to nested representations or the ability to represent another agent's belief about a third agent's belief. In animal behaviour, it can be used loosely for repeated or nested action sequences. These uses are related only if a theory specifies the relevant representational and computational commonalities.

This is particularly important when evaluating claims that animals possess or lack recursion. A task may fail to reveal a capacity because it places heavy demands on memory, motivation, or training. Conversely, success may be achieved through strategies that do not involve the hypothesised computation. The appropriate conclusion is neither that human language is wholly incomparable with animal cognition nor that any nested behaviour constitutes

Merge. Instead, research should specify the computation, define operational criteria, and test competing models.

**Universal Grammar and explanatory underdetermination:** The minimalist programme aims to reduce the role of language-specific innate structure, but the degree of reduction remains an empirical and theoretical question. The SMT is a guiding hypothesis, not a demonstrated theorem that all linguistic properties follow from Merge and general principles. Chomsky et al. (2023) showed that the technical analysis of Merge itself continues to develop including its interactions with interfaces and conditions on computation. If a theory needs additional constraints to account for particular phenomena, those constraints must be evaluated rather than dismissed as irrelevant to minimalism.

Likewise, the existence of context-sensitive interpretation does not disprove Universal Grammar. A system can possess biologically grounded constraints while relying heavily on experience and pragmatic inference. The useful question is comparative: which phenomena are explained more economically by general principles, which require language-specific assumptions, and what new predictions follow from each analysis? A conceptual preference for parsimony is not enough to settle the issue.

**Humanistic risks: reducing thought to syntax:** The phrase “what makes us human?” can invite overly simple answers. If Merge is treated as the sole essence of humanity, the account risks reducing imagination, ethical

reflection, art, social life, and self-understanding to a formal operation. Such a reduction is neither required by minimalism nor supported by current evidence. Merge may be a necessary component of a particular account of linguistic hierarchy without being sufficient for all forms of human cognition or creativity.

A humanistic perspective should instead recognise that the ability to construct structured thoughts matters because it expands the range of what humans can imagine, communicate, contest, and share. Language enables narratives about the past, possible futures, obligations, identities, and worlds that do not exist. Yet the meaning and value of these activities emerge through lived experience, culture, emotion, social relations, and historical circumstances. A theory of the computational basis of hierarchy can illuminate these capacities without exhausting their explanation.

**What would count as evidence?** A strong theory should generate discriminating predictions. Evidence for a shared hierarchical mechanism would be more compelling if the same structural constraints predicted performance across language and nonlinguistic tasks, if the relation emerged developmentally in a principled way, and if computational models showed that a common operation explained the data better than separate mechanisms. Evidence against a simple shared-mechanism account would include robust dissociations between linguistic hierarchy and carefully matched nonlinguistic hierarchy, or data showing that

apparent structural transfer was fully explained by memory and familiarity.

Neural evidence should be interpreted with similar caution. Overlapping activation in two tasks does not prove that the same computation is performed, because many regions support multiple functions. Different activation patterns do not necessarily prove separate computations, because a common abstract operation may be implemented through distinct networks in different contexts.

**A research agenda for a Merge-centred account of human creativity**

The conceptual framework developed here suggests five lines of research.

1. Linguists and cognitive scientists should distinguish the capacity to generate hierarchical structure from the capacity to interpret it in context. Experimental tasks can hold lexical material constant while varying constituency, or hold structure constant while varying the pragmatic setting. This would help isolate contributions from syntax, semantics, and pragmatic inference. The aim is not to deny interaction among components but to establish which factor explains which pattern.
2. Research on object manipulation and action planning should test structural generalisation rather than mere sequence learning. Participants could be trained on action plans with nested subgoals and then tested on novel objects and unfamiliar sequences. If they generalise the hierarchical relation across surface changes, the result would support a domain-general capacity for structured

representation. If generalisation is limited to familiar action scripts, a learned-sequence explanation may be sufficient. Comparable comparative studies should use methods appropriate to the species and avoid assuming that superficially similar behaviour entails identical representations.

3. Developmental research should examine how hierarchical linguistic competence relates to nonlinguistic relational reasoning over time. Longitudinal studies could test whether children's ability to represent nested object relations predicts their understanding of embedded clauses or structural dependencies after controlling for vocabulary, working memory, and general cognitive development. Such studies should not treat correlation as proof of a common mechanism, but they can identify developmental relations worth explaining.

4. Computational modelling should compare alternative architectures. One model could implement recursive combination with a small set of interface constraints; another could rely on domain-specific rules; a third could combine hierarchical structure with learned contextual inference. Models should be evaluated not only on their ability to reproduce familiar data but also on their predictions for novel structures, ambiguity resolution, and cross-domain transfer. The SMT gains empirical force when it makes predictions that could fail.

5. Evolutionary scenarios should be explicit about the level of explanation. A proposal about the emergence of a computational operation is not the same as a proposal about the origin of lexical concepts, the evolution of speech, or the cultural history of particular languages.

Interdisciplinary work should specify which component is under investigation and what evidence would support or weaken the proposed pathway.

## Conclusion

Merge provides a compact and influential account of how a finite cognitive system can generate hierarchically structured expressions without a fixed upper bound. Its importance lies not simply in the production of longer sentences, but in the possibility of constructing representations whose parts stand in structured relations and whose interpretation depends on those relations. The Strong Minimalist Thesis extends this insight into an evolutionary hypothesis: the core of language may be computationally simple, with general principles and interface conditions accounting for much of its design.

The evidence does not warrant treating Merge as a complete explanation of human uniqueness or as a directly observed evolutionary event. Formal simplicity does not by itself establish biological simplicity; action hierarchy does not automatically amount to syntactic computation; and context-sensitive interpretation cannot be reduced to Merge. The most promising account is therefore integrative. A productive combinatorial operation may support hierarchical thought, while conceptual resources, memory, contextual inference, social learning, and externalisation make the resulting representations useful in human life.

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