



Intergenerational Transmission of Igala Naming Practices amid Religious and Educational Change

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Abstract

Personal naming among the Igala people of Kogi State has long functioned as a repository of ancestral memory, theological conviction and linguistic artistry, yet this inheritance now confronts the twin pressures of religious conversion and Western-style schooling, a tension this paper examined under the title Intergenerational Transmission of Igala Naming Practices amid Religious and Educational Change. The paper pursued three objectives, namely to establish the extent to which elders transmit the meanings, structure and ceremonial procedures of indigenous names within the family, to assess the influence of religious affiliation on the choice between indigenous and foreign names, and to determine the effect of formal education on younger Igala persons' competence in the Igala language and their consequent capacity to reproduce indigenous naming forms. Socio-onomastic theory provided the guiding framework, treating naming as a form of social action shaped by its surrounding conditions. A systematic review methodology, structured according to the PRISMA reporting guideline, was adopted to identify, screen and synthesise relevant scholarly sources. The review found that ceremonial transmission persists procedurally while interpretive competence increasingly concentrates among elders, that religious affiliation produces substitution, hybrid and demotion patterns in naming choice rather than a single uniform effect, and that English-medium education measurably erodes the linguistic competence underlying indigenous naming. The paper concluded that the survival of Igala naming as a living rather than ceremonial practice depends on reconciling religious and educational institutions with indigenous linguistic continuity, and recommended explanatory naming ceremonies, hybrid naming dialogue with religious leaders, and curriculum-based Igala language instruction.

Keywords:

Igala, Naming Practices, Intergenerational Transmission, Religious Affiliation, Formal Education.

Introduction

Among the Igala people of Kogi State in North-Central Nigeria, personal naming has historically functioned as a codified instrument of communal memory, in which a name discloses the circumstances of birth, ancestral affiliation, parental aspiration and theological conviction. Names such as those built on the root Ojo (God) or on ancestral epithets are not

arbitrarily assigned; they are composed through consultation with elders, diviners and, in earlier generations, the circumstances surrounding conception, pregnancy or delivery (Abalaka, 2025). Solomon (2015) demonstrates that a substantial proportion of Igala anthroponyms are theophorous, encoding statements of gratitude, supplication or covenant with Ojo and with lineage spirits, so that the naming act itself constitutes a compressed theological utterance rather than a simple label of identification.

Opega (2017), examining the structure and pragmatics of Igala indigenous names, similarly establishes that the syntax of these names often takes the form of full clauses or proverbial statements, meaning that competence in their production and interpretation requires sustained exposure to the Igala language and to the oral conventions from which the names derive their sense. Oyibo (2014) situates this practice within a wider argument that onomastic knowledge among the Igala serves as an instrument of ethnic self-location, distinguishing the group from neighbouring Yoruba, Igbo and Idoma populations while also marking internal distinctions of clan and status. Omachonu and Ejebe (2023), working from a linguistic standpoint, confirm that the phonological, morphological and syntactic patterning of Igala personal names constitutes a coherent grammatical subsystem, one that presupposes fluency in Igala rather than mere familiarity with isolated vocabulary items.

Because this knowledge is customarily transmitted orally, from grandparents and lineage heads to younger kin during naming ceremonies and related rites, its continuity depends on sustained intergenerational contact and on a shared valuation of indigenous religious cosmology. Two institutional forces bear directly on that continuity in present-day Igalaland: Christian religious practice and formal Western-style education. Abalaka (2025) records that Christian evangelisation in Igalaland characterised traditional naming procedures as unacceptable to converts, prompting the substitution of Hebrew and European names for indigenous ones even where the latter carried no content objectionable to Christian doctrine. A comparable pattern has been documented among the neighbouring Nsukka-Igbo, where Agbo et al. (2022) show that indigenous environmental and deistic names, once borne as given names, have increasingly been relegated to the position of surnames while Christian or Islamic names now occupy the position of the child's first, publicly used name.

Ukaegbu and Okon (2024), surveying naming trends among the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria more broadly, report that of 355 names recorded in their sample, 306 were foreign in origin against only 49 indigenous names, a proportion they attribute to the standing of Pentecostal Christianity and to prestige associations attached to Western naming conventions. Formal education compounds this dynamic. Idegu (2025), studying Igala secondary school pupils in Anyigba, finds that sustained exposure to English as the medium of instruction produces measurable interference in pupils' spoken competence in Igala, a pattern consistent with a narrowing of the linguistic base upon which indigenous onomastic literacy depends.

Statement of the Problem

Existing scholarly work on Igala naming has concentrated principally on the internal structure, semantic content and theological grounding of the names themselves. Opega (2017) addresses their grammatical and pragmatic organisation; Solomon (2015) addresses their theophorous character; Oyibo (2014) addresses their role in ethnic identification; and Omachonu and Ejebe (2023) provide a linguistic account of their formation. Abalaka (2025) documents the erosion of the traditional naming procedure under Christian influence, while Idegu (2025) documents

the weakening of Igala language competence among school-going youth. What remains largely unaddressed within this body of work is the mechanism by which naming knowledge is or is not passed from one generation to the next once these two pressures, religious conversion and formal schooling, act simultaneously upon a household.

