

**REVITALIZATION OF URHOBO LANGUAGE**

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**A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS STUDIES, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A) IN LINGUISTICS STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY**

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**APPROVAL PAGE**

I, certify that the research was carried out by **OKOH, PROMISE EBUKE** in the Department of Linguistics Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, under my supervision.

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## **PLAGIARISM CERTIFICATION**

I, **OKOH, PROMISE EBUKE** with the matriculation ART2008927 declare that this work titled “**REVITALIZATION OF URHOBO LANGUAGE**” has successfully passed the anti-plagiarism test and so does not violate any copyright regulation.

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## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to God Almighty, for His unwavering guidance, sustenance, and divine favor. My esteemed mentors, whose invaluable guidance and expertise have significantly shaped my academic journey. My loving parents, whose unconditional love, support, and motivation have been a constant source of inspiration throughout my life. May this work be a testament to their collective impact on my life.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study aimed at investigating the revitalization of the endangered Urhobo language. The goals of the study are to develop a comprehensive revitalization plan for the Urhobo language and to preserve and promote Urhobo cultural identity. This study is motivated by a desire to preserve the indigenous Urhobo language and explore the sociolinguistic phenomena of language shift, endangerment, and revitalization. The data for the study was gathered through responses to a questionnaire conducted with 50 native speakers of the Urhobo language. For demographic information, the respondents were categorized into various age groups, gender and educational level. The data were analyzed using the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) framework. The findings of the study are that the Urhobo language is not well-represented in formal domains such as education, government, and media and that data from Stages 5 and 6 indicate that while some families encourage children to learn Urhobo, the frequency of use within homes is declining. The study recommends that language immersion programs are to be implemented to enable children to learn the Urhobo language in a natural environment and implementation of community-based language initiatives is required to preserve the endangered Urhobo language.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Background of the Study

In an era marked by globalization and rapid socio-cultural change, many indigenous languages face challenges of decline and potential extinction. This study explores the revitalization of the Urhobo language, a timely endeavor aimed at reinvigorating its use among native speakers and ensuring its survival for future generations. By examining the factors that have contributed to the erosion of the language and identifying strategies for its revival, this research seeks to contribute to broader efforts in language preservation and cultural sustainability.

Language is the heart of human society. It stands as a pillar through which we as human beings experience our relationships and transfer thought to one another. Without language, which serves as the basis for all scientific work, we are not so far off from common animals. Various definitions of language have been offered by scholars in a bid to capture the sophisticated nature of language. Greenberg (1956:1) defines language as “a system of signals conforming to the rules which constitute its grammar, or as a set of culturally transmitted behavior patterns shared by a group of individuals.” This definition of language highlights that language as a system of signals can be used in different forms such as spoken, written or gestures as long as it follows the rules which make up the grammar of the said language. It also emphasizes how society and culture influence

language in a particular language group. Language revitalization is a sociolinguistics phenomenon that refers to the stoppage of the loss of a language or the bringing back to life of an already dead language. It is also termed language revival or reversing language shift.

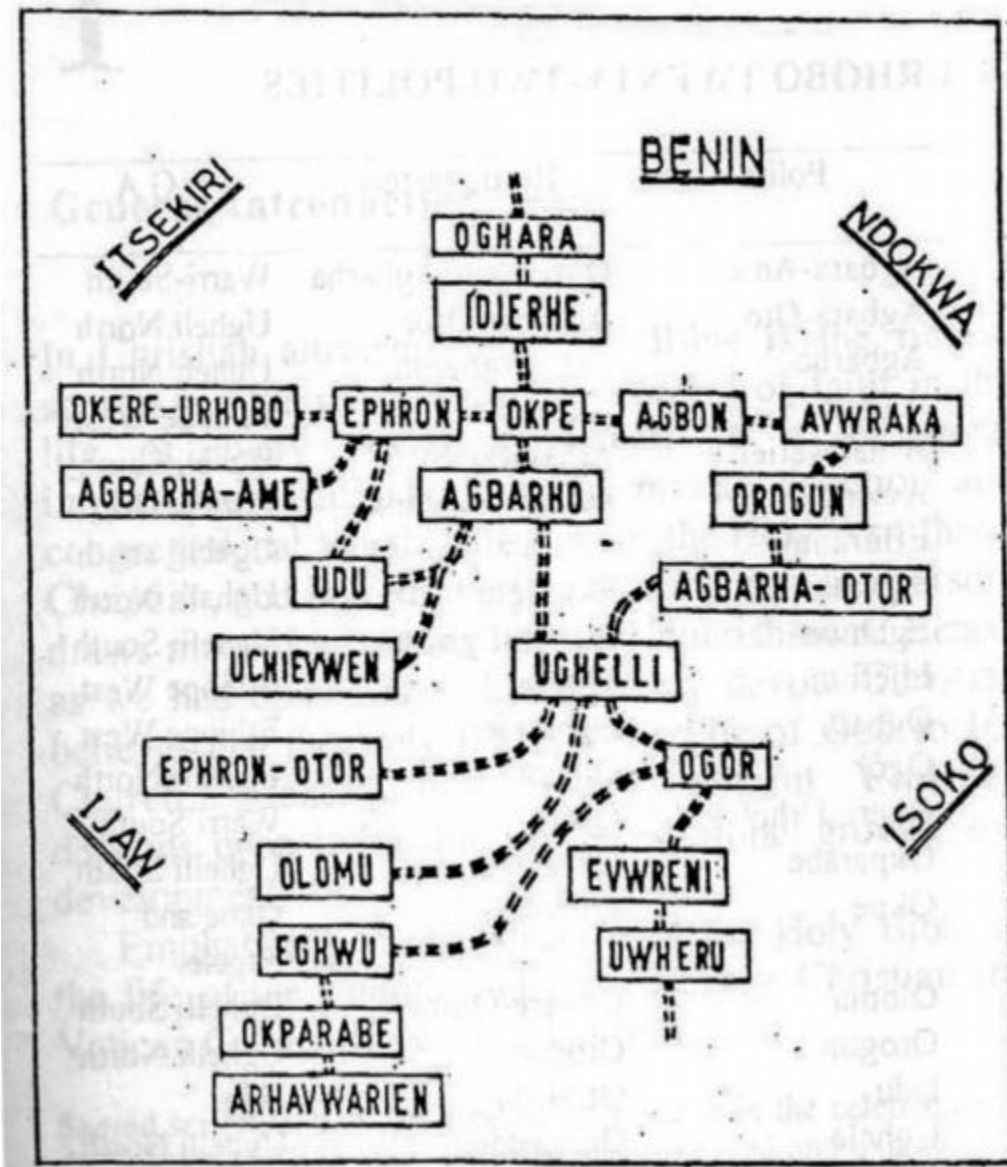
“Language revitalization is essentially the development of programs that result in re-establishing a language which has ceased being the language of communication in a speech community”, (Hinton 2001). Speakers of a language are tasked with the burden to revitalize their endangered language, and a language is termed dead or extinct when there are no longer speakers of that language. Language endangerment occurs when speakers of a language are declining and neglecting the language. This worsens when those speakers of a language opt for another language entirely then begin to teach their children the other language instead of their original language thereby stopping the passage of the language and the culture associated with it leading to its extinction. According to Thompson, 2013, “endangered languages are languages that are on the brink of extinction, much like endangered species of plants or animals. A language is considered to be endangered when parents are no longer teaching it to their children and it is no longer being actively used in everyday life”. This simply entails that language cannot survive without the speakers' consistent usage over time. In this sense, the Urhobo language has become an endangered language due to the rapid decline of speakers over the years.

