



Socio-Economic Drivers of Language Shift and Extinction: A Community-Based Study in Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Afolayan C.K.¹, Prof. T.K. Akinwamide²

Department Of Arts And Language Education

Faculty Of Education

Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti.

Abstract- This study examined the socio-economic factors contributing to language shift and extinction, the effects of globalization and urbanization on minority-language preservation, the consequences of shift for cultural identity and social cohesion, and strategies for revitalization, among residents of Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. Language change or the gradual replacement of a mother tongue with a dominant language is a global danger to language diversity and minority languages in sub-Saharan Africa are particularly at risk. However, evidence at community level on socio-economic factors contributing to this process in Nigeria is still scanty. A convergent mixed-methods design combined a structured Likert-scale questionnaire with semi-structured interviews. Fifty adult residents were purposively sampled across age groups, educational levels, occupations, and mother tongues. Quantitative data were summarized using frequencies and percentages, and interview data were examined through thematic analysis, framed by Fishman's theory of reversing language shift. Respondents identified globalization (80% agreement), educational policies favouring dominant languages (76%), urban migration (74%), and economic opportunity (70%) as the principal drivers of shift. Reduced use of minority languages in public domains (90%) and the influence of global media (82%) were the most strongly endorsed effects of globalization and urbanization. The most-cited consequences were loss of cultural identity (86%) and erosion of social cohesion (86%). Government support (80%), community initiatives (80%), educational reforms (84%), and media promotion (86%) were endorsed as preservation strategies. Language shift in Oye-Ekiti is driven primarily by structural socio-economic forces rather than speaker indifference. A coordinated response combining supportive language policy, community-led revitalization, curriculum reform, and minority-language media is required to safeguard endangered languages.

Keywords: Language shift; Language endangerment; Minority languages; Globalization; Language revitalization.

I. Introduction

Language is one of the most significant means of cultural expression and identity and linguistic diversity is an integral part of human heritage. The process of language shift, in which individual languages are slowly replaced with a more dominant one, therefore, is a serious threat to the individual languages as well as the cultural systems that they contain, which is a global phenomenon (Fishman, 1991; Holmes & Wilson, 2022). It could be argued that minority and immigrant languages are particularly at risk of erosion from the pressure of dominant languages and socio-economic factors (Crystal, 2000; Maikanti et al., 2021). Language shift can lead to language death when a language is forgotten by the speakers or the last speaker dies (Crystal, 2000; Batibo, 2005). The losses are significant: a large percentage of the world's languages are in danger and many have already vanished, with the most dramatic losses being of the small, unwritten languages of minority communities (Nettle & Romaine, 2000). It does not go from one day to the next. Usually, a community starts to increasingly use a dominant language, and its native language becomes less and



less functional, less and less people speak it, and less and less it is passed on to children, so that it ceases to be spoken at all after a few generations (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). The attrition of language is related to the attrition of culture, since language is so much a part of any culture that this attrition is an indicator of much more extensive cultural attrition (Fishman, 1991). In cases of unequal power, the majority language will usually be dominant and more prestigious and the relationship between the languages is unlikely to be even (Thomason, 2001). Speaker attitudes play a crucial role in whether or not a community will continue to use its language, and a sense of the language as an important symbol of identity will help communities sustain their language, while a perception that the language is a barrier to economic and social progress will speed up the process of language shift (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Wakkai & Banda, 2025). These choices may also be influenced by the international status of a language; knowledge of the languages of the international elite is seen as a social and economic advantage.

