








The Perceptions of Indigenous Language and Cultural Synergy in Ghana and Sierra Leone: A Cross-Cultural Study

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how young people perceive the revitalization of indigenous languages in multicultural environments. The research team gathered data from a stratified random sample of 200 participants hailing from diverse rural and urban areas in Ghana and Sierra Leone. Employing a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, the study employed questionnaires and interviews to gauge local community perceptions toward indigenous language revitalization in Ghana and Sierra Leone. The team also conducted focus groups to gain qualitative insights. The two data sets were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as thematic qualitative analysis to reveal the perspectives of study participants on the importance of indigenous language in maintaining cultural legacy. The findings underscored the significance of indigenous languages beyond communication, emphasizing their exposure to external threats such as cultural assimilation and the dominance of foreign languages. The research team calls on the Ministries in charge of culture in Ghana and Sierra Leone to prioritize initiatives aimed at recovering and safeguarding indigenous languages, as a critical step for cultural transmission and preservation.

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, European languages dominated education, governance, and media in Africa. This paper stresses the importance of promoting indigenous languages in Sierra Leone and Ghana to enhance cultural pride and inclusivity. Citing linguistic scholars like Kramsch, Sadiq and Lupyan and Dale, the study argues that multilingualism enriches cultural understanding, with language serving as a medium for expressing ethnic identities, ecosystems, beliefs, and civilizations.¹ The concept of culture encompasses intricate

¹ Claire Kramsch, "Language and Culture in Second Language Learning," in *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Culture* (Routledge, 2014), 403–16; NADIA Sadiq, "English as a Social Symbol of Prestige & Its Impact on Urdu Language Speakers," *European*

social structures, behaviours, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and values, with language as an embodiment of culture.² Despite alternative communication means, language remains a cornerstone of indigenous cultural excellence.³ Language is shaped by cultural needs and encodes messages understandable to its members, emerging as a multifaceted expression of identities, values, beliefs, and conventions.

Ting-Toomey and Dorjee underline the intimate connection between language and culture, with language conveying cultural, ethical, and traditional aspects of indigenous peoples.⁴ Culture includes attire, religion, language, ritual, and artistic inclinations. Arizpe and Arizpe highlight the synergistic influence of language on cultural comprehension, promoting a postcolonial transcultural discourse.⁵ Yazykova emphasizes the implementation of the principle of dialogue of cultures in foreign language teaching methodology.⁶ The research explores the need to study foreign/second languages as a crucial part of national cultures, involving the acceptance of associated cultural norms and values. Effective communication with native speakers in a community requires deep cultural immersion. Gagliano and Grimonprez suggest that language serves as a code that encodes and transmits culture.⁷ Fowler and Kress argue that the syntactic structure of language reflects worldviews and cultures, with ideology embedded in language and practice.⁸ Kramersch differentiates cultural transmission in human and animal communication.⁹

Aftab, et al. discuss the influence of culture on values and norms through a common language.¹⁰ Language plays a key role in communication, cognitive processes, and opinion formation. Baker notes the profound impact of culture on language acquisition, highlighting the human capacity for language learning through cultural transmission.¹¹ Dlamini and Ferreira-Meyers emphasize the importance of understanding a society's culture to grasp specific words and literary terms.¹² Fasold and Connor-Linton advocate for cultural sensitivity in second-language pedagogy.¹³ Nanda and Warms explore the impact of language and culture on societal aspects like politics, economics, and social structures.¹⁴ Samovar, et al. and Ting-Toomey and Dorjee state that understanding a culture enhances creativity, communication, and comprehension.¹⁵ However, disparities in language, culture, and gender often lead to perceptions of incompetence among women. Tareva, et al. advocate for cultural integration in language education, emphasizing linguistic and cultural proficiency.¹⁶ Verhoeven suggests an integrated learning strategy recognizing the interplay of culture and language for personal development.¹⁷

Kramersch and Ayber and Hojeij discuss the significance of cross-cultural pragmatics in understanding language and culture, reinforcing the mutual impact of language and culture on second language acquisition and self-identity.¹⁸ Learning a new language entails immersing oneself in a new

Journal of Academic Essays 2, no. 8 (2015): 41–45; Gary Lupyán and Rick Dale, “The Role of Adaptation in Understanding Linguistic Diversity,” in *Language Structure and Environment* (John Benjamins, 2015), 289–316.

² Istvan Kecskes, “Language, Culture, and Context,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Culture* (Routledge, 2014), 113–28; Larry A Samovar et al., “Communication between Cultures,” 2013; Juliane House, “Own-Language Use in Academic Discourse in English as a Lingua Franca,” in *Exploring ELF in Japanese Academic and Business Contexts* (Routledge, 2015), 59–70.

³ Zdenek Salzmán, James Stanlaw, and Nobuko Adachi, *Language, Culture, and Society: An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology* (Westview Press, 2014).

⁴ Stella Ting-Toomey and Tenzin Dorjee, *Communicating across Cultures* (Guilford Publications, 2018).

⁵ L. Arizpe and L. Arizpe, *The Intellectual History of Culture and Development Institutions* (Springer International Publishing, 2015).

⁶ Natalia V Yazykova, “Paradigmatic Basis of Implementing Intercultural Approach to Foreign Language Education,” in *Proceedings of the Conference “Integrating Engineering Education and Humanities for Global Intercultural Perspectives”* (Springer, 2020), 296–304.

⁷ Monica Gagliano and Mavra Grimonprez, “Breaking the Silence—Language and the Making of Meaning in Plants,” *Ecopsychology* 7, no. 3 (2015): 145–52.

