



Personal Names as Repositories of Communal History and Circumstance among the Igala People of Kogi State

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Abstract

Personal names among African communities function as durable instruments of memory, holding within a single word the conflict, migration, reconciliation and communal occurrence that shaped the moment of a child's birth; this premise underlies the paper, Personal Names as Repositories of Communal History and Circumstance among the Igala people of Kogi State. The paper attempted to identify the categories of communal history and circumstance encoded in Igala personal names, examined the processes by which such names are assigned in relation to family and communal conditions surrounding birth, and assess the extent to which this historical content is presently preserved or eroded among Igala bearers in Kogi State. Halbwachs's Social Memory Theory was adopted as the guiding framework, treating personal names as social instruments through which a community relocates and sustains its past. A systematic review methodology, structured according to the PRISMA 2020 guideline, was employed, drawing on twelve verified scholarly sources retained after a staged process of identification, screening and eligibility assessment. Findings showed that Igala names encode identifiable categories of communal experience, including conflict, migration and reconciliation; that naming is assigned through an interpretive, communally witnessed process rather than private parental choice; and that indigenous naming content is undergoing measurable erosion among urban and elite bearers, though comparative evidence suggests deliberate maintenance can sustain such content even beyond the ancestral territory. The paper concluded that Igala personal names remain a viable, though weakening, repository of communal history, and recommended deliberate documentation, community-based naming education and further empirical fieldwork within Kogi State.

Keywords:

Igala Personal Names, Communal History, Onomastics.

Introduction

Among the Igala people of Kogi State, a personal name is rarely assigned as a neutral label; rather, it is fixed to the circumstance, lineage, spiritual conviction or historical moment surrounding a child's birth. Egbunu (2016) observes that Igala names are given largely in accordance with the spiritual and historico-social circumstances attending birth, as well as the emotions of parents, and that such names are widely regarded as embodying the destiny of the

individual who bears them. This practice situates the Igala people within a broader West African anthroponomastic order in which naming functions as a social and mnemonic act rather than a mere administrative formality. Agyekum (2006), writing on the Akan of Ghana, similarly demonstrates that personal names among that group are sociocultural markers carrying day-of-birth, circumstantial, family and theophorous information, thereby confirming that the phenomenon observed among the Igala people belongs to a wider pattern across the sub-region in which naming systems store social memory within linguistic form.

Among the Igala people, a name may recall a war, a drought, a disputed succession, a reconciliation between kin groups, or the death of a notable elder, so that the recitation of a lineage's names can, in effect, reconstruct fragments of communal experience across generations. Omachonu and Ejeba (2023) note that Igala personal names constitute a prism through which the culture and cosmology of the people may be viewed, and that the corpus of names in circulation reflects phonological, morphological and syntactic processes native to the Igala language itself, thereby binding linguistic structure to cultural content. Beyond the immediate family, the naming ceremony itself operates as a rite of incorporation, formally inducting the child into the community and, by extension, into the stock of remembered communal circumstance that the name encodes (Egbunu, 2016). Comparable evidence from other Nigerian ethnic groups strengthens the claim that personal names function as repositories of communal experience beyond the Igala setting.

Michael et al. (2026), studying naming practices among diasporic Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria, found that names continue to convey migration history, communal ties and emotional attachment to the ancestral homeland even where bearers reside outside Nigeria, indicating that the archival function of African personal names persists under conditions of dispersal and cultural contact. This body of work establishes that among the Igala people, as among related Nigerian and West African peoples, the personal name operates simultaneously as an identity marker, a historical record and a social instrument through which communal circumstance is preserved and transmitted.

Statement of the Problem

Notwithstanding the demonstrated capacity of Igala personal names to preserve communal history, the practice faces measurable strain. Egbunu (2016) attributes part of this strain to what he terms a condition afflicting the Igala elite and urban dwellers, whereby indigenous cultural forms, including naming conventions, are increasingly displaced by foreign religious and social influences, leaving a generation less able to read the historical content embedded in their own names. Where a name that once recorded a specific communal event, a season of hardship, or a settled dispute is abandoned in favour of an imported alternative chosen for fashion rather than for meaning, the historical account that the original name carried is at risk of being lost along with it, and no alternative record necessarily exists to preserve that account elsewhere.

