# Language Ideologies Surrounding the Loss and Revitalization of Indigenous Children's Songs in Nawfija, Nigeria

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## Abstract:

This paper examines how competing language ideologies shape the decline and potential revitalization of Indigenous children's songs in Nawfija, an Igbo-speaking community in southeastern Nigeria. Situated within sociolinguistic debates on language, identity, and globalization, the study explores how beliefs about English and Indigenous languages influence language socialization practices and intergenerational cultural transmission.

The theoretical framework draws on a multilevel conceptualization of language ideologies, with particular attention to how individual experiences, social interests, and community structures interact to produce and sustain beliefs about language value and use. The concept of ideological clarification, which refers to an open and honest assessment of how community members really feel about using and preserving their language, is also employed to interrogate the gap between participants' stated support for revitalization of their Indigenous songs and their willingness to engage in it in practice.

The data were derived from qualitative interviews with 20 participants across different age groups, educational levels, and parental statuses. The analysis identifies three dominant and competing ideologies. The first, "English equates to intelligence and success", is predominantly reported by older participants (aged 30–40), who describe social stigma attached to speaking Igbo or its Nawfija variety in public and institutional spaces. Consequently, in a bid to be perceived as intelligent and economically successful, community members attempt to reconstruct their Igbo identity as *Engligbo* or 'white Igbo'. The second ideology, "English as the language of geographical mobility", is articulated chiefly by younger participants (aged 18–29), many of whom are university students aspiring to migrate to English-speaking countries in the Global North. For these participants, English language competence is pragmatically essential, and Indigenous song practices are consequently deprioritized. The third ideology, "Igbo/Nawfija variety is a language of identity", is voiced predominantly by older participants and mothers, who argue that Indigenous children's songs are inseparable from their cultural heritage, ancestral place, and collective identity as *Ndị Igbo*. This perspective frames Indigenous songs as critical tools for transmitting cultural knowledge, moral values, and a sense of place, such that their erosion represents not merely linguistic loss but a loss of identity and heritage.

While all twenty participants expressed verbal support for revitalizing the Indigenous songs, several, particularly younger participants, simultaneously admitted to a personal lack of interest in learning them. This contradiction, between what community members say they want and what they do and are willing to do, is a recurring pattern in endangered language communities. This underscores the importance of ideological clarification in revitalization efforts, as community verbal support does not necessarily translate into sustained practice.

The findings highlight how globalizing forces and migration aspirations intersect with local language ecologies, producing complex and sometimes contradictory orientations toward language use. Community-driven strategies, such as integrating Indigenous songs into school curricula, leveraging digital media, and fostering intergenerational transmission, are proposed as revitalization pathways. By foregrounding the interplay between language ideologies, identity, and globalization, this study contributes to broader sociolinguistic discussions about the challenges of maintaining minority languages in an increasingly globalized world.

**Keywords: language ideology, language revitalization, Indigenous children's songs, globalization**

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