



Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Approaches to Language-Death Prevention: A Conceptual and Thematic Analysis

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ABSTRACT: Language death records the terminal outcome of sustained language shift, but prevention requires more than the production of grammars, dictionaries and archives. This conceptual and thematic analysis examines linguistic and non-linguistic approaches to preventing the discontinuity of threatened languages. It draws on contemporary scholarship, official international frameworks and selected African and Nigerian studies, while retaining foundational work on reversing language shift and ethno linguistic vitality. The analysis identifies linguistic measures such as vitality assessment, documentation, community-controlled orthography, corpus development, terminology expansion, literacy, immersion, teacher preparation and ethically governed language technology. It also identifies non-linguistic conditions, including family transmission, community leadership, favourable attitudes, legal recognition, policy implementation, stable funding, economic domains, public visibility and institutional partnerships. The central analytical result is that linguistic resources preserve knowledge and support learning, but they do not independently restore ordinary communication. Sustainable prevention arises when communities use those resources across homes, schools, workplaces, media, cultural practices and digital environments, with control over priorities and data. The paper proposes an Integrated Language Continuity Framework that joins diagnosis, intergenerational transmission, domain expansion, institutional support and periodic evaluation. It concludes that prevention should prioritise speakers, relationships and recurring social use, while documentation should support, not replace, communicative continuity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language death occurs when a speech community ceases to use a language as a normal means of communication and no new generation acquires it for sustained social interaction. The final disappearance may appear sudden when the last highly proficient speaker dies, but the decisive changes usually begin much earlier. Families reduce transmission, children encounter the dominant language as the route to schooling and employment, public institutions exclude the threatened language, and speakers gradually restrict it to ceremonial or private functions. Fishman (1991) therefore located the center of reversing language shift in intergenerational continuity, especially the recurring use of a language in family and neighborhood life. More recent scholarship retains this emphasis while showing that contemporary revitalization also depends on education, policy, digital participation, cultural practice, community governance and material support (Olko & Sallabank, 2021; Wiltshire et al., 2024).

The scale of language endangerment has made prevention a matter of international concern. The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2022–2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, and UNESCO's action plan calls for coordinated work by communities, governments, educational institutions, researchers, civil society and technology organizations (UNESCO, 2022; United Nations General Assembly, 2019). This international framework recognizes that linguistic diversity carries cultural memory, ecological knowledge, historical interpretation and distinctive forms of social belonging. However, official recognition does not by

itself secure transmission. A language may receive commemorative attention while children continue to grow up without using it, teachers lack suitable materials, and public services operate exclusively through dominant languages. Prevention therefore requires a clear distinction between symbolic celebration and arrangements that sustain ordinary communication.

Linguists contribute indispensable resources to prevention. Documentation can preserve audio-visual records, grammatical patterns, vocabulary, oral genres and interactional practices. Orthography development can support literacy and educational materials. Corpus planning can extend terminology into administration, science, health, law and technology. Pedagogy can organize immersion, language nests, master-apprentice learning, community classes and digital resources. Austin (2021) nevertheless cautions that documentation materials may fail to serve revitalization when researchers design them primarily for specialist analysis, omit everyday language, or place them in archives that community members cannot readily use. Fitzgerald (2021) similarly presents documentation and revitalization as a feedback relationship: documentation should respond to community goals, while revitalization activities produce new language data and new domains of use.

Non-linguistic factors often determine whether linguistic resources influence behavior. A well-designed dictionary cannot make parents speak the language to children. A standard orthography cannot create employment domains, political recognition or confidence among speakers who have experienced ridicule. A mobile application cannot compensate for the absence of mentors, teachers, community gatherings and opportunities for extended conversation. Dołowy-Rybińska and Hornsby (2021) show that language attitudes connect status, solidarity and social stereotypes, while Leonard (2021) demonstrates that revitalization operates through relationships, power differences and negotiations among community members, researchers and institutions. These findings direct attention from the language as an abstract code to the people who decide when, where and why they will use it.

The distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic approaches has analytical value, but practical programmes cannot keep the two apart. Linguistic approaches address the form, description, teaching and technological representation of a language. Non-linguistic approaches address the social conditions that allow speakers to transmit, value and use those forms. A teaching programme needs an agreed curriculum and suitable materials, but it also needs trained personnel, sustained funding, family support and a respected place in the timetable. Digital tools need corpora, keyboards and speech data, but they also need community consent, data governance, reliable connectivity and reasons for users to communicate through the language. The effectiveness of prevention therefore depends on coordination across both categories.