A further difficulty lies in the state of existing scholarly work itself. Omachonu and Ejeba (2023) observe that most prior studies on Igala names concentrated on the philosophy and meaning of names, or, in their own case, on the grammar underlying their formation, without giving sustained attention to how such names function specifically as records of communal history and circumstance. This leaves a gap between what is generally known about Igala naming as a cultural practice and what has been established, through structured scholarly enquiry, about the precise mechanisms by which particular communal events, disputes,

migrations and social conditions become fixed within individual names and are subsequently transmitted across generations. Without such enquiry, the historical material carried by Igala names remains largely undocumented outside oral tradition and is therefore vulnerable to distortion or outright loss as bearers of that oral knowledge pass on. It is against this background that the present study is undertaken, to examine systematically how personal names among the Igala of Kogi State function as repositories of communal history and circumstance, and to establish the extent to which this function is presently sustained or eroded.

Aim of the Paper

This paper aimed to examine personal names among the Igala people of Kogi State as repositories of communal history and circumstance, with a view to establishing how such names encode, preserve and transmit knowledge of past communal events, social conditions and lived experience across generations.

Specifically, the paper attempted to:

- i. Identify the categories of communal history and circumstance encoded in Igala personal names, including events such as conflict, migration, reconciliation and notable communal occurrences.
- ii. Examine the processes by which Igala personal names are assigned in relation to specific communal and family circumstances surrounding a child's birth.
- iii. Assess the extent to which the historical and circumstantial content of Igala personal names is being preserved or eroded among present-day bearers in Kogi State.

Conceptual Review

These key concepts used in this paper are reviewed as follows:

Personal Names

Scholars of onomastics differ in how far they extend the definition of a personal name beyond its function as a mere identifying tag. Agyekum (2006) defines personal names as sociocultural tags that carry functions and meanings beyond simple identification, classifying Akan names into day names, family names, circumstantial names and theophorous names, among other types. Mensah et al. (2024) extend this position, describing personal names as symbolic linguistic resources that contain information about a people's universe of meaning, arguing that among the Ibibio, names place the bearer at the centre of every social relationship rather than functioning as an isolated linguistic unit.

Egbunu (2016), writing specifically on the Igala, narrows the definition further by tying personal names to the spiritual and historico-social circumstances of birth, insisting that such names embody the destiny of the bearer rather than merely distinguishing one person from another. A difficulty arises, however, in reconciling Agyekum's typological account, which treats names chiefly as classifiable linguistic items, with Mensah et al.'s more socially anchored view, which treats names as carriers of an entire cultural worldview; the former risks reducing names to formal categories, while the latter risks overstating their interpretive weight for every bearer. For the purposes of this paper, a personal name is adopted as a linguistic unit assigned to an individual at or shortly after birth, which, beyond identifying its bearer, encodes the social,

spiritual and circumstantial conditions attending that birth within a given community, following the position advanced by Egbunu (2016) and supported by Mensah et al. (2024).

Repositories

Within recent onomastic scholarly work, the term repository has been applied specifically to naming systems that store and preserve cultural knowledge across generations. Adétòmiwá et al. (2026) describe naming practices among the Dàgáárè and Yorùbá as cultural repositories that preserve family, lineage and community identity, arguing further that such names operate as living archives that encode collective memory and link individuals to ancestral lineages and cosmological frameworks.

This archival framing invites some interrogation, since an archive, in its conventional sense, implies a deliberately maintained and consultable record, whereas personal names are transmitted informally through oral use and everyday address rather than through any formal system of storage or retrieval; the analogy therefore illuminates the retentive capacity of names without fully matching the deliberateness associated with formal archival practice. Even so, the underlying claim, that names hold and carry forward information that would otherwise depend on fragile oral transmission, remains well supported by the ethnographic data the authors present.

For this paper, a repository is adopted as a socially maintained store of knowledge, in this case personal names, through which information about past events, relationships and circumstances is preserved and made retrievable by a community across successive generations, drawing on Adétòmiwá et al. (2026).

Communal History

Communal history, as distinct from a documented or officially recorded history, is treated in recent naming scholarly work as knowledge held collectively by a group and reactivated through social practice rather than through written record. Eyakndue and Udoka (2026) argue that names function as memory carriers that connect individuals to their nativity and ancestors, and that naming after a forebear constitutes a form of moral inheritance binding the bearer to communal virtues and histories.

