

BETWEEN HERITAGE AND MODERNITY: INDIGENOUS RADIO BROADCASTING AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION AMONG THE TIV AND IDOMA PEOPLES OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the contribution of Radio Benue's Kwagh-hir and Obatoha programmes to the preservation and revitalisation of Tiv and Idoma cultural heritage in Benue State, Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design involving questionnaire surveys, key informant interviews, and content analysis of selected programme episodes. A sample of 400 respondents was selected through stratified and simple random sampling, while twelve key informants were purposively selected based on their expertise in indigenous broadcasting and cultural preservation. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, whereas qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that the programmes significantly promote indigenous languages, oral traditions, folklore, traditional values, and cultural identity among listeners. The study further established that audience participation through discussions and feedback contributes to intergenerational cultural transmission. Despite these achievements, inadequate funding, declining youth listenership, increasing competition from digital media, and limited institutional support threaten programme sustainability. The study concludes that indigenous-language broadcasting remains an important instrument for safeguarding cultural heritage and strengthening ethnolinguistic identity. It recommends improved funding, digital adaptation, youth-oriented programming, and stronger collaboration between broadcasting organisations, educational institutions, and cultural stakeholders to enhance the sustainability and impact of indigenous broadcasting.

Keywords: Indigenous broadcasting, cultural preservation, Radio Benue, Kwagh-hir, Obatoha, Tiv, Idoma.

Introduction

Indigenous-language broadcasting remains one of the most effective media platforms for preserving cultural heritage and promoting indigenous identities in multilingual societies. In Nigeria, radio continues to provide affordable and accessible channels through which local languages, oral traditions, folklore, traditional music, and communal values are transmitted to diverse audiences. Unlike many digital media platforms that require internet connectivity and technological literacy, radio reaches both rural and urban populations and therefore remains central to cultural communication.

The rapid expansion of globalisation, urbanisation, and digital media has altered patterns of cultural transmission across many African societies. Younger generations increasingly consume foreign media content, resulting in declining use of indigenous languages and reduced participation in traditional cultural practices. These developments have raised concerns about the gradual erosion of cultural identity among many ethnic communities, including the Tiv and Idoma peoples of Benue State.

Radio Benue contributes to addressing these challenges through indigenous-language programmes, some of the programmes include: Kwagh-hir and Obatoha. Kwagh-hir adapts the renowned Tiv theatrical tradition by integrating storytelling, traditional music, proverbs, and dramatic performance into radio broadcasting, while Obatoha provides an Idoma-language platform for cultural dialogue, oral history, community discussions, and indigenous knowledge sharing. Both programmes create opportunities for preserving cultural heritage while strengthening listeners' attachment to their languages and traditions.

Although indigenous broadcasting has

attracted scholarly attention in Nigeria, existing studies have focused largely on development communication, political participation, and language promotion. Comparatively little empirical research has examined the contribution of indigenous radio programmes to cultural preservation and identity formation among the Tiv and Idoma peoples. This study addresses that gap by investigating how Kwagh-hir and Obatoha promote cultural preservation, audience engagement, and indigenous identity in Benue State.

Statement of the Problem

The continued spread of global media content and changing patterns of media consumption have weakened many traditional mechanisms of cultural transmission among indigenous communities in Nigeria. Indigenous languages, folklore, oral traditions, and communal values increasingly compete with foreign cultural influences, particularly among younger audiences. While Radio Benue has sustained the Kwagh-hir and Obatoha programmes to promote Tiv and Idoma cultural heritage, empirical evidence regarding their effectiveness remains limited.

Previous studies have concentrated primarily on indigenous broadcasting as a tool for development communication and language promotion, with relatively little attention given to its broader contribution to cultural preservation and identity reinforcement. Consequently, insufficient evidence exists on how these programmes influence audience participation, cultural consciousness, and the sustainability of indigenous heritage in contemporary society. This study therefore investigates the contribution of Kwagh-hir and Obatoha to the cultural preservation of the Tiv and Idoma peoples of Benue State.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of Radio Benue's Kwagh-hir and Obatoha programmes on cultural preservation among the Tiv and Idoma peoples of Benue State.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine how the programmes promote indigenous cultural practices and traditions;
2. Assess audience participation in the programmes;
3. Determine the influence of the programmes on cultural identity among listeners;
4. Identify challenges affecting the sustainability of indigenous-language broadcasting; and
5. Propose strategies for improving indigenous cultural broadcasting in Benue State.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do Kwagh-hir and Obatoha promote Tiv and Idoma cultural traditions?
2. What forms of audience participation exist within the programmes?
3. How do the programmes influence cultural identity among listeners?
4. What challenges affect indigenous-language broadcasting in Benue State?

