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THE SOCIOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF DECLINING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE USE AMONG THE IGALA

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| ABSTRACT

Language decline within indigenous communities has become an important sociological concern because of its implications for identity continuity, cultural reproduction, and social cohesion in ethnolinguistic societies. This paper examined the sociological consequences of declining indigenous language use among the Igala people of Kogi State, Nigeria, with emphasis on its effects on cultural identity and sense of belonging, intergenerational communication and social relationships, as well as the transmission of indigenous cultural values, oral traditions, and social norms among younger generations.

| KEYWORDS

Indigenous Language Use, Igala Language, Cultural Identity, Intergenerational Communication, Cultural Transmission, Language Shift, Kogi State

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Abstract:-

Language decline within indigenous communities has become an important sociological concern because of its implications for identity continuity, cultural reproduction, and social cohesion in ethnolinguistic societies. This paper examined the sociological consequences of declining indigenous language use among the Igala people of Kogi State, Nigeria, with emphasis on its effects on cultural identity and sense of belonging, intergenerational communication and social relationships, as well as the transmission of indigenous cultural values, oral traditions, and social norms among younger generations. The paper was anchored on Fishman's Language Maintenance and Shift Theory, which explains the relationship between declining intergenerational language transmission and broader social transformation within speech communities. The paper adopted the analytical literature review method through systematic selection and critical interrogation of recent peer-reviewed empirical and conceptual studies published between 2015 and 2026 on indigenous language decline, cultural continuity, and Igala sociocultural realities. Findings revealed that declining use of the Igala language has significantly weakened cultural identity among younger Igalas by limiting active participation in indigenous communicative practices that define communal belonging. The paper further established that reduced language competence has disrupted intergenerational interaction, weakened traditional family bonds, and diminished the effectiveness of indigenous mechanisms of social guidance. It was also found that declining language use has adversely affected the transmission of oral traditions, communal ethics, and indigenous social values. The paper concluded that the decline of Igala language use constitutes a sociological challenge with far-reaching consequences for cultural continuity and social integration. It recommended strengthened mother-tongue education, revitalisation of indigenous family-based language socialisation, and digital preservation initiatives to enhance the relevance and transmission of the Igala language among younger generations.

Introduction:-

Across Africa, indigenous languages are under sustained pressure from the expansion of colonial languages, urban migration, formal education systems built around exogenous linguistic norms, and the growing influence of digital communication. Recent scholarship shows that language shift is no longer restricted to numerically small speech communities; it is increasingly evident among historically stable ethnic groups where younger generations now prefer globally dominant languages for education, employment, and social mobility (Eke & Salawu, 2026; Kalejaiye et al., 2025). This pattern reflects a wider sociological concern because language is not merely a medium of communication but a primary channel through which collective memory, kinship codes, moral instruction, and systems of social belonging are transmitted. Empirical evidence from multilingual societies indicates that where intergenerational transmission declines, social identity becomes weakened and traditional systems of cultural continuity are disrupted (Chukwu & Chima, 2024). Mathematical projections on language extinction in Nigeria further suggest that declining mother-tongue literacy and reduced domestic use place many indigenous languages at risk within a few generations if active transmission is not sustained (Ikoba & Jolayemi, 2020).

Nigeria provides a clear case of this challenge. With over 500 indigenous languages, the country is one of the most linguistically diverse nations globally, yet research shows that less than 3 per cent of these languages have meaningful digital or educational resource development (Abdulmusawir et al., 2025; Inuwa-Dutse, 2025). English remains the dominant language of schooling, administration, and upward mobility, while Nigerian Pidgin increasingly occupies informal urban interaction. This dual pressure has contributed to the weakening of indigenous language use among younger populations across many ethnic groups. Recent studies on language decline in Nigeria reveal measurable reductions in mother-tongue competence among school-age children, often linked to parental preference for English as a perceived marker of educational advantage (Mba & Oguadinma, 2025). Evidence from language revitalisation efforts such as BBC News Igbo also shows that where indigenous languages gain digital visibility, public attitudes and language pride improve significantly, suggesting that declining use is socially conditioned rather than inevitable (Eke & Salawu, 2026).

Within this national context, the Igala language occupies a significant but increasingly vulnerable position. The Igala people of Kogi State constitute one of the largest ethnic nationalities in North-Central Nigeria, historically bound by a shared linguistic heritage that structures kinship relations, oral traditions, rituals, conflict mediation practices, and indigenous systems of governance. Earlier scholarship emphasised that Igala language served as a central mechanism for transmitting social values and maintaining communal solidarity (Alhassan & Kadiri, 2015). Studies on Igala oral traditions have shown that folktales and proverbs function as repositories of historical consciousness and moral education, shaping social conduct across generations (Ojonugwa & Emah, 2020). More recent analyses of Igala proverbs within speech communities in Ankpa demonstrate that the language still carries context-specific social meanings that are difficult to reproduce through English translation (Emmanuel & Kadiri, 2026).

Despite this significance, observable shifts in language practice among younger Igalas point to a decline in indigenous language use. Urbanisation in towns such as Anyigba, Idah, and Lokoja has encouraged bilingual and, increasingly, English-dominant households. Educational aspirations have led many parents to prioritise English from early childhood, often restricting domestic use of Igala. Research conducted among students in Anyigba indicates substantial interference patterns between Igala and English, suggesting weakening mastery of both formal Igala structure and indigenous communicative norms (Idegu, 2025). This decline extends beyond speech competence to reduced familiarity with oral traditions, indigenous naming systems, and culturally grounded forms of interaction. Since language among the Igala has historically regulated respect relations, age hierarchy, and communal ethics, its declining use raises sociological questions about social cohesion, identity continuity, and cultural reproduction. The sociological consequences of this decline therefore deserve scholarly attention. Language loss among the Igala may alter patterns of intergenerational interaction, weaken traditional authority structures, and produce identity dislocation among younger members of the ethnic group. In a setting where language has historically functioned as a marker of belonging and a basis for social integration, its diminishing use has implications for communal attachment and cultural continuity in Kogi State.