⁸ R. Fowler and G. Kress, *Critical Linguistics. Language and Control* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁹ Kramersch, “Language and Culture in Second Language Learning.”

¹⁰ Rizwan Aftab, Ayyaz Mahmood, and Muhammad Abdullah, “Language And Culture: A Study In The Sociolinguistic Perspective,” *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 6, no. 9 (2022): 5398–5412.

¹¹ Colin Baker, *A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism*, vol. 18 (Multilingual Matters, 2014).

¹² Phindile A Dlamini and Karen Ferreira-Meyers, “First Language Instruction? Eswatini Teachers' Insight of the Eswatini Language-in-Education Policy,” *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 41, no. 2 (2023): 143–57.

¹³ R. W. Fasold and J. Connor-Linton, *An Introduction to Language and Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 2014).

¹⁴ Serena Nanda and Richard L Warms, *Cultural Anthropology* (Sage Publications, 2019).

¹⁵ Samovar et al., “Communication between Cultures”; Ting-Toomey and Dorjee, *Communicating across Cultures*.

¹⁶ E G Tareva, A V Schepilova, and B V Tarev, “Intercultural Content of a Foreign Language Textbooks: Concept, Texts, Practices,” *XLinguae* 10, no. 3 (2017): 246.

¹⁷ Ludo Verhoeven, “Second Language Reading Acquisition,” in *Handbook of Reading Research, Volume IV* (Routledge, 2011), 661–83.

¹⁸ Kramersch, “Language and Culture in Second Language Learning”; Pinar Ozdemir Ayber and Zeina Hojeij, “Promoting Intercultural Awareness through Stories: A UAE Case,” *Journal of Teaching and Teacher Education* 9, no. 02 (2021).

culture, which influences personal identity. Kim and Richardson and Elyas stress the importance of integrating the cultural identities of L2 learners into successful language acquisition processes.¹⁹ The study of languages and cultures in Sierra Leone and Ghana is crucial for understanding language dynamics, cultural practices, identity formation, and the development of inclusive policies, promoting cross-cultural understanding. The study examines the cultural and linguistic dynamics in Ghana and Sierra Leone, focusing on the sub-Saharan African context. It examines the intricate relationship between language, communication, and culture in a post-colonial setting, emphasizing the need for new paradigms in this area. The research scrutinizes the impact of post-colonial privileges on linguistic diversity, media, and communication, particularly in the traditional practices of Ghana and Sierra Leone. Drawing from scholars like Sadiq and Heidari, et al., the study highlights the intertwined nature of language and culture. It argues that culture, being multifaceted and fluid, cannot be demarcated and has interconnected attributes.²⁰ Language plays a crucial role in shaping culture by transmitting norms, values, traditions, rituals, festivals, customs, and social conventions. The research focuses on the preservation and revitalization of endangered African languages, which are vital for cultural diversity and intellectual enrichment. It promises insights into indigenous populations' perspectives on language use. These findings are important for language policies, educational strategies, and social cohesion, advocating for inclusive societies. Indigenous languages, like Mende, Asante Twi, Temne, Yoruba, or Zulu, demonstrate advanced pitch perception and memory capacities, linking linguistic diversity to cognitive processes.

The following research objectives underpinned the study:

- a) To examine how indigenous languages in Ghana and Sierra Leone are perceived in terms of their importance in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage.
- b) To assess the extent to which indigenous language use contributes to cultural synergy and adaptation in the contemporary context of both Ghana and Sierra Leone.
- c) To evaluate the effectiveness of language revitalization efforts and policy implementation in promoting indigenous languages and preserving cultural diversity in these two West African countries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Importance of Preserving and Transmitting Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage, encompassing traditions, practices, and artefacts, plays a pivotal role in human society, essential for maintaining community identity, continuity, and connection to the past.²¹ It resists globalization's homogenizing effects, preserving unique identities.²² Cultural heritage also serves as an educational resource, offering insights into history, art, and social development, with institutions like schools and museums educating future generations.²³

Economically, heritage sites and traditions attract tourism, benefiting local economies. Socially, it fosters unity and a sense of belonging, bridging divides.²⁴ According to Maunganidze, Cultural heritage conserves traditional knowledge, offering solutions to modern challenges and promotes diplomacy.²⁵ It inspires creativity across arts and embeds ecological wisdom, advocating for sustainable practices.

¹⁹ Jungsook Kim and Elaine Richardson, "Transnational Students and Language Use," *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*, 2018, 1–8; Tariq, Elyas, "Diverging Identities: A 'contextualised' exploration of the Interplay of Competing Discourses in Two Saudi University Classrooms" (2011).

²⁰ Sadiq, "English as a Social Symbol of Prestige & Its Impact on Urdu Language Speakers"; Adeleh Heidari, Saeed Ketabi, and Rezvan Zonoobi, "The Role of Culture through the Eyes of Different Approaches to and Methods of Foreign Language Teaching," *Journal of Intercultural Communication* 14, no. 1 (2014): 1–15.

²¹ Kynan Gentry, "History, Heritage and Localism," *Policy Studies* 34, no. 5–6 (2013): 508–22; Hanan Waleed Al-Shami, Hoda A S Al-Alwan, and Tamarah A Abdulkareem, "Cultural Sustainability in Urban Third Places: Assessing the Impact of Co-Operation in Science and Technology in Cultural Third Places," *Ain Shams Engineering Journal* 15, no. 3 (2024): 102465.