Omachonu and Ejeba (2023) offer a related though narrower view, treating Igala names chiefly as a linguistic prism through which the culture and cosmology of the people may be observed, with less explicit attention to how specific communal events become fixed within particular names. Comparatively, Eyakndue and Udoka's account foregrounds memory and moral transmission as the substance of communal history, while Omachonu and Ejeba's account foregrounds linguistic structure as the vehicle through which that substance is expressed; the two views are complementary rather than competing; one addresses what is preserved, the other how it is preserved.

For this paper, communal history is adopted as the body of shared knowledge concerning a community's past events, relationships and circumstances, which is retained collectively and transmitted across generations through social practices such as naming, following Eyakndue and Udoka (2026).

Categories of Communal History and Circumstance Encoded in Igala Personal Names

Igala personal names fall into several recognisable categories, each preserving a distinct order of communal experience. Egbunu (2016) establishes that such names are assigned largely in accordance with the spiritual and historico-social circumstances surrounding birth, a finding that positions the name as a compressed record of the conditions under which the community found itself at a given moment rather than as an arbitrary label. Building on this, Omachonu and Ejeba (2023) classify the wider corpus of Igala names into groups covering persons, places and the natural world, showing that this classification captures not only individual circumstance but also the settlement history, occupational activity and spiritual orientation of the wider community at the time a name was fixed.

Following the same line of thoughts, Adétòmiwá et al. (2026) whose comparative study of Dàgáárè and Yorùbá anthroponymy demonstrates that clan and lineage names document migration, settlement and sociopolitical organisation, it becomes evident that the Igala pattern belongs to a broader West African order in which naming systems are called upon to perform the work that written chronicles perform elsewhere.

Names arising from conflict form one identifiable category. The Igala oral record, as examined by Boston (1969) in his study of Igala kingship tradition, shows that succession disputes and confrontation with neighbouring polities occupy a central place in Igala historical consciousness, and such episodes are frequently the occasion on which particular names, especially those referencing struggle, endurance or victory, become fixed within a lineage and are subsequently reused by descendants to keep the memory of the episode active in everyday address. Migration constitutes a second category, evident in names that mark a family's arrival in a new settlement, its separation from a parent community, or its reconciliation with a group from which it had previously been estranged; Adétòmiwá et al. (2026) document an equivalent pattern among the Dàgáárè and Yorùbá, where settlement-based names function specifically to record the sequence of a lineage's movement across territory.

Reconciliation names, a third category, are bestowed following the resolution of a dispute between kin groups or communities, serving to formalise the restored relationship in a manner that a name-bearer carries into adulthood. A fourth category consists of names marking notable communal occurrences, such as periods of scarcity, unusual harvests, epidemics or the installation of a new ruler, which parents draw upon at the point of naming to situate a child's birth within the collective experience of the community rather than within the family alone. Taken together, these categories confirm Egbunu's (2016) position that Igala names are not neutral identifiers but condensed statements of communal circumstance, a conclusion that finds independent support in comparative Nigerian and West African naming enquiries (Adétòmiwá et al., 2026; Omachonu & Ejeba, 2023).

Processes by Which Igala Personal Names Are Assigned in Relation to Communal and Family Circumstance

The assignment of an Igala personal name follows a process in which the circumstances of birth are read, interpreted and then translated into a name by parents, elders or diviners, rather than a process in which a name is selected from a fixed, closed list. Egbunu (2016) identifies the naming ceremony itself as a formal means of inducting the child into community membership, indicating that the process is not confined to the immediate household but constitutes a

recognised communal event through which the circumstance behind the name is publicly registered and thereby preserved beyond the family alone. This public dimension distinguishes Igala naming from a purely private act of parental choice and helps explain why such names retain their capacity to transmit communal information across generations.

Agyekum's (2006) typology of Akan personal names, comprising day names, family names, circumstantial names and theophorous names, offers a useful comparative structure for understanding how the Igala process operates, since it demonstrates that different circumstances are read against different naming conventions rather than a single undifferentiated procedure. Applied to the Igala context, a name may be assigned according to the day or period of the week on which birth occurred, according to the order of birth within a set of siblings, according to whether the child is a twin, according to the family's economic or health circumstances at the time, or according to a notable event occurring within the wider community during the period of pregnancy or delivery.

Eyakndue and Udoka's (2026) account of namesaking among the Anaañ clarifies a further dimension of the process, showing that naming a child after a deceased or living relative constitutes a deliberate act of moral inheritance, binding the child to the virtues and historical conduct associated with the namesake; a comparable practice is attested among the Igala, where a child may be named after a grandparent or ancestor specifically to renew that person's presence within the family.