Statement of The Problem:-

The declining use of indigenous languages has become a pressing sociological issue in Nigeria, yet scholarly attention has focused more heavily on larger linguistic groups such as Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, leaving minority and middle-sized languages such as Igala under-examined. While available studies acknowledge the importance of preserving the Igala language through formal instruction and documentation (Alhassan & Kadiri, 2015), there remains limited empirical interrogation of the social consequences arising from its gradual decline in everyday use among younger speakers in Kogi State. Among many Igala families, especially in urban and semi-urban areas, English has become the preferred language of parent-child interaction because of its perceived educational and occupational advantages. This shift has reduced opportunities for children to acquire native competence in Igala during the critical stages of language socialisation. The consequence is that many younger Igalas demonstrate restricted fluency, diminished understanding of culturally embedded expressions, and limited access to oral traditions that previously served as instruments of moral and social education. Although this pattern is increasingly visible in

social interaction, schools, and digital communication spaces, there is inadequate sociological analysis of how it affects identity formation, family cohesion, intergenerational relations, and cultural continuity.

The problem is not simply linguistic attrition. Declining use of Igala raises deeper concerns about weakening communal bonds and the erosion of social structures historically sustained through language-based interaction. Proverbs, praise expressions, kinship address forms, and ritual speech acts carry social meanings that organise respect, obligation, and belonging within Igala society. As younger generations lose familiarity with these forms, there is a growing possibility of cultural discontinuity and weakened attachment to collective identity. Existing studies have examined language preservation strategies and aspects of Igala oral heritage, but there is little recent research that specifically investigates the sociological outcomes of language decline among the Igala people of Kogi State. This creates a gap in knowledge regarding the extent to which declining indigenous language use is reshaping social relationships and cultural identity within the community. It is this gap that necessitates the present study on the sociological consequences of declining indigenous language use among the Igala.

Aim and Objectives:-

The aim of this paper was to examine the sociological consequences of declining indigenous language use among the Igala people in Kogi State, with particular attention to its effects on cultural identity, social relationships, and the transmission of indigenous values across generations.

The specific objectives were to:

1. Examine the extent to which declining use of the Igala language affects cultural identity and sense of belonging among the Igala people in Kogi State.
2. Investigate the effects of declining indigenous language use on intergenerational communication and social relationships among Igala families and communities.
3. Assess how the decline in Igala language use influences the transmission of indigenous cultural values, oral traditions, and social norms among younger generations in Kogi State.

Methodology:-

This paper adopted the analytical literature review method, which is a qualitative research approach that involves the systematic identification, selection, critical examination, and synthesis of existing empirical and theoretical studies relevant to a particular subject in order to generate deeper conceptual understanding and identify patterns, inconsistencies, and knowledge gaps. Unlike descriptive reviews that merely summarise previous works, an analytical literature review interrogates existing evidence through comparison, interpretation, and critical evaluation of authors' positions to establish informed conclusions on a research problem. Snyder (2019) explains that analytical literature reviews provide structured synthesis through careful scrutiny of published evidence, thereby enabling the researcher to develop coherent arguments from extant studies. Similarly, Xiao and Watson (2019) maintain that rigorous literature-based studies require clearly defined search procedures, eligibility criteria, and systematic analysis to ensure reliability and transparency. The method was considered suitable for this paper because the study sought to examine the sociological consequences of declining indigenous language use among the Igala people through existing documented evidence rather than through direct field investigation. Since the subject intersects language, culture, identity, and social continuity, analytical review provided an appropriate basis for synthesising findings from linguistic, sociological, and cultural studies relevant to the Igala context.

The material selection process followed a structured search and screening procedure designed to ensure relevance and credibility. Relevant materials were identified through searches of peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, doctoral theses, and conference proceedings indexed in recognised academic databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate, Scopus-indexed repositories, and institutional journal archives. Search strings included combinations such as Igala language decline, indigenous language shift in Nigeria, language and cultural identity among minority ethnic groups, Igala oral tradition, and language maintenance and cultural transmission. The search focused primarily on publications produced between 2015 and 2026 in order to reflect recent empirical and conceptual developments on indigenous language use and sociological transformation. This time frame aligns with current methodological guidance that literature reviews should define temporal boundaries based on relevance to the evolving research context (Page et al., 2021). After the initial search, titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, followed by full-text examination of selected studies.

The inclusion criteria for this review were carefully defined to ensure direct alignment with the objectives of the study. Only studies published within the specified period and written in English were considered. Included materials had to focus on indigenous language use, language shift, cultural identity, intergenerational communication, oral tradition, or sociological consequences of language decline, with particular emphasis on Nigerian or African contexts. Priority was given to works directly related to the Igala people, though studies on comparable Nigerian ethnic groups were also considered where they provided useful comparative insight. Only peer-reviewed and academically traceable materials with clearly identifiable

authorship and publication details were selected. This approach is consistent with methodological standards that emphasise explicit eligibility criteria as necessary for reducing selection bias and improving review validity (Aromataris & Munn, 2020). The exclusion criteria eliminated sources that lacked scholarly credibility or direct relevance to the research problem. Materials published before 2015 were excluded except where foundational theoretical relevance justified limited reference, as in the case of Fishman's language shift framework. Newspaper reports, blogs, websites without academic review processes, unpublished opinion pieces, and sources with unverifiable authorship were excluded. Studies that focused solely on technical linguistic description without sociological implications were also omitted, as were publications addressing unrelated ethnic groups without analytical transferability to the Igala context. This exclusion process was necessary to maintain conceptual precision and methodological rigour.

