



ORIGINS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THE OGWASHI-UKU PEOPLE OF DELTA STATE, NIGERIA: A RECONSIDERATION THROUGH A BASIC QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This basic qualitative study investigates the origins and cultural identity of the Ogwashi-Uku people of Delta State, Nigeria, paying particular attention to both Benin and Nri Igbo ancestral influences. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and questionnaires administered to elders and leaders from nine quarters of Ogwashi-Uku—namely Ikelike, Umudei, Ogbe Ubu, Ogbe Aho, Agidiase, Agidiehe, Azungwu, Ogbe Umu Okwuni, and Ogbe Ihago. Findings indicate that community members widely acknowledge Benin ancestry, yet many also highlight Igbo connections, reflecting a blended heritage. Preservation of this heritage occurs primarily through oral storytelling and traditional festivals, which serve as conduits for passing down genealogies, moral values, and historical narratives. However, challenges such as the absence of formal history education and the proliferation of conflicting narratives on social media threaten the accuracy and continuity of intergenerational knowledge transfer. Elders and leaders emphasize the importance of communal gatherings but note that young people may rely on fragmented or misleading online sources without structured initiatives, particularly in school curriculums or community-organized educational programs. The study concludes that while the Ogwashi-Uku people possess robust systems of oral transmission, modernization, urbanization, and digital misinformation necessitate new strategies, including digital archives, local heritage curricula, and concerted efforts on social media, to ensure that future generations remain connected to Ogwashi-Uku's rich and multifaceted identity.

Keywords

Ogwashi-Uku, Cultural Identity, Heritage Preservation, Oral Storytelling, Social Media Challenges

Introduction

The prevailing narrative often portrays Anioma land as part of the Benin Kingdom, depicting its people as immigrants or refugees from Benin in their current location. This perspective, widely propagated over time, has distorted historical accounts, contributing to an identity crisis among the Anioma people. This distortion, if unchecked, risks leaving the Anioma people with limited knowledge of their past. Opone (2022) identifies the events surrounding the Nigerian Civil War as a significant factor exacerbating this identity crisis. Compounding these historical distortions is the rapid rise of new digital platforms, which have transformed journalistic practices by enabling global communication and user-generated content (Inobemhe et al., 2020). While these platforms have democratized information sharing, they have also accelerated the spread of misinformation and hoaxes—commonly called "fake news"—significantly influencing how individuals interpret events (Inobemhe et al., 2020). The proliferation of misinformation across web pages and social media has reached alarming proportions, undermining public discourse (Inobemhe et al., 2020).

A study by the Pew Research Center highlights that adults who consume news via social media are likelier to share fake news than those who rely on conventional sources like newspapers or television (Robertson, 2016; Wong, 2019). Furthermore, studies show that social media users relying on these platforms for news tend to be less engaged and knowledgeable (Mitchell et al., 2020). Many users unknowingly spread false information by using the "share" button without verifying its authenticity (Inobemhe et al., 2020). Van der Linden, Maibach, Cook, Leiserowitz, and Lewandowsky (2017a) argue that false information can reach vast audiences by rapidly spreading from one individual to another. Wong (2019) similarly highlights how social media facilitates the dissemination of fake news due to its lack of gatekeeping mechanisms. Unlike traditional media, social media lacks editorial oversight, enabling anyone to create and share unverified stories, often misleading millions of followers. Nwofe and Goodall (2019) observe that social media amplifies conspiracy theories, attributing significant events to secret plots by powerful entities (Madueke, 2024). This capability has made social media a tool for ethnic entrepreneurs to escalate conflicts and manipulate narratives. Consequently, fake news and misinformation on these platforms seriously threaten cultural cohesion and societal trust.

Like other Anioma communities, the Ogwashi-Uku people of Delta State, Nigeria, the Anioma's are grappling with a deepening identity crisis influenced by modern disruptions. These disruptions stem from removing history education in Nigerian schools and the proliferation of conflicting narratives on social media. The removal of history as a core subject and from the curriculum of secondary education by the Nigerian government during the 2009/2010 academic session (Alaku et al., 2023) disrupted traditional pathways for transmitting cultural heritage and historical knowledge. Replaced by social studies and civic education, this decision was reportedly driven by concerns about history's relevance to sensitive national issues, such as ethnicity and politics. Although recent efforts have been made to reintroduce history education, progress has been limited, leaving a generation of younger Nigerians with a diminished understanding of their indigenous origins. This challenge is further compounded by social media's influence, which amplifies conflicting narratives and misinformation about the Ogwashi-Uku people's origins and cultural identity. These conflicting accounts have created confusion, fueled debates, and weakened communal ties, undermining the transmission of traditional knowledge.

Social media's rapid proliferation exacerbates the gap left by the absence of structured history education, posing a significant threat to the preservation of cultural heritage.

Oboh (2008:73) explains that in Nigerian traditional society, the council of elders provides leadership in every village. Their decisions on matters concerning the rural community are considered final and binding (Esiri, 2021). Despite the central role of elders and traditional leaders as custodians of the community's historical narratives and cultural identity, limited scholarly work has explored how the Ogwashi-Uku people trace, interpret, and preserve their heritage amidst these contemporary challenges. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the indigenous origins of the Ogwashi-Uku people as recounted by their elders and traditional leaders. It examines their historical narratives and cultural traditions, evaluates the impact of modern disruptions—such as the absence of history education and the spread of misinformation on social media—and identifies strategies to preserve and strengthen their cultural identity.

Anioma, a region with a rich and diverse cultural heritage, draws its identity and experiences from its unique position bordering various ethnic groups and communities. This geographical and cultural proximity has cultivated a distinct character of openness, adaptability, and peaceful coexistence. As Kunirum Osia (Anioma Association Inc., USA, May 24, 1997) noted, the region's interactions with neighboring ethnicities have shaped its societal norms and fostered an environment of harmony in the broader context of national affairs.

The cultural exchange and integration that arise from these interactions reflect Anioma's ability to bridge differences, creating a sense of unity amid diversity. This characteristic has contributed to its reputation as a region prioritizing dialogue and understanding over conflict.

Furthermore, Anioma's historical narrative demonstrates a consistent pattern of seeking constructive engagement and mutual respect with its neighbors, reinforcing its role as a stabilizing force in Nigeria's sociopolitical landscape. The Anioma people's peaceful disposition exemplifies how cultural interconnectedness can be a tool for harmony rather than discord. Their legacy of fostering inclusivity while maintaining their unique identity offers a powerful message about the potential for coexistence in a multicultural society. Therefore, by delving into these issues, this study aims to contribute to understanding and safeguarding the Ogwashi-Uku people's heritage. Furthermore, it provides valuable insights into mitigating the effects of modern disruptions on Indigenous identities, offering a framework for cultural preservation that balances traditional knowledge with contemporary realities.

Overarching Research Question

What is the origin of the Ogwashi-Uku people as traced by their elders and traditional leaders, and how is this heritage preserved amidst contemporary challenges, including the absence of history education and the spread of conflicting narratives on social media?

Sub-Research Questions

1. Who do the elders and traditional leaders of Ogwashi-Uku identify as the town's original settlers, and what historical narratives support these claims?
2. What methods and practices does the Ogwashi-Uku community utilize to preserve and transmit its Indigenous heritage across generations?
3. How do contemporary challenges, such as the absence of history education and the proliferation of conflicting narratives on social media, influence the preservation and interpretation of the Ogwashi-Uku people's indigenous heritage?

Problem Statement

The Ogwashi-Uku people of Delta State, Nigeria, like other Anioma communities, are experiencing a deepening identity crisis rooted in historical legacies and compounded by modern challenges. This crisis can be traced back to unresolved issues following the Nigerian Civil War (Opone, 2022). Central to these challenges is the removal of history education from the Nigerian curriculum, which has disrupted traditional pathways for transmitting historical narratives and cultural heritage (Alaku et al., 2023). This has left younger generations with a diminished understanding of their indigenous origins, threatening the transmission of traditional knowledge and weakening communal ties. Modern digital platforms, particularly social media, have exacerbated this crisis by flooding the public domain with accurate historical information and widespread misinformation (Steinhauer, 2021). This rapid proliferation of conflicting narratives has created confusion, fueled debates, and distorted historical facts, further undermining the community's understanding of its origins and identity.

From a 'cause-and-effect' perspective, these conflicting interpretations and distorted facts represent significant limitations in studying and preserving history (Adjepong, 2015). The aging of elders and the decline of traditional structures further highlights the urgency of documenting and preserving the Ogwashi-Uku community's cultural heritage. Despite their critical role as custodians of historical narratives and cultural identity, limited scholarly work has examined how Ogwashi-Uku elders and traditional leaders trace, interpret, and preserve the community's indigenous origins amidst these contemporary disruptions. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the historical narratives and cultural traditions of the Ogwashi-Uku people. It investigates the impact of modern disruptions, such as the absence of history education and the spread of misinformation on social media. It identifies strategies to preserve and strengthen the community's heritage while fostering cultural continuity and communal cohesion.

Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this study is to explore the indigenous origins of the Ogwashi-Uku people of Delta State, Nigeria, as traced by their elders and traditional leaders, and to examine how this heritage is preserved and interpreted amidst contemporary challenges. Specifically, the study aims to investigate the historical narratives and cultural traditions of the Ogwashi-Uku community, assess the impact of the absence of history education and the spread of conflicting narratives on social media, and identify strategies to strengthen the preservation and transmission of their cultural identity. By addressing these issues, the study seeks to contribute to the understanding and safeguarding of the Ogwashi-Uku people's heritage while providing insights for mitigating the effects of modern disruptions on Indigenous identities.