It is not yet established, on the evidence available, whether elders who possess theophorous and proverbial naming competence are able to transmit it to grandchildren whose primary linguistic environment is now English and whose religious formation discourages engagement with the ancestral referents embedded in such names, nor is it established how younger Igala parents themselves negotiate a choice between indigenous and imported names when both Christian affiliation and school-based literacy shape their preferences. The comparative Igbo evidence assembled by Ukaegbu and Okon (2024) and by Agbo et al. (2022) indicates that indigenous names can persist in attenuated form, as surnames or as unofficial household names, even where they have been displaced from public and official use; whether an equivalent pattern of attenuated survival, rather than outright loss, characterises Igala naming has not been empirically tested. Consequently, this paper is concerned with establishing how the interaction of Christian religious practice and Western-style education among the Igala shapes the willingness and capacity of successive generations to transmit indigenous naming knowledge, and with identifying the conditions under which such transmission is sustained, modified or discontinued.

Aim of the Paper

The aim of this paper was to examine how intergenerational transmission of Igala naming practices is shaped by the combined influence of religious conversion and Western-style education, with a view to establishing the extent to which indigenous onomastic knowledge is retained, modified or discontinued across successive generations in Igalaland.

Specific Objectives

- i. To investigate the extent to which Igala elders and custodians of traditional naming knowledge transmit the meanings, structure and ceremonial procedures of indigenous personal names to younger generations within the family setting.
- ii. To assess the influence of religious affiliation on the choice between indigenous Igala names and Hebrew, Arabic, European or other foreign names among Igala parents and name-givers.
- iii. To determine the effect of formal Western-style education on younger Igala persons' competence in the Igala language and their consequent capacity to understand and reproduce indigenous naming practices.

Conceptual Review

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

Intergenerational Transmission

Ning et al. (2025) define intergenerational transmission as the process by which knowledge, values and identity-bearing practices pass from older to younger members of a group, while cautioning that such passage is neither automatic nor assured, since societal change may convert what was once a transmitted inheritance into a lost one; their study of the Yao minority in China

treats transmission and cultural loss as two possible outcomes of the same generational encounter rather than as a guaranteed continuity. Namjoo et al. (2023), examining bicultural families, offer a narrower, household-level formulation in which transmission is described as a negotiated and selective act: parents and grandparents consciously choose which cultural elements to pass on, and children in turn accept, modify or resist what is offered, so that the outcome is shaped as much by the receiving generation's agency as by the transmitting generation's intention.

The two positions differ chiefly in scope and in the degree of agency they attribute to the younger generation. Ning et al. (2025) work at the level of an entire ethnic community and treat transmission as an indicator of group survival, whereas Namjoo et al. (2023) work at the level of the individual family and treat transmission as an interpersonal negotiation in which resistance and adaptation are ordinary rather than exceptional outcomes. Read together, the two views suggest that transmission cannot be assumed wherever elders and juniors coexist, since coexistence alone does not guarantee that knowledge changes hands.

For the purposes of this paper, intergenerational transmission is adopted as the deliberate and selective passage of naming knowledge, comprising the linguistic competence, ritual procedure and theological rationale attached to Igala personal names, from elders and name-givers to succeeding generations within the family and lineage, an act whose success or failure is shaped by the receiving generation's own religious and educational formation rather than by the mere presence of elders capable of teaching it.

Naming Practices

Mensah (2025) describes naming practices as a body of socio-onomastic resources through which a community encodes ecological knowledge, moral instruction and historical experience into the names it bestows on children, so that a name operates as an instrument of collective memory and, in some cases, of environmental regulation. Mensah et al. (2024), studying the Ibibio anthroponymic system, define naming practices somewhat differently, as the structured set of conventions governing who may give a name, under what circumstances, and what social category, such as birth order, gender or communal status, the resulting name discloses about its bearer; their emphasis falls on naming as a mechanism of social classification rather than as a repository of ecological or moral instruction. The divergence between the two accounts is one of emphasis rather than contradiction: Mensah (2025) foregrounds the content and cultural function of names, while Mensah et al. (2024) foreground the procedural and classificatory apparatus surrounding their bestowal.

Omachonu and Ejeba (2023) add a further, linguistic dimension, showing that among the Igala the conventions governing name formation are also grammatically constrained, so that naming practice cannot be reduced to social procedure alone without also accounting for the language-internal rules that make a name recognisably Igala. This paper adopts naming practices as the combined set of linguistic, procedural and interpretive conventions, encompassing who names a child, when and how the name is given, and what religious, social or circumstantial content the name encodes, through which the Igala people produce and confer personal names on their members.

The Extent to Which Igala Elders Transmit the Meanings, Structure and Ceremonial Procedures of Indigenous Personal Names to Younger Generations

Transmission of Igala naming knowledge has customarily occurred through a defined ceremonial sequence rather than through casual instruction, and this sequence itself constitutes the principal vehicle by which younger family members come to understand how a name is derived and what it signifies. Adegba and Atodo (2021) provide a documented account of the egwele, the fourteenth-day ceremony during which a newborn is formally named, describing how members of the extended family, referred to as *abo olopu*, gather at the family hut, *atakpa*, where an *abifa*, or diviner, is consulted to disclose the ancestral will regarding the appropriate name. In this procedure, parents may propose a name, but its confirmation depends on the diviner's pronouncement, so that the child, and by extension the wider gathering of kin who witness the event, learns that a name is not a private parental choice but a communal and ancestrally sanctioned designation.