This is hastened by a number of socio-economic factors. Minority groups are forced to learn dominant languages for economic reasons to integrate into the society if they migrate or assimilate in the monolingual and dominant language settings, and education, media and globalization focus on national and international languages rather than indigenous languages (Maikanti et al., 2021; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). The socio-economic mechanisms of the pressure on minority languages in Nigeria are still under-documented at the community level (Ekpenyong et al., 2025; Wakkai & Banda, 2025) and their languages are increasingly under pressure from the influence of English and major regional languages, especially in the country which is linguistically very rich. To create successful preservation and revitalization plans, it is important to understand these mechanisms. This study therefore examined the socio-economic factors contributing to language shift and extinction among residents of Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. Specifically, it pursued four objectives: to identify the socio-economic factors influencing language shift within minority and indigenous communities; to assess the impact of globalization and urbanization on the preservation of minority languages; to examine the consequences of language shift for cultural identity and social cohesion; and to propose strategies for mitigating the effects of socio-economic forces on language preservation and revitalization.

II. Literature Review

1. Language Shift, Maintenance, And Death

Language shift is the process whereby the language of a speech community is replaced, over multiple generations and domains of use, by another language, usually more dominant (Fishman, 1991). If it is allowed to continue, it will lead to language death – when the language is abandoned by its speakers or when the language has no more fluent speaker (Batibo, 2005; Crystal, 2000). By contrast, language maintenance is the ongoing use of a language in the face of competition from another language, which could be a dominant one, and is highly dependent on the attitudes of the speakers and the presence of the language in valued domains (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). Such processes are not generally symmetrical, as the dominant language will typically have more economic, social and political power, and the minority language, if it has been highly regarded, will tend to recede unless there is deliberate action taken to reverse the situation (Nettle & Romaine, 2000; Thomason, 2001).

2. Domains, Diglossia, And Ethnolinguistic Vitality

One of the themes that has emerged in literature is the significance of the domain (setting) in which the language is regularly used. The progressive curbing of minority languages in formal settings like education, administration and media results in their gradual withdrawal from the public arena and the weakening of their vitality (Fishman, 1991). Diglossia (Ferguson 1959) describes this situation where a 'high' variety is used in formal and prestigious contexts and a 'low' variety is used in everyday contexts; in many Nigerian contexts, English is the high variety and indigenous languages are the low, which leads to



shift as users move towards the high variety for prestige and economic gain. The concept of ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977) also further explains why some languages persist, while others die out; the smaller languages with less demographic strength, institutional support, and status are more likely to die out than the larger languages of Nigeria, such as Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, which have relatively high vitality.

3. Socio-Economic Pressures In The Nigerian Context

Research on the linguistic situation in Nigeria has always related language change with socio-economic change. The influx of speakers from rural to urban areas as a result of urbanization and economic development causes the disappearance of the use of smaller indigenous languages (Ekpenyong et al., 2025; Wakkai & Banda, 2025). The dominance of English and low status of indigenous languages are reflected in language ideologies that correlate English skills with socio-economic success, and this further diminishes the status of indigenous languages, leading to their demise. The pressures are further exacerbated by the presence of minority languages being overwhelmed by dominant ones through globalization of media, technology and trade (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006; Maikanti et al., 2021). These factors all contribute to the loss of the intergenerational transmission that is essential to language survival and make the socio-economic factors of shift a priority for community-level investigation.

III. Theoretical Framework

Fishman's (1991) theory of reversing language shift, which views language maintenance and loss as a continuum, was the basis for the study and a guide to the evaluation of language vitality and the intervention required to revitalize threatened languages. A key aspect of the theory is that the most critical point in a language's survival is the intergenerational transmission, that is, when parents pass their language on to their children through home and community. The framework supports the sociolinguistic perspective that language and culture go hand in hand and that when a language is lost, so is the cultural knowledge and identity embedded in it (Sapir, 1929; Whorf, 1956). This frame of mind has guided the formulation of study instruments and the interpretation of the study results, focusing on socio-economic factors that hinder the intergenerational transmission and on the strategies that can make the transmission possible.

IV. Methods

1. Design

A convergent mixed-methods design was adopted, combining a structured quantitative questionnaire with semi-structured qualitative interviews. The design was chosen to capture both measurable patterns of language attitudes and use and the deeper perspectives and lived experiences of community members, allowing the two data strands to be integrated for a fuller understanding of the phenomenon.

2. Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in Oye-Ekiti, in Ekiti State, southwest Nigeria, a predominantly Yoruba-speaking area that also hosts speakers of other Nigerian languages. Fifty adult residents were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure representation across age groups, educational levels, occupations, and mother tongues, and to include language speakers, community elders, educators, and community leaders whose perspectives were pertinent to language dynamics. The sample size reflects the exploratory, community-focused scope of the study and is acknowledged as a limitation.



3. Instruments And Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising a demographic section and four thematic sections aligned with the study objectives: socio-economic factors, the impact of globalization and urbanization, the consequences of language shift, and preservation strategies. Items were rated on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected key informants, including community elders, educators, and language activists, which explored collective attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of language shift in greater depth. Face and content validity of the instrument were established through expert review by the research supervisor.

4. Data Analysis

Quantitative responses were analysed with descriptive statistics—frequencies and percentages—and are presented in tables with narrative interpretation; for reporting, the strongly agree and agree categories are read together as overall agreement. Qualitative interview data were analyzed thematically, with transcripts examined to identify recurring themes and patterns, which were then integrated with the quantitative findings to cross-validate and enrich interpretation. Ethical practice was observed throughout: participation was voluntary and informed, and responses were treated as confidential and anonymous.

V. Results

1. Demographic Profile Of Respondents

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 50)

Variable	Category	n	%
Age (years)	18–30	15	30
	31–45	12	24
	46–60	13	26
	61 and above	10	20
Gender	Male	23	46
	Female	27	54
Educational level	No formal education	5	10
	Primary	12	24
	Secondary	18	36
	Tertiary	15	30
Occupation	Farming	15	30
	Trading	10	20
	Civil service	13	26
	Others	12	24
Mother tongue	Yoruba	35	70
	Igbo	5	10
	Hausa	5	10
	Others	5	10

2. Socio-Economic Factors Contributing To Language Shift

Respondents identified a cluster of socio-economic factors as significant drivers of language shift (Table 2). Globalization attracted the highest endorsement, with 80% agreeing that the global spread of dominant languages through media, technology, and trade marginalizes minority languages. Educational policies favoring national or international



languages were endorsed by 76%, urban migration by 74%, and economic opportunity in urban areas by 70%. Qualitative accounts reinforced these patterns: community elders described how economic pressures and the desire for upward mobility led younger people to adopt dominant languages, with one elder lamenting that children “no longer speak our language because they believe it has no value in the modern world,” even though the language “carries our history and identity.”

Table 2 Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Language Shift (N = 50)

Factor	SA n (%)	A n (%)	N n (%)	D n	SD n
Economic opportunities	20 (40)	15 (30)	5 (10)	7	3
Educational policies	18 (36)	20 (40)	6 (12)	4	2
Urban migration	19 (38)	18 (36)	5 (10)	5	3
Globalization	22 (44)	18 (36)	4 (8)	4	2

Note. SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neutral; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree. Overall agreement (SA + A): economic opportunities 70%, educational policies 76%, urban migration 74%, globalisation 80%.

3. Impact Of Globalization And Urbanization On Language Preservation

The reduced use of minority languages in public domains such as schools, government offices, and the media was the most strongly endorsed effect, with 90% of respondents agreeing that it accelerates language shift (Table 3). The influence of global media was recognized by 82%, urban lifestyle changes by 84%, and the dominance of global languages such as English by 80%. Interviews indicated that younger generations, heavily exposed to global culture and media, increasingly prefer dominant languages; one young respondent explained that using English online and in daily life “is easier... even though I feel like I'm losing a part of myself.”