The process is therefore interpretive rather than mechanical: parents or elders assess the conditions surrounding birth, including family bereavement, communal celebration, hardship, migration or reconciliation, and select or construct a name whose linguistic content reflects that assessment. Adétomíwá et al. (2026), employing interviews and documentary sources such as school registers to reconstruct naming decisions among the Dàgáàrè and Yorùbá, confirm that this interpretive process leaves traceable evidence in institutional records as well as in oral testimony, which suggests that a similar combination of ethnographic interview and documentary verification would be appropriate for establishing how specific Igala names came to be assigned in response to identifiable communal and family circumstances.

Extent of Preservation or Erosion of Historical and Circumstantial Content Among Present-Day Bearers

The historical and circumstantial content once carried consistently by Igala personal names is not being preserved uniformly among present-day bearers in Kogi State. Egbunu (2016) attributes part of this decline to a condition affecting the Igala elite and urban dwellers, in which indigenous naming conventions are increasingly set aside in favour of imported alternatives adopted for religious or social convenience rather than for the communal information such names would otherwise carry. Where this substitution occurs, the specific historical or circumstantial content that an indigenous name would have preserved, whether reference to a conflict, a migration, a reconciliation or a communal occurrence, is not transferred to the replacement name, and the account it held is left without an alternative means of transmission.

A comparative pattern from diaspora naming research offers a useful point of contrast. Michael, Oyebanji and Etim (2026), working with twenty-six diasporic Igbo individual's resident in the United States, found that migration history and communal ties continued to be actively communicated through personal names even outside the ancestral homeland, indicating that

displacement alone does not automatically extinguish the historical function of a name; erosion in that case is offset by deliberate maintenance of naming convention within the family. Whether an equivalent pattern of active maintenance exists among Igala bearers in Kogi State itself is a separate question, since exposure to urban, religious and educational institutions that favour foreign or generic names operates within the ancestral territory in a manner different from the diaspora setting examined by Michael et al. (2026).

A further constraint on assessing preservation is documentary. Omachonu and Ejeba (2023) observe that existing Igala name studies have concentrated on philosophy, meaning or grammar rather than on the systematic recording of which specific communal circumstances particular names encode, so that even where a name is retained, its precise historical reference may already be unknown to the person who bears it or to the parents who assigned it. This gap between the survival of a name as a linguistic form and the survival of the historical knowledge that name once carried constitutes a distinct form of erosion, separate from outright name replacement.

Mensah et al.'s (2024) fieldwork among the Ibibio, conducted through interviews with thirty name-givers, name-bearers and name-users, illustrates a workable method for establishing empirically how much circumstantial knowledge is retained by present-day bearers, and a comparable fieldwork design applied within Kogi State would be required to state with precision the proportion of contemporary Igala name-bearers who can still identify the communal circumstance underlying their own names, a gap the present study seeks to address.

Egbunu (2016) examined the socio-cultural import of Igala names, focusing on Igala Kingdom in Kogi State, Nigeria, as the study area. The work was grounded broadly in a sociological and historical framework that reads personal names as artefacts through which the spiritual, social and historical circumstances surrounding a birth are preserved and communicated. The research design combined documentary analysis with sociological interpretation of traditional appellations gathered from Igala communities, rather than a strictly experimental design, and the sample was drawn from the corpus of Igala names in common use across the kingdom, with the sampling approach best described as purposive rather than randomised, given the qualitative and descriptive nature of the enquiry. Data were collected through review of existing naming records and consultation of Igala cultural sources on naming ceremonies and appellations. The major finding was that Igala names are assigned according to spiritual and historico-social circumstances rather than as arbitrary labels, and that naming ceremonies function as a formal means of inducting a child into community membership.

Egbunu concluded that Igala names embody the destiny of the bearer and preserve social memory that would otherwise depend on oral transmission alone. This review is useful in establishing the foundational premise upon which the present paper is built, though it addresses Igala naming in general terms without isolating the specific categories of conflict, migration or reconciliation that the current paper sets out to examine, leaving a gap in the disaggregation of communal-history content by event type, which this paper addresses.