Study Participants

As Dieyi (2004) suggests, the people themselves hold "the keys to their historical origins." This means that instead of broad overviews of the Western Igbo, more focused studies on specific local communities or their interactions will likely provide deeper and more meaningful insights (Afigbo, 1987). For this study, we purposively selected participants who are best positioned to provide meaningful insights into the Indigenous origins and cultural identity of the Ogwashi-Uku people, including:

Elders and Traditional Leaders:

Indigenous elders foster intergenerational solidarity by holistically transmitting knowledge, values, and cultural traditions (Viscogliosi et al., 2020). Elders, chiefs, and traditional figures who act as custodians of oral traditions, historical knowledge, and cultural practices. Their deep-rooted connections to the community's heritage make them invaluable contributors, offering perspectives on the origins, identity, and historical narratives of the Ogwashi-Uku people. Through their insights, the study will capture how the community perceives and interprets its origins and cultural identity in the face of contemporary challenges, ensuring a nuanced understanding of its history and cultural continuity.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes significantly to understanding cultural sustainability by addressing the identity crisis among the Ogwashi-Uku people of Delta State, Nigeria, amidst contemporary challenges. It explores how the community perceives, interprets, and preserves its indigenous origins and cultural identity. The research fills critical gaps in the literature by examining the intersection of traditional knowledge and modern disruptions, such as digital misinformation and the absence of structured history education. The study emphasizes the importance of preserving oral traditions and provides valuable insights into safeguarding cultural heritage in modern transformations (Virtanen et al., 2020; Izadi et al., 2024). This study refines existing theories on cultural sustainability by demonstrating the intersection of traditional practices with digital tools in mitigating modern disruptions. It advances the discourse by highlighting how oral traditions and digital platforms can coexist to reinforce cultural identity and continuity. The study has practical implications by offering actionable strategies for preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge within the Ogwashi-Uku community. Documenting traditional methods such as storytelling, songs, and ceremonies empowers community elders and knowledge holders to sustain cultural identity across generations. Additionally, the research provides practical recommendations for educators and policymakers to integrate traditional knowledge into educational curricula, thereby ensuring the effective transmission of cultural heritage amidst changing societal landscapes (United Nations, 2019).

The societal impact of this research lies in its potential to address the identity crisis faced by the Ogwashi-Uku people and promote cultural resilience. The study demonstrates how preserving cultural heritage can foster a stronger sense of identity and unity within the community, countering the divisive effects of misinformation and other modern disruptions. It further highlights how safeguarding traditional knowledge contributes to broader societal goals, such as fostering inclusive and resilient communities (Ford & Harawa, 2010; Kottak & Kozaitis, 2012; Fusté-Forné & Nguyen, 2018). Regarding policy and practice, the research advocates for reintroducing history education in Nigerian schools as a crucial step toward bridging generational gaps in cultural knowledge. Emphasizing the inclusion of indigenous narratives in educational frameworks supports efforts to integrate cultural preservation into national policy. Furthermore, the study offers strategies for leveraging digital platforms to counter misinformation, ensuring these tools are utilized for cultural sustainability rather than erosion (Steinhauer, 2021; United Nations, 2019). Lastly, the study opens new directions for future research. It underscores the need for further exploration into how traditional leaders can combat the spread of misinformation and strengthen cultural cohesion. Future studies could replicate this research across other Anioma communities or focus on comparative analyses of cultural preservation strategies in similar indigenous settings. Additionally, the findings provide a foundation for interdisciplinary research that bridges cultural sustainability and digital technology (Virtanen et al., 2020).

Theoretical Framework: Cultural Memory Theory

Cultural Memory Theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding how the past and present are interlinked within a community (Dinter, 2023). Originally proposed by Assmann (1995), this theory serves as the foundation for this study, offering insights into how collective memory is formed, preserved, and transmitted within the Ogwashi-Uku community. It is particularly relevant in examining the intersection of historical narratives, cultural practices, and identity amidst modern challenges, such as the erosion of history education and the spread of misinformation through digital platforms. Cultural Memory Theory distinguishes between "communicative memory," which emerges through everyday social interactions, and "cultural memory," sustained through long-term cultural practices, rituals, and symbolic systems. Cultural memory is a repository of collective knowledge, shaping societal behaviors and experiences across generations through repeated practices and initiations (Assmann, 1995, p. 126). It depends on material preservation, such as fixed documents and canonized interpretations, revisited over time through ritualized and ceremonial practices. Cultural elites often lead these practices, including priests, shamans, or community leaders. By contrast, communicative memory is transient, tied to its carriers, and evolves with generational changes, focusing on shared experiences and recollections of the recent past (Assmann, 2011, p. 36).

This theoretical framework emphasizes that individual acts of remembrance are deeply embedded within a socio-cultural context. Collective memories arise through mediation, textualization, and communication, shaping shared versions of the past (Rigney, 2005). These shared memories are instrumental in forming collective identity, answering questions such as "who we are" and "who are the others," and influencing social interactions and behaviors (Kisteman, 2016). For the Ogwashi-Uku community, cultural memory is deeply embedded in oral traditions, ceremonies, and communal practices that preserve their shared identity and historical legacy (Assmann, 1995). These practices not only sustain the community's past but also act as mechanisms for reinforcing social cohesion and continuity. This is particularly significant in the context of contemporary disruptions, such as colonial legacies, urbanization, and digital misinformation. Cultural Memory Theory offers a lens to examine how traditional memory practices interact with external influences, shaping how the Ogwashi-Uku people remember, reinterpret, and adapt their heritage. By situating the Ogwashi-Uku community's practices within Cultural Memory

Theory, this study aligns with and extends Assmann's (1995, 2011) foundational work by exploring how these frameworks operate in non-Western, oral-based societies. The study highlights the role of cultural memory in maintaining identity amidst challenges like the absence of structured history education, thereby contributing to the theoretical discourse on the resilience of oral traditions in the digital age.

Furthermore, it bridges Rigney's (2005) insights on mediation and textualization with contemporary discussions on how digital platforms shape collective memory practices. The study also enhances existing literature by demonstrating how communicative and cultural memory overlap in real-world contexts. For instance, it reveals how oral traditions and digital platforms coexist and influence each other in transmitting cultural heritage. This synthesis contributes to broader theoretical discussions on cultural sustainability and identity preservation, providing actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and cultural practitioners seeking to mitigate the impacts of modern disruptions on traditional communities. Ultimately, this refined framework underscores the enduring relevance of shared memory as a cornerstone of community resilience and cultural continuity. By leveraging Cultural Memory Theory, the study advances theoretical understanding and offers practical strategies for fostering the Ogwashi-Uku community's cultural heritage amidst the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

Literature Review

The Impact of History Education's Removal on the Cultural Heritage and Identity of the Ogwashi-Uku People

Rees (2010) explains that culture evolves rapidly, as it is passed down from one generation to the next and shared across generations, with creative change serving as the most efficient means of transmission (Choe, 2007, p. 136). While Soini and Birkeland (2014) describe culture as permanent and consistent across generations, Hofstede and McCrae (2007, p. 58) define culture as a set of rules and practices that unify a community's members, forming a crucial part of individual identity and distinguishing one community from another. Understanding how societies shape their cultural heritage, including the reasons for its evolution, provides insight into contemporary societal structures and demonstrates the potential for transitioning toward a sustainable, eco-centric society. However, since the onset of colonization in 1788, Indigenous cultures have been neglected in favor of adopting Western cultural norms, further marginalizing traditional practices (Dockery, 2010, p. 315).

History is a discipline that plays a vital role in shaping individuals and society by fostering national consciousness and patriotism. Despite its importance, history has been marginalized in Nigeria's National Curriculum, particularly at the primary school level, following its removal after the 1969 National Curriculum Conference (Markus & Yohanna, 2023). This neglect has adversely affected the youth and the nation's developmental process. The removal of history education from the Nigerian school curriculum has significantly impacted the transmission and preservation of cultural and historical knowledge (Markus & Yohanna, 2023), including among the Ogwashi-Uku people. History was effectively removed around 2008, reportedly replaced by social studies and civic education due to concerns about its relevance to national issues such as ethnicity and politics. This decision disrupted traditional educational pathways for teaching cultural heritage and historical narratives. While efforts have been made recently to reintroduce history education, its absence for nearly a decade has contributed to a diminished understanding of Indigenous origins among younger generations.

Earlier changes in Nigeria's educational system, such as the transition from the 8-6-2-3 system to the 6-5-2-3 system in 1954, did not affect the inclusion of history in school curriculums. However, adopting the 6-3-3-4 system in 1982 marked a deliberate shift. History was removed from the Junior Secondary curriculum and replaced with social studies (Nwoke, 2021). Although history was retained as an optional subject at the Senior Secondary level, it gradually became marginalized. By 2011, with the introduction of new compulsory subjects, history was not prioritized, effectively sealing its decline in the educational system. This historical context underscores the challenges communities like Ogwashi-Uku face in preserving and transmitting their indigenous origins and cultural identity. Markus and Yohanna (2023) found that excluding history as a subject has led to a diminished sense of historical awareness and a lack of patriotism. The absence of history education has disrupted the traditional pathways for teaching cultural heritage, leaving a gap now compounded by the rise of conflicting narratives on social media. This study seeks to explore how the Ogwashi-Uku people perceive, interpret, and preserve their indigenous heritage amidst these contemporary challenges, particularly considering the diminished role of history education in Nigeria's schools.

Historical Narratives of the Ogwashi-Uku People

The literature highlights the interconnectedness of Indigenous origins, cultural preservation, and contemporary challenges (Kania, 2019). For the Ogwashi-Uku people, understanding and documenting their historical narratives is critical to countering modernization's impacts and safeguarding their cultural identity. This study contributes to the growing discourse on cultural sustainability by examining the Ogwashi-Uku people's heritage, preservation practices, and the broader implications of digitalization and modernization. History is a foundational tool for understanding cultural identity and guiding societal progress. It provides a structured framework for analyzing past events, causes, and consequences, enabling learners to develop critical thinking skills (López-Fernández, 2023).

Like a detective investigating a case, history students assess evidence and analyze scenarios to uncover the truth (Nwoke, 2021). This process not only sharpens analytical abilities but also broadens imagination, allowing individuals to connect with past events as though they are occurring in the present (Nwoke, 2021). For the Ogwashi-Uku people of Delta State, Nigeria, historical narratives are pivotal in preserving their cultural identity. They provide insights into the community's origins, the challenges their ancestors faced, and the strategies they employed to overcome those challenges. For instance, lessons from the 1967–1970 Nigeria-Biafra war reinforce the importance of learning from history to avoid past mistakes and foster resilience (Nwoke, 2021). On a broader scale, history contributes to national development by providing insights into the successes and failures of past policies, plans, and projects. According to Dr. Muritala Olalekon from the University of Ibadan, development is intrinsically tied to history, as understanding a country's past is essential for shaping its progress (as cited in Nwoke, 2021).