Urhobo children have differed the language in favour of other languages such as Nigerian pidgin or English or even neighbouring languages which has resulted in a major decline of speakers of the language. The adults and elders of the language also struggle to enforce and pass the language on to the younger generation while some even join them in speaking other languages further, resulting in the endangerment of the language.

This phenomenon can be termed as language shift, which refers to the preference or usage of another language over the original language in a particular language group. In the case of the Urhobo people, colonialism had brought about the introduction of English and Nigerian Pidgin language, thereby causing a language shift from Urhobo to these foreign languages, leading to the endangerment of Urhobo language. McGuinne (2013) also suggests that: “a language becomes endangered when it loses power to another language because of colonialism”. This is evident in the predicament of the Urhobo language. Aside from colonialism, language shift can occur from various causes which includes; migration or changing locations, as speakers of a language might move to an area occupied by another language group and drop their language to learn the other. This, in turn, will cause the generation after them to lose their original language if they are not properly guided by the adults. Negative language attitudes can also result in language shifts. However, in the case of revitalization, the Urhobo language remains in dire need due to its steady decline. Its endangerment, which began shortly after the colonization of Nigeria, due to the strong economic and political power of the British empire, has exacerbated.

## **1.1 The Urohobo People and Their Language**

The view is widely held among Urohobos that Urohobos were at some distant past among the people of Ife. They migrated to Benin about the 6th Century A.D. During the Ogiso Dynasty, they began the series of migrations from Benin and by 11th Century A.D. had peopled by and large, the area now known as Urohobo-land. That area spans 22 clans. (Obiomah, 1995). The geographical display above shows the 22 clans that make up the Urohobo land. Urohobo, as a term, refers to the language, the native speakers of the language, and their traditional homeland. They belong to the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, belonging to the Niger-Congo language family and the Edoid group within the Benue-Congo branch. The Urohobo speaking population is estimated to be around 1.2 million, although they possess a population of about 7 million with a bulk of the people residing in the southwestern states of Delta and Bayelsa in Nigeria are also known as part of the Niger Delta. The Urohobo people's linguistic neighbours include the Itsekiri and Ijaw to the west, the Ijaw to the south, the Edo people to the north, the Ukwuani people to the northeast and the Isoko people to the southeast. (Ekeh: 2006)



(Ekeh, 2006)

## **1.2 Purpose of Study**

Urhobo language has become an endangered language due to the rapid decline of speakers over the years. With fewer people speaking the language and limited scholarly attention being paid to this phenomenon, this study becomes paramount. This study seeks to revitalize the endangered Urhobo language by analyzing the causes and proffering adequate solutions that are streamlined to this particular language. The goals of the study are;

- i. to assess the current status of the Urhobo language, i.e., the level of endangerment
- ii. to preserve and promote Urhobo cultural identity because the culture dies with the language if it is not revitalized
- iii. to develop a comprehensive revitalization plan for the Urhobo language
- iv. to identify the social, cultural, political, educational, and even economic factors contributing to the endangerment of the Urhobo language

## **1.3 Research Questions**

This study seeks to analyze the revitalization of an endangered Urhobo language and address some key questions such as;

- i. Is Urhobo language an endangered language?

- ii. Is the revitalization of Urhobo language achievable?
- iii. How can the Urhobo language be preserved?
- iv. Are there socio-cultural, political, economic and educational factors responsible for the engagement of the Urhobo language?

## **1.4 Methodology**

This study's methodology used a few data collection techniques, such as a questionnaire and analysis of reference materials.

### **1.4.1 Method of Data Collection**

This study utilized a qualitative research design, specifically through the use of a questionnaire. Data were gathered from responses to the questionnaire conducted with 50 native speakers of the Urhobo language. For demographic information, the respondents were categorized into various age groups, gender and educational level. For ages group, 34 (68%) of the respondents belonged to the age group of 18 to 30 (younger generation), 11 (22%) of the respondents belonged to the age group of 31 to 50 (middle generation) and 5 (10%) of the respondents belonged to the age group of 51 and above (older generation). For gender, 24 (48%) of the respondents were males while 26 (52%) of the respondents were females. For educational level, 37 (74%) of the respondents possess a tertiary level, 10 (20%) of the respondents possess a secondary level, 1 (2%) of the

respondents possess a primary level and 2 (4%) of the respondents possess no formal education.

The collected data was analyzed using the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) to identify and categorize various steps of the framework and to devise the necessary revitalization path for the Urhobo language. The primary data source for this study were obtained from the respondents. Also, a secondary set of data was acquired from books, journals, articles, and other online resources. These secondary sources provided relevant materials that contributed to a deeper understanding of the study and served as valuable references.

#### **1.4.2 Method of Data Analysis**

From the data gathered, a large part of the data were used to build the study.