This paper develops a conceptual and thematic account of that coordination. It examines language-death prevention as a continuum that begins with early detection of declining transmission and extends through documentation, maintenance, revitalization and, in some cases, reclamation from archival records. The analysis gives particular attention to multilingual African settings, where colonial languages frequently dominate formal institutions and hundreds of indigenous languages compete for limited educational and technological resources. Nigerian evidence demonstrates both policy ambition and implementation difficulty. The National Language Policy seeks broader indigenous-language use, but educational practice, urban language choice and unequal resource distribution continue to weaken transmission in many communities (Lawani, 2025; Senayon, 2021). The paper argues that prevention succeeds when linguistic work serves a broader social programme of language continuity rather than functioning as an endpoint in itself.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Language-death prevention frequently suffers from a division between technical language work and the social conditions of language use. Documentation projects may produce valuable archives without increasing the number of speakers or the frequency of interaction. School programmes may teach vocabulary and grammar while leaving the home, workplace, media and public administration dominated by another language. Governments may adopt multilingual policies but allocate inadequate funds, fail to train teachers, or treat minority languages as cultural ornaments. Digital projects may increase online visibility but leave intergenerational transmission unchanged. The result is a pattern in which a language appears preserved as an object of study while it continues to decline as a medium of relationships and daily activity.

The literature supplies extensive descriptions of individual interventions, but programmes still need a coherent basis for deciding which measures should take priority at different stages of endangerment. Wiltshire et al. (2024) found that revitalization research often reports what programmes do without adequately explaining how local participation, community strength and external support produce particular outcomes. African scholarship also identifies a distance between broad prescriptions and the practical constraints of multilingual states, including scarce materials, limited institutional support and uneven policy implementation (Are, 2015). Thus, the unresolved issue concerns integration: how can linguistic interventions and non-linguistic support operate as a connected prevention strategy that protects intergenerational use, expands domains and respects community control? This paper addresses that conceptual problem through thematic synthesis.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the principal linguistic approaches used to prevent language death.
2. To analyze the non-linguistic social, political, educational, economic and institutional conditions that support language continuity.
3. To explain how linguistic and non-linguistic approaches interact across different stages of language endangerment.

4. To propose an integrated conceptual framework for sustainable language-death prevention, with attention to multilingual African societies.

4. CONCEPTUAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Which linguistic approaches contribute most directly to the prevention of language death?
2. Which non-linguistic conditions determine whether prevention efforts can endure?
3. How should linguistic and non-linguistic approaches interact across stages of language endangerment?
4. What integrated framework can guide sustainable language-death prevention in multilingual societies?

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 Language Death, Endangerment and Prevention

Language death describes the cessation of a language as a means of communication, but language endangerment refers to the preceding reduction in speakers, transmission and domains. The distinction matters because prevention must begin before terminal loss. A language with many adult speakers may still face severe danger when children no longer acquire it, whereas a language with a smaller population may remain stable when families transmit it and institutions support its use. Fishman's (1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale made intergenerational transmission the diagnostic center of reversing language shift. Later vitality models extended assessment to education, literacy, public functions and wider communication, but the family remains the point at which a language either enters the next generation or fails to do so.

Prevention differs from archival preservation. Preservation seeks to retain records of linguistic knowledge, while prevention seeks to keep, restore or expand communication among people. The two aims can support each other, but they answer different questions. An archive asks whether future users can access reliable records; a continuity programme asks whether present and future community members will speak, understand, read, write and create through the language. Austin and Sallabank (2018) argue that documentation must consider revitalization purposes from the beginning, including usable formats, community access and the kinds of language that learners need. Fitzgerald (2021) advances a similar feedback model in which community engagement shapes linguistic research, and linguistic outputs return to teaching and use.

The language-death metaphor can also mislead when it presents a language as a patient separated from social history. Languages decline through decisions shaped by power, inequality, mobility, schooling, religion, labor markets, discrimination and changing family aspirations. Community members may choose a dominant language because it offers educational or economic benefits, but those choices do not occur under equal conditions. Ehala (2010) relates ethno linguistic vitality to perceived group strength, distance, utility and intergroup relations. This perspective explains why speakers may value a heritage language emotionally but still reduce its use when institutions reward another language. Prevention must therefore alter communicative opportunities and social evaluation, not merely appeal to sentiment.

