

# Language Preservation: Strategies for Indigenous Languages

Kakembo Aisha Annet

Faculty of Education, Kampala International University, Uganda

## ABSTRACT

Indigenous languages are critical to cultural identity, carrying unique worldviews, knowledge systems, and histories. However, these languages are rapidly disappearing due to factors like globalization, urbanization, and intergenerational transmission gaps. This paper discusses strategies for the preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages, emphasizing the importance of community involvement, educational initiatives, and the use of digital tools. By exploring successful language preservation models from Indigenous communities worldwide, the paper highlights how bottom-up approaches, immersive language programs, and technological innovations can support revitalization. Collaboration between communities, government bodies, and non-governmental organizations is essential to creating sustainable methods for language survival and adaptability in the modern world. Ultimately, preserving indigenous languages not only maintains cultural diversity but also reinforces social and psychological identity for present and future generations.

**Keywords:** Indigenous language preservation, language revitalization, cultural identity, community-based programs, digital tools in language preservation.

## INTRODUCTION

Language, being an integral part of human societies, plays a significant role in identity formation and sense of place. Language preservation refers to the conscious efforts that are made to ensure a language's survival and adaptability. This paper will focus on the preservation of indigenous languages, many of which are at imminent risk of extinction. Concluding that the preservation of indigenous languages and culture is valuable, this examination will observe the rationale behind communal involvement in language preservation. The paper will propose that indigenous people should be encouraged to acquire the language of their ancestors and offer a variety of methods to preserve their languages. The value of a language and the system of knowledge it carries is presently decided by its populace. Government bodies and non-governmental organizations also play an active role in the preservation of these semi-moribund languages [1, 2]. Indigenous languages are those that have grown domestically within an ethnic community, rather than being introduced into the area by external learners, market traders, or immigrants. These linguistic communities generally possess their own social and cultural heritage. These languages often cannot be put into a script form, with words and sentences differently structured than the primary language or languages surrounding them. Indigenous languages are local channels to cultures, and cultures are engrossed in their languages. Therefore, without these indigenous languages, the cultures of these people would either be forever lost or else conserved but divorced from iteration and decay in real life. Thus, language can be fragile and may need preservation, fostering, growth, and reshaping strategies, generally facilitated by states' initiatives and those by other organizations [3, 4].

### The Importance of Language Preservation

Preserving Indigenous Languages encode complex systems of thought, worldviews, and significations; they are bearers of environments, histories, literatures, ethics, and geographies. In the

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

majority of ancient cultures, language is not just the product of the human experience of life but represents cosmogonies, the creation itself, and the identity of ancient and continual presence in the sacred stories and languages of the ancestors. For youth and future generations, languages play a significant role in ancestral knowledge and convey the balance and wisdom of the heritage inherited from the origins. Often so deeply interwoven with entire worldviews and cultural systems, the loss of a language can cause great emotional trauma to its speakers as they feel their lifeworld collapsing as a result. The emotional connection of speakers to their languages is reflected in linguistic identification. In psychological terms, highly salient social categories can greatly contribute to people's overall feelings of inclusivity or exclusivity at both a self-ascribed and social level. Language and dialect are frequently included in such categories, and people often identify linguistically with fairly small and previously insignificant groups. Indigenous languages are essential to our cultural identity, our heritage, and our way of life. They form small windows through which we encounter the world, and they are deeply meaningful to those communities and individuals with whom these languages are associated. They relate to and affirm, and obtain their meaning from, the world around us - the people, places, and relations that we are connected to [5, 6].

### **Challenges in Preserving Indigenous Languages**

Preserving indigenous languages has many challenges. Economic globalization has reduced the need for small communities to rely on their indigenous languages, and as a result, the domain of indigenous language use is weak. Urbanization is shifting global population patterns, and most indigenous peoples have been assimilated into the dominant culture. The major imperial languages are used in the most powerful nations and are spreading global communication. English is also the main world language of newspapers, entertainment, movies, and international academic writing. As a result, a powerful global culture promotes geopolitical inequality and linguistic racism toward indigenous peoples. Intergenerational loss of transmission leaves each generation with less practical ability and a decreasing belief that indigenous languages are useful or worth preserving [7, 8]. Many sociopolitical factors have resulted in inadequate language vitality: marginal minority status has resulted in few resources devoted to endangered language preservation and revitalization, social discrimination and prejudice often including stereotype threat for learners, and loss of ecosystem territories and agricultural land reduces the need for speaking indigenous languages. Many speakers have begun to believe public sentiment that their languages are impediments and to stop transmitting their language to the next generation. Many indigenous peoples are stigmatized by others because of extreme poverty that occurred when colonies attempted to exterminate a group through starvation. Many indigenous languages have suffered language shift so that the number of speakers is much fewer than the total population. Indigenous peoples are found all over the world. Although the majority of the world's languages are indigenous, nearly 90% speak less than 10 languages each. The vast majority of indigenous languages will go extinct this century unless urgent revitalization measures are taken [9, 10].