Based on the aim of the study, the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) by Fishman is used as a framework towards a path for language revitalization. Data collected were majorly analyzed using this framework.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study is significant in its attempt to preserve the cultural identity of the Urhobos and revitalize the endangered language. It serves as a valuable reference material for future researchers interested in related topics and also contributes to larger efforts to revitalize endangered languages. It also emphasizes the need to prevent the death of the Urhobo

language and supports global initiatives to promote linguistic and cultural diversity. This study is different from other related studies as it focuses on revitalization of the endangered Urhobo language and makes use of the GIDS framework as a reference path to revitalization.

### **1.6 Limitation of the Study**

Despite the significance of this study, there are several limitations that must be noted. One of the major limitations is the scope of the study, which focuses primarily on the Urhobo language and culture. While the study provides useful knowledge into the language and culture of the Urhobos, it may not be generalizable to other languages and cultures as it may lack the ability to capture the full range of perspectives and experiences related to language revitalization efforts. Also, the study relies heavily on the GIDS framework by Fishman, which may not capture the full extent of language revitalization efforts. Lastly, the study's reliance on qualitative data collection methods may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. This study on Urhobo language revitalization was conducted despite limitations, as it provides valuable insights into language preservation efforts and contributes to the broader discourse on the topic. The study's findings, although not entirely generalizable, offer a comprehensive analysis of the Urhobo language and culture, and its application of the GIDS framework and qualitative research method (questionnaire) enhances the understanding of language revitalization in localized contexts and for indigenous languages.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature organized under the following subheadings: conceptual framework, previous studies, and issues addressed in the present study.

#### **2.1 Conceptual Review**

Joshua Fishman, a prominent advocate for language revitalization, on several occasions has likened language shift to a terminal illness (Fishman, 1991:39). He emphasised the importance of recognizing that "believing that finding a cure is worthwhile" (Fishman, 1991:39) is crucial for initiating meaningful action in the area of revitalization. .

To gain a thorough understanding of language revitalization in the case of Uhrobo, several additional concepts highlight the process and creates a basis for understanding how the process works in Urhobo language as well as other languages. A few of these concepts include;

##### **2.1.1 Language Revitalization and Devitalization**

The very use of the prefix 're' in words such as revitalization, rejuvenation, revival, and resurgence points to the undoing of some past action or deed (Glass, 2004). Namely, if

the world's linguistic diversity had not been "devitalized" to begin with, through colonization, imperial adventure, war, and forced migration, there would be less need for historically marginalized languages with ever-dwindling numbers of speakers to be "revitalized" today, (Pine, Turin, 2017). Devitalization of a language refers to the decline in the vitality of a language. For example, the Urhobo language has been in a downward decline since colonialism and the introduction of English language as a replacement for communication in Nigeria. According to The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Urhobo language is now considered an endangered language and this is due to the devitalization of the language. Several factors can cause a language to devitalize such as language shift, natural disaster and war, economic disadvantages, e.t.c.

Language revitalization as a linguistic topic was introduced in the 1970s (Ghobhainn, 1971). Until the late 1980s the topic only featured marginally in socio- and contact linguistics. Revitalization efforts are poised at increasing speakers of the endangered language in order to revive it. Under normal circumstances, a language is learnt from home but due to devitalization of a language, it might be learnt as a second language in order to ensure revitalization. Other revitalization efforts include teaching the younger generation the language. According to Krauss, 1992, most of the times, the work of language revitalization is left up to the community members. Therefore, parents and elders may take it upon themselves to teach the younger generation the language. For example, children were restricted from speaking English or rather "Oyinbo" language in

various household in other to ensure that the Urhobo culture was preserved. (Akpofure-Okenrentie, 2018). The challenge here was that even though parents and elders might be fluent speakers, they may not possess the necessary expertise in second language acquisition and pedagogy to effectively address revitalization challenges that the Urhobo culture faces nor effectively prevent the loss of the language.

### **2.1.2 Language Shift**

Nawaz et al (2012) explain that language shift is the initial step of the cause of language death; therefore, it may also be referred to as language death (especially when the shift is total), as it results to total disappearance of the language. In the case of Urhobo, a clear sign of language shift is the fact that there has been a steady decline in the number of native speakers (especially elders) while the younger generation has little to no proficiency in the language. The language is being used less and less and more restricted to the home only as English and Nigerian Pidgin gain more dominance. De Clerk (2002:222) asserts that language shift occurs when a linguistic minority comes in contact with a language which offers greater political and economic rewards or carries higher prestige. This is also evident in the fact that Urhobo's contact with a much more powerful English language during colonialism led to a language shift in modern day.

Another factor contributing to language shift is religion. Scholars such as Igboanus (2009) and Omoniyi (2009) posit that religion plays a significant role in language shift, particularly within the West African context. To buttress this point, Urhobo has lost

dominance to English due to over 92% of the Urhobo people being Christians. Christianity which slowly became a dominant religion along Islam in the late 19th century has influenced Urhobo people to shift from their language, culture and gods thereby resulting in not even just a language shift but also a culture shift.

For example, a sample data of pupils' names collected (from a primary school in Gbagyi community: Dnakwo LEA primary school, Bwari, Abuja) to investigate the naming practices among the Gbagyi is presented. These are names of Gbagyi children in the age group between 4 to 10 years as in table below.

<b>S/no</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Language of name</b>
1	Agbmada Philimon	Gbagyi + English
2	Shekwolo Allolo	Gbagyi + Gbagyi
3	Marvelous Allolo	English + Gbagyi
4	Goodness Samuel	English + English
5	Rachael Titus	English + English
6	Desire Dantani	English + Hausa
7	Confidence Joseph	English + English
8	Jude Hosea	English + English

9	Gift Barnabas	English + English
10	Joseph David	English + English

**(Dalhatu, 2020).**

The table above, presented by Abigail Musa Dalhatu, 2020 analyzes the naming practice among the Gbagyi to account for language shift. Using this data, it can be observed that most pupils bear English first and surnames, only two pupils bear

Gbagyi first name and two, Gbagyi surnames. Also, one pupil bears an English first name and Hausa surname. This shows how English dominates Gbagyi in naming practices further highlight a language shift or preference for the Gbagyi people. Language revitalisation is the process of reversing language shift by implementing methods to strengthen the language (Fitzgerald 2021; Hinton 2001). This shows that language shift is first and foremost the most critical cause of a language being in need of revival.