²² Michelle L Stefano et al., *Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Boydell and Brewer, 2012).

²³ Rabeeh Barghi et al., "Heritage Education in the Primary School Standard Curriculum of Malaysia," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 61 (2017): 124–31.

²⁴ Natalina Carrà, "Heritage/Culture and Social Cohesion in the Project of Metropolitan City," *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 223 (2016): 583–89.

²⁵ Langtone Maunganidze, "A Moral Compass That Slipped: Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Rural Development in Zimbabwe," *Cogent Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2016): 1266749.

Preserving and sharing cultural heritage is vital for identity, education, economic growth, social cohesion, environmental sustainability, and international relations, ensuring a culturally rich global community.

Indigenous Language Use and Cultural Synergy

Zosu and Owosu mention that, indigenous languages are vital to the cultural identity of Indigenous communities, intertwined with the preservation of traditional knowledge and heritage.²⁶ Language serves as a cultural carrier, encoding worldviews and traditions.²⁷ The transmission of Indigenous languages across generations ensures the perpetuation of cultural heritage.²⁸ With the alarming rate of language endangerment, there's an urgent need for revitalization strategies.²⁹ Revitalization efforts, including speaking, writing, and teaching, drive cultural resurgence, enabling communities to reconnect with their roots.³⁰ According to Tabouret-Keller Language profoundly impacts Indigenous identity and self-worth.³¹

Community-led initiatives are critical for fostering ownership and agency in language preservation.³² Government policies and funding support these efforts, with research assessing their effectiveness.³³ Technology plays a role in engaging younger generations and bridging language transmission gaps.³⁴ The development of metrics to assess revitalization impact is crucial for gauging cultural synergy, highlighting the comprehensive approach needed for Indigenous language and cultural preservation.

Language Revitalization and Preservation

Language revitalization is crucial for maintaining the cultural diversity of indigenous communities, and addressing the risk posed by globalization, urbanization, and historical policies against indigenous languages.³⁵ McIvor and Ball are of the view that, efforts to reverse language decline involve legislative measures like New Zealand's Māori Language Act and Canada's Indigenous Languages Act, aiming to preserve linguistic heritage.³⁶ Incorporating indigenous languages into education through bilingual and immersion programs is a key strategy for fostering proficiency and sustainability.³⁷ However, challenges persist due to inconsistent policy implementation, inadequate funding, and the decline of fluent speakers.³⁸ This research underscores the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of revitalization initiatives to adapt strategies for the enduring preservation of indigenous languages and cultural diversity.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study was carried out using the convergent parallel mixed-methods design. The key data collection methods were questionnaires, observations, and interviews which were used to elicit responses from study participants. Structured questionnaires and structured interview guides were used to collect data on attitudes toward indigenous languages and cultures.

²⁶ Segbenu Joseph Zosu and Joseph Oluropo Owoso, "Exploring Cultural Synergies: Intergrating Yoruba Language in Mechanical Engineering Education," *Journal of College of Languages and Communication Arts Education* 2, no. 1 (2023): 103–14.

²⁷ Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, vol. 4 (Penguin, 2015); Kecskes, "Language, Culture, and Context."

²⁸ Gregory Younging, *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing by and about Indigenous Peoples* (Brush Education, 2018).

²⁹ Timothy Fitzgerald, *Religion and the Secular: Historical and Colonial Formations* (London: Routledge, 2014).

³⁰ Aidan Pine and Mark Turin, "Language Revitalization" (Oxford University Press, 2017).

³¹ Andrée Tabouret-Keller, "Language and Identity," *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, 2017, 315–26.

³² Glenn C Sutter, "Growing Ecomuseums on the Canadian Prairies: Prospects for Intangible Cultural Heritage," in *The Routledge Companion to Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Routledge, 2016), 453–64.

³³ Arjo Klamer, Anna Mignosa, and Lyudmila Lyudmila, "Cultural Heritage Policies: A Comparative Perspective," in *Handbook on the Economics of Cultural Heritage* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013), 37–86; Thomas G Weiss and Nina Connelly, "Protecting Cultural Heritage in War Zones," *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2019): 1–17.

³⁴ Dickson Adom et al., "African Proverbs for Cultural Education: A Step towards Digital Archiving," *Journal of History Culture and Art Research* 10, no. 4 (2021): 44–59.

³⁵ Mary Hermes, Megan Bang, and Ananda Marin, "Designing Indigenous Language Revitalization," *Harvard Educational Review* 82, no. 3 (2012): 381–402; Pine and Turin, "Language Revitalization."

³⁶ Onowa McIvor and Jessica Ball, "Language-in-Education Policies and Indigenous Language Revitalization Efforts in Canada: Considerations for Non-Dominant Language Education in the Global South" (FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education, 2019).

³⁷ Morgane Simonis et al., "Executive Control Performance and Foreign-Language Proficiency Associated with Immersion Education in French-Speaking Belgium," *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 23, no. 2 (2020): 355–70.

³⁸ Helga Pülzl and Oliver Treib, "Implementing Public Policy," in *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis* (Routledge, 2017), 115–34.