Similarly, Prof. Godswill Obioma emphasizes history's capacity to illuminate a nation's evolution and inter-communal relationships, fostering tolerance, patriotism, and citizen solidarity (as cited in Nwoke, 2021). Historical knowledge promotes social cohesion and nation-building by reducing societal vices such as religious bigotry and nepotism (Nwoke, 2021). Promoting historical education ensures that future generations inherit and appreciate cultural values and identities. Babangida Kachalla, a research expert at the Centre of Trans-Saharan Studies, stresses that a sophisticated society is rooted in preserving culture, values, and history (as cited in Nwoke, 2021). Without such education, societies risk becoming disoriented, akin to victims of "collective amnesia," as described by historian R.V. Daniels (as cited in Nwoke, 2021). Scholars such as K.O. Dike and Obaro Ikime advocate using historical insights to address contemporary challenges and plans (as cited in Nwoke, 2021). Additionally, E.H. Carr asserts that great historical analysis connects past events with present challenges, providing clarity for future action (as cited in Nwoke, 2021). In summary, history bridges the past, present, and future (Cairns & Garrard, 2024). It equips individuals and communities with the tools to understand their origins, strengthen their identity, and chart a path toward a cohesive and progressive society. For the Ogwashi-Uku people, preserving and teaching their rich historical narratives is essential to maintaining their cultural heritage amidst contemporary challenges. By doing so, they uphold their traditions and contribute to the broader discourse on cultural sustainability and societal resilience.

Indigenous Origins and Historical Narratives

The Enuani Clan

Early settlers in the Enuani region, including Ogwashi-Uku, were primarily migrants from Nri. Many of these communities were founded by Nri princes who carried over Nri's royal and ritual practices to their new settlements (Onwuejeogwu, 1987, p. 28; Opone, 2012). The Enuani kingdoms also established connections with the neighboring Benin kingdom (Opone, 2012). For example, the Obi of Ogwashi-Uku reportedly traveled to Benin around 1836 on a diplomatic mission (Jull, 1936). Studies by Dike (1956), and Basden (1966) suggest that West Niger Igbo kingship institutions were derived from Benin (Opone, 2012). However, some scholars contend that Niger Igbos merely adopted select practices from Benin, with no conclusive evidence showing that Western Igbo communities and institutions originated there. Notably, the Enuani kingdoms had little difficulty absorbing and integrating certain Benin customs whenever it suited their needs (Opone, 2012). The term "Anioma," meaning "good land," refers to a community historically located between Ubuluku and Ebu in present-day Aniocha North Local Government Area, Delta State (Okoh, 2020). The Anioma people are culturally diverse, with origins rooted in various backgrounds. Through sustained cultural interaction and blending, they have developed a unique identity distinct from neighboring communities. Anioma serves as a cultural melting pot where approximately thirteen languages are spoken, including Aboh, Bini, Olukumi (a nearly extinct Yoruba dialect), Igala, Ishan, Ika, Ukwuani, and Enuani—the most widely spoken language among Anioma communities such as Asaba, Ibusa, Ubulu-Uku, Ubulu-Unor, Obomkpa, and Ogwashi-Uku (Okoh, 2020). The Enuani people, often referred to as the Igbo of the West Niger or "Western Igbos," inhabit what was historically described as "terra incognita" until the arrival of migrants from Benin (Afigbo, 1981a).

The origins, migrations, and settlement patterns of the Enuani have been the subject of two contrasting theories. One school of thought, led by Egharevba (1968), posits that the Enuani and all other Igbo-speaking communities in the region trace their roots to Benin migrants. Alternatively, another perspective emphasizes their Igbo origins, suggesting that the westward migration of the Western Igbos was halted by the expansion of the Benin Empire, prompting a recoil movement back toward the Niger (Afigbo, 1981b). Afigbo (1998) criticized accounts such as Egharevba's, arguing that they provide limited insight into the origins and settlement patterns of the populations that later formed the region's kingdoms. He concluded that the Western Igbos are authentic Igbo people and maintained that their traditions referencing Benin reflect a later phase of interaction and migration rather than their initial settlement. This dual heritage shapes the identity of the Enuani people, combining their Igbo roots with their historical interactions with Benin (Mordi & Opone, 2009). The history of Ogwashi-Uku is intricately tied to the Anioma Western Igbo people of Enuani. Western Igbo comprises the Igboland portion located in Nigeria's Delta region (Amadi & Agena, 2015). Onwuejeogwu (1987) identifies Ogwashi-Uku as the oldest and most senior

among the groups in the Enuani region, with all tracing their origins to Nri (p. 27). This historical connection underscores Ogwashi-Uku's prominence in the cultural and historical framework of the Enuani clan.

Hierarchical Structures and Political Organization in Anioma Communities

The political organization of Anioma, the Western Igbo village or town republics and monarchies, falls under the 'segmentary' or 'fragmentary' classification of political systems (Hortin, 1967). Within these communities, the overall ruler was referred to as the Obi. In areas without the institution of Obi-ship, the Okpala Uku served as the titular head. Each town was composed of multiple lineages, known as Idumu or Ogbe (Lagos Notes & Records, 1999).

Each Idumu or Ogbe was further subdivided into patrilineages referred to as Ebo, also called Imusu or Iku in Ukwaniand. These patrilineages were then split into smaller units of extended families: Umunna, Onuntu, Onumuzo, Obulu, and other similar names. These subdivisions formed the foundational units known as Ezinuno. The head of the nuclear family, or Ezinuno, was typically the oldest male, who held authority over his wife (or wives) and children and managed the household's affairs (Onyekpe, 1999).

At the next level in the hierarchy, each Umunna or Onuntu was led by the oldest surviving male, referred to as the Okpala. The Okpala convened with other elders within the group to manage its affairs. Similarly, at the Ebo level, the oldest male member held the title of Diokpa or Okpala. His residence, known as the Ogwa, served as a meeting place for the elders, where group matters were deliberated, disputes resolved, and fines imposed. The Okpala presided over these gatherings and was the custodian of the Ndiche and the Ofo, symbols of the group's spiritual and ancestral authority (Onyekpe, 1999).

As the oldest living male, the Okpala was regarded as the direct link between the group and their ancestors, often referred to as the "ripest fruit," symbolizing his proximity to the ancestors. He performed rituals and served as the intermediary with the ancestors on behalf of the living members of the group (Dike & Ajayi, 1968). Additionally, the Okpala bore responsibility for managing the group's land, underlining his crucial role in preserving and maintaining the group's heritage and resources. These hierarchical structures reflect the deeply ingrained cultural and political organization of Anioma communities, emphasizing collective governance and spiritual continuity.

Nri Origin and Nri-Relatedness

The historical narratives of the Ogwashi-Uku people are deeply intertwined with the broader Nri-Igbo culture and civilization. Communities such as Ogwashi-Uku, Issele-Ukwu, and Illah form part of the core settlement areas historically linked to Nri-Igbo influence. Nri, an ancient town in present-day Anambra State, lies in the southeastern scarp lands, positioned within the depression of Agulu Lake at an elevation of 40–60 feet above sea level. Geographically, it is located about 18 miles east of Onitsha at latitude 6.08N and longitude 6.02E (Onwuejeogwu, 1981). Nri's cultural and historical influence extended to communities like Ogwashi-Uku, serving as a unifying entity for surrounding Igbo settlements. Debates about the origins of the Igbo people suggest that aboriginal groups inhabited the forests around Aguukwu before the arrival of the Nri. Scholars like Afigbo (1975) propose that the Igbo may have migrated from the Niger-Benue trough, an area associated with the Igala people, supported by Nri traditions that highlight cultural and trading exchanges between the Igbo and Igala. According to these traditions, Eri, the progenitor of the Nri people, arrived at a settlement called Eri-aka by canoe. He married a local woman there, and their descendants founded the Nri settlements. Eri's political unification of surrounding districts established the cultural dominance of Nri (Onwuejeogwu, 1981; Agu, 1990).

Oral traditions collected in the 1970s link the origins of Ogwashi-Uku, Akwukwu, and Igbuzo (Ibusa) communities to migrations from Nri (Isichei, 1977). These accounts describe Odaigbo, the son of Eze Nri, and Edini, either his sister or a close relative, as exiles from Nri. Their father provided them with medicine pots to guide their journey, instructing them to settle wherever the pots fell. Edini's pot reportedly fell at Ani Udo ("land of peace") in Ibusa. In contrast, Odaigbo's pot fell near Eke in Ogwashi-Uku, where he established a settlement and built a court (Ogwa), giving the town its name (Mordi & Opone, 2009; Osadebe, 2007). In some variations, Obodo, identified as an Nri princess, is considered the mother of Odaigbo and Edini. Kalu (1986) described Nri's origins as rooted in mythology, with Eri as its founding figure. According to this myth, Eri was sent by Chukwu (the supreme deity) from the sky to a watery and marshy earth, where he landed on an anthill. Eri complained to Chukwu, who sent an Awka blacksmith with fiery bellows and charcoal to dry the land. The blacksmith was rewarded with an ofo, a traditional symbol of authority for his craftsmanship (Okwelume, 2009). While Eri lived, Chukwu provided sustenance in the form of azu igwe, a special substance, but this ceased after Eri's death. Nri, Eri's first son, pleaded with Chukwu for food. Chukwu instructed him to sacrifice his first son and daughter and bury them in separate graves. Three Igbo weeks (izu ato) later, yam sprouted from the son's grave and cocoyam from the daughter's grave, becoming staple foods for Nri and his people (Okwelume, 2009).

Later, Nri sacrificed a male and female slave. Again, after izu ato, an oil palm grew from the male slave's grave, and a breadfruit tree (ukwa) from the female slave's grave. These new resources ensured Nri's prosperity. Chukwu then entered into a sacred agreement with Nri, granting him exclusive privileges such as cleansing towns

of abominations, crowning kings (*eze*) at Aguleri, overseeing ozo title rituals, and performing yam sacrifices crucial for bountiful harvests. Neighboring towns became reliant on Nri for these rituals and crops. Additionally, the agreement allowed Nri and his descendants to travel freely and safely across regions under their influence (Kirk-Greene, 1971). Nri held a position of immense significance in Igboland, shaping political systems and domestic economies. Ritual practices and ceremonies performed by Nri were foundational to Igbo cultural identity (Leith-Ross, 1937).