5. What strategies can improve the sustainability of indigenous broadcasting?

Literature Review

Empirical Review

Empirical evidence suggests that indigenous-language broadcasting remains a vital instrument for preserving cultural heritage, promoting indigenous languages, and strengthening cultural identity in multilingual societies. Studies conducted in Nigeria and other African countries consistently show that radio provides an accessible platform for transmitting oral traditions, indigenous knowledge, folklore, music, and communal values, particularly among rural populations where digital media access remains limited.

Ibrahim, Usman, and Sule (2020) investigated the influence of indigenous-language broadcasting on cultural identity in Northern Nigeria using a survey research design. Their findings revealed that regular exposure to indigenous-language radio programmes significantly enhanced audience participation and strengthened attachment to local languages and cultural practices. The study concluded that indigenous broadcasting contributes meaningfully to cultural continuity and identity formation. However, the study examined indigenous broadcasting generally and did not focus on specific cultural programmes or compare different ethnic communities. Consequently, its findings provide only a broad understanding of indigenous broadcasting without explaining the distinctive contributions of individual programmes.

Tsafa, Akor, and Iornumbe (2023) examined language preference and message retention among audiences of Radio Benue. Employing a quantitative survey, the researchers found that broadcasts delivered in indigenous languages achieved significantly higher levels of message comprehension, audience participation, and information retention than English-language programmes. The study concluded that broadcasting in indigenous

languages improves communication effectiveness because listeners easily identify with culturally familiar expressions and communication styles. Nevertheless, the research focused primarily on communication effectiveness and did not investigate how indigenous broadcasting contributes to cultural preservation or ethnolinguistic identity.

Egere and Ushi (2024) explored the role of community radio in promoting intergenerational language transmission in Benue State through qualitative interviews with broadcasters, community elders, and listeners. Their findings demonstrated that indigenous-language broadcasting facilitates the transmission of oral traditions, indigenous knowledge, and cultural values between older and younger generations. The authors recommended increased institutional support for community radio stations to sustain indigenous languages. Despite these valuable contributions, the study focused mainly on language preservation and did not evaluate the broader cultural functions of specific indigenous radio programmes.

Adamu and Garba (2024) investigated the adaptation of folk media into contemporary broadcasting across North-Central Nigeria using qualitative interviews and programme analysis. The study found that radio remains the most effective medium for adapting indigenous cultural performances because of its affordability, linguistic accessibility, and extensive rural coverage. It further identified inadequate funding, insufficient institutional support, and declining youth interest as major constraints affecting indigenous broadcasting. Although the study provides useful regional insights, it did not undertake a comparative analysis of Radio Benue's Kwagh-hir and Obatoha programmes or assess their specific contributions to cultural preservation.

Beyond Nigeria, UNESCO (2021) emphasised that indigenous languages and

cultural expressions constitute an essential component of humanity's intangible cultural heritage and that the media play a crucial role in preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge across generations. The report argues that sustained institutional support for indigenous-language communication enhances cultural diversity, strengthens social inclusion, and promotes sustainable cultural development. These observations reinforce the importance of indigenous broadcasting as a strategic tool for safeguarding cultural heritage in multilingual societies.

Overall, the reviewed studies demonstrate that indigenous-language broadcasting enhances language preservation, audience participation, cultural communication, and identity formation. However, most existing studies either examine indigenous broadcasting from a general perspective or focus primarily on language preservation and development communication. Very few studies have specifically investigated the comparative contributions of Radio Benue's Kwagh-hir and Obatoha programmes to the preservation of Tiv and Idoma cultural heritage. This study addresses that empirical gap by examining how the two programmes promote indigenous cultural values, strengthen cultural identity, encourage audience participation, and confront the institutional challenges affecting their sustainability.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the **Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT)** developed by Howard Giles, Richard Y. Bourhis, and Donald M. Taylor (1977). The theory explains the factors that determine the strength, survival, and continuity of a language and the cultural identity of the group that speaks it. According to the theory, the vitality of an ethnolinguistic group depends

largely on three interrelated variables: **status**, **demographic strength**, and **institutional support**. Institutional support refers to the extent to which a language is recognised and utilised by key social institutions such as the media, education, government, and religious organisations.

The theory argues that when indigenous languages receive consistent institutional support through media platforms and other public institutions, they are more likely to survive and flourish across generations. Conversely, languages that lack institutional recognition and public usage gradually lose speakers and become vulnerable to cultural erosion. Consequently, the media play a critical role in strengthening ethnolinguistic vitality by promoting indigenous languages, preserving oral traditions, and reinforcing cultural identity among members of the community.