Sample Selection Procedure and Sample Size

The participant pool consisted of 200 individuals with 100 participants each from Sierra Leone and Ghana. The study sample was a representation of people with a variety of age groups, gender, ethnic affiliations and religions. A well-chosen sample presented a diversity of perspectives, allowing for a thorough study. As a result, the researchers concluded that the study participants possessed extensive knowledge, competence, and a diverse perspective, as well as the ability to make insightful remarks on the subject at hand. By selecting study participants with a wide range of experiences, perspectives, or unique insights, the researchers were able to gain deeper understanding of the topic under investigation. The study subjects were chosen based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The researchers used a variety of engagement strategies that were effective for gathering data. For the many study participants, in-person interviews, phone interviews, observation, and structured questionnaires were undertaken. On the designated days, the study participants were interviewed using both formal and unstructured approaches to gain deeper insights into areas such as language revitalization, collaborative efforts, and individual experiences. The proper values in telephone and video interviews were accordingly monitored, including preserving flexibility and sincerity in the researchers' behaviour and tone of voice as well as keeping the room quiet where calls were placed. Observations were made at indigenous cultural events and locations to provide practical context for the study. The questionnaires, which were available in both electronic and paper modes, requested information on the importance, application, and issues related to indigenous languages and cultures. The quantitative data was examined using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were interpreted using theme analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were provided with clear information about the study's purpose and procedures in the introductory section of the Google Form shared online for data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity measures were taken to protect study participants' identities and personal information, including anonymized data reporting and secure data storage. All the study participants were required to sign or provide the initials of their names on an informed consent form before they were recruited to be a part of the study. Respect for cultural sensitivity was a crucial aspect of the ethics that governed this study, especially given its focus on indigenous languages and cultural heritage. The researchers avoided using any language in the research instruments that could be perceived as disrespectful and/or may be labeled as culturally insensitive. This study was conducted in a manner that promoted equity and fairness, ensuring equal opportunity for all the 200 study participants. The researchers also ensured that the voices of the participants were heard and valued. By adhering to these ethical considerations, the researchers upheld the integrity of the study.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This section begins with the research results and then moves on to the discussion. The research objectives were as follows: a) Investigate how indigenous languages in Ghana and Sierra Leone are perceived in terms of their importance in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage, b) Assess the extent to which indigenous language use contributes to cultural synergy and adaptation in the contemporary context of both Ghana and Sierra Leone. c) Evaluate the effectiveness of language revitalization efforts and policy implementation in promoting indigenous languages and preserving cultural diversity in these two West African countries.

Demographic Information of Study Participants

Table 1: Distribution of Age, Gender, Religion, and Marital Status

Distribution	Range	%
Age	20-30 years	34.4
	31-40 years	42.0

	41-50 years	18.3
	51-60 years	2.5
	61-70 years	1.3
	71-80 years	1.5
Gender	Male	62.7
	Female	37.3
Religion	Christianity	79.1
	Islam	17.9
	Indigenous or Traditional Religions	2
	Nil	0.4
	Free thinker	0.6
Marital Status	Single 37.3% Married	49.3
	In a Relationship	9.7
	Widowed	2
	Divorced	1
	Separated	0.7

The study's study participants were predominantly young, with 34.4% aged 20-30 and 42.0% aged 31-40, showing a younger demographic. Gender representation was equal at 37.3% for both males and females. The majority were Christian (79.1%), with Islam being the second most common religion (17.9%). Other beliefs like indigenous religions and freethinking had minimal representation. Most study participants were single (37.3%) or married (49.3%).

Could you please specify your ethnic background? (For example: Mende, Temne, Limba, Akan, Mole-Dagbon, Ewe, etc.)

115 responses

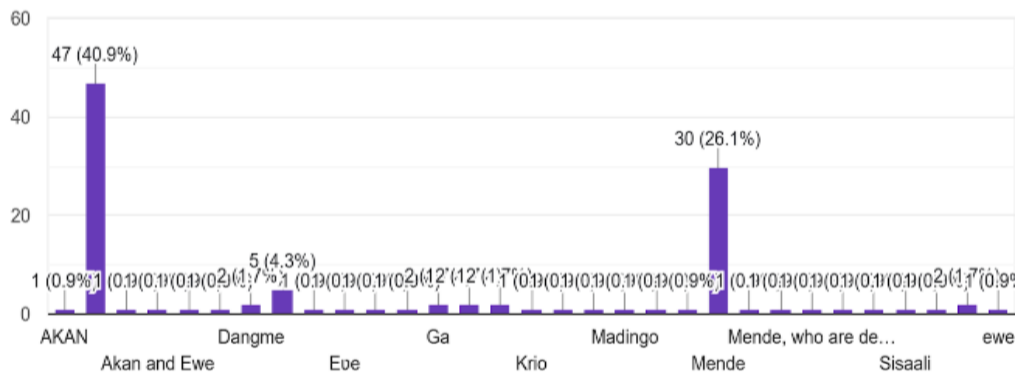


Figure 1: Distribution of Ethnic Background

Based on ethnic distribution, Akan people were the most prevalent ethnic group among the study participants with a share of 40.9%. Mende people are the second most common ethnic group, accounting for 26.1% of study participants. Dangme in Ghana and other ethnic groups like the Temne have a lower presence, at 4.3% of study participants and below.