### **Successful Models and Strategies Perseverance and Determination**

Success stories do exist. Preserving languages is difficult, but it is not impossible. Many indigenous communities have begun language revitalization efforts, and many languages considered lost have been brought back into use. The Mati Ke group in Australia, for example, is an adult immersion group using the language of the Gumbaynggirr people from the Coffs Harbor area. In Hood River, Oregon, the Kih-Chu-Choo-Na were spoken, and in 2008 a new group of speakers emerged under a project. The group met weekly to study with an instructor. Working from older materials in the language, they were able to create a new community dictionary. The Cherokee Nation of the US has some 2,000 language speakers in the 21st century, thanks to decades of dedication to language preservation and development. More stories from our indigenous communities are needed [11, 12]. A few common themes run through most of the success stories: the efforts tend to be community-based, often in environments where academics and indigenous people serving as linguists have met and formed relationships. They have been built on a grassroots, bottom-up structure. Communities need to be able to see results to be encouraged to continue. Successful projects are those that can draw young speakers and revitalization activists not only from local communities but from the diaspora as well. A major trend has been to focus on the transmission of the language from the aging but still fluent speakers to the children, through intergenerational programs. Successful programs create cultural, social, and academic settings that support language learning and use. Programs that use immersion or techniques with large numbers of teachers and students often result in a

**This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.**

significant number of speakers who continue to practice and who can carry on a conversation outside the classroom. In Hawaii, there are already several schools in which teachers and students in the indigenous languages far outnumber the academic specialists who have been trained to work in them. At the end of the summer of 2006, the results of a longitudinal study of 6,000 of their graduates were published. Of the graduates who had studied the Hawaiian language, one-third could maintain a conversation in Hawaiian, compared to a much lower percentage of those who graduated in later years. Indigenous media, traditional storytelling, festivals, and the arts have been widely celebrated as creating an environment where individuals are proud to use the language and to function in their culture [13, 14].

#### **Technological Innovations in Language Preservation**

Although different stakeholders in language preservation can have varying opinions on the role of new and emerging technologies, few language activists or linguists would deny at this point that digital technologies offer many new techniques and formats for facilitating and promoting language learning on a wider scale. This is important not only for preservation but also for documentation itself, as documentation not in some way initiated into learning via sharing cannot ultimately provide for the continued independent use of the language when no speakers skilled in the language and its teaching methods exist. Old materials that can be readily digitized can be scanned in and shared, making them available to both communities and researchers who lack access to the largest libraries or field-based populations of speakers, or invaluable early field notebooks and sound recordings. More recently, voice recordings, dictionaries, grammar, pedagogical materials, and speech communities' media can be put up on websites, also forming part of a language documentation body of material. Mobile applications for language documentation are becoming resources that can now also be shared cross-linguistically to develop wider documentation and description. Mobile apps and learning communities in social networking sites are beginning to influence language learning on a much broader basis, reaching outside of the traditional language education channels used by those working to preserve their languages. Also, tools on the internet — from dictionaries and thesauri to spell checkers and translation engines — are now being used in the creation of software aimed at capturing and perhaps even speaking languages. These tools can provide a resource for community quality assurance and tools like voice recognition and artificial intelligence demonstrate that there is increasing effort being given to making such tools available for smaller languages. Many of these resources also additionally benefited from the use of linked open data, such as thesauri, collections of lexicographic data connected with a semantic web architecture. It is nowadays becoming increasingly accepted that the documentation of naturally occurring utterances is as important as recording old legends and grammatical paradigms, and open-access digital archives pave the way toward an open-access future for language resources. Finally, the development of digital archives as part of language documentation training in disadvantaged areas helps to provide global access to world linguistic heritage. While one is always encouraged to use modern technology unless it falls below the bar of traditional methods, there are risks associated with an over-reliance on digital solutions in that they do not always reach the widest possible group of users, and that they can be easily lost or become inaccessible should technology or web solutions become obsolete. As indigenous culture increasingly relies upon presentations and postings on the internet, another significant risk of our increased digital reliance lies in the vulnerability of this technology to propaganda, censorship, the usage of spam to drown out and discredit small voices, and other techniques designed to discredit the place of small voices in a crowded media environment [15, 16].