The relevance of Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory to this study lies in its emphasis on the role of institutional media in sustaining indigenous languages and cultural heritage. As indigenous-language programmes, *Kwagh-hir* and *Obatoha* provide platforms through which Tiv and Idoma languages, folklore, oral traditions, traditional music, proverbs, and cultural values are transmitted to diverse audiences. Through regular broadcasting, the programmes reinforce listeners' attachment to their linguistic and cultural heritage while facilitating the intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge.

The theory therefore provides an appropriate framework for explaining how Radio Benue contributes to the preservation of Tiv and Idoma cultural heritage through indigenous-language broadcasting. It also offers a useful basis for interpreting the findings of this study concerning audience awareness, cultural identity, participation, and the institutional challenges affecting the

sustainability of indigenous-language broadcasting.

Methodology

This study adopted a **convergent mixed-methods research design**, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the contribution of Radio Benue's *Kwagh-hir* and *Obatoha* programmes to the preservation of Tiv and Idoma cultural heritage in Benue State, Nigeria. The study was conducted in Benue State because it is home to the Tiv and Idoma ethnic groups and the broadcast area of the two indigenous-language programmes.

The study population comprised regular listeners of *Kwagh-hir* and *Obatoha*, alongside programme producers, broadcasters, traditional rulers, cultural practitioners, and media scholars. A total of **400 respondents** participated in the questionnaire survey, while **12 key informants** were purposively selected for in-depth interviews. A multi-stage sampling technique involving purposive and simple random sampling was used to select survey respondents, whereas purposive sampling was employed for the qualitative participants based on their expertise in indigenous broadcasting and cultural preservation.

The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations, applied to Makurdi metropolis — the specific location where the survey was administered — whose estimated adult population of 85,000 is drawn from the National Population Commission's (2006) projected figures. This yielded a minimum sample of 383 at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, rounded up to 400 to strengthen representativeness and allow for attrition; the final sample comprised 212 Tiv and 188 Idoma respondents. Prior to full administration, the questionnaire was pilot-

tested on 20 respondents drawn from outside the final sample, and minor amendments were made following the pilot. Of 420 questionnaires administered, 400 were returned fully completed, representing a response rate of 95.2%.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, a semi-structured interview guide, and a content analysis checklist. The questionnaire elicited quantitative data on audience awareness, participation, and perceptions of the programmes, while the interview guide and content analysis generated qualitative evidence on indigenous language use, folklore, storytelling, traditional music, cultural values, and audience engagement. The use of multiple instruments enhanced methodological triangulation and strengthened the credibility of the findings.

The content analysis covered eight purposively selected programme episodes — four from Kwagh-hir and four from Obatoha — coded using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach across six categories: language use, oral tradition, cultural symbolism, communal values, intergenerational communication, and moral instruction. Two independent coders reviewed the coded material, and a Cohen's Kappa coefficient of 0.81 confirmed strong inter-rater reliability (Landis & Koch, 1977).

The research instruments were subjected to face and content validity by experts in Mass Communication, while the questionnaire was pilot-tested to improve its clarity and reliability before the main study. Ethical approval and informed consent were obtained prior to data collection, and participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics comprising frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data from

interviews and content analysis were analysed thematically. The findings from both approaches were integrated during interpretation and discussed within the framework of the **Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory**.

Data Presentation and Analysis Audience Awareness and Listenership

Table 1: Audience Awareness and Listenership

Variable	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Awareness	Aware	338	84.5
	Not aware	62	15.5
Listenership	Frequent	271	67.8

Variable	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Occasional	89	22.2
	Rare	40	10.0

Source: Field Survey (2024).

The results indicate a high level of audience awareness and regular listenership of *Kwagh-hir* and *Obatoha*. A total of 338 respondents (84.5%) were aware of the programmes, while 271 respondents (67.8%) reported listening frequently. Only 10.0% indicated that they rarely listened to the programmes.

The findings suggest that the programmes enjoy substantial audience patronage within the study area.

Interview responses further support the survey results. A Radio Benue broadcaster noted that listeners identify strongly with programmes broadcast in their indigenous languages, while an Idoma community elder observed that the programmes reinforce cultural identity among younger generations.

Promotion of Indigenous Cultural Elements

Table 2: Perceived Cultural Impact of the Programmes

Survey Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Indigenous language appreciation	312	78.0
Survey Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Knowledge of traditions	296	74.0
Promotion of social values	321	80.3
Youth cultural understanding	287	71.8
Post-broadcast discussions	278	69.5

Source: Field Survey (2024).

The results indicate that the programmes contribute significantly to cultural preservation. Most respondents agreed that

the broadcasts promote social values (80.3%), encourage appreciation of indigenous languages (78.0%), improve knowledge of cultural traditions (74.0%), enhance youth understanding of culture (71.8%), and stimulate post-broadcast discussions (69.5%).