Other narratives suggest Edini's pot fell at Ani Obodo ("settlement of Obodo"), highlighting variations in oral histories about Ogwashi-Uku's origins (Isichei, 1977; Osadebe, 2007). The Nri settlement area was initially inhabited by aboriginal groups such as the Adama, Nsekpe, Achalla, and Enuora. These groups later integrated with Nri emigrants to form the Akamkpisi community, unified under the Eze Nri. The Eze Nri's authority was reinforced through ritual journeys during the crowning of kings, extending his influence across Igbo settlements from Nri to Onitsha (Onwuejeogwu, 1981). Migration accounts also describe encounters with other settlers. Odaigbo met Igbo, an elephant hunter from Nri residing in Akwukwu Igbo, who later joined him in Ogwashi-Uku before returning to Akwukwu Igbo. Similarly, Edini encountered Umejei at Ibusa, an Isu immigrant from east of the Niger, whose migration predated the 15th century and contributed to settlements west of the Niger (Onwuejeogwu, 1987). These narratives underscore the Nri civilization's unifying role among Igbo communities and reflect the shared identity fostered through Nri's ritual authority (Agu, 1990).

Colonial records introduced another dimension to these narratives. Opu, a Benin immigrant who settled in Akwukwu Igbo, was identified by Samuel Crowther's 1854 Niger expedition as part of an Igbo group recognized by the Igala as northern Igbo (Forde & Jones, 1950; Northrup, 1972). Scholars argue Opu and Akwukwu Igbo likely migrated from an Igbo-dominated area east of the Niger (Mordi & Opone, 2009). These accounts highlight Ogwashi-Uku's ties to Nri civilization while emphasizing its unique cultural identity. Oral traditions preserved by elders and chiefs are central to understanding these narratives and maintaining the community's heritage amidst contemporary challenges (Abdullahi et al., 2021; Juma, 2022; Sharma & Magar, 2024). Lastly, Rowling (1948) notes that Ogwashi-Uku, located in the Asaba Division, perceived Igbo and Isoko migrants as living in isolated bush areas. These migrants were criticized for unsustainable farming practices, disturbances, tax evasion, and resistance to governance. They were described as maintaining separate lifestyles and disregarding traditional authority structures, further complicating interactions within the community (Fenske, 2014).

The Influence of Benin on the Origins and Cultural Identity of Ogwashi-Uku

The history of many communities often begins with migration and the narrative of a founding ancestor, preserved through either written records or oral traditions passed down to researchers and historians (Opone, 2017). The origins of certain Anioma communities have been a focal point for scholarly inquiry. Scholars suggest that the Anioma region was populated through three distinct waves of migration. According to Opone (2017), the first and second migration waves are from the Benin Kingdom and occurred during the 15th and 17th centuries, respectively. A significant portion of Aniomans including Ogwashi-Uku's population traces its ancestry to the Kingdom of Benin (Mordi 2018; Nwafor, 2018). Oral histories suggest their migrations from Benin emphasizing the Benin roots of a notable segment of Ogwashi-Uku's population. This connection highlights the broader influence of Benin on the political and cultural development of Anioma Igbo-speaking communities like Ogwashi-Uku west of the Niger. The Kingdom of Benin is recognized for its impact on the evolution of political structures in Ogwashi-Uku. Egharevba (1968) asserts that early Igbo-speaking communities and their rulers were either dispatched from or invested in by Benin, reflecting the kingdom's imperial expansion and its influence on local governance. However, this perspective has faced criticism. Afigbo (1981a) characterizes such claims as overly simplistic, while Ikime (2006) views it as one of the uncritical propagations of Benin-centric narratives by early European scholars. Ohadike (1994) provides a more nuanced interpretation, identifying two distinct phases in Anioma's history. The first phase involved the replication of traditional Igbo socio-political institutions. The second, influenced by Benin's expansion between 1500 and 1750, was marked by Anioma resistance and selective adoption of Benin's kingship system. This perspective highlights the dynamic cultural exchanges between Anioma communities and Benin while emphasizing the agency of Anioma people, including those in Ogwashi-Uku, in preserving their cultural distinctiveness.

Furthermore, Mordi (2018) questions the extent of Benin's influence on Anioma kingship institutions. Drawing on oral traditions and critical historical evaluations, Mordi argues that some kingship systems in Anioma communities, including Ogwashi-Uku, predated significant contact with Benin and were shaped more by Nri connections than by Benin's imperial reach. This challenges the dominant narrative of Benin's overarching influence and underscores the importance of localized historical investigations. Similarly, Apeh (2022) observes that some Western Igbo villages claim kinship with Benin, supported by kingship institutions regarded as evidence of descent. During Benin's expansion, significant disruptions in the West Niger Igbo areas prompted migrations across the Niger River. These movements coincided with the growing influence of the Benin Kingdom, explaining the presence of Igbo communities west of the Niger and their claims of Benin ancestry (Egharevba, 1968). The ongoing debate on Benin's influence highlights the importance of a balanced approach to understanding Ogwashi-

Uku's origins and cultural identity. As Afigbo (1980) notes, comprehensive research incorporating perspectives from both Benin and its neighboring communities is essential. For Ogwashi-Uku, such an approach is critical to tracing its unique cultural heritage and contextualizing its connections to the Nri and Benin spheres of influence.

Significance of Cultural Identity: The Role of Cultural Identity in Community Cohesion and Self-Determination

According to Joseph (2013), identity manifests in language through three key mechanisms: using labels and categories, reflecting group membership via speech and behavior, and interpreting these signals by others. Cultural identity encompasses how individuals relate to and identify with a group's attitudes, emotions, and sense of belonging (Berry et al., 1989) and its ideals and values (Schwartz et al., 2006). It also involves social dimensions like class, nationality, and race, contributing to cultural unity, shared understanding, and confidence (Villarroya, 2012; Zhang et al., 2021; Azada-Palacios, 2022).

Cultural identity is foundational for community cohesion and self-determination, as it entails identifying with specific cultures or groups (Martin & Shao, 2016). It fosters shared beliefs, traditions, and behaviors (Strizhakova & Coulter, 2019), strengthening interpersonal bonds and encouraging collaboration. Over time, this shared identity unites community members around common goals, creating trust and mutual respect among those who share or value diverse cultural backgrounds. Cultural identity also galvanizes collective engagement, reinforcing the motivation to preserve traditions while innovating to adapt to modern societal challenges. Acting as a collective identity in diverse societies (Usborne & de la Sablonnière, 2014), it shapes individual self-concepts through norms, values, and objective factors like wealth or social standards that influence subjective well-being (Diener et al., 2003). By fostering pride and belonging, cultural identity underpins a sense of unity that motivates communities to pursue shared objectives (Adabanya et al., 2023).

Moreover, cultural identity directly supports self-determination. When communities recognize their distinct heritage, they can advocate for their interests more effectively and shape their futures. Cultural identity is not merely about labels but involves the performance and interpretation of belonging (Joseph, 2013; Wan & Chew, 2013). This performance and recognition strengthen group solidarity, promoting cultural preservation and social cohesion (Zhang et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). Self-determination arises from collective awareness: as communities understand who they are and what they value, they can address local challenges and protect traditions on their own terms. This distinctiveness fosters infrastructure, from governance frameworks to social networks, that sustains autonomy and safeguards cultural expression (Azada-Palacios, 2022). Ultimately, cultural identity unites communities internally while empowering them to define their social, political, and economic trajectories. It is the cornerstone for communities to thrive while preserving their unique heritage.

Preservation of Indigenous Heritage

Culture is a dynamic and multifaceted concept, encompassing the collective beliefs, values, customs, traditions, and social norms shared by a group or society (Ferraro, 2002; Nunn, 2012; Gorton & Zentefis, 2023). It operates as a learned and negotiated system that shapes how members of a society think and interact (Moradi & Ghabanchi, 2019). Culture evolves through continuous interaction and exchange with other cultures, illustrating a process of ongoing negotiation and expression (Shepherd, 2014). This evolving nature underlines culture's foundational role in forming individual and collective identities within specific contexts (Anbaran, 2016). Cultural heritage (CH) signifies the physical artifacts and intangible attributes passed down from prior generations, preserved in the present, and safeguarded for future generations (Crowley et al., 2022; Frigo, 2004). This continuum of traditions and practices represents a society's collective memory.

The CH includes tangible, intangible, and natural forms (Blake, 2000). Tangible CH involves buildings, historical places, monuments, and artifacts deemed worthy of preservation (Banda et al., 2024). Intangible CH comprises practices, representations, knowledge, and skills that communities identify as part of their heritage, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, and craftsmanship (Banda et al., 2024). Preservation aims to maintain CH while preventing deterioration and harm (Banda et al., 2024). These efforts often involve discouraging activities such as poaching, encroachment, logging, and cleaning, repairing, or restoring artifacts and traditions in their community context. Research and documentation initiatives further protect intangible cultural elements and support their continued practice. Ultimately, CH preservation refers to protecting, maintaining, and recovering cultural elements without altering them, ensuring they endure for the benefit of future generations (Banda et al., 2024).

Strategies Used by Indigenous Communities Globally to Preserve Their Heritage

Indigenous knowledge (IK) represents a community's traditional wisdom, handed orally through generations. Although such knowledge informs decision-making, it faces risks when elders pass away without transferring these insights. Moreover, successors sometimes neglect the responsibility or fail to respect associated practices. As a result, there are limited safeguards to prevent misuse, and communities often stipulate specific conditions for passing on knowledge to ensure it is used appropriately (Zwane & Masipa, 2021). In nations like Canada, cultural

memory institutions uphold an ethical duty to respect indigenous knowledge, regardless of whether copyright rules or indigenous legal systems are fully clarified (Callison et al., 2021). Because IK is dynamic, these institutions must continually update their procedures to accommodate new expressions of cultural heritage.

Documenting oral traditions remains critical in many societies to safeguard them from fading. Libraries, archives, and museums play key roles here by actively collecting, cataloging, and preserving such knowledge. However, these institutions must stay informed about suitable technologies and formats to maintain the authenticity and security of what they hold (Oyelude, 2023). Research and collaboration with communities are similarly crucial; as indigenous knowledge evolves or takes on new forms, reestablishing relationships with those who share it ensures that preservation efforts remain respectful and accurate.

Oyelude (2023) describes how the Kalenjin community in Kenya utilized technology to record and engage with local knowledge, balancing local and diaspora needs in both online and offline environments. This example underscores the importance of heritage institutions working alongside indigenous community members to adapt IK into new formats. Ultimately, respectful management of indigenous knowledge remains paramount, whether through technological means or direct cultural engagement (Oyelude, 2023). Employing community members and preserving strong, ongoing partnerships not only enhances accuracy and integrity in documentation but also honors the cultural values integral to IK.