### **2.1.3 Language Endangerment**

According to the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2003, there are six categories or degrees to language endangerment which include;

5. Safe: Is spoken by all generations and intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted.

4. Unsafe: Most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g. home).

3. Definitely endangered: Children no longer learn the language as a mother tongue in the home.

2. Severely endangered: The language is spoken by grandparents and older generations. While the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves.

1. Critically endangered: The youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently.

0. Extinct: there are no speakers left (NB: The Atlas presumes extinction if there have been no known speakers since the 1950s.)

Language endangerment is concerned with degrees as it is important to understand the classification of endangerment situations and the appropriate response for each situation. For example, a situation whereby children no longer learn the language as a mother tongue in the home means that the language is definitely endangered and language revitalization programmes should be set in place.

#### **2.1.4 Language Documentation**

Language documentation is a "comprehensive corpus of primary data which leaves nothing to be desired by later generations wanting to explore whatever aspect of the

language they are interested in' (Himmelmann, 2006). This indicates that language documentation encompasses a thorough collection of data reflecting the complete linguistic practices associated with a specific speech community. A good documentation of the language, including a grammar, dictionary and texts, is indispensable, but this does not always exist (Schmidt 1990: 100, 108, 111, Amery 1994: 147). Language documentation as a subfield of linguistics shares an important relationship with language revitalization as it provides a foundation for language education, cultural preservation, and community engagement. These documentations can be in forms of written texts, audio and video recordings, and dictionaries. By documenting a language, linguists and community members can develop language learning materials, create language programs, and promote language use among young people, ultimately helping to revitalize and sustain endangered languages.

According to Susan et al (2011: 291-305), in rare cases, individuals have revived languages purely from documentation, learning them and passing them on to their children. In the United States, two such examples - both the result of extraordinary efforts by the individuals involved - are those of Jessie Little Doe Baird of the Wampanoag tribe in Massachusetts and Daryl Baldwin and his family of the Miami tribe. Both of these individuals took it upon themselves to further their education in formal linguistics and work diligently to apply that knowledge to the everyday access and use of their heritage languages at home and in their communities

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

Previous works of authors relating to the subject matter ‘language revitalization’ will be reviewed in an attempt to establish possible connections and similarities between their works and this present work. These works include;

### **2.2.1 Towards Revitalization of The Urhobo Language: A Return To Orality by Akpofure-Okenrentie, Ejomafuvwe C. (2018)**

Akpofure-Okenrentie and Ejomafuvwe C. (2018) work of towards language revitalization in the case of Urhobo language discusses language revitalization as a pressing concern globally, as many languages face the threat of extinction. The Urhobo language, spoken by the Urhobo people in the Delta region of Nigeria, is no exception. The Urhobo language is spoken by approximately 1 million people in the Delta region of Nigeria (Akpofure-Okenrentie & Ejomafuvwe C., 2018). Despite its relatively large speaker population, the Urhobo language is considered endangered due to the increasing use of English and other dominant languages in the region (Bamgbose, 2000). Akpofure-Okenrentie and Ejomafuvwe C. (2018) study highlights the importance of revitalizing the Urhobo language to promote cultural identity and preserve the language's unique features.

Akpofure-Okenrentie and Ejomafuvwe C. (2018) study emphasizes the importance of orality in language revitalization. Orality refers to the use of spoken language in communication, as opposed to written language (Ong, 1982). The authors argue that a

return to orality is essential for revitalizing the Urhobo language, as it allows for the natural and spontaneous use of the language in everyday communication.

Akpofure-Okenrentie and Ejomafuvwe C. (2018) study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining verbal interactions, interviews, and historical research. The study found that the Urhobo language has been neglected and marginalized, leading to a decline in its use and proficiency among younger generations. The authors propose a range of strategies for revitalizing the Urhobo language, including the development of language education programs, the promotion of language use in public domains, and the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to support language learning and communication.

Akpofure-Okenrentie and Ejomafuvwe C. (2018) study provides valuable insights into the challenges facing the Urhobo language and proposes practical strategies for its revitalization. The study highlights the importance of orality and community engagement in language revitalization efforts. As the world becomes increasingly globalized, it is essential to preserve and promote linguistic diversity, and studies like this one contribute to our understanding of the complex issues involved in language revitalization.

2.2.2 Ifeoma Mabel Onyemelukwe's (2019) research on language endangerment, specifically focusing on the Igbo language, offers important data into the factors that contribute to language endangerment, the implications of language loss, and potential strategies for revitalizing the Igbo language. The study utilizes both descriptive and

historical methodologies to assess the current status of the Igbo language, identifying negative language attitudes, a lack of loyalty to the Igbo language, and its marginalization as significant contributors to its endangerment. These findings align with existing literature on language endangerment, which emphasizes the critical roles of language attitudes, loyalty, and policy in influencing the survival of endangered languages (Fishman, 1991; Krauss, 1992).

More so, Onyemelukwe's study underscores the repercussions of language loss, such as the threat of extinction, cultural decline, and the erosion of identity. The research indicates that the Igbo language could face extinction within the next forty to fifty years if substantial revitalization efforts are not implemented. This conclusion is consistent with prior studies that stress the urgent necessity for revitalization initiatives to avert language extinction (Hinton, 2002). The study recommends addressing negative language attitudes, raising awareness among the Igbo community about the significance of language loyalty, and fostering socio-linguistic readiness for literacy in Igbo as essential measures for the revitalization of the Igbo language.

The study shows the significance of language loyalty and attitudes in influencing the status of endangered languages, aligning with prior research in the field of language endangerment (Emenanjo & Bleambo, 2013). Additionally, the recommendation for fostering socio-linguistic readiness for literacy in Igbo is in agreement with earlier studies

on language revitalization, which emphasize the critical role of literacy in enhancing language usage and preservation (Hinton, 2002).