The adoption of analytical literature review for this paper is justified by the nature of the inquiry. The study aimed to interrogate sociological outcomes such as identity transformation, weakening communal bonds, and disruption in value transmission arising from declining indigenous language use among the Igala. These issues require interpretive synthesis of existing evidence across multiple disciplines rather than purely numerical measurement. The method enabled the integration of empirical findings with theoretical insights, thereby facilitating deeper analysis of the relationship between language decline and social transformation. It also provided the opportunity to identify existing gaps in Igala-focused studies and establish the need for further context-specific investigation. In line with PRISMA-informed evidence selection principles, the structured screening and analytical synthesis adopted in this study enhanced transparency, consistency, and academic reliability of the review process, making it appropriate for examining the sociological dimensions of language decline among the Igala people of Kogi State.

Literature Review:-

Conceptual Review:-

Indigenous Language Use:-

The concept of indigenous language use has received increasing scholarly attention due to concerns over language attrition and its implications for cultural continuity. Recent studies define indigenous language use as the regular employment of a native community language in communication across domestic, educational, social, and institutional settings where such language functions as a medium for transmitting collective knowledge and social norms. Udoh (2025) conceives indigenous language use as an active process through which linguistic heritage sustains social development and intergenerational continuity, arguing that the vitality of indigenous languages depends on their practical deployment rather than mere symbolic recognition. Similarly, Mba and Oguadinma (2025) view indigenous language use as habitual linguistic practice that sustains ethnic consciousness and preserves culturally embedded systems of thought. Their position emphasises frequency of use as a critical indicator of linguistic survival. Alhassan and Kadiri (2015), in their study of the Igala language, argue that indigenous language use extends beyond communication to include its role in maintaining group interaction, social integration, and value transmission. While these perspectives converge on the communicative and preservative functions of indigenous language use, they differ in emphasis, with some focusing on developmental utility and others on identity maintenance. For this paper, indigenous language use was adopted as the consistent and functional use of Igala in everyday social interaction, family communication, and communal practices through which cultural meanings and social values are transmitted across generations. This definition is appropriate because it captures both the practical and sociological dimensions relevant to the present inquiry.

Igala People:-

The Igala people are one of the major ethnic nationalities in North-Central Nigeria, predominantly located in the Eastern part of Kogi State, with a social organisation historically rooted in kinship structures, traditional authority systems, and a shared linguistic heritage. Scholarly discussions on the Igala people often situate them within debates on indigenous identity, cultural continuity, and social adaptation. Opara et al. (2025) describe the Igala as a culturally cohesive group whose beliefs, values, and practices continue to shape social behaviour and communal life, particularly through normative systems embedded in language and tradition. Ochinana (2025) presents the Igala as a historically resilient people whose cultural institutions have undergone notable transformation under the influence of formal education, Christianity, and westernisation. His argument highlights cultural adaptation but also raises concerns regarding the weakening of indigenous structures.

Ugboja and Dada (2025) further define the Igala people through the lens of indigenous socialisation, stressing that communal institutions such as age grades have historically served as mechanisms for transmitting shared values and maintaining social order. These scholarly positions reveal that definitions of the Igala people extend beyond geographical location to encompass shared language, social institutions, and collective historical consciousness. For the purpose of this paper, the Igala people are understood as an indigenous ethnolinguistic group in Kogi State whose social identity is sustained through common language, cultural practices, and communal systems of socialisation. This definition is suitable because it foregrounds the centrality of language to the sociological life of the group.

Cultural Identity:-

Cultural identity refers to the sense of belonging derived from shared language, values, traditions, beliefs, and historical experiences that distinguish one social group from another. Recent scholarship has treated cultural identity as a socially constructed but historically grounded phenomenon maintained through recurring cultural practices. Jegede and Arubuola (2025) define cultural identity as the consciousness individuals develop through participation in linguistic and cultural systems that affirm group belonging and self-recognition. Their emphasis is on the role of language in shaping self-esteem and collective awareness. Mba and Oguadinma (2025) approach cultural identity from the standpoint of language preservation, arguing that it is sustained through continued proficiency in indigenous languages, without which ethnic distinctiveness gradually weakens. Asogwa (2026) broadens the discussion by presenting cultural identity as an arena of contestation shaped by resistance to external cultural dominance and by efforts at reclaiming indigenous meaning systems. While these views differ in orientation, they agree that language remains central to cultural self-definition. The debate lies mainly in whether cultural identity is primarily inherited or continuously negotiated through social interaction. This paper adopts cultural identity as the shared sense of belonging and self-definition derived from active participation in Igala linguistic and cultural practices. This definition is preferred because it recognises both continuity and adaptation while retaining language as the principal marker of collective identity within the Igala context.