This structure means that transmission occurs publicly and repeatedly, since every naming ceremony attended by a young relative reinforces the same procedural knowledge, yet it also means that transmission is contingent on continued attendance and on the continued availability of custodians competent to perform the *abifa* role. Atodo (2015), in a dedicated study of Igala indigenous names and their socio-cultural and religio-philosophical implications, found through interviews with custodians in Kogi State that command of the deeper meanings attached to names, particularly those referencing lineage spirits or circumstances of birth, was concentrated among older informants, while younger respondents in the same households could often state a name but not explain its derivation. This pattern indicates that transmission is only partially effective: the outward form of a name, its pronunciation and its bearer's identification with it, passes down with little difficulty, but the interpretive and grammatical competence required to construct or fully decode a name is transmitted far less reliably.

Opega (2017), examining the structure and pragmatics of Igala personal names, supports this distinction by demonstrating that many indigenous names take the form of complete clauses or proverbial statements, so that genuine competence in naming requires an understanding of Igala syntax that is not automatically acquired merely by bearing or hearing a name. Solomon (2015) reaches a comparable conclusion in respect of theophorous names, noting that their socio-cultural weight, as statements of covenant or gratitude towards *Ojo*, is understood mainly by those elders who were themselves named and instructed within the older ceremonial framework.

Oyibo (2014) frames this generational gap as a matter of ethnic self-location, arguing that indigenous onomastic knowledge functions as a marker of belonging precisely because it is unevenly distributed, so that possessing it distinguishes those who have been closely mentored by elders from those who have not. Taken together, this evidence indicates that transmission within the Igala family setting remains procedurally intact wherever the egwele ceremony continues to be performed, but that the substantive linguistic and theological content of naming knowledge is increasingly retained by custodians alone rather than being fully passed on to the generation being named.

The Influence of Religious Affiliation on the Choice between Indigenous Igala Names and Foreign Names among Igala Parents and Name-Givers

Religious affiliation exercises a demonstrable influence on naming choice among the Igala, and the direction of that influence depends on whether a family's Christian or Islamic identity is expressed through outright substitution of foreign names or through the adaptation of indigenous morphology to accommodate a religious referent. Abalaka (2025) documents that early Christian evangelisation in Igalaland characterised the traditional naming procedure as unacceptable, describing it as heathenish, and records that converts were consequently given Hebrew and European names that carried no meaning within the Igala linguistic or cosmological system.

This pattern of substitution finds a close parallel among the neighbouring Nsukka-Igbo, where Agbo, Opata and Okwueze (2022) show that indigenous names once borne as a child's principal given name have been displaced to the position of a surname, with a Christian or Islamic name now occupying the socially prominent first-name position; the indigenous name persists, but only in an administratively secondary role. A quantitative illustration of the scale of such displacement is offered by Ukaegbu and Okon (2024), who, working among the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria, recorded 306 foreign names against only 49 indigenous names among their sample of contemporary child names, a ratio in which foreign names accounted for approximately eighty-six per cent of the total, and which they attribute in large part to the standing of Pentecostal Christianity and to the prestige value attached to Western nomenclature. Although this figure derives from an Igbo rather than an Igala population, the religious mechanism it documents, in which Christian affiliation correlates with a numerical preference for foreign names, is directly comparable to the pattern Abalaka (2025) reports for Igalaland.

A different outcome is evident where religious identity is expressed through hybrid construction rather than substitution. Ayegba (2018), compiling a corpus of names in use among Igala Christians and Muslims, records forms such as Eleojo, meaning God's or Allah's gift, Adujo, meaning God's or Allah's servant, and Omaojo, meaning God's or Allah's child, in which the Igala root *ojo*, referring to God, is retained and combined with a further Igala morpheme to produce a name that is simultaneously religious and grammatically indigenous. This hybrid strategy differs materially from the wholesale adoption of names such as Abdullah, Mariam or David, since it preserves the syntactic pattern that Opega (2017) identifies as characteristic of Igala onomastic structure while still signalling the parent's religious commitment. The presence of both strategies within the same population indicates that religious affiliation does not act uniformly on naming choice; rather, its effect depends on whether a family or a religious community regards indigenous linguistic form as compatible with the new faith or as inherently opposed to it, a distinction that Abalaka (2025) suggests could be resolved through the deliberate incorporation of non-objectionable aspects of Igala culture into Christian and Islamic practice rather than their wholesale rejection.

The Effect of Formal Western-Style Education on Younger Igala Persons' Competence in the Igala Language and Indigenous Naming Practices

Formal education conducted through English as the medium of instruction has a measurable bearing on the linguistic competence that indigenous naming practice presupposes, and this bearing can be identified in concrete, documented instances rather than as a general assumption. Idegu (2025), examining Igala secondary school pupils in selected schools in Anyigba, found

demonstrable interference from English in pupils' spoken Igala, a finding obtained through the direct assessment of pupils' language production rather than through inference, and one that indicates a narrowing of the linguistic resources on which competent use of Igala, including its onomastic vocabulary and grammar, depends.