Onyemelukwe's (2019) recommendations towards revitalizing the Igbo language includes:

### 1. Changing Undesirable Attitudes to the Igbo Language

- Reclaim adult Igbo speakers to Type A polyglottism
- Encourage willing readiness to use Igbo language
- Cultivate fluent speaking in Igbo
- Avoid code-switching and code-mixing
- Socialize Igbo children in Igbo language
- Use Igbo as the medium of communication at home

### 2. Sensitization of Ndigbo to Display Great Loyalty to the Igbo Language

- Promote robust language loyalty among Igbo people
- Encourage language loyalty to prevent language shift

### 3. Socio-Linguistic Readiness for Literacy in Igbo

- Encourage Igbo children to learn Igbo in schools
- Teach Igbo children to read and write Igbo at home

- Read Igbo stories and fables to Igbo children
- Provide learner-friendly Igbo books
- Include Igbo language in school curricula
- Provide adequate infrastructural facilities and instructional materials for Igbo language teaching

#### 4. Development of Igbo to Become a Language of Science and Technology

- Develop Igbo language to become a language of science and technology
- Sensitize the public to the availability of Igbo language teaching
- Elevate Igbo language teaching to L2 status

### **2.3 Concern of present study**

This study is focused on the revitalization of the Urhobo language, which is a Niger-Congo language spoken in Delta State, Nigeria. Unlike previous research that has examined language revitalization in the context of endangered languages using various theoretical frameworks, including orality, the study specifically targets the revitalization of the Urhobo language. The primary objective of this research is to investigate the revitalization efforts for the Urhobo language aided by the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) theoretical framework.

While their research shows the importance of oral traditions in encouraging language use, this study advances this conversation by applying a systematic framework, such as the GIDS, to the revitalization of the Urhobo language. The GIDS serves as a robust tool for evaluating language endangerment and revitalization initiatives, thus enhancing the effectiveness of the research. By focusing on revitalization and using a systematic framework, the study aims to provide a more proactive and solution-focused approach to addressing language decline.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.0 Introduction

This study uses the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) theory developed by Fishman (1991) as its theoretical framework. The GIDS theory serves as a descriptive model for understanding language shift and revitalization processes. It is arranged in stages, outlining the phenomena of language decline and revitalization while offering a means to identify stages of language endangerment and corresponding revitalization strategies. The GIDS theory suggests that language shift is a gradual process that unfolds over multiple generations. Fishman identifies eight stages within this framework; notably, the higher the stage number assigned to a minority language, the greater the level of disruption it experiences.

Grounded in sociolinguistics, language contact, and language planning theories, the GIDS theory utilizes the contributions of notable sociolinguists, including Joshua Fishman, who has extensively examined language maintenance and is the propounder of the theory. Also, the theory incorporates insights from language planners such as Haugen (1966), who addressed themes related to language planning and development. While the GIDS theory is primarily descriptive, it is important to note that it does not aim to explain the underlying mechanisms driving language shift and revitalization. Rather, it provides a structured framework to comprehend these important processes.

### **3.1 Theoretical Orientation and Application**

The Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) framework was developed through Fishman's extensive experience with language minorities and his observations of their functioning. The GIDS consists of eight stages, resembling the Richter scale, where higher stages indicate greater disruption to the language minority (Fishman, 1991). These stages enable researchers to classify language minorities and compare their situations. The GIDS is instrumental in descriptive and empirical research. Through its eight stages, researchers can effectively classify language minorities and carry out comparisons among various language groups. Also, the GIDS supports the formulation of targeted language revitalization strategies, taking into account the status of a minority language within the framework.

**STAGES OF REVERSING LANGUAGE SHIFT  
SEVERITY OF INTERGENERATIONAL DISLOCATION**  
(read from the bottom up)

1. Education, work sphere, mass media and governmental operations at higher and nationwide levels
2. Local/regional mass media and governmental services
3. The local/regional (i.e. non-neighbourhood) work sphere, both among Xmen and among Ymen
- 4b. Public schools for Xish children, offering some instruction via Xish, but substantially under Yish curricular and staffing control
- 4a. Schools in lieu of compulsory education and substantially under Xish curricular and staffing control

*II. RLS to transcend diglossia, subsequent to its attainment*

5. Schools for literacy acquisition, for the old and for the young, and not in lieu of compulsory education
6. The intergenerational and demographically concentrated home-family-neighbourhood: the basis of mother tongue transmission
7. Cultural interaction in Xish primarily involving the community-based older generation
8. Reconstructing Xish and adult acquisition of XSL.

*I. RLS to attain diglossia (assuming prior ideological clarification)*

(Fishman, 1991)

[Xmen = member of the language minority; Ymen = member of the majority; Xish = minority language; Yish = majority language; XSL = Xish as a Second Language]

For clarity regarding the figure presented above, the stages of GIDS will be elaborated upon below. These stages are structured hierarchically, with Stage 1 at the top designated for languages that demonstrate strong vitality and dominance, while Stage 8 at the bottom is for languages that are severely endangered and at risk of extinction. The stages can also be represented in the following manner;

**Stage 1:** The language is used in national government services and international communication.

**Stage 2:** The language is used in regional government services and national media.

**Stage 3:** The language is used in local government services and mass media.

**Stage 4:** The language is used in formal education, such as schools.

**Stage 5:** The language is used in informal settings, such as the home and community.

**Stage 6:** Intergenerational mother-tongue continuity, where the language is transmitted from parents to children.

**Stage 7:** The language is used by older generations and some members of the younger generation.

**Stage 8:** The most vulnerable stage, where the language is used only by older generations.

Fishman (1991) talks on the importance of a systematic, step-by-step approach to reversing language shift, where each stage builds on the previous one. He argued that educational institutions can play a constructive role in language revitalization only if the language is already ingrained in intergenerational use within the community (stage 6). He also advises against prioritizing more advanced stages (3-1) without first establishing a strong foundation of intergenerational mother-tongue continuity (stage 6). He argues that the success of language revitalization primarily relies on family and community dynamics, rather than solely on formal educational institutions (Fishman, 1991).

Category	Number Of Respondents	Percentage (%)
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Is Urhobo taught in schools in your area? (yes)	18	36.7
What level of education is Urhobo taught? (Primary, secondary and tertiary)	Primary - 5	23.8
	Secondary - 7	33.3
	Tertiary - 9	42.9
Are there any Urhobo language materials or resources available for students? (Yes)	18	38.3

**(Okoh, 2025)**

To understand the application of the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), the Urhobo language will serve as a case study in the table above. The sample data, sourced from respondents was collected through a questionnaire administered to 50 respondents.