Transmission of Cultural Values:-

Transmission of cultural values refers to the process through which a society passes its norms, beliefs, ethics, behavioural expectations, and social meanings from one generation to another. Recent literature treats this process as fundamental to social reproduction and communal continuity. Opara et al. (2025) explain that cultural values are transmitted through repeated social practices, oral instruction, and community-based interaction, particularly within family structures where indigenous expressions encode moral expectations. Ugboja and Dada (2025) argue that indigenous institutions such as age-grade systems remain critical channels through which younger members internalise communal obligations and standards of conduct. Wada et al. (2026), examining digital communication and African indigenous cultures, contend that the erosion of native linguistic spaces weakens the transmission process because language carries contextual meanings that cannot be fully transferred through dominant foreign linguistic systems. These perspectives indicate broad agreement that language serves as the primary vehicle of cultural transmission, though scholars differ on whether contemporary digital spaces can adequately substitute traditional channels. For this study, transmission of cultural values is defined as the intergenerational communication of Igala norms, moral expectations, customs, and communal ethics through language-mediated interaction within family and community life. This definition is adopted because it aligns directly with the study's concern for how declining indigenous language use affects continuity of social values among the Igala people.

The Extent to which Declining Use of the Igala Language Affects Cultural Identity and Sense of Belonging among the Igala People in Kogi State:-

The relationship between indigenous language retention and cultural identity has attracted sustained academic attention because language functions as a principal medium through which collective identity is constructed and sustained. In ethnolinguistic communities, the weakening of indigenous language competence often corresponds with a weakening of symbolic attachment to communal history, norms, and identity markers. Recent Nigerian studies show that declining mother-tongue use contributes significantly to identity displacement among younger generations who increasingly orient themselves towards English-mediated social identities (Mba&Oguadinma, 2025). This concern is especially relevant among the Igala people of Kogi State, where language has historically served as the basis for social recognition, kinship affiliation, ritual participation, and communal belonging.

The Igala language has traditionally occupied a central place in defining what it means to belong to the Igala ethnic group. Beyond verbal communication, it encodes indigenous greetings, praise forms, kinship titles, proverbs, and ritual expressions that affirm communal identity. Emmanuel and Kadiri (2026), in their linguistic analysis of Igala proverbs in Awo speech community, observed that many proverbs contain culturally embedded meanings that lose interpretive force when translated into English. Their study demonstrated that younger respondents who could not fully comprehend such proverbs also showed limited understanding of the social expectations embedded within them. This finding suggests that declining proficiency does not merely indicate linguistic loss but a weakening of cultural cognition.

Practical examples across Igala communities illustrate this pattern. In Idah and Ankpa, for instance, ceremonial gatherings such as traditional marriage negotiations and ancestral commemorative rites often require participants to demonstrate competence in formal Igala expressions. Elders frequently report that younger participants struggle to respond appropriately to culturally prescribed verbal exchanges, necessitating translation or simplification into English. This alteration weakens the performative significance of these events because the cultural force of expressions such as kinship salutations and ancestral invocations depends heavily on indigenous linguistic precision. Adofu (2025), examining socio-cultural practices among the Igala, notes that ritual exclusion and inclusion are often mediated through language, with competence functioning as a marker of legitimate

participation. Where linguistic competence declines, the symbolic boundary between cultural insiders and outsiders becomes blurred.

Evidence from educational settings in Anyigba also reflects this decline. Idegu (2025), studying language interference among Igala students, found that many secondary school students displayed limited mastery of formal Igala lexical structures despite identifying ethnically as Igala. The study reported that over 60 per cent of sampled students regularly preferred English for peer interaction, even within predominantly Igala-speaking environments. Such preference reflects an emerging social orientation in which ethnic affiliation is increasingly detached from linguistic competence. This shift has implications for identity formation because language is one of the most visible markers through which communal belonging is enacted. The erosion of linguistic competence has also affected naming practices among younger Igalas. Traditional Igala names often encode historical memory, family expectations, cosmological beliefs, and social circumstances surrounding birth. However, urban households increasingly adopt English or biblical names as primary identifiers while relegating indigenous names to ceremonial use. This trend reflects changing identity priorities. Ochimana (2025) argues that westernisation has contributed to a gradual redefinition of Igala identity in which external linguistic and cultural forms increasingly displace indigenous expressions of selfhood.

Digital communication further illustrates this transformation. Social media interactions among Igala youth are overwhelmingly conducted in English or Nigerian Pidgin, even in online groups dedicated to Igala identity. While this maintains ethnic association at a symbolic level, it often reduces Igala language use to isolated lexical insertions rather than sustained communication. Comparative evidence from other Nigerian languages shows that where indigenous languages retain strong digital visibility, identity attachment tends to remain stronger among younger users (Eke & Salawu, 2026). The relative absence of similar digital revitalisation initiatives for Igala contributes to reduced linguistic prestige among youths. The decline in language use also affects emotional belonging. Interviews reported by Ojonugwa and Emah (2020) revealed that many younger Igala speakers experience discomfort participating in oral storytelling sessions because they lack fluency sufficient for meaningful engagement. This creates subtle social exclusion within family gatherings, where competence in the language historically signified inclusion. Such experiences gradually diminish attachment to communal identity. In all, the evidence indicates that declining use of the Igala language significantly affects cultural identity and sense of belonging among the Igala people. The decline weakens access to indigenous symbolic systems, reduces participation in culturally meaningful interactions, and encourages alternative identity orientations detached from linguistic heritage. Among the Igala, where language historically mediated belonging, its declining use constitutes a measurable sociological shift.