How often do you use an indigenous language in your daily life? (Select one)
134 responses

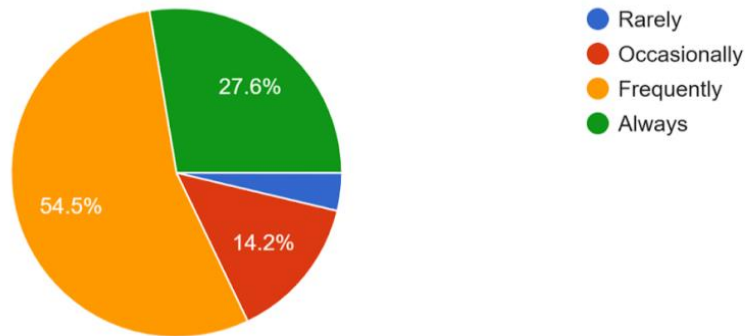


Figure 2: Use of Indigenous Language

More than half of the study participants (54.5%) said they frequently use indigenous languages in their daily lives (Figure 2). This means that indigenous languages are used significantly and consistently in communication. A significant proportion of study participants (27.6%) reported always using an indigenous language. This shows a strong commitment to preserving and prioritizing the use of these languages in everyday interactions. A small but significant proportion (14.2%) reported occasionally using an indigenous language. This may indicate that study participants sometimes prefer to use indigenous languages, although this is not always the case. A small proportion (3.7%) reported rarely using indigenous languages.

A participant in their middle ages during a focus group discussion stated that:

"I frequently use our indigenous language daily for cultural connections and heritage, varying its use depending on the context."

Another elderly participant stated that:

"In Ghana, our native languages, embodying history and beliefs, are vital for preserving and transmitting our cultural legacy."

Indigenous Language Proficiency: (Rate your proficiency on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not proficient and 5 being highly proficient)
133 responses

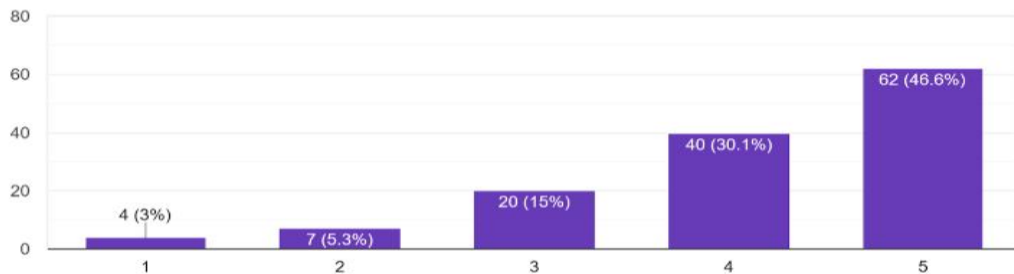


Figure 3: Indigenous Language Proficiency

The survey (Figure 3) revealed that 46.6% of participants are fluent, 30.1% proficient, 15% moderately qualified, 5.3% have limited skills, and 3% are not fluent in the language. The table below displays the significant relationships between gender, language use, and language proficiency.

Table 2: The chi-square test for the relationship between gender and language use and between gender and language proficiency.

Test	Chi-Square Statistic	P-Value
Gender and Language Use	7.54	0.006
Gender and Language Proficiency	5.48	0.019

In both cases, because the p-values are less than the conventional significance level of 0.05, we can conclude that there are significant correlations between gender and language use, as well as gender and language skill.

Research Objectives

- a) *Investigate how indigenous languages in Ghana and Sierra Leone are perceived in terms of their importance in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage*

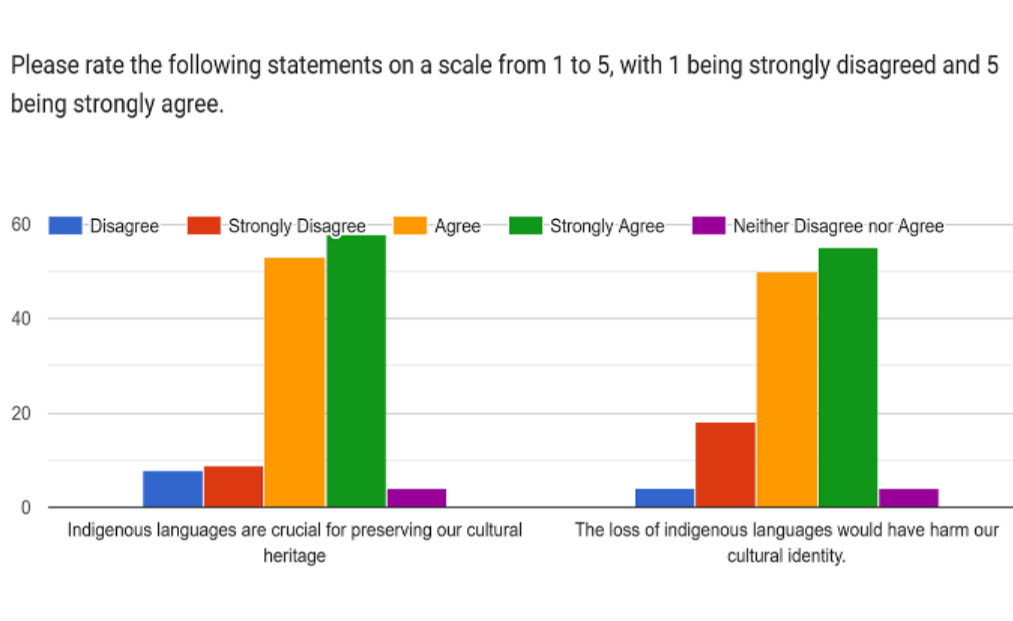


Figure 4: Perceptions on the Importance of Preserving and Transmitting Cultural Heritage

The majority of study participants strongly agreed that "indigenous languages are critical for preserving our cultural heritage" and that "loss of indigenous language would harm our cultural identity." The following statements by two older participants from Ghana and Sierra Leone provide insight into their views on the preservation of indigenous languages.

"Our languages in Sierra Leone are crucial for preserving customs, traditions, folklore, and identity; they're more than words, they're our legacy."