Findings revealed that the Urhobo language is used to a minimal extent for teaching in different level of education.

This data indicates that Urhobo is not at Stage 4 of the GIDS, as its limited use in formal education suggests a disruption in its intergenerational transmission. By analyzing the

language's position on the GIDS, we can assess the vitality of Urhobo and identify appropriate revitalization strategies to strengthen its usage and ensure its sustainability.

### **3.2 Theoretical Application to Current Study**

The study's objective is to demonstrate how the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) can be used in the process of revitalising the endangered Urhobo language. Through the implementation of the GIDS framework to the Urhobo language, this study will add to the current literature on language revitalization. The GIDS framework will help to reveal the level of Urhobo language's usage in different spheres of life, such as education, government, media and the community.

The application of the GIDS framework will allow for the determination of the best language revitalization measures that can be taken for the Urhobo language. Through the assessment of the language's current vitality and the identification of areas that need improvement, this study will aid in the creation of specific language revitalization measures that are suitable for the Urhobo language community. It may include ensuring that Urhobo is taught in formal schooling systems, encouraging community language projects or lobbying for political and legal measures that would encourage the use of Urhobo in government and the media.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter examines and discusses the primary aspects of the work, which are data presentation and analysis. We have explored the relevant concepts associated with the study and connected them to the language in question. However, a comprehensive understanding can only be achieved through a substantial presentation of data illustrations related to the language under investigation. In this chapter, we shall discuss the findings of the research that we conducted with the endangered Urhobo language using the GIDS framework and a questionnaire filled by 50 native speakers of Urhobo. The findings reveal the situation of the language, in particular how well it is maintained by the native speakers and how often they use it, their level of language proficiency and what attitudes they hold towards the language.

## 4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

### Stage 1, 2, 3 of The GIDS Framework

Category	Number Of Respondents	Percentage (%)
At work or school	3	6.3
Are there any community-based language initiatives or programs to promote Urhobo? (Yes)	16	34
Is Urhobo taught in schools in your area? (Yes)	18	36.7
Is Urhobo used in government official contexts? (Yes)	15	31.3
How often is Urhobo used in government official contexts? (frequently)	3	11.1
Are there any Urhobo language programs or broadcasts on radio or television? (Yes)	17	37.8
Are there any Urhobo language materials or resources available for students? (Yes)	18	38.3

(Okoh, 2025)

The data presented above for Stage 1, 2 and 3 of the GIDS framework shows that Urhobo language is still not well developed in the formal register, that is, in educational institutions, at the workplace, in the mass media and in government institutions. This is shown by the fact that only 18 respondents (36.7%) said that this language is taught in schools in their area. In addition, the use of Urhobo language in government functions is not common since 15 (31.3%) said that the language is used in this context while 3 (11.1%) of the respondents reported that they use it frequently. In addition, while 17 (37.8%) of the respondents responded that there are Urhobo language programs or broadcasts on radio or television, this is not widespread. Lack of language materials is also an issue of concern as only 18 (38.3%) of the respondents indicated that there are Urhobo language materials or resources for students. From these results, it can be stated that Urhobo language is not at Stage 1, 2 and 3 of the GIDS framework and is actually at a more severe level of language threat.

#### **Stage 4 of the GIDS Framework**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number Of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Is Urhobo taught in schools in your area? (yes)	18	36.7
What level of education is Urhobo taught? (Primary,	Primary – 5	23.8

secondary and tertiary)	Secondary - 7	33.3
	Tertiary – 9	42.9
Are there any Urhobo language materials or resources available for students? (Yes)	18	38.3

**(Okoh, 2025)**

The data presented above for Stage 4 of the GIDS framework indicates that the Urhobo language has a minimal presence within the education system. Specifically, only 18 respondents, representing 36.7%, reported that Urhobo is offered in schools within their locality, suggesting a limited use of the language in formal educational contexts. The data further reveals that Urhobo instruction occurs at various educational levels, including primary, secondary, and tertiary education.

A breakdown of the levels at which Urhobo is taught shows that 23.8% of respondents indicated it is taught at the primary level, 33.3% at the secondary level, and 42.9% at the tertiary level. Nevertheless, despite this variation, the overall utilization of Urhobo in educational settings remains restricted. Additionally, the availability of language materials is also constrained, with only 18 respondents, or 38.3%, reporting the presence of Urhobo language resources for students.

These findings suggest that the Urhobo language is not at Stage 4 of the GIDS framework; rather, it appears to be at a more advanced stage of language endangerment.

### Stage 5 of the GIDS Framework

Category	Number Of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Do you speak Urhobo with your family members?(Yes)	30	60
How often do you speak Urhobo with your family members?	Daily- 16 Weekly- 6 Rarely- 21	37.2 14 48.8
Do your children or younger relatives speak Urhobo?(Yes)	24	49
How often do they speak Urhobo?	Daily- 14 Weekly- 5 Rarely- 18	37.8 13.5 48.6
Is Urhobo used in community events and gatherings?(Yes)	40	80.6

How often is Urhobo used in community events and gatherings?	Frequently - 18	42.9
	Occasionally - 19	45.2
	Rarely – 6	14.3
Are there any community-based language initiatives or programs to promote Urhobo? (Yes)	16	34

**(Okoh, 2025)**

The data presented regarding Stage 5 of the GIDS framework evaluates the use of the Urhobo language in informal contexts, including home and community environments. The results indicate that the Urhobo language does not fulfill the criteria required for Stage 5, which entails frequent usage in informal settings and strong intergenerational transmission of the language.

Only 30 respondents, representing 60%, reported speaking Urhobo with family members. Notably, a significant portion, 21 respondents or 48.8%, indicated that they seldom communicate in Urhobo within the family. Additionally, while 24 respondents, or 49%, stated that their children or younger relatives speak Urhobo, the frequency of this usage raises concerns, as only 14, or 37.8%, engage in daily conversation in Urhobo.

These findings clearly show that the Urhobo language does not qualify for Stage 5 of the GIDS framework. Its usage in informal settings is limited and intergenerational

transmission appears to be waning. This observation aligns with UNESCO’s classification of Urhobo as an endangered language.