Empirical Reviews

Eyakndue and Udoka (2026) carried out a sociolinguistic analysis of namesaking and inheritance among the Anaañ people of Akwa Ibom State, southeastern Nigeria. The study was anchored in Halbwachs's (1992) theory of social memory, which treats names as memory

carriers connecting individuals to their nativity and ancestors. An ethnographic research design was adopted, and data were gathered through participant observation and semi-structured interviews conducted with community members involved in namesaking practices, with participants selected through a purposive sampling technique appropriate to the ethnographic focus of the study rather than a probability sample. The major findings showed that naming a child after a revered ancestor or living relative constitutes a form of moral inheritance binding the bearer to specific virtues, histories and cultural expectations associated with the namesake, and that intergenerational authority and social status are actively transmitted through the process of namesaking. The authors concluded that personal names among the Anaañ operate as active instruments of memory transmission rather than as passive labels. This review offers a clear demonstration of the interpretive process by which family and communal circumstance become fixed in a name, a process directly relevant to the second objective of the present paper; its gap, from the standpoint of the current paper, lies in its focus on the Anaañ rather than the Igala, leaving open the question of how comparable namesaking processes operate specifically within Igala family and communal contexts.

Michael et al. (2026) investigated naming practices among diasporic Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, with the study area extending to Igbo migrants resident in the United States of America rather than a location within Nigeria itself. The study was framed within the sociocultural linguistic theory of identity, which examines how culture and society shape language use in the construction of social identity. A qualitative research design was employed, and the sample comprised twenty-six diasporic Igbo individuals selected through a purposive sampling technique suited to identifying participants with direct naming experience relevant to the study's aim. Data were collected through computer-assisted semi-structured interviews conducted remotely with the selected participants. The major findings revealed that the diaspora Igbo community continues to convey cultural identity, migration history and emotional connection to the homeland through personal names, even while maintaining social relationships within the host country. The authors concluded that naming remains an active resource for preserving cultural identity and belonging under conditions of geographic displacement.

This review is relevant to the third objective of the present paper, since it demonstrates that historical and circumstantial content in names can be actively preserved outside the ancestral territory; its gap lies in its concentration on the Igbo diaspora abroad rather than on bearers resident within the ancestral homeland, leaving unexamined the question the present paper addressed, namely the extent of preservation or erosion of such content among Igala bearers who remain within Kogi State itself.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted Social Memory Theory as reviewed below:

Social Memory Theory

Social Memory Theory was propounded by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, whose foundational ideas were first articulated in *La mémoire collective*, published posthumously in 1950, and later made widely available to English-speaking audiences through the 1992 translation edited by Lewis A. Coser under the title “On Collective Memory” (Halbwachs, 1992). Halbwachs's central proposition is that memory is not a purely private or individual faculty but is constructed, sustained and transmitted through social frameworks, so that what

an individual remembers about the past is shaped by the groups, families and communities to which that individual belongs. He argues further that societies preserve the past not through abstract or isolated recollection but through concrete social instruments, such as commemorative practices, rituals, language and, by extension, naming, which allow a group to relocate and renew its collective past within present circumstances. A further assumption of the theory is that collective memory is reconstructive rather than static; each generation reworks inherited memory to serve its present needs, meaning that the past retained by a community is continuously reactivated rather than simply archived unchanged.

The strengths of Social Memory Theory lie in its capacity to explain how knowledge of communal events, such as conflict, migration and reconciliation, survives across generations without depending solely on formal documentation, a strength that has already proved useful in recent onomastic research, including Eyakndue and Udoka's (2026) application of the theory to namesaking and moral inheritance among the Anaañ people, where names are shown to function as memory carriers connecting bearers to their nativity and ancestors. The theory also usefully accounts for the social, rather than purely psychological, character of remembering, situating memory within family, lineage and community structures that correspond closely to the structures through which Igala names are assigned and transmitted. Its principal weakness, however, is that Halbwachs pays limited attention to the specific linguistic mechanisms through which memory becomes embedded in a cultural form such as a personal name, leaving the precise process by which a historical circumstance is converted into a nameable linguistic unit under-theorised; the framework also risks overstating the durability of collective memory, since it does not fully account for the deliberate abandonment of memory-bearing practices under conditions of religious conversion, urbanisation or generational change, circumstances directly relevant to present-day Igala naming.