Because Omachonu and Ejeba (2023) establish that Igala personal names are governed by identifiable phonological, morphological and syntactic rules, a pupil whose spoken Igala is measurably compromised by English interference is correspondingly less equipped to parse the internal structure of a name, to recognise the clausal or proverbial form that Opega (2017) associates with many indigenous names, or to construct a new name that conforms to established patterns. In practical terms, this produces a pupil who can identify and pronounce a name such as Onucheojo, meaning God's or Allah's messenger, as recorded by Ayegba (2018), without being able to explain the morphological composition that yields that meaning, since the school setting in which the pupil spends the greater part of the day offers no instruction in Igala grammar and actively rewards competence in English.

A comparable dynamic has been documented among the Igbo by Ezeani and Mbah (2025), who examine how English-medium nursery and primary education contributes to a fading command of Igbo as a mother tongue and argue for its reintroduction as a working classroom language if indigenous linguistic competence, including the vocabulary domains associated with naming, blessing and proverb, is to be sustained. Applied to the Igala context, this comparative evidence suggests that the erosion Idegu (2025) records at secondary level is likely preceded by a similar process at the nursery and primary stages, when a child's exposure to Igala as a medium of instruction, rather than merely as a spoken language at home, is at its lowest.

The consequence for naming practice specifically is that even where a family continues to perform the egwele ceremony described by Adegba and Atodo (2021) and continues to select an indigenous name for a child, the child who receives that name may, by the time of secondary schooling, have insufficient command of Igala to reproduce the same naming competence for the following generation, so that formal education does not merely coexist with declining indigenous language use but actively contributes to the interruption of the very linguistic transmission on which the continuation of indigenous naming practice depends.

Empirical Review

Adegba and Atodo (2021), in a study concerned with the egwele, the fourteenth-day naming ceremony observed among the Igala of north-central Nigeria, situate their enquiry within Igalaland, drawing specifically on communities in the Kogi State area where the ceremony continues to be performed. The study proceeds from a phenomenological and historical standpoint, treating the ceremony as a lived cultural and religious experience whose meaning is best accessed through the testimony of those who continue to observe it, rather than through a predetermined sociological model. Its design is qualitative, combining oral interview with library-based historical enquiry, and its informants, drawn purposively from among recognised custodians and elders such as one identified simply as Egunu, aged sixty-one, were selected on the basis of their known involvement in performing or witnessing the ceremony rather than through random or stratified sampling. Data were gathered principally through unstructured interviews conducted with these custodians, supplemented by documentary sources on Igala religion and culture.

The major finding was that naming remains embedded in a communal ritual sequence involving the extended family, the family hut known as *atakpa* and a diviner, the *abifa*, whose pronouncement determines the ancestrally sanctioned name, with parents proposing rather than unilaterally deciding the name to be conferred. The authors conclude that the ceremony persists as an authentic institution but is under pressure from modernisation and religious change, and they recommend its deliberate retention. This review is useful in that it documents, through named informants, the mechanics by which naming knowledge is enacted rather than merely described in the abstract. Its limitation lies in its concentration on custodians who already possess the knowledge in question, without correspondingly assessing whether younger relatives present at such ceremonies retain or reproduce that knowledge in later life. The present paper addressed this gap by examining transmission from the standpoint of the receiving generation rather than solely from that of the officiating elders.

Ukaegbu and Okon (2024), in a study of naming trends among the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria, situate their enquiry in communities where Pentecostal Christianity has attained a prominent social position, treating the causal theory of names as their guiding theoretical framework, a perspective which holds that the meaning of a name is fixed by the social and historical circumstances of its original bestowal rather than by its literal semantic content alone. Their research design is qualitative, and their sample comprised one hundred participants, made up of name-givers, name-bearers and name-users, selected through purposive sampling intended to capture informants directly implicated in the naming process rather than a demographically representative cross-section of the population. Data were collected through structured engagement with these participants, eliciting accounts of the motivations behind, and perceptions of, contemporary naming choices.

The major finding was a marked numerical preference for foreign names over indigenous ones, with foreign names constituting the substantial majority of those recorded, a pattern the authors attribute to the standing of Pentecostal Christianity, to increased media exposure and to the association of foreign names with prestige and modernity. The study concludes that indigenous naming has declined in observance without disappearing entirely, since indigenous names frequently persist in unofficial or domestic use even where a foreign name is used publicly. This review is instructive for the present paper because it demonstrates, through a defined sample and an explicit theoretical grounding, that religious affiliation operates as a measurable rather than merely impressionistic influence on naming choice. Its limitation, from the standpoint of the current paper, is that it addresses an Igbo rather than an Igala population and does not examine the hybrid naming strategies, combining an indigenous root with a religious referent, that appear to operate among Igala Christians and Muslims. The present paper closed this gap by attending specifically to Igala practice and to such hybrid forms.