The data also highlights a decline in language use among various generations. For instance, 21 respondents, or 48.8%, rarely engage in speaking Urhobo with their family members, and 18 respondents, or 48.6%, noted that their children or younger relatives seldom speak the language. These results suggest that the use of Urhobo in informal settings is not as robust as it has the potential to be.

### Stage 6 of the GIDS Framework

Category	Number Of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Do you encourage your children or younger family members to learn and speak Urhobo? (Yes)	27	54
Do your children or younger relatives speak Urhobo? (Yes)	24	49
How often do they speak Urhobo?	Daily- 14 Weekly- 5	37.8 13.5

	Rarely- 18	48.6
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**(Okoh, 2025)**

The data collected for Stage 6 of the GIDS framework assesses intergenerational mother-tongue continuity, where the language is transmitted from parents to children. However, the results indicate that the Urhobo language does not meet the criteria for Stage 6. This is evident in the limited parental encouragement, with only 27 (54%) respondents reporting that they encourage their children or younger family members to learn and speak Urhobo.

Furthermore, the data reveals a declining intergenerational transmission of Urhobo language. While 24 (49%) respondents reported that their children or younger relatives speak Urhobo, the frequency of use is a concern, with only 14 (37.8%) speaking Urhobo daily. Additionally, a significant number of respondents (18 or 48.6%) reported that their children or younger relatives rarely speak Urhobo. This indicates that the transmission of the Urhobo language between generations is not occurring effectively.

The findings clearly demonstrate that the Urhobo language does not reach Stage 6 of the GIDS framework. There is a decline in its intergenerational transmission, and its usage among younger populations remains restricted. These observations align with UNESCO's classification of Urhobo as an endangered language. Consequently, it is essential to implement urgent measures to encourage and facilitate the transmission of the Urhobo language from parents to children, thereby ensuring its long-term viability.

**Stage 7 of the GIDS Framework.**

Category (age and language proficiency)	Number Of Respondents	Percentage (%)
18 to 30 (Younger generation)	Fluent: 4	11.76
	Conversational: 3	8.82
	Basic knowledge: 14	41.18
	No knowledge: 13	38.24
31 to 50 (Middle generation)	Fluent: 5	45.45
	Conversational: 3	27.27
	Basic knowledge: 2	18.18
	No knowledge: 1	9.09
51 and above (Older generation)	Fluent: 4	80
	Conversational: 1	20
	Basic knowledge: 0	0
	No knowledge: 0	0

**(Okoh, 2025)**

The data reveals a significant decline in intergenerational language use, aligning with the characteristics of Stage 7.

The analysis of the data highlights the limited transmission of Urhobo to younger generations. Among the 18-30 age group, only 11.76% are fluent in Urhobo, while 38.24% have no knowledge of the language. The majority (41.18%) possess only basic knowledge, suggesting weak transmission of Urhobo to this age group. This aligns with the characteristics of Stage 7, as proficiency is minimal among the younger population.

In contrast, the 31-50 age group shows relatively strong knowledge of the language, with 45.45% being fluent and 27.27% being conversational. However, this group also shows a decline in language transmission, with 9.09% having no knowledge of Urhobo. The 51 and above age group shows a high level of proficiency, with 80% being fluent and 20% conversational. This demonstrates that Urhobo is actively spoken by the older generation, but its use is not being transmitted to younger generations.

Based on the data, it is clear that Urhobo aligns with Stage 7 of the GIDS framework. The language is predominantly used by the older generation, with significant fluency observed in individuals aged 51 and above. However, proficiency sharply declines in younger age groups, where many have only basic or no knowledge. These trends suggest a lack of robust intergenerational transmission, which is a hallmark of Stage 7.

### **Stage 8 of the GIDS Framework**

Category (age and language proficiency)	Number Of Respondents	Percentage (%)
18 to 30 (Younger generation)	Fluent: 4	11.76
	Conversational: 3	8.82
	Basic knowledge: 14	41.18
	No knowledge: 13	38.24
31 to 50 (Middle generation)	Fluent: 5	45.45
	Conversational: 3	27.27
	Basic knowledge: 2	18.18
	No knowledge: 1	9.09
51 and above (Older generation)	Fluent: 4	80
	Conversational: 1	20
	Basic knowledge: 0	0
	No knowledge: 0	0

(Okoh, 2025)

Stage 8 on the GIDS scale indicates that the language is no longer being transmitted to children in a natural setting, and its use is limited to a few elders who are highly fluent. This stage signifies severe endangerment, often preceding language extinction.

For the younger generation (18 to 30), only 11.76% of respondents are fluent, and 8.82% are conversational, while 41.18% have basic knowledge and 38.24% have no knowledge of Urhobo. This indicates a sharp decline in fluency and active use among the younger generation. Basic or no knowledge dominates this group, suggesting that intergenerational transmission of Urhobo is weakening.

In the middle generation (31 to 50), 45.45% are fluent, and 27.27% are conversational. A smaller proportion (18.18%) has basic knowledge, while only 9.09% lack any knowledge. While fluency is relatively higher in this group, the declining proficiency, especially compared to the older generation, signals a weakening of Urhobo's vitality.

For the older generation (51 and above), 80% are fluent, and 20% are conversational, with no respondents having basic or no knowledge. This reflects strong language competence among elders, suggesting that the language is primarily maintained within this demographic.

The data shows a significant generational decline in fluency in the Urhobo language. While the older generation retains a high level of proficiency, the younger generation shows minimal fluency and a high percentage of no or basic knowledge. Middle-aged

speakers maintain moderate fluency, but the absence of robust fluency in younger speakers suggests a potential shift toward Stage 8.

Urhobo appears to be transitioning toward Stage 8 of the GIDS framework. The generational decline in fluency and the lack of significant transmission to the younger generation are critical indicators.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 5.0 Summary

This study examines the revitalization of the Urhobo language, an endangered indigenous language spoken in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. In the face of globalization and sociocultural shifts, many indigenous languages, including Urhobo, are experiencing decline due to reduced intergenerational transmission, limited use in formal domains, and external influences. The research explores the historical background of the Urhobo people, the factors contributing to the endangerment of their language, and possible strategies for revitalization. The study aims to assess the language's current status, promote its cultural significance, and develop an effective revitalization plan by identifying socio-cultural, political, educational, and economic factors affecting its use.