The Effects of Declining Indigenous Language Use on Intergenerational Communication and Social Relationships among Igala Families and Communities:-

Intergenerational communication within indigenous communities depends substantially on shared linguistic competence. Where younger generations lose proficiency in ancestral languages, communication between age groups becomes strained, often weakening family cohesion and altering traditional authority structures. This pattern has been documented across multilingual African societies and is increasingly visible among the Igala of Kogi State. Within traditional Igala society, communication between elders and younger persons is governed by culturally prescribed speech forms. Respectful interaction often requires specialised address systems, indirect expressions, and context-sensitive responses. These forms communicate not only information but also social hierarchy and moral positioning. Emmanuel and Kadiri (2026) note that Igala proverbs frequently function as indirect corrective tools through which elders guide behaviour. Their effectiveness depends on the younger listener's linguistic and cultural competence.

As fluency declines, this communicative system is weakened. In many urban Igala households in Anyigba and Lokoja, parents increasingly use English as the primary language of interaction with children. Alhassan and Kadiri (2015) observed that this shift often begins in early childhood, driven by parental belief that English competence confers educational advantage. While this may enhance school performance, it simultaneously reduces opportunities for indigenous language socialisation. The implications for family relationships are significant. Ojonugwa and Emah (2020) documented that traditional evening storytelling sessions, once central to family interaction in many Igala homes, have become increasingly rare. Even where such gatherings occur, younger participants often require interpretation, interrupting narrative flow and reducing engagement. Since these sessions historically functioned as spaces for moral instruction and emotional bonding, their decline weakens intergenerational relational depth.

A practical example can be observed during funeral rites in Idah and Dekina communities, where elders deliver culturally encoded speeches requiring nuanced comprehension. Younger attendees often rely on whispered translations from relatives, limiting direct engagement with communal meanings. Such dependence alters the relational dynamic between elders and youths. Rather than active participants, younger members become passive observers. Recent evidence from educational research reinforces this concern. Idegu (2025) found notable interference patterns among Igala-speaking students, indicating incomplete mastery of both Igala and English structures. This linguistic instability affects confidence in communicating with elders, many of whom remain more comfortable in indigenous forms. The resulting communicative hesitation often leads younger people to avoid extended interaction with older relatives.

This decline also affects communal solidarity beyond the household. In many Igala communities, conflict mediation, dispute settlement, and communal deliberation traditionally occur through indigenous speech forms rich in metaphor and customary references. Udaa et al. (2026), examining inter-group relations in Kogi State, found that language remains central to local peace-building processes. Reduced competence among younger participants limits their effective participation in such communal forums. Age-grade associations provide another useful case study. Ugboja and Dada (2025) demonstrate that age-grade institutions among the Igala rely heavily on indigenous language for instruction, ritual induction, and social regulation. Where younger members lack sufficient fluency, their participation becomes superficial. This weakens the institution's capacity to sustain social cohesion.

Statistical trends from broader Nigerian studies support these observations. Mba and Oguadinma (2025) reported that approximately 68 per cent of urban secondary school respondents preferred English over their indigenous language for domestic communication. Although their study focused on Igbo-speaking communities, the pattern mirrors evidence emerging from urban Igalasettings. Social relationships are also affected at the peer level. Younger Igalas who lack proficiency often experience subtle exclusion during culturally grounded interactions. Conversely, fluent speakers may be regarded as excessively traditional in urban contexts. This creates linguistic stratification within the youth population itself. Digital communication intensifies this shift. Most online interaction among Igala youths occurs in English or pidgin, reducing opportunities for intergenerational linguistic exchange. Elders, often excluded from these spaces, become further distanced from younger family members. These evidence therefore shows that declining indigenous language use significantly disrupts intergenerational communication and social relationships among Igala families and communities. It weakens traditional channels of moral instruction, reduces communicative intimacy, and diminishes younger people's participation in communal processes essential for social continuity.

How the Decline in Igala Language Use Influences the Transmission of Indigenous Cultural Values, Oral Traditions, and Social Norms among Younger Generations in Kogi State:-

The transmission of cultural values in indigenous societies depends fundamentally on language because social norms are embedded within verbal forms, narratives, proverbs, songs, ritual expressions, and oral instruction. Where language competence declines, the transmission process becomes fragmented. This concern is particularly pronounced among the Igala, whose cultural heritage has historically been preserved through oral mechanisms. Igala oral tradition includes folktales, praise poetry, ancestral narratives, dirges, initiation chants, and proverbial instruction. These forms serve as repositories of moral values such as respect for elders, communal responsibility, honesty, diligence, and kinship loyalty. Ojonugwa and Emah (2020) found that Igala folktales traditionally functioned as pedagogical tools through which children learned acceptable conduct. Their study observed that many younger respondents had minimal familiarity with canonical folktales previously regarded as foundational to socialisation. A practical consequence of declining language use is reduced understanding of culturally embedded moral lessons. For instance, many Igala proverbs rely on symbolic references drawn from indigenous ecological and historical experiences. Emmanuel and Kadiri (2026) demonstrated that younger speakers often understand literal translations but fail to grasp normative implications. This weakens the pedagogical value of proverb-based instruction. Traditional marriage rites offer another clear example. Negotiation processes involve specialised expressions that communicate respect, alliance, obligation, and reciprocity. Increasingly, portions of these interactions are translated into English for younger participants. While this facilitates procedural understanding, it strips away cultural depth. The younger generation may observe the event without internalising its normative significance.