Idegu (2025), in a study of mother-tongue interference in the spoken English of Igala students, situates the enquiry in Anyigba, drawing participants from Our Lady of Schools, Anyigba, and Secondary Commercial College, Anyigba. The study adopts the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis as its theoretical framework, a position that anticipates language errors at points where the phonemic systems of a learner's first and second languages diverge. Its research design is descriptive and comparative, contrasting the phonemic systems of Igala and English, and its sample consisted of twenty students drawn from the two named schools, selected purposively on the basis of their enrolment in those institutions rather than through random sampling across a wider population. Data were collected through an oral test comprising twenty-four English words, administered to and recorded from the sampled students, with the

resulting pronunciations analysed in tabular form against the phonemic inventories of Igala and English.

The major finding was that Igala students consistently restructured English consonant clusters and triphthongs in accordance with Igala phonological patterns, for example, realising the word *fire* as a two-syllable sequence rather than as an English triphthong, confirming measurable mother-tongue interference. The study concludes that this interference is systematic rather than incidental and recommends pedagogical attention to the specific phonemic points of divergence between the two languages. This review is valuable to the present paper because it offers direct, instrument-based evidence of the linguistic condition of young Igala speakers rather than a general assertion of language decline. Its limitation is that it examines interference running from Igala into English, without addressing the reverse and arguably more consequential process, namely the erosion of Igala competence itself and its effect on pupils' capacity to understand or reproduce indigenous naming forms. The present paper addressed this gap by connecting documented Igala-English interference to the specific competence required for onomastic comprehension.

Theoretical Framework

This paper was anchored on the Socio-onomastic Theory as reviewed below:

Socio-onomastic Theory

Socio-onomastic theory was proposed by Skipper and Leslie (1990) in their treatment of nicknames as a case for socio-onomastics. Although the theory originated in an examination of nicknaming within particular American occupational subcultures, its central proposition, that a name is not a fixed lexical label but a form of social action whose meaning is generated by the social, cultural and situational conditions surrounding its use, has since been adopted widely by scholars working on African anthroponymic systems, among them Mensah (2025) and Ukaegbu and Okon (2024), both of whom apply it to the study of Nigerian naming trends.

The theory rests on several major assumptions. It assumes that naming is a socially embedded practice rather than a purely linguistic or biological one, so that the act of assigning, bearing or altering a name must be read against the relationships, institutions and circumstances of the community in which it occurs. It further assumes that variation in the form of a name, whether indigenous, foreign or hybrid, is not arbitrary but corresponds to identifiable social conditions such as religious affiliation, social status, migration or education, so that a shift in naming pattern signals a shift in the underlying social order rather than a merely stylistic preference. It also assumes that names retain interpretive value only in relation to the social actors who give, bear and use them, meaning that a name's significance can change over time as the social position of its bearer or the surrounding community changes.

The strength of the theory lies chiefly in its capacity to connect a linguistic object, the personal name, directly to extralinguistic social variables without requiring a separate explanatory model for each variable, so that religious conversion, educational change and generational transmission can all be examined within a single analytic frame rather than as unrelated influences.

It is also methodologically compatible with the qualitative, interview-based approaches that dominate African onomastic research, since it does not demand quantification of transmission

rates but instead accommodates rich, situated description of naming events such as ceremonies, conversions or classroom experiences. Its accommodation of both synchronic variation and change over time makes it well suited to a study concerned with generational comparison.

The theory is not without weaknesses, however. Its original formulation was developed with reference to informal nicknaming within narrow subcultural settings in the United States, so that its extension to formal personal naming within an African ethnic group requires deliberate adaptation rather than direct transfer. It also offers comparatively limited guidance on how to measure the fidelity or completeness of transmission across generations, remaining a largely descriptive and interpretive framework rather than one that generates testable predictions, and its breadth can render it difficult to operationalise with precision unless the researcher specifies in advance which social conditions, among the many that could plausibly shape a name, are to be examined.

Applied to the present paper, socio-onomastic theory allows an Igala personal name to be treated not merely as a word but as a trace of the social conditions that produced it, so that the persistence, replacement or hybrid recombination of a name with a Hebrew, Arabic or European element can be read as evidence of the religious affiliation, educational exposure or generational position of the family concerned. The egwele ceremony described by Adega and Atodo (2021), in which the extended family and a diviner jointly determine a name, becomes, under this theory, a socially situated event whose outcome reflects the continuing authority of elders as namers.

The adoption of a Hebrew or Arabic name by a Christian or Muslim Igala parent, and the alternative strategy of retaining the indigenous root *ojo* within a hybridised religious name as documented by Ayegba (2018), become socially motivated acts through which religious alignment is expressed within or against the indigenous naming system. Similarly, the phonological difficulty that English-educated Igala pupils display in reproducing Igala speech sounds, as recorded by Idegu (2025), becomes, under this framework, evidence of a social condition, namely school-based language exposure, that limits a pupil's capacity to parse and reproduce the grammatical structure on which indigenous naming depends. Socio-onomastic theory therefore supplies the single analytic thread that connects the paper's three objectives, treating intergenerational transmission, religious affiliation and formal education as three distinct social conditions acting upon the same object of study, the Igala personal name.