To achieve these objectives, a qualitative research approach was adopted, utilizing questionnaires distributed to 50 native speakers across different age groups, genders, and educational levels. The data was analyzed using Joshua Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) to determine the level of language endangerment and devise a suitable revitalization strategy. Findings revealed a significant intergenerational transmission decline in language proficiency, with the younger generation (18-30 years) demonstrating minimal fluency compared to older speakers. The research also highlighted the weak representation of Urhobo in formal domains such as

education, government, and media, as well as the diminishing use of the language in family and community interactions.

The study concludes that without urgent intervention, Urhobo is at risk of further decline towards extinction, aligning with UNESCO's classification of the language as endangered. While some community-based initiatives exist, they are insufficient to ensure long-term sustainability. The research underscores the need for formal language policies, increased media representation, and community-driven efforts to promote Urhobo in schools and public spaces. By applying the GIDS framework, the study provides a structured approach to language revitalization, offering valuable insights for policymakers, linguists, and the Urhobo-speaking community in their efforts to preserve and promote their linguistic and cultural heritage.

## **5.1 Conclusion**

This study highlights the concerning status of the Urhobo language, which is marked by insufficient institutional support and a significant decrease in intergenerational transmission. While there are some ongoing conservation efforts, it is essential to implement more comprehensive revitalization strategies to reverse the decline of the language. Prompt action is needed to secure the long-term viability of Urhobo. These initiatives are vital for preserving the language and maintaining its significance for future generations.

## **5.2. Recommendation for Urhobo Language Revitalization**

Using GIDS framework,

### **Stage 1-3**

Implementation of community-based language initiatives is required. It can be achieved through the establishment of language clubs, cultural events, and language classes that are specifically designed to promote the use of the Urhobo language. Also, using Urhobo language as a medium of instruction into school curricula, beginning with primary education, will help create a foundation for language education. Advocating for government officials to use Urhobo in formal contexts, such as public gatherings and community meetings, will improve the language's presence in official settings.

### **Stage 4-5**

The development of language materials and resources is essential for enhancing Urhobo language instruction. This can be accomplished through the creation of textbooks, language learning applications, and multimedia resources. Additionally, establishing language proficiency certification programs will acknowledge individuals' skills in Urhobo, thereby promoting its use in both formal and informal contexts. Furthermore, encouraging intergenerational language transmission via language exchange programs, in which proficient older speakers mentor younger learners, will contribute significantly to the revitalization of the language.

### **Stage 6-7**

Developing community-based language planning initiatives is essential for revitalizing the Urhobo language. Establishing language planning committees will develop and implement language revitalization strategies. Promoting language use in media and technology, such as radio programs, TV shows, and social media content, will increase the language's visibility and appeal. Supporting language documentation and research through funding research projects and language documentation initiatives will develop a comprehensive understanding of Urhobo language structure and use.

### **Stage 8**

The language immersion programs that are to be implemented will enable children to learn the Urhobo language in a natural environment. Through providing financial and technical assistance to community led language revitalization projects we will be able to ensure the language is preserved in the long run. Also, encouraging the speaking of Urhobo language during cultural events such as festivals, ceremonies and traditional dances will ensure that the language is well understood in different situations.

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## APPENDIX

### QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE REVITALIZATION OF THE URHOBO LANGUAGE

#### Demographic Information

1.

Age

*Mark only one oval.*

18–30

31–50

51 and above

2.

Gender

*Mark only one oval.*

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

3.

Educational level

*Mark only one oval.*

No formal education

Primary level

Secondary level

Tertiary level

4.

Occupation

---

5.

Are you a native speaker of Urhobo?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

**Individual Language Use and Proficiency**

6.

How well do you speak the Urhobo language?

*Mark only one oval.*

Fluent

Conversational

Basic knowledge

Not at all

7.

How often do you use the Urhobo language in daily communication?

*Mark only one oval.*

Frequently

Occasionally

Never

8.

In what contexts do you use the Urhobo language?

*Check all that apply.*

At home with family

With friends

During cultural or traditional events

At work or school

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

9.

Do you encourage your children or younger family members to learn and speak Urhobo?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

**Language Use in the Family**

10.

Do you speak Urhobo with your family members?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

11.

If yes, how often do you speak Urhobo with your family members?

*Mark only one oval.*

Daily

Weekly

Rarely

12.

Do your children or younger relatives speak Urhobo?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

13.

If yes, how often do they speak Urhobo?

*Mark only one oval.*

Daily

Weekly

Rarely

**Language Use in the Community**

14.

Is Urhobo used in community events and gatherings?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

15.

If yes, how often is Urhobo used in community events and gatherings?

*Mark only one oval.*

Frequently

Occasionally

Rarely

16.

Are there any community-based language initiatives or programs to promote Urhobo?

*Mark only one oval*

Yes

No

17.

If yes, can you provide more information about these initiatives or programs?

---

### **Language Use in Education**

18.

Is Urhobo taught in schools in your area?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

19.

If yes, what level of education is Urhobo taught?

*Mark only one oval.*

Primary

Secondary

Tertiary

20.

Are there any Urhobo language materials or resources available for students?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

21.

If yes, can you provide more information about these materials or resources by naming some?

---

### **Language Use in Government and Media**

22.

Is Urhobo used in government official contexts?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

23.

If yes, how often is Urhobo used in government official contexts?

*Mark only one oval.*

Frequently

Occasionally

Rarely

24.

Are there any Urhobo language programs or broadcasts on radio or television?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

25.

If yes, can you provide more information about these programs or broadcasts such as names of the programs or broadcast?

---

### **Attitudes towards Urhobo**

26.

How important is it for you to preserve the Urhobo language?

*Mark only one oval.*

Very important

Somewhat important

Not very important

Not important at all

27.

Do you think Urhobo is an important part of Urhobo culture and identity?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

28.

Would you support efforts to promote the use of Urhobo in education and government?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

29.

Which language do you most prefer to speak?

*Mark only one oval.*

English

Urhobo

Nigerian Pidgin

Other: \_\_\_\_\_