Religious and ritual practices have experienced similar shifts. Adofu (2025) notes that several ceremonial practices among the Igala require precise verbal formulations. Where younger participants lack competence, they often become detached from ritual meaning. This contributes to declining participation and reduced transmission of spiritual-cultural values. The educational system contributes significantly to this decline. Despite policy support for mother-tongue instruction, implementation remains weak. Alhassan and Kadiri (2015) found limited structured teaching of Igala in many schools across Kogi State. Without institutional reinforcement, cultural transmission relies almost entirely on family structures already under pressure from urbanisation and English dominance. Digital media present both challenge and opportunity. Current usage patterns among Igala youths favour English content. Unlike Igbo, which has benefited from initiatives such as BBC News Igbo, Igala lacks comparable large-scale digital revitalisation platforms. Eke and Salawu (2026) show that digital language visibility enhances youth engagement and language prestige. The absence of equivalent Igala platforms reduces opportunities for modernised cultural transmission.

Case evidence from Ankpa and Dekina indicates that younger people increasingly consume entertainment and educational content exclusively in English. Consequently, indigenous songs, oral histories, and cultural narratives occupy a shrinking portion of their cognitive environment. This shift matters because repeated exposure is central to cultural internalisation. The decline also affects informal normative regulation. In traditional settings, elders frequently corrected behaviour using culturally coded expressions. Such corrections carried authority because they invoked shared symbolic understanding. Where younger

people no longer fully understand these expressions, their regulatory force weakens. Ugboja and Dada (2025) found that age-grade systems historically transmitted communal ethics through indigenous instruction. Reduced linguistic competence among younger members has weakened this process, contributing to declining participation and diminished normative continuity.

Statistically, broader Nigerian evidence is revealing. Abdulmusawir et al. (2025) note that fewer than 3 per cent of Nigerian indigenous languages possess sufficient digital resources for sustained modern transmission. Igala falls within the low-resource category. This technological marginality compounds oral decline. The cumulative effect is cultural thinning rather than abrupt disappearance. Younger Igalas may retain symbolic awareness of traditions while lacking deep operational knowledge of their meanings and functions. Such partial transmission produces weakened continuity. These analyses therefore established that declining Igala language use substantially undermines the transmission of indigenous cultural values, oral traditions, and social norms. By disrupting oral pedagogy, reducing ritual participation, and weakening culturally grounded instruction, language decline threatens the continuity of core social values among younger generations in Kogi State.

Empirical Reviews:-

Alhassan and Kadiri (2015) conducted a study on *Reviving Indigenous Languages through Teaching and Learning: The Case of Igala Language in Kogi State, Nigeria*, to examine the declining use of Igala and evaluate educational strategies for its preservation. The investigation was anchored on Fishman's theory of language maintenance and shift, which explains how intergenerational transmission determines the survival of minority languages. The researchers adopted a descriptive survey design to interrogate the status of Igala within formal educational institutions. Their study drew respondents from selected primary and secondary schools across Igala-speaking areas of Kogi East using purposive sampling to ensure participants had direct experience with indigenous language instruction. Data were generated through structured questionnaires and interviews administered to teachers, school administrators, and language instructors. The findings revealed that the implementation of mother-tongue instruction was significantly weak, with fewer than half of sampled schools actively teaching Igala as stipulated by national educational policy. The study further established that many parents and school authorities considered English superior for academic advancement, thereby limiting practical exposure to Igala among younger learners. The authors concluded that declining institutional support was accelerating language shift and weakening the cultural identity of younger Igalas. Their work made an important contribution by establishing the educational dimension of Igala language decline. However, the analysis focused largely on policy implementation and pedagogical limitations without examining the broader sociological implications for cultural belonging, family cohesion, and value transmission. The present paper addressed this omission by investigating the social consequences of declining language use within the everyday lived realities of Igala communities.

Ojonugwa and Emah (2020) carried out an empirical enquiry entitled *Towards Preserving Igala Folktales with emphasis on selected Igala communities in Kogi State*. The purpose of the research was to assess the extent to which younger generations still engage with oral narratives and to determine the implications of declining exposure for cultural continuity. The study was situated within oral tradition theory, which maintains that communal memory and normative instruction are transmitted through repeated narrative performance. Employing a qualitative ethnographic design, the researchers purposively selected elderly storytellers, parents, and youths from Idah, Ankpa, and Dekina. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observation during family storytelling sessions, and textual analysis of documented folktales. The findings showed a marked reduction in oral storytelling practices within sampled households, particularly among urban families where English had become dominant. The researchers observed that many younger participants could identify the titles of popular folktales but were unable to recount their content or interpret their moral lessons. The study further revealed that technological entertainment, westernised educational orientation, and reduced indigenous language competence had jointly displaced traditional storytelling sessions that previously served as mechanisms for moral instruction and intergenerational bonding. Ojonugwa and Emah concluded that the weakening of Igala oral traditions signalled not merely cultural change but a disruption in indigenous systems of socialisation. Their contribution is significant because it empirically demonstrates the link between language decline and erosion of oral heritage. Nonetheless, the research concentrated primarily on folktales and did not extend its analysis to broader dimensions such as changing kinship communication, communal participation, and identity negotiation among younger Igalas. The current paper extended this discussion by situating oral decline within a wider sociological framework of language loss and social transformation.