Contemporary scholarship also distinguishes revitalization from reclamation. Revitalization usually seeks to strengthen a language that retains some speakers or domains. Reclamation may draw on archival and scholarly records when ordinary transmission has ceased. Grenoble (2021) notes that programme goals should not be reduced to producing an idealized category of fluent native speaker; communities may seek cultural access, partial competence, public recognition, healing or new speaker networks. Sallabank and King (2021) similarly ask what communities intend to revitalize, for whom and for which purposes. Prevention should thus establish realistic goals grounded in local priorities and the current vitality of the language.

5.2 Linguistic Approaches to Prevention

Linguistic approaches focus on the structure, representation, teaching and technological treatment of the threatened language. Vitality assessment is the first measure because programmes need evidence about speaker age, proficiency, transmission, domains, attitudes and available resources. Diagnosis prevents the uncritical transfer of one model to every community. A language that still has child speakers may require maintenance and domain expansion, while a language spoken mainly by elders may require urgent documentation, adult learning and intensive intergenerational programmes. Penfield (2021) recommends strategic planning that connects goals, activities, responsibilities, resources and evaluation, thereby converting broad concern into an ordered programme. Documentation provides a durable record of speech and cultural practice. Effective documentation includes natural conversation, child-directed speech, narratives, songs, ceremonies, specialized knowledge, place names and everyday interaction. It also includes transcription, translation, annotation, metadata and clear access conditions. Austin (2021) observes that legacy records and specialist archives often present practical barriers to learners. Documentation becomes more useful when communities help choose content, recording conditions, access levels and future products. Such work can produce dictionaries, grammars, audio readers, story collections, teacher resources and searchable corpora instead of leaving data as an academic deposit.

Orthography and corpus development support literacy, curriculum and public communication. Shah and Brenzinger (2021) explain that writing systems carry practical and ideological consequences: spelling choices affect learnability, identity, dialect relations and community acceptance. An externally imposed orthography may intensify disagreement, while a participatory process can improve ownership and consistency. Corpus planning also extends vocabulary for contemporary domains. Threatened languages need terms and genres for health information, science, technology, law, administration, entertainment and new social practices if speakers are

to use them beyond heritage events. Terminology creation should draw on internal word-formation patterns, borrowing, semantic extension and community preference instead of enforcing purism that discourages actual speakers.

Pedagogy converts linguistic description into communicative competence. Underriner et al. (2021) review immersion, language nests, master-apprentice learning, place-based education and methods adapted to different levels of teacher and learner proficiency. Effective teaching priorities meaningful input, recurring interaction and culturally relevant activity instead of isolated word lists. It also links children, parents, elders and new speakers. Forrest (2018) shows why family-focused programmes matter: school exposure alone rarely compensates for the absence of home transmission. Pedagogy should therefore prepare parents and caregivers to use the language in routines such as meals, play, stories, greetings and household tasks.

Technology now forms part of the linguistic infrastructure of continuity. Kornai (2013) demonstrates that a language may retain offline speakers but face digital decline when it lacks online content, tools and computational support. Digital prevention can include Unicode-compliant orthographies, fonts, keyboards, spell-checkers, electronic dictionaries, corpora, subtitled videos, podcasts, online lessons, social-media content, speech recognition and machine translation. Elliott (2021) and Surma and Truong (2024) warn that technology should answer identified community needs instead of driving projects for its own sake. Meighan (2021) also stresses that digital work should respect Indigenous knowledge, local pedagogy and control over representation.

5.3 Non-Linguistic Approaches to Prevention

Non-linguistic approaches address the social environment that determines whether people use linguistic resources. Family transmission occupies the first position because children acquire language through recurring relationships, not through materials alone. Parents may need confidence-building, practical routines, peer groups, childcare resources and support from proficient speakers. In Nigeria, Babatunde and Akinawo (2026) report that language choice in educated bilingual homes can accelerate endangerment when parents assign low value to indigenous-language transmission. Etim and Tyoh (2026) likewise connect heritage-language maintenance among Anaañ-English bilinguals to family practice, community participation and educational support. These studies show that prevention must treat the household as a programme setting, not as an assumed background.

Community leadership and participation shape legitimacy. Flores Farfán and Olko (2021) describe different forms of ancestral, dispersed and learning communities, each with distinct expectations and resources. Leonard (2021) adds that revitalization may redistribute authority among elders, teachers, activists, linguists, institutions and new speakers. Programmes need transparent decision-making and respect for variation in proficiency, age, dialect and social position. Community leadership does not exclude external expertise; it establishes how expertise should serve local aims. Wiltshire et al. (2024) found that sustained participation can strengthen commitment and collective capacity, especially when programmes support relationships instead of delivering short projects from outside.