Historical Narratives and Knowledge Transmission

Narratives, broadly defined as “anything that tells a story, in whatever genre” (Jahn, 2001) or “telling someone else that something happened” (Herrenstein–Smith, 1981, p. 228), play a critical role in how knowledge is communicated and understood. Although historians differ on whether narrative is always the best medium for historical knowledge, constructing narratives is closely intertwined with studying history (Gómez & Sáiz, 2017). Indeed, historical thinking involves creatively interpreting past sources and weaving them into coherent stories (Gómez & Sáiz, 2017). Historical narratives, including students' perspectives, also shape our world understanding (Epstein, 2009). When applied to organizational contexts, historical narratives impose meaning on sequences of events (McCullagh, 1987) and connect an organization's past, present, and future (Foster et al., 2016).

Leaders often package knowledge in these narratives to address systemic issues or reach specific audiences (Foster et al., 2016). Success may hinge on their skill in crafting narratives that confer a strategic advantage while acknowledging that “history” can carry different meanings across communities (Hansen, 2012). From a realist to a constructivist lens, leaders interpret their organization's past to align current actions and guide future directions (Maclean et al., 2016). Leaders construct historical narratives to identify lessons from the past—whether reused as valuable expertise or recognized as potential pitfalls (Janssen, 2012). The future can likewise be perceived as part of the past, offering insights into how to avoid unwanted outcomes or achieve desired goals (Jenkins, 1995). Consequently, a leader's view of the past strongly influences how historical knowledge is mobilized as a strategic resource (Jones et al., 2005). Furthermore, people commonly rely on narratives to express individual and collective identities (Mohatt et al., 2014; Wertsch, 2008), underscoring historical narratives' dual role in transmitting knowledge and shaping communal self-understanding.

Oral Traditions in African Societies

Oral traditions and expressions are used to pass on knowledge, *cultural* and social values and collective memory (UNESCO, n.d). Oral traditions are a foundational mechanism for transmitting historical and cultural narratives across African communities, functioning as a living archive of collective memory (Mustafa, 2024; Vansina, 1985). These practices encompass storytelling, proverbs, songs, dances, and rituals, passed down through generations primarily by word of mouth (Crowley & Finnegan, 1970). Oral traditions preserve factual events—such as genealogies and chronicles—and embody communal beliefs, values, and social norms (Ki-Zerbo, 1990). Thus, they help shape individual and group identities, offering a sense of continuity and belonging (Barber, 1987). In many African contexts, oral traditions often hold equal or greater authority than written sources, reflecting the dynamic interplay between spoken word, memory, and performance (Crowley & Finnegan, 1970; Finnegan, 1970).

Griots or other designated custodians of history maintain the collective heritage of entire lineages, villages, or kingdoms (Haşim & Soppe, 2023). Through songs and praise poetry, they recount historical events and critique societal structures and leaders, thereby influencing contemporary social and political dynamics (Ahmad, 2024). As a result, oral forms of history can challenge Eurocentric narratives, offering alternative perspectives that underscore the richness and complexity of African historical experiences (Calabria & Bailey, 2023). However, scholars frequently debate the reliability and accuracy of orally transmitted histories. Critics argue that memory, performance styles, and sociopolitical factors can shape or distort the content (Henige, 1982). Researchers have responded by developing critical methodologies—comparing multiple oral accounts, analyzing them within their cultural contexts, and cross-verifying them with archaeological or written evidence—to validate and interpret oral data (Firouzkouhi & Zargham-Boroujeni, 2015). Such approaches recognize the inherent strengths of oral traditions, which often integrate moral lessons, collective identities, and a deep resonance with local values. Overall, oral traditions play a crucial role in maintaining cultural knowledge and identity within African

communities, serving as a repository of the past and a tool for guiding present and future generations (Ki-Zerbo, 1990). Consequently, they remain at the heart of African cultural life, illustrating how knowledge is dynamically preserved, adapted, and transmitted through evolving social contexts.

Role of Elders and Traditional Leaders

Elders in Indigenous communities play a crucial role as custodians of knowledge, values, and cultural traditions, fostering intergenerational solidarity through a holistic approach (Viscogliosi et al., 2020). In the Anioma community, particularly Ogwashi-Uku, elders are central to preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge, reinforcing the community's ethnic identity. Anioma ethnic identity is fundamentally a cultural self-definition and a philosophical affirmation of self-determination, positioning themselves at the intersection of the contemporary Nigerian state (Ozue, 2016). This identity is further strengthened by cultural homogeneity and a shared consensus on collective experiences (Samuel, 2020). Elders' social participation and contribution to intergenerational relationships benefit themselves and youth, families, and society (Viscogliosi et al., 2020; Whitewater et al., 2016). They serve as gatekeepers and knowledge holders for Indigenous languages, teachings, values, and traditions, as important role models for future generations (Yang & Warburton, 2018). Traditional leadership within the community involves organizing tribal and cultural affairs, managing resources, and upholding cultural values (Matsiliza, 2024).

Tribal authorities, recognized as custodians of culture, are respected by tribes and lineage clans, ensuring the preservation of cultural symbols and cognitions (Baldwin & Raffer, 2019). The Anioma region has four primary groups, each with distinct origins yet united by shared traditions. The largest group, the Ezechuma, claims Benin ancestry and includes over ten communities east and west of the Niger River, such as Obior, Isseleuku, Onicha-Ugbo, Onicha-Olona, Onicha-Ukwu, Obomkpa, and Ezi in the Enuni area (Mordi & Opone, 2009). The second group traces its origins to Nri and related communities, including Igbo, Asaba, Ibusa (Igbuzor), Isheagu, parts of Ubulu-Uku, Issele Uku, and Illah. The third group, comprising the Ubulu Clans of Ubulu-Uku, Ubulu Uno, and Ubulu-Okiti, links its founders to Benin despite originating from neighboring communities. The fourth group claims Yoruba and Igala heritage from the southwest and the Niger-Benue confluence, found in Ugboodu, Ukwunzu, Ebu, Illah, Ubulubu, Obomkpa, Okpaman, Okwe, and Oko. Enuani, the dominant language, is spoken by communities such as Asaba, Ibusa, and Ogwashi-Uku (Samuel, 2020).

Elders provide essential historical consciousness, bridging past experiences with future aspirations (Uchendu, 2006). They communicate a sense of history that underscores the diverse origins of the Anioma people while highlighting the unique culture they have developed over time. This cultural heritage fosters unity, as no Anioma person perceives others as strangers, whether from Aniocha, Ndokwa, or Oshimili. Within this rich cultural framework, Anioma communities find inspiration and identity internally, guided by their patrilineal structures, male monarchs, titleholders, and elders (Uchendu, 2006). Leaders and elders in Ogwashi-Uku continue to play a vital role in fostering intergenerational relationships, ensuring that youth remain connected to their heritage. By maintaining and transmitting oral traditions, elders help preserve the collective memory and cultural identity of the Anioma people, enabling the community to thrive while honoring their ancestral roots. Anioma ethnic identity derives from a standard set of symbols and cognitions shared by the people, with elders diligently maintaining this heritage and ensuring its transmission to future generations (Ozue, 2016).

Challenges to Knowledge Transmission

Cultures worldwide have developed diverse perspectives on nature throughout human history. Many of these perspectives are deeply rooted in traditional belief systems, which indigenous peoples use to understand and interpret their biophysical environments (Iaccarino, 2003). These systems not only play a vital role in managing the environment but also form an integral part of indigenous populations' cultural identity and social integrity. At the core of traditional knowledge lies a wealth of wisdom and experience gained over millennia through direct observations of nature and transmitted—often orally—across generations. Humans have sought to conceptualize empirical observations in all cultures to better understand, interpret, and predict natural phenomena (Iaccarino, 2003). Cultural knowledge means having the essential understanding needed for people to communicate and connect effectively within a large social group. As Hirsch (1988) stated, "Being culturally knowledgeable means having the basic information required to succeed in today's world" (p. xiii). Cultural transmission, which facilitates the spread of behaviors within social groups, is a cornerstone of the emergence and maintenance of traditions (Truskanov & Prat, 2018). It is critical to establishing stable traditions in both human and non-human societies (Truskanov & Prat, 2018).

Our histories, whether they reflect events from five years ago or ten generations back, are a vital part of our cultures. They shape who we are and provide insights that help us understand ourselves and one another better (Lau, 2024). Exploring historical interactions among various societal groups can open channels for cross-cultural communication, enriching our understanding and fostering greater connection (Lau, 2024). Traditional knowledge

systems often adopt a holistic approach, contrasting Western science, which separates observations into distinct disciplines (Iaccarino, 2003). Unlike the linear cause-and-effect framework of Western science, traditional knowledge interprets reality through multidimensional cycles, where all elements are interconnected in a complex web of interactions (Freeman, 1992). The nuanced approach of traditional knowledge systems underscores their importance, yet modernization and globalization have intensified threats to these systems. For example, European colonization replaced indigenous knowledge with Western educational and cultural systems, leading to significant erosion and destruction of traditional methods of knowledge transfer. The trend toward a global culture exacerbates this process, further fostering cultural homogenization and marginalizing indigenous knowledge (Mazzocchi, 2006). Culture, which reflects specific ways of life and societal value systems, is persistently shaped by the transmission of knowledge across generations (Sumathi et al., 2018; Harrison & Carroll, 1991).

However, the very nature of tacit knowledge, often unspoken and intuitive, challenges standard accounts of how knowledge is transferred (Miton & DeDeo, 2022). The process of cognitive mining, which isolates elements of traditional systems, threatens to disrupt these knowledge systems by fragmenting their holistic structure, leading to dispossession and loss (Nakashima & Roué, 2002). It is critical to recognize the intrinsic value of traditional knowledge systems and their unique approaches to understanding the world. Rather than allowing Western science to dominate as the sole arbiter of valid knowledge, strategies should be devised to preserve and integrate diverse knowledge systems. This would ensure that traditional knowledge remains accessible and relevant for future generations. Western science and traditional knowledge represent distinct but complementary paths to understanding reality, rooted in shared cognitive features of human nature (Mazzocchi, 2006). By understanding and addressing these challenges to knowledge transmission, we can foster a more inclusive and enriched cultural heritage.