Table 3 Impact of Globalization and Urbanization on Language Preservation (N = 50)

Impact factor	SA n (%)	A n (%)	N n (%)	D n	SD n
Dominance of global languages	25 (50)	15 (30)	5 (10)	3	2
Reduced use in public domains	28 (56)	17 (34)	3 (6)	1	1
Influence of media	26 (52)	15 (30)	5 (10)	2	2
Urban lifestyle changes	24 (48)	18 (36)	5 (10)	2	1

Note. Overall agreement (SA + A): dominance of global languages 80%, reduced use in public domains 90%, influence of media 82%, urban lifestyle changes 84%.

4. Consequences Of Language Shift And Extinction

Respondents regarded the consequences of language shift as profound (Table 4). Loss of cultural identity and erosion of social cohesion were each endorsed by 86%, reflecting the view that language is a central vehicle of heritage and community solidarity. Disruption of traditional knowledge transmission including ecological knowledge, medicinal practices, and cultural narratives encoded in indigenous languages was recognized by 84%, and marginalization of minority communities in socio-political life by 76%. Interviews underscored the emotional weight of these losses; one elder observed that “without our language, we are losing our soul... it's not just words, it's who we are.”



Table 4 Consequences of Language Shift and Extinction (N = 50)

Consequence	SA n (%)	A n (%)	N n (%)	D n	SD n
Loss of cultural identity	28 (56)	15 (30)	3 (6)	2	2
Erosion of social cohesion	26 (52)	17 (34)	3 (6)	2	2
Disrupted knowledge transmission	24 (48)	18 (36)	4 (8)	3	1
Marginalization	20 (40)	18 (36)	5 (10)	4	3

Note. Overall agreement (SA + A): loss of cultural identity 86%, erosion of social cohesion 86%, disrupted knowledge transmission 84%, marginalization 76%.

5. Strategies For Language Preservation And Revitalization

Respondents expressed strong consensus on the strategies needed to preserve and revitalise minority languages (Table 5). Media promotion attracted the highest endorsement (86%), followed by educational reforms incorporating indigenous languages into curricula (84%), with government support and community initiatives each endorsed by 80%. Qualitative accounts emphasized the primacy of grassroots action: while government backing was seen as important, respondents held that community-driven efforts are often more sustainable, one community leader insisting, “we need to take ownership of our language... it's our responsibility to pass it on to the next generation.”

Table 5 Proposed Strategies for Language Preservation and Revitalization (N = 50)

Strategy	SA n (%)	A n (%)	N n (%)	D n	SD n
Government support	25 (50)	15 (30)	5 (10)	3	2
Community initiatives	22 (44)	18 (36)	5 (10)	3	2
Educational reforms	24 (48)	18 (36)	4 (8)	2	2
Media promotion	26 (52)	17 (34)	4 (8)	2	1

Note. Overall agreement (SA + A): government support 80%, community initiatives 80%, educational reforms 84%, media promotion 86%.

VI. Discussion

The results reveal that the language shift in Oye-Ekiti is motivated more by the structural socio-economic forces than by any lack of interest on the part of the speakers in the persistence of their language. Globalization, educational policy, urban migration and the search for economic opportunity were all supported by large majorities as factors of shift, and this concurs with the long-running explanation of how dominant languages replace minority languages in conditions of inequality, both in power and prestige (Crystal, 2000; Thomason, 2001; Wakkai & Banda, 2025). This reflects the observations that globalization and influence of media are a factor that makes indigenous languages less visible and useful (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006; Maikanti et al., 2021).

This is theoretically important strong endorsement of reduced use in public domain as an accelerant of shift. In Fishman's (1991) model, when a language withdraws from the school, government and media, the domains where it is transmitted and used become more restricted, and the intergenerational transmission of language upon which its vitality depends becomes weaker. The qualitative accounts do confirm this reading, as younger



speakers report that they have adopted the dominant languages for practical and economic reasons, and at the same time felt a loss of identity – that is, there is a positive attitude to the dominant languages, but a behavioral shift, as the surrounding institutional context favors the dominant language.