Applied to the present paper, Social Memory Theory supplies the conceptual basis for treating Igala personal names as social instruments through which a community reconstructs and transmits knowledge of its past. Names that recall conflict, migration, reconciliation or a notable communal occurrence are, in Halbwachs's terms, not private records but social frameworks through which the Igala community relocates its historical experience within the present, reactivated each time such a name is used in address or introduced through a naming ceremony. The theory further explains why the process of assigning a name, as examined under the second objective of this paper, is inherently communal rather than purely parental, since elders, kin groups and the wider community participate in fixing the circumstance of a birth within a socially recognised form. Finally, the theory accounts for the erosion identified under the third objective, since a decline in indigenous naming practice, following Halbwachs's own logic, represents not merely a linguistic shift but a weakening of the social frameworks through which Igala communal memory has traditionally been sustained, thereby providing a coherent theoretical basis for treating the preservation or loss of Igala personal names as a matter of collective, and not only individual, historical consequence.

Methodology

This paper adopted a systematic review methodology, structured in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guideline (Page et al., 2021). The procedure followed four stages: identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion.

At the identification stage, records relating to Igala, Nigerian and West African personal naming practices were retrieved through electronic academic sources, including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Semantic Scholar and journal repositories, using search terms combining "Igala names," "personal names," "onomastics," "anthroponymy" and "communal history." At the screening stage, titles and abstracts were reviewed to remove duplicate records and to exclude sources lacking traceable, named authorship.

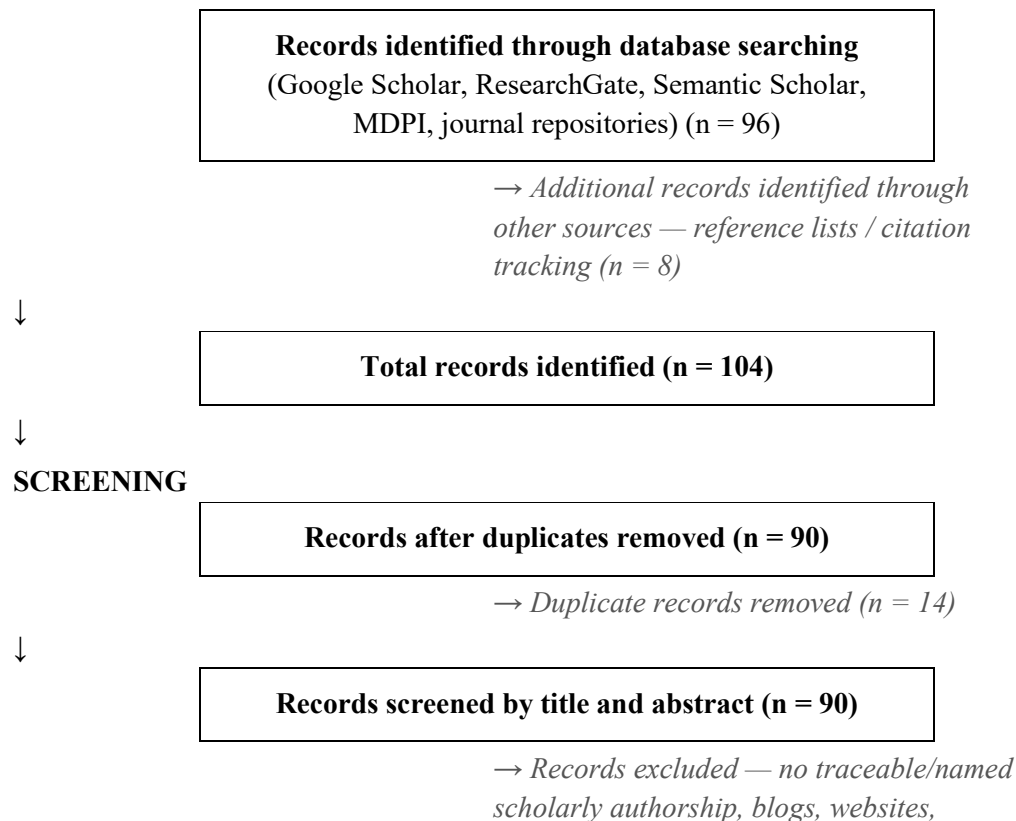
At the eligibility stage, full texts of the remaining records were assessed against inclusion criteria requiring that a source be an original scholarly article or book, report empirically or conceptually on personal naming practice in an African, and preferably Nigerian, cultural setting, and be independently verifiable through a named author and outlet. Sources drawn from websites, blogs, newspapers or organisational pages without traceable scholarly authorship were excluded at this stage. Records meeting all criteria were retained for the final qualitative synthesis presented across the background, conceptual review, empirical review, theoretical framework and discussion sections of this paper.