Educational Gaps and the Removal of History Education

The removal of history education from the curricula of Nigerian primary and secondary schools during the 2009/2010 academic session (Alaku et al., 2023) has created significant gaps in cultural awareness and national identity among students. History provides a foundation for understanding societal evolution, fostering national consciousness, and building a sense of community belonging. Its absence deprives students of the opportunity to grasp how families, institutions, and nations evolved and to apply critical thinking to solve societal challenges. The neglect of history education has been described as disastrous to Nigeria's national development, equating to neglecting a nation's soul (Lau, 2024; Markus & Yohanna, 2023). A society disconnected from its history risks repeating past mistakes and losing its place in global discourse. History is vital for citizenship development by promoting informed decision-making and responsible public behavior. Without history education, students are less likely to understand the complexities of national development or the cultural heritage that binds their communities (Lau, 2024). The resulting sociopolitical and economic challenges include a lack of national cohesion, weak governance systems, and diminished patriotism. Markus and Yohanna (2023) emphasize that neglecting history education contributes to a generation with limited historical awareness, impairing their ability to foster national unity and development. The removal of history has also caused Nigerian youths to lose a critical link to their roots, leaving them disconnected from their heritage, unlike their counterparts in Europe and America, who embrace their cultural identity with pride.

Efforts to reintroduce history into Nigerian school curricula recognize its importance in nurturing critical thinking, national consciousness, and problem-solving skills. Sumathi et al. (2018) highlight that history is instrumental in preserving culture, reflecting societal values, and fostering a sense of national identity. Similarly, Markus and Yohanna (2023) advocate for restoring history education to strengthen students' connection to their heritage and equip them to address societal challenges. Recent initiatives to reinstate history in schools mark progress but require a sustained commitment to ensure it regains its rightful place as a cornerstone of education. For Nigeria to achieve comprehensive educational and national development, history must be re-emphasized and made compulsory in primary and secondary schools. Moreover, tertiary institutions should reintroduce departments of history to support this effort. By restoring history education, students can robustly understand societal dynamics, cultivate a sense of national pride, and contribute meaningfully to nation-building (Markus & Yohanna, 2023). Government and policy planners must prioritize this reform to equip future generations with the knowledge and values necessary to preserve Nigeria's cultural heritage and promote its growth.

Social Media and Conflicting Narratives

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for shaping cultural narratives, but its impact is multifaceted and complex (Balogun & Aruoture, 2024). On one hand, it facilitates the rapid dissemination of information, fostering global connections and awareness. On the other hand, it is a conduit for misinformation that can undermine cultural cohesion and distort historical truths. Alsaleh (2024) highlights that the digital transmission of knowledge often challenges traditional cultural systems, amplifying divergent perspectives and diminishing the reliability of shared narratives. Indigenous communities are particularly susceptible to the adverse effects of misinformation on social

media (Berrío-Zapata et al., 2024). The circulation of conflicting narratives on these platforms has fueled divisions within these communities, weakening cultural integrity and eroding trust in traditional knowledge systems.

Studies reveal that Indigenous populations disproportionately experience online harms such as trolling, cyberbullying, and digital violence (Carlson & Frazer, 2020; Campbell et al., 2010). For instance, unverified claims and manipulated stories on social media can misrepresent Indigenous histories, creating friction between modern interpretations and traditional worldviews. Despite these challenges, social media also holds promise as a tool for cultural preservation. It can amplify accurate historical narratives and elevate the voices of marginalized groups, fostering cultural pride and awareness. Ajani et al. (2024) argue that when used responsibly, social media can bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and contemporary understanding, helping communities safeguard their heritage while educating a broader audience. Although social media offers significant potential for cultural preservation, there are still challenges that must be resolved. (Indah, 2024). The primary challenge lies in managing the disruptive tendencies of social media while leveraging its potential to enhance cultural preservation and cohesion. Striking this balance requires collective efforts from policymakers, educators, and platform developers to ensure social media serves as a tool for unity rather than division.

The Ogwashi-Uku Context

Ohadike (1994) identifies two distinct eras in Anioma's history. The first era was marked by the reproduction of basic Igbo institutions in the region. The second period, spanning approximately 1500 to 1750, was characterized by "Benin expansion and Anioma resistance." This era saw the integration of the Igbo kingship system, rooted in the *ozo* title, alongside the Edo political system based on *obishop*. Despite bordering the expansive Benin and Igala kingdoms, Anioma communities, including Ogwashi-Uku, chose to establish small chiefdoms rather than large kingdoms. These chiefdoms were organized as small-scale republics, governed by elders and titled chiefs, with their political systems largely unchanged. Ohadike (1994) argues that the rise of the Benin Empire in the 15th and 16th centuries introduced and popularized Benin political structures, including title systems, in Anioma. This influence also encouraged the formation of compact villages and towns strategically designed for military preparedness (Ohadike, 1994, pp. xvii–xix).

Nwaezeigwe (2007) supports these findings, noting the contact between the Igbo communities west of the Niger and the Benin Kingdom, which introduced the kingship system and its associated structures to the region (p. 201). Ogwashi-Uku, located in the Anioma region of Delta State, Nigeria, boasts a rich history and cultural heritage that reflects its unique identity within the Igbo-speaking communities. Historically, it served as a center of commerce and governance, playing a significant role in the socio-economic and political development of the region. Its cultural traditions, including elaborate festivals, traditional leadership systems, and artistic expressions, have contributed to its distinct identity within Anioma (Freeman, 1992). The town's identity is deeply rooted in oral traditions and historical accounts passed down through generations. Residents take pride in their heritage, often highlighting connections to notable ancestral figures and historic milestones. However, globalization and urbanization have introduced challenges, including shifts in cultural values and a growing disconnect among younger generations (Nakashima & Roué, 2002).

Scholarly research on Ogwashi-Uku and Anioma highlights various aspects of their cultural and historical dynamics. Studies have explored topics such as traditional governance structures and the impact of colonialism on the community's identity and development (Iaccarino, 2003). These works emphasize the importance of preserving cultural heritage for communities such as Ogwashi-Uku's in the face of modernity while identifying opportunities to revitalize and sustain their traditions for future generations (Mazzocchi, 2006). Ogwashi-Uku is also celebrated as a vibrant cultural hub within Anioma, Nigeria. Annual cultural carnivals are prominent events for showcasing the town's rich heritage, emphasizing love, unity, and community identity (Osayande, 2012). Such festivals gather over massive participation, including foreigners to celebrate African culture. The carnival's vibrant displays of traditional attire, music, and dance are a testament to the community's commitment to preserving its heritage and resisting pressures to assimilate foreign influences (Osayande, 2012).

Presently, Ogwashi-Uku is the headquarters of Aniocha South Local Government Area in Delta State, located west of Asaba, the state capital. It is home to the Enuani Igbo-speaking people, predominantly farmers and fishers. The town consists of villages such as Ikeli, Umu Dei, Azungwu, Agidiase, Agidiehe, Ogbe Akwu, Ishekpe, Ogbe Onicha, Ogbe Ubu, Ogbe Ani, and Umu-okwe (Adingupu, 2015). The town also has historical ties to the Ekumeku movement, a significant anti-colonial resistance in Anioma between 1883 and 1914 (Asogwa & Basu, 2021). As historian Don Ohadike documented, the movement used covert tactics and local knowledge of the forest to resist colonial forces (Ohadike, 1994). In retaliation, the colonial forces devastated towns and communities associated with the resistance. Despite its importance, the Ekumeku movement remains largely absent from national narratives and educational curricula in Nigeria, leaving its legacy obscure (Asogwa & Basu, 2021).

Ogwashi-Ukwu and neighboring towns in the Asaba hinterland, key sites of Ekumeku activity, were also the focus of Northcote Thomas's anthropological surveys between 1912 and 1913 (Thomas, 1913). While Thomas's photographs do not explicitly document the conflict, they indirectly capture its memory. Some individuals photographed may have participated in or been affected by the resistance. These images provide an

"underneath" view of the conflict, reflecting the movement's enduring legacy despite the lack of overt visual records (Asogwa & Basu, 2021). Nnaemezie Asogwa's *Mourning Clothes* project commemorates the Ekumeku resistance by creating a symbolic monument to those who died opposing colonial invasion. Inspired by Igbo mourning traditions, the project used garments to honor the deceased and connect individuals to the memory of the struggle. Asogwa and Basu (2021) view the project as an evolving effort to reclaim and preserve the Ekumeku legacy. *Mourning Clothes* is both a critique of colonial violence and a celebration of resistance. Asogwa's work challenges the silencing of history and reaffirms the relevance of these memories in shaping cultural identity and resistance (Asogwa & Basu, 2021).

Ogwashi-Uku and Ekumeku War

Between 1883 and 1914, the Anioma region of Western Igboland mounted an underground resistance against British incursions known as the Ekumeku Movement (Eluemunor, 2019; Iweze, 2016). Ekumeku is an indigenous term suggesting "breathing," "blowing," or "dispersal" (Basden, 2010)—emerged from a secret society's tradition of valor among young men, effectively combining the roles of a clandestine police force and a guerrilla army (Isichei, 1976; Ohadike, 1991; Afigbo, 1981b). Membership required strict secrecy regarding leadership, initiation rites, operational bases, and overall movements (Iweze, 2016). During this period, British officials often described the Ekumeku in derogatory terms: Captain Ian Hogg called it an "Anti-European Club" (Afigbo, 1981b), while Father Strub labeled it a "secret police force-cum-guerrilla band" (Ohadike, 1991). High Commissioner Ralph Moor dismissed the Ekumeku fighters as nocturnal brigands who instigated disorder and lawlessness.

Early Foundations and Cultural Links

Historically, Ogwashi-Uku and other Enuani communities in Anioma had complex origins tied to Nri and Benin (Onwuejeogwu, 1987; Dike, 1956; Basden, 1966; Onwumechili, 2000). Many of the early settlers in the Enuani area—including Ogwashi-Uku—were migrants from Nri, and "many of these communities were founded by princes from Nri, who continued to practice in their new settlements the kingly and ritual civilization for which Nri was known" (Onwuejeogwu, 1987, p. 28). The Enuani kingdoms, such as Ogwashi-Uku, also established diplomatic ties with the Benin Kingdom—evidenced by the Obi of Ogwashi-Uku's reported visit to Benin around 1836 (Jull, 1936). Studies by Dike (1956), Basden (1966), and Onwumechili (2000) support the idea that West Niger Igbo kingship institutions derived various elements from Benin. **Nevertheless**, some scholars argue that the Western (or "Niger") Igbos "only borrowed some practices of Benin, but there is no evidence among the Western Igbos and their institutions showing they came from Benin" (Opone, 2012).