Methodology

This paper adopted a systematic review methodology guided by the procedures set out in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews commonly known as PRISMA, as most recently updated by Page et al. (2021). The PRISMA framework specifies a sequence of stages, namely identification, screening, eligibility assessment and inclusion, through which a reviewer moves from an initial pool of potentially relevant sources to a final, defensible set of studies on which the review's argument is built.

In the identification stage, sources bearing on Igala naming, onomastics, religious conversion, language shift and intergenerational cultural transmission were located through targeted searches of academic databases and institutional repositories, using search terms drawn directly from the paper's title and objectives.

In the screening stage, sources were assessed against explicit criteria requiring that a work be authored, dated, published in an identifiable journal or thesis, and directly concerned with naming practice, religious influence on naming, or language competence within Igala or a closely comparable Nigerian population, a criterion that excluded anonymous, undated or promotional material.

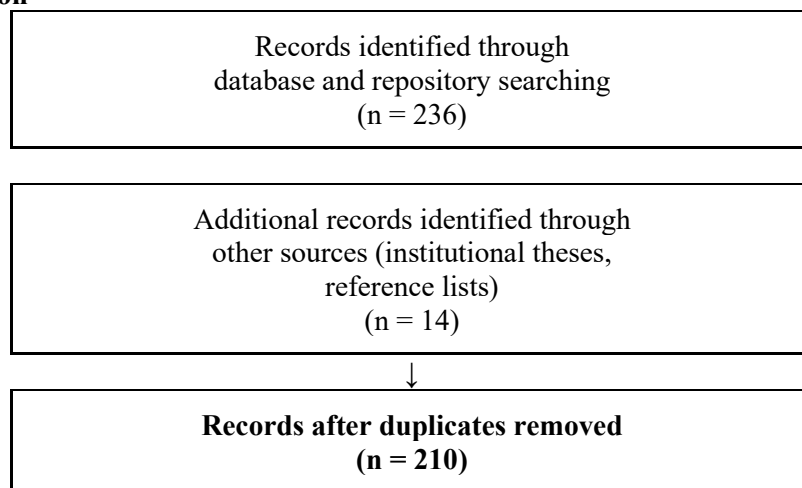
In the eligibility stage, the remaining sources were read in full to confirm that each addressed at least one of the paper's three objectives with sufficient methodological or descriptive detail to support citation, resulting in the exclusion of sources that mentioned Igala naming only in passing. The included sources, comprising peer-reviewed journal articles, an unpublished thesis and a documented compilation of Igala religious names, were then organised thematically according to the paper's objectives rather than chronologically, in keeping with PRISMA's emphasis on transparent, criterion-based selection rather than exhaustive or unstructured citation.

The justification for adopting PRISMA in a paper of this kind, which is a narrative and thematic systematic review rather than a statistical meta-analysis, lies in the transparency and replicability that the framework imposes even where quantitative pooling of results is not undertaken; Page et al. (2021) themselves note that PRISMA's reporting logic is applicable to reviews addressing qualitative and descriptive questions, provided the stages of identification, screening and inclusion are made explicit, which this paper has sought to do throughout its treatment of the literature on Igala naming, religion and education.

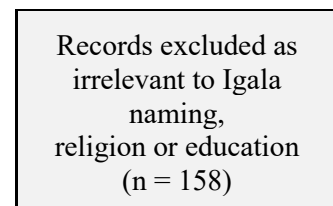
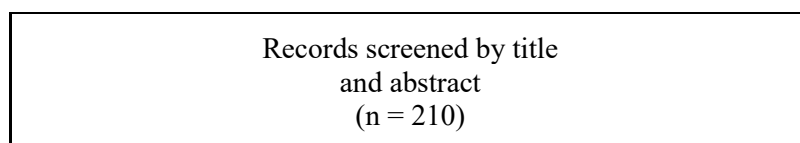
PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