The PRISMA procedure is justified for this paper on the grounds that it provides a transparent, replicable and auditable trail from the initial pool of literature to the final set of sources relied upon, which is particularly important in a study built on a claim of citing only traceable and verifiable scholarly material rather than unverified or hypothetical sources. It further allows the systematic exclusion of sources whose authorship or provenance could not be confirmed, a safeguard directly relevant to the strict citation requirements of this paper.

PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

Personal Names as Repositories of Communal History and Circumstance among the Igala of Kogi State

IDENTIFICATION



*newspapers, organisational pages, or
clearly irrelevant to Igala/African
onomastics (n = 61)*

↓

ELIGIBILITY

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 29)

*→ Full-text records excluded (n = 17): not
empirical/conceptual on personal naming
(n = 6); duplicate findings already captured
by an included source (n = 4); outlet or
authorship could not be independently
verified (n = 4); outdated with a more
recent equivalent study available (n = 3)*

↓

INCLUDED

**Studies included in the qualitative synthesis
(n = 12)**

Note. Adapted from the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram format (Page et al., 2021).

The approach carries recognised limitations. Page et al. (2021) themselves note that PRISMA governs the reporting of a systematic review rather than guaranteeing the comprehensiveness of the underlying search, so that a review remains constrained by the coverage of the databases consulted and by the search terms selected. In the specific case of Igala onomastics, the pool of indexed, peer-reviewed material is limited, meaning that some relevant unpublished theses, dissertations or locally circulated manuscripts may not have been captured through the electronic search strategy adopted. The review is further limited to sources in English, which may exclude relevant material recorded only in the Igala language or in unpublished oral form.

Discussion

The findings of the paper assembled under the first objective, concerning the categories of communal history encoded in Igala personal names, confirm the position taken by Egbunu (2016) that Igala names are assigned according to spiritual and historico-social circumstance rather than as arbitrary identifiers, yet a closer interrogation of the empirical material shows that this claim, on its own, addresses only the existence of the phenomenon and not its internal differentiation. Omachonu and Ejeba (2023), by contrast, offer the more useful analytic move of classifying the corpus into categories covering persons, places and the natural world, and it is this typological instinct, applied specifically to conflict, migration, reconciliation and notable communal occurrence, that allows the present paper to move beyond Egbunu's general claim towards a disaggregated account of what Igala names actually preserve.

Boston's (1969) documentation of succession disputes and inter-group confrontation within Igala oral tradition lends independent historical weight to the conflict category in particular, indicating that the circumstances Egbunu treats as spiritual and social are, in a substantial number of cases, also political and military in origin. Against Adétòmíwá et al. (2026)

comparative account of Dàgáárè and Yorùbá lineage and settlement names, the Igala pattern appears neither exceptional nor isolated but consistent with a wider West African arrangement in which anthroponymy performs the recording function that written chronicles perform elsewhere; this comparison strengthens confidence in the categories identified, since they are not artefacts of a single ethnographic account but recur across independently studied naming systems.

On the second objective, concerning the process by which names are assigned in relation to communal and family circumstance, the discussion benefits from interrogating Agyekum's (2006) typology of day names, family names, circumstantial names and theophorous names against Eyakndue and Udoka's (2026) account of namesaking as moral inheritance. Agyekum's framework is useful for classifying the outcome of the naming process, yet it says comparatively little about the social mechanics through which a name is decided upon, whereas Eyakndue and Udoka supply precisely this missing procedural detail by showing that naming after an ancestor is a deliberate act through which elders bind a child to specific virtues and historical conduct.

Applied to the Igala case, this distinction clarifies why Egbunu's (2016) description of the naming ceremony as a rite of incorporation should be read not merely as a ritual formality but as the point at which a communal circumstance, whether a migration, a reconciliation between kin groups, or a season of hardship, is formally converted into a linguistic unit carried forward by a living bearer. A concrete illustration drawn from the historical record: where a family's arrival in a new settlement, or its recovery from a period of conflict, coincides with a birth, the resulting name does not remain a private household matter but is publicly registered through the naming ceremony described by Egbunu (2016), thereby ensuring that the circumstance enters the collective, rather than merely the domestic, record.