Escalation of British Incursions

By the late 19th century, British colonial expansion increasingly encroached upon Anioma territories. Tensions rose and eventually escalated into what some observers characterize as genocide in the 1880s (Eluemunor, 2019). When these intrusions intensified, various Anioma communities coalesced into the Ekumeku Movement. One of the earliest documented clashes occurred in 1897, when the British bombarded Onicha-Ado (present-day Onitsha), an Anioma settlement (Eluemunor, 2019). In 1898, British forces launched a surprise assault on Ibusa, forcing its defenders to retreat temporarily, yet they soon mounted a counteroffensive that became widely recognized as the first major battle of the Ekumeku War. Father Zappa, writing in 1898, noted that rather than surrender, "the Ekumeku soldiers continued to resist as the Ibusa forces reinforced" (Eluemunor, 2019).

Ogwashi-Uku as Epicenter

Ogwashi-Uku figured prominently in this extended resistance. The 1909–1910 wave of conflicts saw Ogwashi-Uku become the main theater of hostilities (Iweze, 2016). On November 2, 1909, a pivotal battle took place in which British troops were instructed to "kill indiscriminately," yet they suffered significant casualties, including the death of Captain H. C. Chapman (Eluemunor, 2019). In retaliation, the British turned Ogwashi-Uku into an administrative stronghold, establishing it in 1910 as the headquarters of the Asaba Division and constructing a prison to suppress residual uprisings (Eluemunor, 2019). Despite these actions, neighboring Anioma towns, including Obomkpa, Ezi, Isheagwu, and Ibusa, rallied in solidarity, attempting to repel British demands for forced labor, food requisitions, and other harsh policies, including assaults on women (Eluemunor, 2019).

As a final measure against the Ekumeku fighters, the British government passed the "Unlawful Society Ordinance" in October 1910, banning the movement outright and restricting the carrying of firearms (Iweze, 2016). Eight Native Courts were concurrently established in Asaba, Ogwashi-Uku, Ibusa, Issele-Uku, Ukunzu, Ubulu-Uku, and Onicha-Olona—making Anioma the most extensive court system in Southern Nigeria at the time. British authorities justified this move by referring to "perpetual disturbance and opposition to British rule" in what they deemed an "unquiet and troublesome" district (Asenime, 2013, as cited in Iweze, 2016).

Omission from National Narratives

Notably, between July 1912 and August 1913, Northcote Thomas conducted his third anthropological survey in multiple Anioma towns deeply affected by the Ekumeku War (Iweze, 2016). Despite the proximity of this study to the actual conflicts, Thomas's photographs and records display scant evidence of the turmoil. This paucity of documentation, coupled with the near-complete exclusion of the Ekumeku Movement from Nigeria's official historical narratives and educational curricula, has facilitated the erasure of this significant resistance struggle from the collective consciousness. In response, Asogwa and other scholars have insisted on revisiting and preserving Ekumeku's history, arguing that the Anioma people's 31-year fight against colonial subjugation deserves greater recognition (Iweze, 2016).

A Legacy of Resilience

Sylvester Ifeanyichukwu Moemeka—pioneer of Nigerian advertising and the first African head of LINTAS in 1974—referred to the Ekumeku War as a 31-year effort, from 1883 to 1914, revealing the Anioma people's unwavering resolve (Eluemunor, 2019). Indeed, British attitudes toward Anioma communities had long been colored by accounts like those of the Lander Brothers in 1830, who documented their capture and harsh treatment by one such community wary of outsiders (Eluemunor, 2019). However, these events underscore how deeply Anioma valued their sovereignty and cultural heritage. Over decades of confrontation, they endured punitive sanctions—ranging from forced labor to large-scale military crackdowns—and remained staunchly defiant of external control.

Although ultimately subdued by 1910, the Ekumeku Movement's impact lives on in Anioma collective memory. Historians, anthropologists, and local custodians of culture continue highlighting the need for comprehensive archival research, community-based oral histories, and curricular inclusions that honor the Anioma people's sacrifices. Today, the Ekumeku legacy stands as a potent emblem of resilience, showcasing Anioma determination to defend not only physical territories but also social institutions, belief systems, and traditions. This courageous stand against colonial domination resonates throughout history, inspiring future generations to acknowledge and preserve their shared heritage (Eluemunor, 2019).

Ogwashi uku and The Biafran War

The Igbo-speaking Anioma people are part of the old Midwest Region not Biafra in Nigeria (Nwaokocha, 2019). However, they are generally considered as Igbo (Talbot, 1969; Isichei, 1976, p. 16). The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) profoundly affected Aniomaland, including Ogwashi-Uku, with unarmed civilians caught in the crossfire between federal and Biafran forces (Nwaokocha, 2019). The war stemmed from political and ethnic tensions exacerbated by the January 15, 1966, coup, led predominantly by Igbo officers, and the subsequent retaliatory July coup, which deepened divisions along ethnic lines. The Eastern Region's secession as Biafra, following waves of anti-Igbo massacres in the North, triggered a federal military response and marked the beginning of the war (Nwaokocha, 2019). Anioma communities, though part of the old Midwest Region and not Biafra, were perceived as pro-Biafra due to shared cultural and linguistic ties with the Igbo. According to Nwaokocha (2019), "segments of the Anioma civilian populace were slyly pro-Biafra, much to the anger of Nigerian troops." This association led to unique challenges for the Anioma people, including accusations of disloyalty and targeted killings. The Anioma endured atrocities from both Biafran and federal forces, with Biafran troops killing Northerners and non-Easterners and federal troops retaliating against Anioma civilians in towns like Ogwashi-Uku, Asaba, and Ibusa (Nwaokocha, 2019).

The conflict in Ogwashi-Uku and its surrounding areas highlighted the complexities of Anioma identity during the war. While the Anioma were culturally Igbo, their geopolitical alignment with Nigeria placed them in a precarious position. Biafran incursions into the Midwest in August 1967, starting from Asaba, intensified federal hostility toward Anioma communities. Federal forces regarded the Anioma as hostile, partly due to the migration of Anioma officers to Biafra and perceived civilian support for Biafran forces (Obasanjo, 1980). Okocha (2012) provided a vivid and detailed account of the killings in Ogwashi-Uku, Isheagu, and especially Asaba (pp. 47–162). The war left lasting scars on Aniomaland, underscoring the tension between cultural identity and political affiliation. Scholarly works on the subject, such as those by Bird and Ottanelli (2011), highlight the devastating civilian massacres, particularly in Asaba, and the broader impact on Anioma communities. These accounts provide critical insights into how historical and cultural factors shaped the experiences of Anioma people, including those in Ogwashi-Uku, during the war (Nwaokocha, 2019). This historical backdrop offers a lens to understand the cultural resilience of Ogwashi-Uku within Anioma, emphasizing the need for a deeper exploration of their origins and identity. By examining the intersections of historical, cultural, and political narratives, this study seeks to uncover the complexities of Ogwashi-Uku's identity within the broader Anioma region.

Biafran Killings of Innocent Civilians of Enuani

During the Biafran occupation of the Midwest from April 9th to September 4th, 1967, non-Igbo residents of Aniomaland faced significant threats, including targeted killings by Biafran forces (Nwaokocha, 2019). By 1967,

many of Asaba's northern residents, who had considered Asaba home since 1886 and spoke Igbo fluently, were still referred to as *ndi Awusa* (Hausa people). Tragically, numerous of the residents were killed by the Biafran forces (Okocha, 2012, pp. 56–57; Nwaokocha, 2019). This attack on *Ogbe Awusa* instilled fear among non-Igbo residents of Asaba. For instance, Nwaokocha (2019) recounted how some Agbor residents smuggled their Esan family to safety in a tipper lorry during the occupation. These accounts underscore the widespread fear and danger experienced by non-Igbo populations during the occupation.

The Biafran forces also extended their actions beyond Asaba, and On April 17th, 1968, they killed an American Catholic missionary and Principal of St. Patrick's College at Ogwashi-Uku, accusing him of being a federal mercenary (Okonji, 2006, pp. 25–29). Additionally, at Ogwashi-Uku and Ubulu-Uku, Biafran troops killed Fulani herdsmen they encountered (Okocha, 2012, p. 128). On May 5th, 1969, a Biafran unit attacked the Okapi 3 oil field, killing ten Italian Agip oil workers and abducting thirty others, including Italians, West Germans, Lebanese, and Nigerians (Okocha, 2012, pp. 129–131; Nwaokocha, 2019). These examples highlight the grave losses endured by the Enuani indigens during this harrowing period (Nwaokocha, 2019). While these killings may appear senseless from a military perspective, they reflected the zero-sum mentality that defined the war. However, to the Biafran forces, such actions symbolized victories over perceived enemies. These massacres contributed to the tragic realities of the war in Aniomaland, particularly as the conflict escalated and federal troops eventually took control.

Biafran Disaster at Ogwashi-Uku

The western Igbo people, including the Anioma, suffered immense casualties during the Nigerian Civil War, constituting about 60% of all war victims in the Midwest (Iweze, 2013). Biafran troops, in what appeared to be retaliatory actions against Northerners in Aniomaland, killed Fulani herdsmen they encountered at Ogwashi-Uku (Okocha, 2012, p. 128). This fueled suspicions of Anioma's loyalty to Biafra, prompting federal forces to unleash even greater brutality in Ogwashi-Uku, Asaba, Ibusa, and other Anioma locations (Ighodalo, 2021). Ogwashi-Uku, in particular, witnessed tragic events that underscored the horrors of the war. Federal troops, advancing from Umunede without resistance, encountered Biafran opposition upon reaching the town (Nwaokocha, 2019). The ensuing clashes, which resulted in federal casualties, including a commander, prompted federal troops to resort to targeting unarmed civilians—a tactic frequently employed across Aniomaland. This violence left an indelible scar on the Onukwu family, who became victims of the federal forces' brutality. Babatunde Onukwu and his five brothers were executed in front of their mother, Mrs. Onwuegbuzie Onukwu, who later lost her sanity and never recovered until she died in the 1990s (Ilechie, 2011, as cited in Nwaokocha, 2019; Udegbugue, 2011, as cited in Nwaokocha, 2019).

The military situation around Ogwashi-Uku was chaotic, with retreating Biafran forces camping in the surrounding areas. As federal troops entered a near-empty town, many residents have fled, a battle broke out near the Post Office and Government Primary School. After suffering losses, the Biafrans retreated toward Ibusa. The Onukwu family, whose home was near the battlefield, tragically bore the brunt of federal troops' anger and suspicions of local collusion with Biafrans (Nwaokocha, 2019). Other prominent figures in Ogwashi-Uku also became targets. Afamefuna Elue, Secretary of the Ogwashi-Uku Development Union, was abducted by federal forces and later found dead in a rubber plantation. Years later, when questioned about his inability to intervene, the Obi of Ogwashi-Uku expressed fear of similar retribution, referencing the fate of a chief buried alive in Isheagu (Okocha, 2012, pp. 104–128).