The consequences mentioned – loss of culture identity, breakdown of social cohesion, loss of knowledge transmission and marginalization – are very similar to the sociolinguistic literature on the cultural costs of language loss. The relationship between language and cultural identity resonates with the classic formulations of Sapir (1929) and Whorf (1956), and the loss of ecological and cultural knowledge embedded in indigenous languages is a theme of research on bio-cultural diversity and endangered knowledge systems (Harrison, 2007; Olugbemi-Gabriel & Ukpi, 2023). Language loss and marginalization go hand in hand, as is also the case for the argument that language loss contributes to socio-economic disadvantage and to the loss of minority communities' voice in larger socio-political processes (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

The strategies most strongly supported by the respondents can be related to existing approaches for language revitalization, such as media promotion, educational reform, community initiatives and government support. The priority placed on grassroots/community action is consistent with evidence that community ownership is pivotal to sustainable revitalization (Hinton, 2001; Wakkai & Banda, 2025), and the demand for curriculum reform and bilingual education shows the importance of the role of schools in maintaining minority languages (Hornberger, 2008; Kupolati, 2024). This media endorsement is in line with media being seen as a power for normalization and dissemination of minority languages (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). It should be noted that these strategies are most likely to be effective if they complement (rather than replace) intergenerational transmission in the home and community, as outlined in Fishman (1991).

These findings can be understood in the context of the demographic profile of the sample. The ages and educational and occupational backgrounds of respondents were wide-ranging, but there was a high level of agreement on the causes and consequences of shift, indicating that awareness of language endangerment was not limited to any particular age or segment of society in the community. The high proportion of Yoruba speakers, indigenous language with relatively high ethnolinguistic vitality, and the high levels of concern about shift, is noteworthy because it suggests that even those with a language with a relatively high ethnolinguistic vitality see the encroachment of English and global media on domains once occupied by indigenous languages. This concurs with the fact that the withdrawal of a language from high prestige areas of public life is a major early indicator of language endangerment (Ekpenyong et al., 2025; Ferguson, 1959). In the case of smaller languages in the sample, the same pressures would be anticipated to be more intense.

1. Limitations

There are a number of limitations to point out. Smallness of the sample, the fact that it was selected for the purposes of the study and was only taken from one locality, and the cross-sectional nature of the study, which measures perceptions at one point in time, not necessarily actual language behaviour or language change, make the results statistically less precise and less generalized. The self-reported attitudes could have been subject to social-desirability bias, and the analysis was descriptive, meaning that no formal tests were conducted to test associations among the demographic characteristics and language attitudes. Future studies should use larger probability samples within multiple communities, use direct measures of language use and intergenerational transmission, and use inferential methods in an attempt to quantify the relative influence of each socio-economic factor.



VII. Conclusion And Recommendations

This study offers community-level evidence which suggests that socio-economic factors, such as globalization, educational policy, urban migration and economic opportunity, combine to push minority languages out of those spheres where they are acquired and used in Oye-Ekiti. Residents' perception of consequences – loss of cultural identity, weakened social cohesion, disrupted knowledge transmission and marginalization – highlight the fact that the consequences of language loss go beyond the word level to the cultural and social fabric of the community. Most importantly, respondents did not see that shift as inevitable; they endorsed a coherent set of strategies for reverting the shift.

Based on this, some measures are proposed. Governments should enact and implement policies which will advance minority languages in education, administration and the media and which will encourage the documentation and revitalization of endangered languages. The communities should be given the space to drive revitalization, for example, through cultural festivals, language classes and community media, creating pride and ownership. Include indigenous languages in the curriculum of educational systems and establish bilingual education, with proper teacher preparation. Media should develop and broadcast indigenous language media to enhance visibility and use in everyday life. These measures would be supported by sustained research and documentation, as well as by using digital tools and ongoing monitoring of revitalization actions. Such strategies, pursued together and with a commitment to intergenerational transmission as an ultimate objective, can provide a realistic means to protect the language and culture of endangered languages.