Attitudes and ideology influence whether speakers regard use as dignified, useful and appropriate. Negative experiences at school or work can produce silence even after formal restrictions disappear. Dołowy-Rybińska and Hornsby (2021) recommend careful attention to the beliefs beneath expressed attitudes, including assumptions about authenticity, correctness and modernity. Prestige planning can involve public campaigns, respected role models, cultural production, and awards, signage and media representation. However, positive slogans have limited effect if speakers still encounter penalties in education, employment or public service. Attitude work must therefore accompany structural changes that make the language usable and respected.

Policy and legal recognition can secure educational, administrative and media domains. Wicherkiwicz (2021) distinguishes corpus, status, prestige and acquisition planning, and shows that communities need both bottom-up mobilization and engagement with public institutions. In Nigeria, Lawani (2025) presents the National Language Policy as a framework for indigenous-language use across education, governance, media, technology, health and security. Senayon (2021), however, documents the damaging effect of non-implementation in Ogu-speaking communities, where another regional language displaced the intended local medium of instruction. Policy therefore contributes to prevention only when budgets, teacher preparation, materials, monitoring and accountability accompany formal statements.

Economic and institutional conditions affect long-term participation. Speakers may support a language emotionally but priorities languages associated with employment and mobility. Olko (2021) argues that revitalization can connect language to cultural tourism, environmental knowledge, creative industries and local employment, although commercialization must not reduce the language to performance for outsiders. Emlen (2021) emphasises funding and organizational support, while Penfield (2021) stresses realistic planning. Sustainable programmes require paid coordinators, teacher development, materials production, venues, digital maintenance and evaluation. Volunteer energy remains valuable, but permanent language functions cannot depend indefinitely on unpaid labor.

5.4 The African and Nigerian Context

African language endangerment reflects both global pressures and distinctive national histories. Colonial languages continue to dominate higher education, administration, law, elite employment and much commercial media. Regional lingua francas can also displace smaller neighboring languages. Are (2015) argues that African programmes must distinguish between functional revitalization and archival preservation according to vitality, resources and community commitment. This position encourages prioritization but also raises an ethical requirement: communities should participate in decisions about goals, and limited resources should not become a reason for automatic neglect.

Nigeria illustrates the difficulty of connecting multilingual policy to everyday practice. The country possesses hundreds of languages, but the distribution of population, institutional resources and public visibility remains highly unequal. The 2022 National Language Policy and its implementation guidelines widen the recognized functions of Nigerian languages, but implementation depends on legislation, research, advocacy, capacity building, translation, quality assurance, infrastructure and financing (Lawani, 2025). Educational research also shows that policy outcomes depend on teacher competence, learning materials and the actual multilingual profile of classrooms. A language-of-instruction rule cannot succeed through legal wording when schools lack trained teachers or when parents equate English-only schooling with advancement.

The Nigerian context also demonstrates that major indigenous languages can exert pressure on smaller languages. Senayon (2021) shows that Ogu children may encounter Yoruba instead of Ogu as the supposed language of the immediate environment. Thus, prevention should not frame the issue only as indigenous languages against English. It must also address local hierarchies, migration, urbanization, intermarriage and the use of regional lingua francas. A national programme should combine broad rights with locally differentiated planning, because each language has a different speaker base, transmission pattern, literacy history and institutional position.

6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

6.1 Reversing Language Shift Theory

This paper draws first on Fishman's (1991) theory of reversing language shift. The theory diagnoses disruption through a graded scale and places intergenerational mother-tongue transmission at the center of continuity. Fishman argues that activities in education, media and government cannot substitute for the recurring use of the language among families and local communities. Higher institutional functions can strengthen a language, but programmes that neglect transmission may create symbolic visibility without reproducing speakers. The theory therefore supports a sequence: diagnose the level of disruption, restore informal intergenerational use, strengthen literacy and education, and expand public functions as capacity grows.

The theory contributes two important principles to this paper. First, prevention should match intervention to vitality. A language with active child speakers needs support different from a language with only elderly remembers. Second, success should be assessed through continuing use across generations, not through the number of materials produced. The theory has limits because contemporary communication includes digital networks, dispersed communities and new-speaker identities that received less attention in 1991. However, its focus on transmission remains indispensable, and current research repeatedly confirms that family and community practice mediate the effects of formal programmes (Forrest, 2018; Wiltshire et al., 2024).