Emmanuel and Kadiri (2026) undertook a study on *An Analysis of Igala Proverbs in Awo Speech Community of Ankpa, Kogi State* to examine how indigenous proverbial expressions continue to function within contemporary Igala discourse and to assess the extent of younger speakers' comprehension. The investigation was grounded in speech act theory, which explains how language performs social functions beyond literal meaning, particularly in culturally regulated interactions. The researchers adopted a qualitative descriptive research design involving respondents drawn from Awo speech community in Ankpa Local Government Area. Through purposive and snowball sampling techniques, they selected community elders, middle-aged speakers, and younger participants to provide generational comparison. Data collection involved oral elicitation sessions, focus group discussions, and pragmatic analysis of selected proverbs used in natural communicative settings. The findings showed substantial disparity between age groups in proverb interpretation and contextual application. While older

respondents demonstrated ease in decoding metaphorical and normative meanings, younger participants frequently interpreted expressions literally or required explanatory translation into English. The study established that declining proficiency in Igala significantly reduced the ability of younger individuals to grasp culturally encoded messages relating to respect, obligation, conflict resolution, and communal ethics. Emmanuel and Kadiri concluded that the weakening of proverbial competence reflected a broader erosion of indigenous communicative knowledge and warned that continued decline would affect cultural continuity. Their research is particularly relevant because it provides direct empirical evidence linking language attrition with diminishing cultural literacy among the Igala. However, its scope was restricted to one speech community and primarily linguistic interpretation, leaving insufficient attention to the wider social effects on family relationships, communal integration, and identity consciousness across Kogi State. The present study filled this gap by examining these broader sociological consequences across the Igala ethnic space.

Theoretical Framework - Language Maintenance and Shift Theory:-

The most suitable theoretical framework for this paper is Language Maintenance and Shift Theory, propounded by Joshua A. Fishman (1964; further developed extensively in 1991). Although the theory was first introduced earlier, its continued application in contemporary sociolinguistic studies of indigenous language decline and cultural continuity makes it highly relevant to current investigations into language endangerment and its social consequences. Fishman developed the theory to explain the conditions under which a speech community retains its indigenous language across generations or gradually abandons it in favour of a socially dominant language. His work emerged from concerns about minority language attrition and has remained central to studies examining the relationship between language choice, ethnic identity, and social continuity.

The central assumption of the theory is that language survival depends primarily on intergenerational transmission within the family and community rather than on formal institutional recognition alone. Fishman argues that a language remains viable when it is consistently used in everyday social domains such as family interaction, neighbourhood communication, traditional ceremonies, and community gatherings. Once these informal domains become dominated by another language, a gradual shift begins, eventually resulting in linguistic displacement. The theory further assumes that language is closely tied to ethnic identity and cultural continuity, such that decline in indigenous language use often corresponds with weakening communal attachment and disruption of traditional systems of socialisation. Fishman also posits that social prestige, economic advantage, educational systems, and urbanisation are significant external factors that influence linguistic choices within multilingual societies. Where a dominant language offers broader social mobility, younger generations are more likely to abandon indigenous linguistic practices. One major strength of the theory lies in its strong explanatory capacity for understanding why indigenous languages decline despite constitutional or policy recognition. It offers a practical framework for analysing language use across social domains and provides clear indicators for assessing stages of language shift. The theory is especially useful in examining communities such as the Igala, where declining use of the indigenous language is observable within households, educational institutions, and peer interactions. Another important strength is its emphasis on sociological processes rather than purely linguistic structures. It recognises language as a social institution embedded within family systems, cultural reproduction, and identity formation. This makes it particularly relevant for studies investigating social consequences beyond phonological or grammatical decline.

Despite these strengths, the theory has certain limitations. One criticism is that it places considerable emphasis on intergenerational family transmission while giving less attention to contemporary digital communication and transnational media environments that increasingly shape language practices. In present contexts, language use is no longer confined to traditional social domains but extends significantly into digital spaces, which can either accelerate decline or support revitalisation. Another limitation is that the theory tends to present language shift as a linear process, whereas current realities often involve hybrid bilingual identities in which individuals maintain symbolic ethnic attachment despite limited indigenous language competence. This complexity may not always be fully captured by Fishman's original framework. The relevance of Language Maintenance and Shift Theory to the present study is direct and substantial. The topic, *The Sociological Consequences of Declining Indigenous Language Use among the Igalas*, centres on examining how reduced use of the Igala language affects cultural identity, social relationships, and the transmission of indigenous values. Fishman's theory provides the conceptual basis for understanding how weakening intergenerational use of Igala within families and communities contributes to broader social transformation. Among the Igala of Kogi State, increasing preference for English in domestic communication, formal education, and digital interaction reflects precisely the type of domain displacement described by Fishman. As younger generations use Igala less frequently, traditional channels for transmitting oral traditions, kinship norms, and communal ethics become weakened.

The theory is particularly applicable in explaining observed patterns such as younger Igalas' limited understanding of proverbs, declining participation in indigenous oral traditions, reduced effectiveness of elder-youth communication, and weakening attachment to cultural identity. It helps situate these developments within a broader process of language shift rather than viewing them as isolated cultural changes. Furthermore, the framework supports the study's focus on sociological consequences by showing that language decline affects not only communication but also social cohesion, identity continuity,

and collective belonging. Its application therefore provides a strong analytical foundation for interrogating how declining Igala language use is reshaping social life in Kogi State.

Results and Discussions:-

This paper revealed that declining use of the Igala language has significant implications for cultural identity and the sense of belonging among the Igala people of Kogi State. The evidence indicates that reduced competence in the indigenous language among younger generations weakens attachment to communal history, indigenous knowledge systems, and ethnic consciousness. This outcome aligns with the position of Emmanuel and Kadiri (2026), who found that limited understanding of Igala proverbs among younger speakers reduces their ability to internalise culturally encoded meanings. Similarly, Ochimana (2025) observed that external cultural influences have altered the traditional foundations of Igala identity, particularly among urban youth. The present findings deepen this argument by showing that language decline does not merely affect communication but gradually erodes the symbolic markers through which individuals recognise themselves as members of the Igala ethnic community. In practical terms, when younger persons cannot adequately participate in traditional marriage rites, ancestral commemorations, or indigenous verbal exchanges, their sense of belonging becomes increasingly symbolic rather than experiential. Sociologically, this creates identity fragmentation, where ethnic affiliation is retained in name but detached from cultural substance.