"In Ghana, our languages are key to preserving stories, customs, and ancestral knowledge, embodying our pride, identity, and legacy, beyond mere communication tools."

b) Assess the extent to which indigenous language use contributes to cultural synergy and adaptation in the contemporary context of both Ghana and Sierra Leone.

To achieve this objective, a frequency analysis was conducted. The results are displayed in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Indigenous Language Use and Cultural Synergy

Category	Number of Responses
Strong Relationship between Indigenous Languages and Cultural Preservation	61
Importance of Indigenous Languages in Cultural Transmission	16
Examples from Personal Experience	10
Importance of Indigenous Language in Cultural Identity	5
Concerns about Cultural Extinction and Westernization	5
Miscellaneous/Other	5

Sixty-one study participants see a strong link between indigenous languages and cultural preservation; 16 and 10 cited transmission importance and presented personal examples. A respondent commented on the relationship between indigenous language and cultural preservation as follows:

"I believe our indigenous languages play a vital role in preserving culture. Personal experiences highlight their significance. Transmitting culture through language is crucial."

c) Evaluate the effectiveness of language revitalization efforts and policy implementation in promoting indigenous languages and preserving cultural diversity in these two West African countries.

To address this objective, a frequency analysis was carried out. Table 7 below displays the result.

Please rate the following statements on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagreed and 5 being strongly agree:

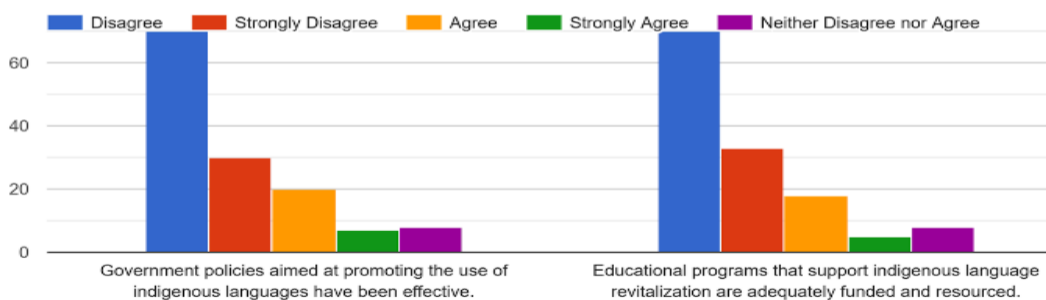


Figure 5: Perceptions on the Importance of Preserving and Transmitting Cultural Heritage

The majority of study participants (over 60) disagreed that 'Government policies aimed at improving the use of indigenous languages have been beneficial', and that 'Educational programs that encourage indigenous language revitalization are appropriately funded and resources'.

A respondent stated as follows:

"I strongly dispute government initiatives promoting native languages as effective. I see no intended impact, and most people share this sentiment. These policies haven't advanced our languages."

DISCUSSION

The consensus among study participants is that indigenous languages are crucial for cultural heritage and identity, encapsulating community narratives and traditions, and symbolizing unique cultural identities.³⁹ Moreover, the study links indigenous language use with cultural preservation, echoing Pine and Turin as well as Fitzgerald on the necessity of revitalization.⁴⁰ Interviewee anecdotes reinforce findings, guiding policymakers and educators in developing revitalization strategies. Also, participants' scepticism about government initiatives' effectiveness mirrors academic worries, highlighting the gap between policy aims and local results, resonating with Khawaja as well as O'Rourke and Ramallo's advocacy for evaluating language revitalization efforts to preserve indigenous languages and cultures.⁴¹

Furthermore, the views of the study participants on language proficiency align with the studies of Gentry, Ghahramani et al., and Al-Shami et al. on the influence of fluency in preserving cultural heritage.⁴² The study's findings indicate that the majority of the study participants strongly agreed on the critical role of indigenous languages in preserving cultural heritage and identity. This is in league with the view of Gentry who intimated that indigenous languages are repositories of community narratives, traditions, and oral histories, essential for maintaining cultural continuity.⁴³ In unison with this view, Ghahramani et al. argue that indigenous languages symbolise unique cultural identities, reflecting diverse worldviews and belief systems.⁴⁴ Al-Shami et al. further elaborate on how indigenous languages serve as vehicles for transmitting traditional knowledge, customs, and oral traditions across generations.⁴⁵ These scholars collectively highlight the intrinsic link between language and cultural heritage preservation.

The study's revelation of a strong linkage between indigenous languages and cultural preservation, with study participants citing personal experiences to underscore language's importance in maintaining cultural practices, is consistent with scholarly viewpoints that advocate language revitalization efforts. Pine and Turin stress the necessity of revitalization in safeguarding cultural identity, asserting that language serves as a medium through which cultural knowledge and traditions are transmitted.⁴⁶ Fitzgerald further emphasises the pivotal role of language in cultural preservation, highlighting how language revitalization initiatives empower communities to reclaim and perpetuate their cultural heritage.⁴⁷ Together, these scholars underscore the indispensable connection between language revitalization and the preservation of cultural diversity.

The demographic distribution of study participants reveals a predominantly young population, with 34.4% aged 20–30 and 42.0% aged 31–40, suggesting a generational shift in attitudes towards indigenous languages. This demographic trend contrasts with some scholarly views that may have emphasised the role of older generations in preserving linguistic and cultural traditions.⁴⁸ It affirms how the youth in various communities could potentially influence their age class in conversations on the nexus between indigenous language and cultural preservation. While the study participants expressed the cultural significance of indigenous languages with over 60% strongly affirming the importance of preserving these languages, there may be nuances that challenge some scholarly views. For instance, the scepticism expressed by study participants regarding the effectiveness of government initiatives aimed at promoting indigenous languages contradicts the arguments made by Weiss and Connelly, who

³⁹ Stefano et al., *Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage*.