6.2 Ethno linguistic Vitality Theory

The second framework is ethno linguistic vitality. Ehala (2010) explains language continuity through perceived group strength, social distance, utility and relations with other groups. Vitality therefore includes more than speaker numbers. It concerns whether members regard the language as valuable, whether institutions recognize it, whether social networks support its use, and whether speakers expect benefits or penalties from choosing it. This framework helps explain why a technically documented language may continue to decline: the community may lack favorable status, institutional support or confidence in future use.

Ethno linguistic vitality also directs attention to non-linguistic intervention. Status planning, public visibility, employment domains, media, community organizations and positive identities can increase the practical and symbolic value of use. Conversely, discrimination, fragmented networks and economic exclusion can weaken transmission. The framework does not prescribe a single revitalization method, but it helps programmes identify the social variables that shape behavior. It thus complements reversing language shift, which supplies a transmission-centered sequence, by explaining why individuals and groups commit to or withdraw from that sequence.

6.3 Integrated Theoretical Position

The paper combines the two theories as follows. Reversing language shift identifies intergenerational continuity as the primary outcome and orders interventions according to disruption. Ethno linguistic vitality explains the social conditions under which speakers will participate in those interventions. Linguistic work supplies the codes, materials, teaching methods and technologies needed for transmission and domain expansion. Non-linguistic work strengthens the relationships, status, resources and institutions that make those tools usable. This integrated position predicts that prevention will remain weak when either side is absent: social enthusiasm without linguistic resources cannot sustain learning, while linguistic resources without social motivation and domains cannot restore communication.

7. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a conceptual and thematic literature-analysis design. It examined peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books and chapters, official policy documents and international language-revitalization frameworks. Contemporary sources from 2018 to 2026 received priority, while foundational works were retained for theoretical explanation. Materials were located through Crossref-linked DOI records, publisher platforms, the ACL Anthology, PLOS, Cambridge Core, Taylor & Francis, Springer Link, UNESCO, United Nations records and selected African and Nigerian journals. Search expressions combined terms such as language death,

language endangerment, language maintenance, language revitalization, intergenerational transmission, documentation, orthography, language policy, digital language support, community participation, Africa and Nigeria.

Selection focused on sources that addressed causes of language shift, prevention methods, programme conditions, implementation outcomes or theoretical models. The review excluded sources that discussed endangered languages only as examples for unrelated linguistic analysis. The analysis followed four stages: conceptual clarification, coding of linguistic and non-linguistic measures, comparison of relationships across sources, and synthesis under the four conceptual research questions. Because the study did not use a formal systematic-review protocol or claim exhaustive database coverage, its results are analytical deductions from a structured thematic review, not statistical estimates of intervention effectiveness.

8. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

8.1 Research Question One: Linguistic Approaches that Contribute Directly to Prevention

The synthesis identifies six connected linguistic approaches: diagnosis, documentation, orthography and corpus planning, communicative pedagogy, domain-specific materials and digital language infrastructure. Diagnosis comes first because intervention must respond to actual vitality. Speaker counts alone provide an incomplete picture. Programmes should map age distribution, proficiency, child acquisition, home use, institutional domains, literacy, attitudes, dialect patterns and existing resources. This assessment should be repeated because vitality can change through migration, schooling and media exposure. The analytical deduction is that prevention begins as an information problem: communities and institutions need an accurate account of where transmission remains strong, where it is weakening and which resources are immediately available.

Documentation contributes most when it records usable language and returns products to users. Natural conversation, family speech, oral genres, procedural knowledge and youth language provide models for learners and teachers. Austin (2021) recommends attention to everyday language and to the documentation of revitalization activities themselves. Fitzgerald (2021) strengthens this conclusion by presenting documentation and revitalization as reciprocal. The result of the synthesis is that archival quality and community usability should operate as joint standards. A technically excellent corpus with inaccessible formats or restrictive ownership may preserve evidence but contribute little to present continuity.

Orthography and corpus planning provide a bridge from oral knowledge to literacy, education and technology. Community-controlled orthography reduces the danger that spelling disputes will consume programme energy or alienate speakers. Shah and Brenzinger (2021) show that writing carries symbolic value, but practical success depends on who will read, what will be written and how conventions relate to speaker preferences. Corpus planning should also support modern vocabulary and diverse genres. A language that cannot readily express school subjects, public health, digital communication and contemporary work remains confined to limited domains. The deduction is that standardization should increase participation and functionality instead of producing a rigid norm that labels ordinary speakers as deficient.