Declarations

- **Ethical considerations.** Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent, and all responses were treated as confidential and anonymous.
- **Conflict of interest.** The author declares no conflict of interest.
- **Funding.** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency.

References

1. Batibo, H. M. (2005). Language decline and death in Africa: Causes, consequences and challenges. *Multilingual Matters*. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853598104>
2. Crystal, D. (2000). *Language death*. Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/language-death/E02594D0218AD1AB99259F0C717DF256>
3. Ekpenyong, M., Udoh, I., Urua, E.-A., Udoh, N., Obikudo, E., Anyanwu, O., Shehu, A., Sylvanus, E., Bassey, R., Saturday, U., Fakiyesi, T., Kekai, C.-P., Udoh, E., Ansa, S., Ifesieh, E., Ikhimwin, G., Udoeyo, U., Alexander, E., Okon, E., ... Akpan, A. (2025). A multimodal dataset for automating language vitality and endangerment assessment in south-south Nigeria. *Scientific Data*, 12(1), 1102. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41597-025-05337-6>
4. Ferguson, C. A. (1959). Diglossia. *Word*, 15(2), 325–340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00437956.1959.11659702>
5. Fishman, J. A. (1991). Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages. *Multilingual Matters*. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781800418097>
6. Giles, H., Bourhis, R. Y., & Taylor, D. M. (1977). Towards a theory of language in ethnic group relations. In H. Giles (Ed.), *Language, ethnicity and intergroup relations* (pp. 307–348). Academic Press.



7. Grenoble, L. A., & Whaley, L. J. (Eds.). (2006). *Saving languages: An introduction to language revitalisation*. Cambridge University Press.
8. Harrison, K. D. (2007). *When languages die: The extinction of the world's languages and the erosion of human knowledge*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195181920.001.0001>
9. Hinton, L. (2001). Language revitalisation: An overview. In L. Hinton & K. Hale (Eds.), *The green book of language revitalisation in practice* (pp. 3–18). Academic Press.
10. Holmes, J., & Wilson, N. (2022). *An introduction to sociolinguistics* (6th ed.). Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/An-Introduction-to-Sociolinguistics/Holmes-Wilson/p/book/9780367421106>
11. Hornberger, N. H. (Ed.). (2008). *Can schools save indigenous languages? Policy and practice on four continents*. Palgrave Macmillan.
12. Kupolati, O. O. (2024). Beyond home language: Heritage language maintenance practices of Yorùbá–English bilingual immigrants. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 28(3), 570–590. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13670069231175266>
13. Maikanti, S., Chukwu, A., Odibah, M. G., & Ogu, M. V. (2021). Globalization as a factor for language endangerment: Nigerian indigenous languages in focus. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 6(9), 521–527. <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v6i9.1055>
14. Nettle, D., & Romaine, S. (2000). *Vanishing voices: The extinction of the world's languages*. Oxford University Press.
15. Olugbemi-Gabriel, O., & Ukpi, M. (2023). The signifying culture: An intercultural and qualitative analysis of Tiv and Yoruba folktales for moral instruction and character determination in children. *F1000Research*, 11, 455. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.75732.2>
16. Sapir, E. (1929). The status of linguistics as a science. *Language*, 5(4), 207–214. <https://doi.org/10.2307/409588>
17. Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2000). *Linguistic genocide in education—or worldwide diversity and human rights?* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
18. Thomason, S. G. (2001). *Language contact: An introduction*. Edinburgh University Press.
19. Wakkai, H. H., & Banda, S. (2025). Intergenerational perspectives on language endangerment in Nigeria: A case study of Tarok. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 13(1), 41–54. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijll.20251301.15>
20. Whorf, B. L. (1956). *Language, thought, and reality: Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. MIT Press.