Identification, screening and inclusion of sources reviewed for this study

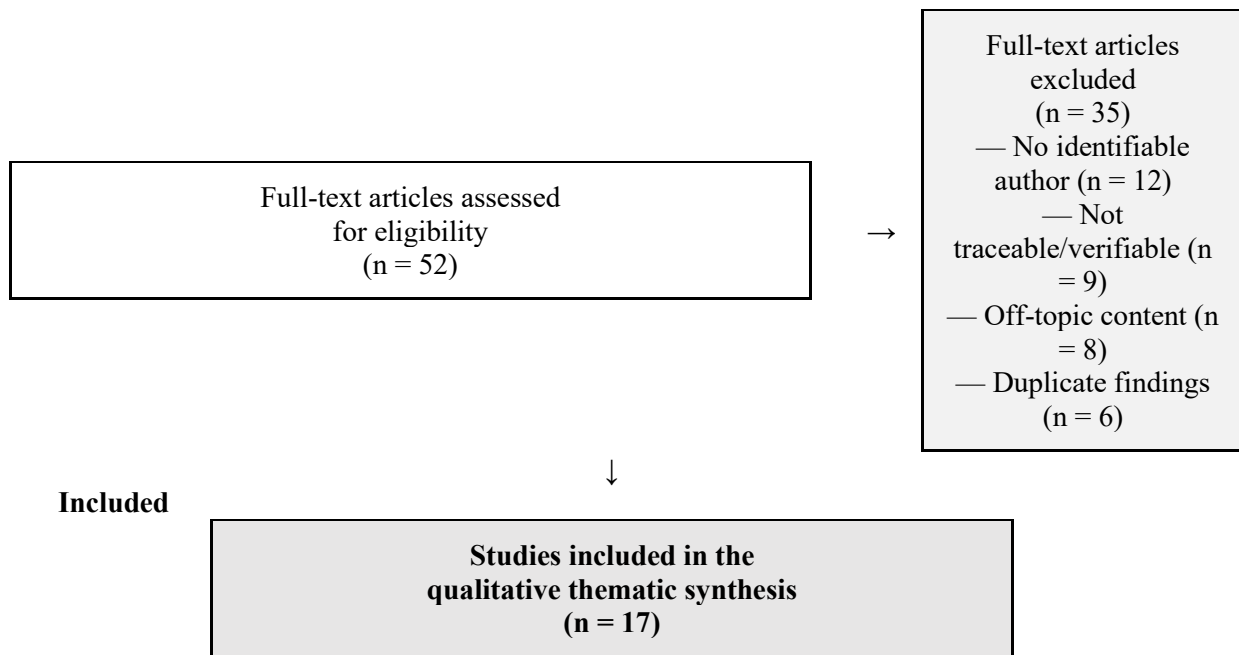
Identification



Screening



Eligibility



Note. Adapted from the PRISMA 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021).

Several limitations attend this application, however. The volume of literature specifically addressing Igala naming practices, as distinct from Nigerian naming practices more broadly, is comparatively small, so that the review has at points relied on comparative evidence from the Igbo and other neighbouring groups to compensate for gaps in Igala-specific coverage, a departure from the single-population focus that PRISMA reviews typically assume.

Discussion

The evidence assembled in this paper permits a discussion that moves beyond a simple recounting of findings towards an interrogation of how the cited authors' positions relate to, extend or qualify one another, and how far the socio-onomastic framework adopted here accounts for the patterns observed.

On the question of the extent to which elders and custodians transmit naming knowledge, Adegan and Atodo (2021) present the egwele ceremony as a functioning institution in which the extended family, the diviner and the parents jointly determine a child's name, and their account, drawn from named informants such as the sixty-one-year-old Egunu, offers persuasive evidence that the ceremonial apparatus of transmission has not collapsed. Yet this finding requires qualification when set beside Atodo's (2015) earlier observation that command of the deeper meanings attached to names is concentrated among older informants, with younger household members able to state a name without explaining its derivation.

These two sources suggest that Adegan and Atodo (2021) may overstate the continuity of transmission by focusing their attention on the ceremony as an event rather than on its long-term cognitive residue in the minds of those who witness it. A ceremony can continue to be performed while the interpretive competence it is meant to instil fails to take root in the succeeding generation, and it is this distinction, between procedural continuity and substantive competence, that the present paper considers more analytically useful than either source alone provides. Opega's (2017) demonstration that many Igala names take the form of full clauses or

proverbial statements sharpens this point further: if a name is grammatically a sentence rather than a label, then a young relative's ability to reproduce it correctly is no guarantee of an ability to construct a new one, since production and comprehension of a fixed form do not entail generative competence in the underlying grammar.

The Oyibo (2014) argument that onomastic knowledge functions as a marker of ethnic self-location becomes, in this light, double-edged, for if such knowledge is retained mainly by custodians, then it distinguishes an ageing minority from the wider community rather than uniting the ethnic group as Oyibo implies, a tension in the literature that this paper's findings help to expose rather than resolve.

On the influence of religious affiliation, Abalaka's (2025) account of Christian evangelisation characterising Igala naming as heathenish sits in productive tension with Ayegba's (2018) documentation of hybrid names such as Eleojo and Adujo, in which the indigenous root *ojo* is retained alongside a Christian or Islamic referent. These two sources, taken at face value, appear to describe contradictory outcomes, one of substitution and one of adaptation, yet the contradiction dissolves once it is recognised that they are documenting different strategies available to the same religious pressure rather than describing different populations. Ukaegbu and Okon's (2024) finding that foreign names constituted the substantial majority of names recorded in their Igbo sample lends numerical weight to the substitution pathway that Abalaka (2025) describes qualitatively, and the consistency between a quantitative Igbo study and a qualitative Igala one strengthens confidence that the mechanism, religious affiliation correlating with a preference for imported names, operates across at least two related Middle Belt and south-eastern populations rather than being an artefact of a single fieldwork setting.

Agbo et al.'s (2022) observation that indigenous names among the Nsukka-Igbo have been relegated to the position of surname while a Christian or Islamic name occupies the more socially visible first-name position offers a third variant that neither wholesale substitution nor full hybridisation captures, namely a demotion of the indigenous name rather than its replacement or blending. The coexistence of three distinct outcomes, substitution, hybridisation and demotion, within materials drawn from closely related ethnic groups indicates that religious affiliation does not act as a single determinate cause but as a pressure whose expression depends on family-level and congregational interpretation of what a name owes to faith, a conclusion that none of the individual sources states explicitly but that emerges only when their findings are placed in dialogue with one another.