Communicative pedagogy forms the transmission mechanism. Language nests, immersion, master-apprentice programmes, family classes and place-based learning differ in structure, but effective models create sustained input, purposeful interaction and repeated opportunities to speak. Underriner et al. (2021) stress adaptation to community desires, resources and teacher proficiency. The synthesis therefore rejects a single universal method. Communities should select methods according to speaker availability, learner age, time, domains and goals. However, every method should move beyond recognition and memorization towards spontaneous use in relationships and tasks.

Digital infrastructure expands access but does not replace speech communities. Kornai (2013) shows that exclusion from digital environments can create a second form of endangerment. Contemporary tools can support keyboards, dictionaries, searchable corpora, speech technologies and online learning. Zhang et al. (2022) demonstrate how natural language processing may assist language education when technologists collaborate with community partners. Haberland et al. (2026) further propose integrated tools that connect documentation, corpus search, morphology and dictionary development. However, Kwok (2026) warns that AI projects can reproduce data extraction and unequal ownership. Thus, digital prevention should require community consent, transparent data handling, local control and realistic evaluation of accuracy.

Taken together, linguistic approaches create the informational and pedagogical means of continuity. They answer what the language contains, how it can be represented, how it can be taught and how it can function in contemporary media. However, the synthesis also shows their boundary. They cannot independently create commitment, time, funding, status or intergenerational relationships. Their direct contribution is therefore enabling rather than self-sufficient.

8.2 Research Question Two: Non-Linguistic Conditions that Determine Durability

The first non-linguistic condition is intergenerational commitment in families and close social networks. Parents and caregivers decide whether children hear the language frequently enough to acquire it. They also influence whether children associate it with affection, discipline, humor, knowledge and belonging. Forrest (2018) demonstrates that maintenance programmes should address family practices directly. Nigerian evidence reinforces the point: negative parental attitudes and low home use can weaken indigenous-language transmission even among educated bilinguals (Babatunde & Akinawo, 2026). The analytical result is that family language planning should form an explicit programme component, supported by routines, materials, mentors and peer networks.

The second condition is community governance. Programmes endure when participants recognize the goals, decision process and distribution of benefits as legitimate. Leonard (2021) shows that revitalization interacts with existing power relations and can create disagreement over authority, correctness and representation. External institutions may contribute expertise and resources, but community members need meaningful control over priorities, access and evaluation. This does not require unanimity. It requires procedures that hear elders, youth, women, diaspora members, new speakers and dialect groups, and that explain how decisions are made.

The third condition is favorable status supported by real domains. Attitude campaigns can increase pride, but use grows when the language has practical functions. Public signage, local administration, health communication, broadcasting, worship, cultural production, sport, markets and creative work can create repeated reasons to speak and write. Dołowy-Rybińska and Hornsby (2021) show that status and solidarity affect evaluation, while Olko (2021) discusses economic value and employment. The synthesis indicates that prestige planning should connect positive representation with concrete opportunities. Visibility without interaction may produce recognition but not transmission.

The fourth condition is enforceable policy and institutional capacity. Legal recognition can protect educational and public-service functions, but implementation requires budgets, trained staff, materials, timetables, monitoring and sanctions for persistent neglect. Lawani (2025) describes Nigeria's policy architecture, while Senayon (2021) demonstrates how non-implementation can expose a minority language to further displacement. The deduction is that a policy should specify responsible institutions, measurable duties, funding lines and reporting procedures. Broad declarations of support should not count as successful prevention.

The fifth condition is stable material support. Language work needs coordinators, teachers, recording equipment, software maintenance, community venues and time. Emlen (2021) notes that funding needs vary by programme scale and goals. Overreliance on short grants can produce cycles of activity followed by collapse. Prevention therefore needs mixed support from public budgets, community organizations, universities, foundations and revenue-generating cultural activity where appropriate. Compensation also communicates respect for the knowledge and labor of speakers.

The sixth condition is ethical partnership and data sovereignty. Digital archives and AI tools can circulate language data far beyond the community. Meighan (2021) and Kwok (2026) show that technological inclusion can reproduce colonial relations when outsiders control data, models and benefits. Ethical prevention requires informed consent, differentiated access, attribution, and benefit sharing and community authority over sensitive materials. The result is not an argument against technology; it is an argument for governance that keeps technological capacity aligned with linguistic and cultural priorities.