The fear of federal troops was pervasive throughout Anioma communities. To prevent further atrocities, Ibusa youths and retreating Biafran troops destroyed the Oboshi bridge, which connected Ogwashi-Uku and Ibusa, forcing federal forces to reroute through Azagba-Ogwashi to reach Ibusa. Upon entering Ibusa, federal troops were initially restrained, influenced by a welcoming delegation led by the Diokpa of Ibusa, Obi Mordi, and other prominent figures. However, tensions flared after a Biafran attack on federal troops stationed at St. Michael's Primary School, resulting in federal retaliation and the deaths of about twenty civilians (Ikpo, 2008, as cited in Nwaokocha, 2019).

The cruelty extended to incidents such as the gruesome killing of Martha Emeshie, a blind woman who was burned alive in her hut near Ibusa. Similarly, two senior Barclays Bank officials, Joseph Onyemem and Emmanuel Anuchi-Ogbolu, were abducted and killed after refusing soldiers' demands to access the bank's safe. Their bodies were later found on the Ibusa-Asaba road in a crime allegedly perpetrated by a squad led by Captain Patrick Idahosa. Although pressure from influential institutions led to the court-martial and execution of some perpetrators, such atrocities highlighted the relentless suffering endured by Anioma communities (Okocha, 2012, pp. 103–104; Agokei, 2011, as cited in Nwaokocha, 2019). The events in Ogwashi-Uku and neighboring towns epitomize the more significant tragedy faced by the Anioma people during the war. The federal forces' perception of Anioma communities as pro-Biafra exacerbated the violence, leaving lasting scars on the region's history (Nwaokocha, 2019).

Outline for the Results Section

Introduction

This Results Section presents findings from interviews and questionnaires administered to elders and leaders across nine quarters of Ogwashi-Uku—namely Ikeliike, Umudei, Ogbu Ubu, Ogbe Aho, Agidiase, Agidiehe, Azungwu, Oghe Umu Okwuni, and Ogbe Ihago. The overarching research question guiding the study is: What is the origin of the Ogwashi-Uku people as traced by their elders and traditional leaders, and how is this heritage preserved amidst contemporary challenges, including the absence of history education and the spread of conflicting narratives on social media?

In addressing this central concern, the study also explores three sub-research questions:

1. Who do the elders and traditional leaders of Ogwashi-Uku identify as the town's original settlers, and what historical narratives support these claims?
2. What methods and practices does the Ogwashi-Uku community utilize to preserve and transmit its Indigenous heritage across generations?
3. How do contemporary challenges, such as the absence of history education and the proliferation of conflicting narratives on social media, influence the preservation and interpretation of the Ogwashi-Uku people's indigenous heritage?

Participants' accounts offer insights into the nuanced blend of Benin and Igbo ancestral influences, conveyed primarily through oral histories and longstanding cultural festivals. Simultaneously, elders and leaders express concern over how social media and the lack of formal history education may dilute or distort established narratives. By organizing the results into major themes—origins, preservation efforts, and contemporary challenges—this section elucidates how Ogwashi-Uku's cultural identity endures despite modern disruptions.

Theme 1: Indigenous Origins of the Ogwashi-Uku People

Many participants emphasized Benin ancestry, often referencing migration from the Benin Kingdom and highlighting a connection to a Benin royal lineage. In a questionnaire response, one participant specifically selected "Benin origin" to identify the original settlers, explaining that "our earliest stories connect Ogwashi-Uku to migration waves linked to the Benin palace." However, when asked whether elders and traditional leaders fully agree on these narratives, this participant selected "Not sure," indicating some level of uncertainty about the degree of consensus within the community.

Despite varying degrees of confidence in the precise details, a majority of participants reported that they **had heard oral histories** about their origins from older family members and community elders. Several families or lineages (including Ikeliike, Azungwu, Ogbe Ishago, Agidiase, Agidiehe, and Umuokwe) were repeatedly named descendants of the original settlers. However, whether these accounts are documented in written form remained inconclusive for some, with the same participant marking "Not sure," aligning with the broader observation that much of the historical knowledge continues to be transmitted orally rather than through comprehensive written records.

Theme 2: Preservation and Transmission of Indigenous Heritage

Participants' responses revealed strong reliance on traditional festivals and oral storytelling for cultural preservation. When asked if festivals are used to preserve and transmit Ogwashi-Uku's heritage, at least one informant explicitly answered "Yes," echoing earlier findings that annual events such as the Ihu Ani festival, the New Yam festival, and various cultural days serve as platforms for recounting origin stories and passing down communal values. Additionally, participants confirmed that storytelling by elders is common, with many referencing evening gatherings or fireside chats where grandparents and senior community figures share ancestral narratives.

Several participants also acknowledged the role of cultural artifacts or symbols—including sculptures, masks, or carved staffs—in preserving Ogwashi-Uku's heritage. They indicated "Yes" in response to whether such symbols exist and serve a cultural preservation function, though specific details varied by quarter. Despite these robust practices, questionnaire data revealed that there are no community-organized events specifically aimed at systematically teaching younger generations about Ogwashi-Uku's history. One participant selected "No" when asked about such dedicated events, highlighting a potential gap in the continuity of knowledge transfer outside of major festivals or familial settings.

Compounding this gap, the teaching of Ogwashi-Uku's history is also not incorporated into local school curriculums or educational programs, as confirmed by participants. In response to whether the teaching of Ogwashi-Uku's history is included in curriculums, a participant answered "No," suggesting that younger generations receive limited formal reinforcement of their cultural heritage.

Theme 3: Impacts of Contemporary Challenges

A strong consensus emerged that the absence of formal history education has negatively impacted the younger generation's understanding of Ogwashi-Uku's origins. Reflecting on the question, participants overwhelmingly answered "Yes," affirming that many youths do not receive systematic exposure to the community's founding narratives beyond sporadic family discussions or social gatherings.

Simultaneously, the influence of social media was also prominent. Several respondents noted that social media "spreads conflicting narratives," choosing "Yes" when asked whether social media contributes to contradictory claims about the origins of Ogwashi-Uku. Many recounted incidents of coming across historical inaccuracies online, again selecting "Yes" to indicate direct encounters with misleading or oversimplified information about which families or lineages were the original settlers. When asked if the community is making efforts to address these conflicting narratives on social media, the participant who indicated strong Benin origins chose "No," reflecting a lack of organized initiatives to correct misconceptions or unify digital storytelling around Ogwashi-Uku's heritage.

Finally, participants nearly unanimously stated that urbanization and modernization threaten the preservation of Ogwashi-Uku's heritage. "Yes" responses expressed concern that young people's increasing migration to urban centers hampers regular involvement in festivals and cultural rites. These developments, coupled with the scant presence of formal educational measures, intensify the challenges of maintaining intergenerational continuity of local customs.

Theme 4: Role of Elders and Traditional Leaders in Addressing Challenges

Although many elders and traditional leaders attempt to champion the community's heritage, the latest questionnaire data confirm that no formal, community-wide endeavors are in place to systematically correct social media misconceptions. Some participants indicated past attempts at recording oral histories or hosting occasional youth forums, but others highlighted that the absence of structured programs—beyond festival celebrations—remains a persistent obstacle. One individual succinctly stated "No" when asked about ongoing efforts to address conflicting narratives on social media, indicating a potential area for future action among leadership circles.

Even so, the role of elders in orally transmitting knowledge was reaffirmed by most participants. Through communal gatherings, festival speeches, and personal storytelling, these elders still serve as custodians of Ogwashi-Uku's collective memory. However, as modernization accelerates, strategies for bridging traditional forms of knowledge transfer with contemporary digital communication remain underdeveloped.

Patterns or Trends Observed Across Themes

First and most striking is the emphasis on Benin's heritage. While references to Igbo influences persist, the responses consistently highlight direct or central Benin links as a key marker of origin. Second, participants widely endorse festivals and oral storytelling as core preservation tools but note the lack of structured events specifically devoted to historical education. Third, the absence of formal history education compounds the potential confusion sowed by social media. Participants also diverge on whether any corrective measures are taking place online, with at least one stating "No" outright, suggesting the community has not yet fully harnessed social media to counter misinformation.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the updated data affirm that Benin-origin narratives remain dominant in participant responses, although some participants are unsure about the degree of unanimity among elders and leaders. Festivals, storytelling, and cultural artifacts remain vital conduits for preserving and transmitting Ogwashi-Uku's heritage; however, the lack of both formal educational curricula and specialized community-organized events has created knowledge gaps that social media often fills with incomplete or conflicting information. While modernization and urbanization are widely seen as threats to cultural continuity, systematic efforts to combat online inaccuracies or integrate local history into formal schooling are currently absent or minimal. Together, these findings confirm the urgency of establishing more robust, community-led offline and online strategies to ensure that younger generations inherit a nuanced, cohesive understanding of Ogwashi-Uku's origins and cultural identity.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the origins of the Ogwashi-Uku people as traced by elders and traditional leaders and to examine how this heritage is preserved in the face of contemporary challenges. The narratives gathered from nine quarters of Ogwashi-Uku highlight a complex interplay of Benin and Igbo influences, underscoring the community's pluralistic identity rooted in multiple migration stories, intermarriages, and shared cultural practices.

Despite the resilience of oral storytelling and traditional festivals, such as the Ihu Ani and New Yam celebrations, participants point to significant hurdles. The absence of formal history education in local schools has left young people increasingly detached from foundational knowledge, while social media—though offering potential platforms for cultural promotion—frequently amplifies conflicting and sometimes inaccurate narratives. The wealth of oral histories passed down through elders may diminish unless structured interventions are introduced, such as community-led heritage workshops, digital archives of oral accounts, and more proactive engagement with social media to clarify misconceptions.

Overall, the study underscores the urgency of reinforcing traditional methods of heritage preservation with modern approaches that reflect an evolving cultural landscape. Integrating Ogwashi-Uku history into school curricula, expanding youth-oriented cultural events, and actively countering misinformation online would help safeguard Ogwashi-Uku's cultural identity in the coming decades. Future research may explore how emerging digital tools and local educational policies can be harnessed to bolster the intergenerational transmission of Ogwashi-Uku's rich and multifaceted heritage.

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