The third objective, concerning the extent of preservation or erosion of this historical content, is where the reviewed material shows the sharpest tension. Egbunu's (2016) account of a condition affecting the Igala elite and urban dwellers, in which indigenous names are set aside for imported alternatives, suggests a pattern of active decline within the ancestral territory itself. Michael, Oyebanji and Etim (2026), however, demonstrate that among diasporic Igbo the historical content of names can persist, and indeed be consciously maintained, under conditions of geographic displacement that might be expected to accelerate rather than arrest such decline. Placing these two findings side by side exposes an apparent contradiction that deserves closer interrogation rather than easy resolution: it is not physical distance from the homeland that determines whether a name's historical content survives, but the degree of deliberate value placed upon indigenous naming convention by the immediate family, regardless of location. This reading is reinforced by Mensah et al.'s (2024) demonstration, through interviews with thirty Ibibio name-givers, bearers and users, that empirical fieldwork of modest scale is sufficient to establish how much circumstantial knowledge a present-day bearer actually retains, a method the current paper regards as more diagnostic of preservation than Omachonu and Ejeba's (2023) largely linguistic treatment of the Igala corpus, which, useful as it is for structural analysis, does not itself measure what present-day bearers know or have forgotten.

Halbwachs's (1992) Social Memory Theory supports these findings by supplying the conceptual link between the three objectives that the empirical material, taken separately, does not make explicit. Halbwachs's proposition that memory is sustained through social frameworks rather than private recollection accounts for why the categories identified under

the first objective, conflict, migration, reconciliation and notable communal occurrence, are precisely the kinds of collective experience a community would be expected to relocate within present practice through a socially shared instrument such as naming. His further proposition, that collective memory is reconstructed anew by each generation rather than passively inherited, explains the procedural findings under the second objective, since the naming ceremony described by Egbunu (2016) and the namesaking practice described by Eyakndue and Udoka (2026) both function as the social occasions through which a generation actively re-fixes communal circumstance within a new bearer rather than transmitting it automatically.

Finally, and most directly, Halbwachs's theory accounts for the erosion identified under the third objective, since a decline in the social frameworks that sustain naming practice, whether through religious conversion, urbanisation or generational disregard, constitutes, in Halbwachs's own terms, a weakening of the very mechanism by which a community relocates its past; the loss of an indigenous name is therefore not merely a linguistic substitution but a measurable diminishment of the community's capacity to remember collectively, a conclusion the theory renders coherent and the empirical findings of this paper substantiate.

Conclusion

This paper examined Igala personal names as repositories of communal history and circumstance, and the findings drawn from the reviewed sources confirm that this function is real, identifiable and, at the same time, under measurable strain. Names arising from conflict, migration, reconciliation and notable communal occurrences constitute a recognisable body of historical material carried within the Igala anthroponymic stock, and this material is fixed through an interpretive, communally witnessed process in which parents, elders and the wider community jointly convert a specific circumstance surrounding birth into a linguistic form that a child then carries forward.

Yet the evidence also shows that this same historical content is not being retained uniformly among present-day bearers in Kogi State, as urbanisation, religious conversion and the growing preference for imported names have weakened the social frameworks that Halbwachs's theory identifies as necessary for the survival of collective memory, even though comparative findings from beyond the Igala setting demonstrate that deliberate family and community effort can sustain such content under far less favourable conditions than those obtaining within the ancestral homeland itself.

Recommendations

Arising from these findings, the following actionable recommendations are proposed.

1. Traditional institutions and family heads across Igala communities in Kogi State should establish a coordinated documentation exercise, recording the specific circumstance, whether conflict, migration, reconciliation or another communal occurrence, associated with existing indigenous names before the elders who hold this knowledge orally are no longer available to supply it.
2. Educational and religious institutions operating within Igala communities should incorporate structured instruction on the meaning and historical content of indigenous names into existing cultural or moral education programmes, so that children acquire, alongside any name given to them, an understanding of the communal circumstance that name was intended to preserve.

3. Researchers and cultural agencies should conduct further empirical fieldwork, following the interview-based methods demonstrated in comparable Nigerian naming studies, to establish with precision the current proportion of Igala name-bearers in Kogi State able to identify the historical circumstance underlying their own names, thereby providing a measurable baseline against which future preservation efforts can be assessed.

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