8.3 Research Question Three: Interaction across Stages of Endangerment

The relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic approaches changes according to vitality. At an early stage, when children still acquire the language, prevention should protect family transmission and resist domain loss. Linguistic activity may focus on curriculum improvement, terminology, literacy and digital support, while non-linguistic activity secures policy, teacher preparation, media presence and positive attitudes. The principal aim is maintenance, because waiting for severe decline makes recovery more expensive and uncertain.

At a middle stage, when adult speakers remain numerous but children use the language less, programmes need intensive coordination. Family language planning, preschool nests, immersion, youth media and community events should operate together. Documentation should capture proficient speech while speakers remain available, but products should feed directly into teaching. Prestige and economic domains become especially important because adolescents and parents need reasons to choose the language alongside dominant languages. The synthesis indicates that this stage offers substantial preventive opportunity, but it also carries danger because speaker numbers can conceal the collapse of transmission.

At a severe stage, when proficient speakers are mainly elderly, documentation becomes urgent and pedagogical design must support new speakers. Master-apprentice programmes, adult immersion, archival learning and concentrated teacher development may take priority. Non-linguistic support should provide time, compensation and emotional safety for learners who may face criticism about accent or authenticity. Flores Farfán and Olko (2021) caution against rigid speaker categories that discourage participation. Prevention at this stage depends on constructing new networks of use, not on reproducing an unattainable image of the past.

At a dormant stage, when ordinary speech has ceased, reclamation relies heavily on archives, historical texts and related varieties. Linguistic reconstruction and curriculum development carry greater weight, but community motivation, identity, cultural authority and institutional support remain necessary. The goal may begin with ceremonial language, names, songs, reading or partial competence before broader conversation develops. Grenoble (2021) supports a plural understanding of benefits and goals. Thus, the interaction across stages follows a consistent principle: linguistic intensity increases as transmitted knowledge decreases, but non-linguistic commitment remains necessary at every stage.

8.4 Research Question Four: An Integrated Language Continuity Framework

The thematic synthesis supports an Integrated Language Continuity Framework with five linked functions: diagnosis, transmission, resource development, domain expansion and institutional sustainability. Diagnosis establishes vitality and community goals. Transmission organizes family, early-childhood, youth and adult learning. Resource development produces documentation, orthography, corpora, curricula, teacher materials and digital tools. Domain expansion creates recurring use in education, public

services, culture, work, media and online communication. Institutional sustainability secures governance, rights, funding, partnerships, data control and evaluation.

The framework treats intergenerational communication as the organizing outcome. Every activity should answer a continuity question. Documentation should identify which learners and teachers will use the recordings. Orthography work should identify the readers and genres it will support. Policy should specify the domains in which speakers can exercise rights. Technology should identify the communicative practice it will strengthen. Funding should identify how capacity will remain after a project ends. This approach converts lists of activities into a causal programme centered on use.

The framework also requires periodic evaluation. Programmes should measure more than outputs such as books, workshops and recordings. They should examine changes in child exposure, home routines, learner proficiency, and frequency of interaction, number of active domains, teacher capacity, public visibility, digital use and speaker attitudes. Wiltshire et al. (2024) argue that revitalization research needs stronger explanations of how outcomes arise. Evaluation should therefore combine indicators with qualitative accounts of participation, motivation and barriers. Communities should help define success because different settings may priorities different forms of continuity.

Finally, the framework supports multilingualism instead of demanding isolation from dominant languages. Language-death prevention does not require speakers to abandon national or international languages. It requires stable spaces in which the threatened language performs valued functions and reaches children. Fishman (1991) treated functional differentiation as compatible with continuity, and contemporary multilingual societies make this principle especially important. A sustainable programme should build additive multilingual competence while preventing the dominant language from occupying every domain.

9. DISCUSSION

The analysis confirms that language-death prevention is neither solely a linguistic project nor solely a political campaign. Linguistic work gives a community reliable records, writing conventions, teaching resources and digital representation. Non-linguistic work creates the willingness, authority, time, status and institutional space required to use them. This interpretation agrees with Fitzgerald's (2021) feedback model and with Austin's (2021) call for documentation designed for revitalization. It also supports Wiltshire et al. (2024), who connect programme outcomes to community participation and supportive external structures.

The findings clarify why documentation alone often produces an incomplete form of success. An archive can protect knowledge from total disappearance and may later support reclamation, but prevention concerns continued communication before such reconstruction becomes necessary. This distinction does not diminish documentation. It places documentation in a wider chain from recording to curriculum, teaching, interaction and new production. The same reasoning applies to dictionaries, orthographies and apps. Their value depends on the social practices they support.