⁴⁰ Pine and Turin, "Language Revitalization." Colleen M Fitzgerald, "Understanding Language Vitality and Reclamation as Resilience: A Framework for Language Endangerment and 'loss' (Commentary on Mufwene)," *Language* 93, no. 4 (2017): e280–97.

⁴¹ Khawaja, "Consequences and Remedies of Indigenous Language Loss in Canada"; Bernadette O'Rourke and Fernando Ramallo, "Competing Ideologies of Linguistic Authority amongst New Speakers in Contemporary Galicia," *Language in Society* 42, no. 3 (2013): 287–305.

⁴² Gentry, "History, Heritage and Localism"; Ghahramani, McArdle, and Fatorić, "Minority Community Resilience and Cultural Heritage Preservation: A Case Study of the Gullah Geechee Community"; Al-Shami, Al-Alwan, and Abdulkareem, "Cultural Sustainability in Urban Third Places: Assessing the Impact of Co-Operation in Science and Technology' in Cultural Third Places."

⁴³ Gentry, "History, Heritage and Localism."

⁴⁴ Ghahramani, McArdle, and Fatorić, "Minority Community Resilience and Cultural Heritage Preservation: A Case Study of the Gullah Geechee Community."

⁴⁵ Al-Shami, Al-Alwan, and Abdulkareem, "Cultural Sustainability in Urban Third Places: Assessing the Impact of Co-Operation in Science and Technology' in Cultural Third Places."

⁴⁶ Pine and Turin, "Language Revitalization."

⁴⁷ Fitzgerald, "Understanding Language Vitality and Reclamation as Resilience: A Framework for Language Endangerment and 'loss' (Commentary on Mufwene)."

⁴⁸ Kramsch, "Language and Culture in Second Language Learning."

advocated for a robust policy framework to support language revitalization efforts.⁴⁹ Despite the recognition of the cultural value of indigenous languages, the perceived lack of impact from government policies suggests a gap between policy intentions and community perceptions, highlighting the need for further investigation and dialogue between policymakers and local communities.

The study indicated that 46.6% of study participants considered themselves fluent in their indigenous language. The study's findings reveal varying levels of proficiency in indigenous languages among participants, with a significant proportion being fluent or proficient. While this aligns with the importance placed on language fluency by scholars like Gentry and Ghahramani et al. in preserving cultural heritage, it also diverges from the perspective of Al-Shami et al., who emphasize the significance of language maintenance and transmission regardless of proficiency level.⁵⁰ In other words, while language proficiency is crucial, maintaining and using indigenous languages in everyday contexts, even at limited skill levels, can still contribute to cultural preservation and identity formation.

Moreover, the gender distribution of study participants, with 62.7% male and 37.3% female, challenges the assumptions about gender parity in language use and proficiency. While some scholars may have explored gender dynamics in language acquisition and usage, the numerical representation of gender in this study prompts further investigation into gender-specific patterns of language behaviour and attitudes.⁵¹ Regarding the use of indigenous languages, Figure 2 illustrates that over half of the study participants (54.5%) frequently use indigenous languages in their daily lives, indicating a significant level of linguistic engagement. This finding contrasts with any scholarly perspectives that may have suggested a decline in indigenous language usage due to globalisation or urbanisation.⁵²

Furthermore, the perceived importance of indigenous languages in preserving cultural heritage, as depicted in Figure 4, reflects a strong consensus among study participants. The majority strongly agreed that indigenous languages are critical for cultural preservation, contradicting any scholarly viewpoints that may have questioned the efficacy of language revitalization efforts.⁵³ Scholars such as Kramsch emphasise the benefits of multilingualism and cultural integration, suggesting that indigenous language use alone may not be sufficient for fostering cultural synergy and adaptation.⁵⁴ Moreover, while the study highlights the strong link between indigenous languages and cultural preservation, some scholars argue for the coexistence of indigenous and global languages, emphasising the role of linguistic diversity in cultural exchange and understanding.

In assessing the effectiveness of language revitalization efforts and policy implementation, Figure 5 reveals a significant divergence between community perceptions and scholarly recommendations. While scholars may advocate for robust policy frameworks to support language revitalization, the majority of study participants disagreed that government initiatives aimed at improving the use of indigenous languages have been beneficial.⁵⁵ The findings of this study highlight nuanced perspectives and challenges that may not always align with scholarly discourse. By interrogating these discrepancies, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding indigenous language revitalization and cultural preservation in Ghana and Sierra Leone.

The study's revelation of scepticism among participants regarding the effectiveness of government initiatives aimed at promoting indigenous languages aligns with scholarly concerns about the implementation and impact of language revitalization policies. Khawaja discusses the gap between policy objectives and local realities, emphasising the need for rigorous evaluation of revitalization efforts to ensure their effectiveness.⁵⁶ Similarly, O'Rourke and Ramallo advocate for systematic assessment of

⁴⁹ Weiss and Connelly, "Protecting Cultural Heritage in War Zones."

⁵⁰ Gentry, "History, Heritage and Localism"; Ghahramani, McArdle, and Fatorić, "Minority Community Resilience and Cultural Heritage Preservation: A Case Study of the Gullah Geechee Community." Al-Shami, Al-Alwan, and Abdulkareem, "Cultural Sustainability in Urban Third Places: Assessing the Impact of Co-Operation in Science and Technology in Cultural Third Places."