The paper further established that declining indigenous language use has altered intergenerational communication and social relationships within Igala families and communities. This finding corroborates Alhassan and Kadiri's (2015) observation that parental preference for English in child socialisation reduces opportunities for indigenous language acquisition. It also resonates with Ojonugwa and Emah's (2020) conclusion that the decline of traditional storytelling has weakened interactional bonds between elders and younger family members. The current study extends these views by demonstrating that communication barriers now affect not only cultural instruction but also emotional intimacy and relational cohesion. In many Igala households, elders who are more fluent in the indigenous language increasingly find it difficult to communicate moral expectations, life experiences, and social guidance effectively to younger relatives. This creates subtle relational distance, often leading to reduced engagement between generations. For instance, in family gatherings where elders communicate through idiomatic expressions or culturally loaded speech forms, younger participants frequently require interpretation or withdraw from active participation. The sociological consequence is the weakening of traditional authority structures and a gradual redefinition of family relations away from indigenous norms of hierarchy and respect.

The paper also showed that declining Igala language use undermines the transmission of indigenous cultural values, oral traditions, and social norms among younger generations. This supports Ojonugwa and Emah's (2020) position that oral traditions remain essential vehicles for preserving communal ethics and historical consciousness. It also reinforces the empirical evidence presented by Ugboja and Dada (2025), who argued that indigenous institutions such as age-grade systems depend heavily on language for socialisation and moral instruction. The present study demonstrates that as younger Igalas become less proficient in the language, they lose access to traditional pedagogical mechanisms through which values such as communal responsibility, respect for elders, conflict mediation, and kinship obligations are transmitted. Practical illustrations are visible in the declining understanding of ritual expressions, ancestral narratives, and proverbial teachings that once shaped acceptable conduct. This has produced observable shifts in behavioural orientation, including declining participation in communal rites and weakened adherence to customary norms. Sociologically, this represents a disruption in cultural reproduction, where one generation becomes less equipped to inherit and transmit the collective values of the preceding one.

The cumulative implication of these findings is that declining use of the Igala language is generating profound sociological consequences for the structure and continuity of Igala society. The paper demonstrated that language decline is not an isolated linguistic issue but a process that reshapes identity formation, alters family interaction, weakens communal integration, and disrupts value transmission. These conclusions are consistent with Mba and Oguadinma's (2025) broader argument that indigenous language decline contributes directly to cultural dislocation and social detachment among younger generations. However, the current paper contributes further by locating these consequences within the specific socio-cultural realities of the Igala people and by illustrating their practical manifestations in family life, ceremonial participation, and indigenous socialisation processes.

The explanatory strength of Language Maintenance and Shift Theory is particularly evident here, as it provides a coherent basis for understanding how the displacement of Igala by English across domestic, educational, and social domains has produced measurable shifts in social relations and cultural continuity. The findings therefore suggest that without deliberate revitalisation efforts through family socialisation, school-based instruction, and community-driven linguistic preservation, the Igala people may experience increasing cultural thinning characterised by symbolic ethnic affiliation without substantive cultural competence. From a sociological standpoint, this threatens the continuity of collective identity and the social mechanisms through which Igala society reproduces itself across generations.

Conclusions:-

This paper examined the sociological consequences of declining indigenous language use among the Igala people of Kogi State and established that the gradual reduction in the use of the Igala language has far-reaching implications for cultural continuity, communal identity, and social cohesion. The findings revealed that declining language use has weakened cultural identity and the sense of belonging among younger Igalas by limiting their access to indigenous symbolic systems through which communal membership is affirmed and expressed. The study also showed that reduced proficiency in the language has disrupted intergenerational communication, creating relational gaps between elders and younger family members and weakening traditional mechanisms of social guidance and moral regulation.

Furthermore, the paper established that the erosion of Igala language competence has significantly affected the transmission of indigenous cultural values, oral traditions, and social norms, thereby threatening the continuity of indigenous systems of socialisation that historically sustained communal life. These outcomes affirm that language decline among the Igala is not merely a linguistic concern but a sociological challenge with implications for identity reproduction, social integration, and cultural survival. The paper therefore concluded that sustained neglect of the Igala language may accelerate cultural dislocation and weaken the social structures through which the Igala people preserve their collective heritage across generations.

Recommendations:-

Following the above findings, the paper suggested the following recommendations:

1. There should be deliberate integration and effective implementation of Igala language instruction at all levels of basic education within Igala-speaking areas of Kogi State, supported by the development of standardised teaching materials, trained language instructors, and regular monitoring by relevant educational authorities. This will strengthen early language acquisition and promote cultural literacy among younger generations.
2. Families and community institutions should intentionally restore indigenous language use within domestic interaction, cultural ceremonies, storytelling sessions, and age-grade activities by encouraging parents, elders, and traditional leaders to prioritise Igala as the primary medium of intergenerational communication and cultural instruction.
3. Government agencies, cultural associations especially Igala Cultural Development Association (I.C.D.A), and private stakeholders should invest in digital revitalisation initiatives such as Igala-language media platforms, mobile applications, online storytelling archives, and youth-oriented social media content to increase the visibility, relevance, and prestige of the language among younger speakers in contemporary communication spaces.

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