#### **CONCLUSION**

The preservation of indigenous languages is essential to maintaining cultural diversity and sustaining the unique worldviews and identities of indigenous communities. This paper demonstrates that language revitalization efforts benefit greatly from community-based programs, educational initiatives, and digital innovations. As shown in successful case studies, collaboration between community members, linguists, and organizations has led to meaningful language preservation outcomes. Digital resources such as mobile apps, social media platforms, and online archives are invaluable tools that allow for both documentation and active language learning across generations and geographic boundaries. However, it remains crucial to balance these tools with traditional methods, ensuring they reach the broadest possible audience. Language preservation is more than linguistic conservation; it is a step toward cultural empowerment and resilience, fostering a world where diverse voices continue to thrive and enrich global heritage.

**This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.**

## REFERENCES

1. Kibrik AA. A Program for the Preservation and Revitalization of the Languages of Russia. *Russian journal of linguistics*. 2021 Jun 23;25(2):507-27.
2. Farfán JA, Olko J. Types of communities and speakers in language revitalization. *Revitalizing endangered languages: A practical guide*. 2021 Apr 29:85-103.
3. MacLeod L. More than personal communication: Templates for citing Indigenous elders and knowledge keepers. *Kula*. 2021;5(1):1-5.
4. Sasmal S, Saring Y. Isolated words recognition of Adi, a low-resource indigenous language of Arunachal Pradesh. *International Journal of Information Technology*. 2023 Aug;15(6):3079-92.
5. Eichler J. Intangible cultural heritage, inequalities and participation: who decides on heritage?. *The International Journal of Human Rights*. 2021 May 28;25(5):793-814.
6. Meighan PJ. Decolonizing the digital landscape: The role of technology in Indigenous language revitalization. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*. 2021 Sep;17(3):397-405. [sagepub.com](http://sagepub.com)
7. Greenspan I, Katz-Gerro T, Handy F, Park S. Intergenerational transmission of environmental household practices among South Korean families: continuity and change. *Families, Relationships and Societies*. 2022 Feb 7;11(1):101-25. [google.com](http://google.com)
8. Andersen SH, Richmond-Rakerd LS, Moffitt TE, Caspi A. Nationwide evidence that education disrupts the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. 2021 Aug 3;118(31):e2103896118. [pnas.org](http://pnas.org)
9. Keles U, Yazan B. Representation of cultures and communities in a global ELT textbook: A diachronic content analysis. *Language Teaching Research*. 2023 Sep;27(5):1325-46.
10. Bozavli E. Is foreign language teaching possible without school? Distance learning experiences of foreign language students at Ataturk University during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Volume*. 2021 Apr 14;12.
11. Khawaja M. Consequences and remedies of indigenous language loss in Canada. *Societies*. 2021 Aug 2;11(3):89.
12. Chew KA, McIvor O, Hemlock KT, Marinakis A. Persistence in Indigenous language work during the COVID-19 pandemic. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*. 2022 Dec;18(4):594-604.
13. Namaziandost E, Rezai A. Interplay of academic emotion regulation, academic mindfulness, L2 learning experience, academic motivation, and learner autonomy in intelligent computer-assisted language learning: A study of EFL learners. *System*. 2024 Oct 1;125:103419.
14. Hazaymeh WA. EFL Students' Perceptions of Online Distance Learning for Enhancing English Language Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Instruction*. 2021 Jul;14(3):501-18.
15. Karsenti T, Kozarenko OM, Skakunova VA. Digital technologies in teaching and learning foreign languages: Pedagogical strategies and teachers' professional competence. *Education and Self Development*. 2020 Sep;15(3):76-88. [academia.edu](http://academia.edu)
16. Hazaymeh WA. EFL Students' Perceptions of Online Distance Learning for Enhancing English Language Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Instruction*. 2021 Jul;14(3):501-18.

**CITE AS: Kakembo Aisha Annet (2024). Language Preservation: Strategies for Indigenous Languages. NEWPORT INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CURRENT ISSUES IN ARTS AND MANAGEMENT, 5(3):1-4**  
<https://doi.org/10.59298/NIJCIAM/2024/5.3.14100>