Content analysis also revealed consistent use of Tiv and Idoma languages, folklore, storytelling, proverbs, traditional music, and communal dialogue. Interview participants equally described the programmes as important educational platforms that preserve indigenous knowledge and expose younger generations to their cultural heritage.

Audience Participation and Engagement

The findings reveal that audience participation extends beyond listening to include telephone interactions, listener feedback, and discussions within families and communities. Approximately 69.5% of respondents indicated that they discussed programme content after listening.

Interview responses suggest that these discussions encourage younger audiences to seek additional cultural knowledge from elders and strengthen communal learning. This demonstrates that the programmes promote active audience participation in cultural communication.

Challenges Affecting Indigenous Broadcasting

Table 3: Challenges Affecting Indigenous Broadcasting

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
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Inadequate funding	306	76.5
Declining youth listenership	272	68.0
Competition from digital and foreign media	245	61.3
Limited airtime	224	56.0
Poor technical equipment	210	52.5

Source: Field Survey (2024).

The findings identify inadequate funding (76.5%) as the major challenge affecting indigenous-language broadcasting. Other challenges include declining youth listenership (68.0%), competition from digital and foreign media (61.3%), limited airtime (56.0%), and inadequate technical facilities (52.5%).

Interview participants attributed these challenges to limited institutional support and changing audience preferences, particularly among younger listeners.

Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrate that *Kwagh-hir* and *Obatoha* continue to serve as effective platforms for preserving Tiv and Idoma languages and promoting indigenous cultural heritage. The high level of audience awareness and regular listenership suggests that indigenous-language broadcasting remains relevant despite increasing competition from digital media. This finding is consistent with Ibrahim, Usman, and Sule (2020), who found that indigenous-language broadcasting strengthens cultural identity and

enhances audience attachment to local languages and traditions.

The study also found that the programmes promote indigenous language appreciation, cultural values, and knowledge of traditional practices through storytelling, folklore, proverbs, traditional music, and community dialogue. This finding supports Tsafa, Akor, and Iornumbe (2023), who observed that indigenous-language broadcasting enhances audience comprehension and participation because listeners easily relate to culturally familiar messages. The present study, however, extends previous findings by demonstrating that *Kwagh-hir* and *Obatoha* contribute not only to language preservation but also to the transmission of indigenous knowledge and cultural values across generations.

Furthermore, the study establishes that audience participation extends beyond programme listenership to include discussions within families and communities. These interactions encourage communal learning and reinforce indigenous identity, confirming the educational role of indigenous broadcasting. This finding agrees with Egere and Ushi (2024), who concluded that indigenous-language broadcasting facilitates the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge.

The findings also reveal that inadequate funding, declining youth listenership, competition from digital media, limited airtime, and inadequate technical facilities constitute major constraints to the sustainability of indigenous-language broadcasting. This finding corroborates Adekaa, Igyuve, and Akase (2024), who identified inadequate institutional support and changing media consumption patterns as significant challenges confronting indigenous broadcasting in North-Central Nigeria.

Overall, the findings support the

Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory, which argues that institutional support is essential for the survival and vitality of minority languages. By providing regular broadcasting in Tiv and Idoma, Radio Benue strengthens ethnolinguistic identity, promotes indigenous knowledge, and contributes to the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Tiv and Idoma peoples.

Conclusion

This study examined the contribution of Radio Benue's *Kwagh-hir* and *Obatoha* programmes to the preservation of Tiv and Idoma cultural heritage in Benue State. The findings demonstrate that the programmes remain effective platforms for preserving indigenous languages, oral traditions, folklore, traditional values, and cultural identity. They also facilitate intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge through storytelling, community dialogue, and audience participation.

Despite these contributions, inadequate funding, declining youth listenership, competition from digital media, limited airtime, and inadequate technical facilities threaten the sustainability of indigenous-language broadcasting. The study therefore concludes that stronger institutional support, digital innovation, and youth-oriented programming are essential for sustaining indigenous broadcasting as a viable instrument for cultural preservation.

Recommendations

1. The Benue State Government, Radio Benue, and relevant cultural agencies should provide increased funding to improve programme production, expand airtime, and upgrade broadcasting facilities.
2. Radio Benue should strengthen its digital presence by distributing *Kwagh-hir* and

Obatoha through podcasts, online streaming platforms, mobile applications, and social media to reach younger audiences.

3. Programme producers should develop more youth-oriented and interactive formats while preserving the authenticity of Tiv and Idoma cultural traditions.

4. Radio Benue should collaborate with educational institutions, traditional councils, and cultural organisations to promote indigenous language learning and cultural heritage education.

5. Broadcasters and programme producers should receive regular training in indigenous-language broadcasting, digital storytelling, and multimedia content production.

6. Further studies should examine the role of digital media in complementing indigenous-language broadcasting across other regions of Nigeria.

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