⁵¹ Ting-Toomey and Dorjee, *Communicating across Cultures*.

⁵² Fasold and Connor-Linton, *An Introduction to Language and Linguistics*.

⁵³ McIvor and Ball, "Language-in-Education Policies and Indigenous Language Revitalization Efforts in Canada: Considerations for Non-Dominant Language Education in the Global South"; Skutnabb-Kangas, Nicholas, and Reyhner, "Linguistic Human Rights and Language Revitalization in the USA and Canada."

⁵⁴ Kramsch, "Language and Culture in Second Language Learning."

⁵⁵ Matthews and Van Wyk, "Speaking the Language of the Patient: Indigenous Language Policy and Practice."

⁵⁶ Khawaja, "Consequences and Remedies of Indigenous Language Loss in Canada."

language revitalization initiatives to address challenges and optimise outcomes.⁵⁷ While the study participants expressed scepticism about the effectiveness of government initiatives aimed at promoting indigenous languages, some scholars in the literature review might hold contrasting views. For example, Khawaja (2021) discusses the importance of evaluating language revitalization efforts but emphasises the potential benefits of such initiatives more than the study's study participants. Similarly, O'Rourke and Ramallo advocate for assessing revitalization programmes, suggesting that they contribute positively to language preservation and cultural diversity.⁵⁸ The disagreement lies in the participants' assertion that government policies have had little to no impact on advancing indigenous languages, contrasting with scholars who may argue for the potential efficacy of well-implemented policies in supporting language revitalization.

Also, the study participants' perspectives on the promotion of international relations are consistent with the findings of Lähdesmäki, Winter, Lee, and Mark.⁵⁹ This is because the study called for community engagement and collaboration with indigenous groups in both countries. Overall, the study corroborates academic research, underscoring the importance of indigenous languages in cultural heritage protection in Ghana and Sierra Leone. Participants' insights and scholarly findings highlight the challenges and significance of language revitalization for maintaining cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the perceptions and revitalization of indigenous languages in multicultural environments in Ghana and Sierra Leone. The data revealed that most Ghanaians and Sierra Leoneans use indigenous languages fluently in their daily lives, which implies that contrary to popular belief that globalization gradually wipes out local languages, it only limits the use of these languages in bigger towns. Also, Ghanaians and Sierra Leoneans believe that indigenous languages are critical for preserving our cultural heritage and that losing our indigenous language would harm our cultural identity, which implies that there issues of language loss and acculturation are not just matters of concern for linguists and ethnologists but equally for indigenous peoples in Africa. The study further revealed that policies aimed at improving the use of indigenous languages have not been enforced, and not enough funds and resources have been put into educational programs that encourage indigenous language revitalization. Based on these key findings, these conclusions have been drawn:

1. Indigenous languages are still considered important in preserving the culture and identity of people in Ghana and Sierra Leone. This implies that there is still a segment of the community in both countries that can be used to revitalize Indigenous languages.
2. Indigenous language use is a vital component of Ghanaian and Sierra Leonean culture. This suggests that Indigenous language use and cultural preservation are strongly connected.
3. Language revitalization efforts and policies have not been effective in promoting Indigenous languages and preserving cultural diversity in Ghana and Sierra Leone. This implies that community-led initiatives and technology could be effective alternatives to promote Indigenous languages and preserve cultural diversity in the two countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Governments of Ghana and Sierra Leone should analyze their policies and initiatives related to indigenous languages and cultures. This might include examining the inclusion of indigenous languages in educational curricula, the provision of resources for language revitalization programmes, and the recognition of indigenous rights and cultural heritage. In addition, through their ministries of culture, they should identify the challenges faced by indigenous communities in preserving

⁵⁷ O'Rourke and Ramallo, "Competing Ideologies of Linguistic Authority amongst New Speakers in Contemporary Galicia."

⁵⁸ O'Rourke and Ramallo, "Competing Ideologies of Linguistic Authority amongst New Speakers in Contemporary Galicia."

⁵⁹ Lähdesmäki, "Developing EU Heritage Diplomacy: Notions of Cultural Diplomacy, Cultural Heritage, and Intercultural Dialogue among EU Officials and European Heritage Practitioners"; Tim Winter, "One Belt, One Road, One Heritage: Cultural Diplomacy and the Silk Road," *The Diplomat* 29 (2016): 1–5; Lee, "Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy: Emerging Education Hubs in Asia"; Mark, "Rethinking Cultural Diplomacy: The Cultural Diplomacy of New Zealand, the Canadian Federation and Quebec."

and revitalizing their languages and cultures. This might include factors such as language endangerment, limited access to education in indigenous languages, and the erosion of traditional knowledge systems.

The Ministry of Education in Sierra Leone and Ghana should develop culturally relevant pedagogical approaches for teaching indigenous languages, incorporating community-based learning methods and traditional cultural practices.

Future studies must investigate the intergenerational language transmission practices should be examined within indigenous societies in Africa to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder language transmission across generations. Also, language attitude surveys should be conducted for an in-depth exploration of the attitudes of different age groups towards indigenous languages in Sierra Leone and Ghana to identify the perceived relevance of language in cultural heritage preservation. Moreover, language proficiency and cultural adaptation relationships should be explored to examine the degree to which fluency influences cultural practices and identity formation. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to assess the effectiveness of language revitalization efforts in promoting language continuity and to understand the generational language transmission patterns within indigenous communities in Sierra Leone and Ghana.

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