The analysis also strengthens Fishman's emphasis on intergenerational transmission. Contemporary digital networks expand possible domains, but they do not remove the need for sustained relationships. Children may encounter songs and short videos online without developing the ability to converse. Schools may provide lessons without altering family language choice. Digital and formal education therefore work best as reinforcements for recurring use across generations. Forrest's (2018) family-focused argument and the Nigerian home-language findings of Babatunde and Akinlawo (2026) support this conclusion.

However, the family should not carry responsibility alone. Parents make language choices under institutional and economic pressure. When examinations, employment, public services and media reward only dominant languages, advice to speak the heritage language at home may sound morally demanding but materially unsupported. Ethno linguistic vitality theory explains this relationship between utility, status and commitment (Ehala, 2010). Prevention should therefore distribute responsibility across families, communities, schools, government, media, employers and technology organizations.

The Nigerian case shows the importance of local differentiation. A single national policy cannot prescribe identical interventions for languages with millions of speakers and languages spoken by small, dispersed communities. It also cannot assume that English is the only source of pressure. Regional languages, urban mixed practices and mobility reshape local ecologies. The national framework should guarantee rights and resources, while local vitality assessments determine priorities, methods and languages of immediate educational environments. Lawani (2025) provides an implementation-oriented policy account, but Senayon (2021) demonstrates why local monitoring remains necessary.

The role of technology requires a balanced interpretation. Digital presence can support youth participation, learning, documentation and public visibility. It can also deepen inequality when low-resource languages lack data or when external organizations control models. Kornai's (2013) warning about digital language death remains relevant, while current AI research adds questions of consent, sovereignty and benefit (Kwok, 2026). The practical implication is that language technology should be community-informed, modular, transparent and connected to teaching and communication goals.

A final implication concerns evaluation. Many programmes count products because products are visible and easy to report. However, continuity depends on behavior. Evaluation should ask whether more children hear and use the language, whether learners sustain conversation, whether new teachers can work independently, whether public domains have expanded, and whether institutions continue to fund and respect the programme. Such evidence can guide adjustment without imposing one universal definition of success.

10. CONCLUSION

Language-death prevention requires the coordinated operation of linguistic and non-linguistic approaches. Documentation, orthography, corpus planning, pedagogy and digital tools provide the means to record, teach and extend a threatened language. Family transmission, community governance, favorable attitudes, enforceable policy, economic domains, stable funding and ethical partnerships create the conditions in which those means can influence communication. The central contribution of this paper is the Integrated Language Continuity Framework, which connects diagnosis, transmission, resource development, domain expansion and institutional sustainability. The framework places recurring intergenerational use at the center while allowing different communities to define realistic goals according to vitality and aspiration. Thus, prevention should judge success through continuing relationships and domains of use, not through preservation outputs alone.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Language communities, universities and relevant public institutions should conduct periodic vitality assessments that document transmission, speaker age, proficiency, domains, attitudes and available resources. Each assessment should lead to a staged language plan with named responsibilities, timelines and locally defined indicators.
2. Documentation projects should adopt community-approved priorities and produce accessible outputs for teaching, family use and public communication. Researchers should return recordings, transcripts, dictionaries and corpora in formats that community members can use, while respecting restricted knowledge and agreed access conditions.
3. Education authorities should connect school programmes to family transmission. They should support language nests, parent workshops, home-use materials, mentor networks and teacher preparation so that classroom learning reinforces communication beyond school hours.
4. Governments should convert language-policy commitments into funded duties. Implementation guidelines should identify responsible bodies, teacher-development targets, material-production plans, public-service domains, monitoring procedures and annual budget lines, especially for smaller languages that lack commercial publishing markets.
5. Community organizations and local governments should expand regular domains of use through broadcasting, cultural production, public signage, markets, health communication, worship, youth activities and creative enterprise. These domains should encourage sustained interaction instead of ceremonial display alone.
6. Technology developers and research institutions should build tools through informed community participation. Projects involving corpora, speech data or artificial intelligence should specify ownership, consent, access, attribution, benefit sharing, security and procedures for correcting harmful or inaccurate outputs.
7. Funding bodies should support multi-year programmes and institutional capacity instead of isolated products. Grants should include fair compensation for speakers, teacher development, coordination, technology maintenance and evaluation of changes in actual language use.
8. Nigerian language planning should combine national rights with locally differentiated implementation. Federal and state bodies should protect minority languages from displacement by both English and larger regional languages, while local communities determine appropriate combinations of maintenance, revitalization, reclamation and documentation.

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