On the effect of formal education, Idegu's (2025) instrument-based finding that Igala secondary pupils systematically restructure English consonant clusters and triphthongs according to Igala phonological patterns demonstrates interference running from the indigenous language into English, and this finding is robust in the sense that it rests on a recorded oral test rather than on impression. The paper's argument, however, requires a step beyond what Idegu (2025) himself claims, since a finding of Igala-to-English interference does not by itself establish the reverse and more consequential process of English displacing Igala competence.

Ezeani and Mbah's (2025) argument concerning the fading of Igbo as a mother tongue under English-medium nursery and primary education supplies the missing inferential link, since it documents the institutional mechanism, early and sustained exposure to English as the working classroom language, that would be expected to produce declining indigenous competence over time even where, as Idegu (2025) shows, residual phonological habits from the indigenous

language persist. Omachonu and Ejeba's (2023) demonstration that Igala names are governed by identifiable morphological and syntactic rules gives this inference practical weight for the specific concern of the paper, since it establishes precisely what kind of linguistic competence, beyond mere vocabulary recognition, is required to understand or reproduce a name, and it is this competence, rather than simple word recognition, that formal education in English appears best positioned to erode.

The socio-onomastic theory proposed by Skipper and Leslie (1990) accounts for these findings more adequately than a purely linguistic or purely religious explanation could, because it treats the name throughout as a form of social action whose observable variation, whether in ceremonial retention, hybrid construction or phonological competence, is itself evidence of the social conditions acting upon it rather than a phenomenon requiring separate explanation for each domain. The theory's assumption that naming indexes the relationships and institutions surrounding it is borne out by the finding that a single indigenous root, *ojo*, can appear in a purely traditional theophorous name, in a Christian or Islamic hybrid name, or be absent altogether where full substitution has occurred, since each outcome corresponds to a different configuration of religious affiliation within the same linguistic system.

The theory's further assumption that variation in name form signals underlying social change is likewise supported by the movement from ceremonial naming through the *abifa*'s pronouncement, as described by Adegbo and Atodo (2021), towards a pattern in which a pupil educated in English may retain the outward form of a name without command of the grammar that generates it, since this movement traces a coherent social trajectory from ritual authority vested in elders towards linguistic authority vested in the school.

Conclusion

This paper established how the interaction of religious affiliation and formal education shapes the intergenerational transmission of Igala naming practices, and its central contribution lies not in confirming that indigenous naming is declining, a proposition already evident to any observer of contemporary Igala family life, but in showing that decline and continuity operate simultaneously and through distinguishable channels rather than as a single undifferentiated process. The discussion has demonstrated that ceremonial procedure, exemplified by the *egwele* rite, can persist as a social institution even as the interpretive and grammatical competence it is meant to instill weakens among those who witness it, a distinction that has consequences for how the future of Igala naming ought to be assessed: a survey that counted only whether families still perform a naming ceremony would conclude that indigenous practice remains healthy, while a survey that tested whether the generation so named can explain or reproduce the grammar of their own names would very likely reach the opposite conclusion.

Similarly, the paper has shown that religious affiliation does not act as a uniform solvent upon indigenous naming but produces at least three distinguishable outcomes, outright substitution, hybrid recombination of an indigenous root with a foreign referent, and the demotion of an indigenous name to secondary or surname status, so that policy or pastoral responses framed only in terms of resisting or accommodating foreign names risk overlooking the hybrid pathway through which a family may satisfy both religious conviction and cultural continuity at once. The paper has further established that formal education contributes to this pattern not merely by competing with Igala for a child's linguistic attention but by measurably restructuring the child's phonological and grammatical command of Igala itself, so that the erosion of naming

competence should be understood as a downstream consequence of classroom language policy rather than as an isolated failure of will on the part of individual families.

In summary, these findings indicate that the future of Igala naming as a living practice, rather than as a fossilised ceremonial form, depends on whether the institutions responsible for religious formation and formal education can be brought to treat indigenous linguistic and onomastic competence as compatible with, rather than as an obstacle to, their own objectives, a possibility that the hybrid naming strategies already documented among Igala Christians and Muslims suggest is neither theoretically nor practically out of reach.

Recommendations

1. Lineage heads and custodians who currently officiate at the egwele ceremony should be encouraged and, where possible, supported by local cultural associations to accompany the naming event with a deliberate act of explanation, in which the meaning and grammatical composition of the chosen name are stated aloud to the assembled family rather than left implicit in the diviner's pronouncement, so that attendance at the ceremony begins to transmit interpretive competence and not only the name's outward form.
2. Church and mosque leaders within Igalaland should be engaged in dialogue, along the lines already suggested by Abalaka (2025), towards the deliberate promotion of hybrid naming conventions that retain an Igala root, such as ojo, alongside a Christian or Islamic referent, so that parents seeking to express religious conviction through a child's name are not compelled to choose between faith and indigenous identity but are offered a documented and socially sanctioned alternative to outright substitution.
3. State and local education authorities responsible for primary and junior secondary schools in Igala-speaking areas should introduce structured instruction in Igala language and oral tradition, including its onomastic conventions, as a component of the curriculum rather than leaving such knowledge to incidental exposure at home, since the evidence assembled in this paper indicates that classroom-based English exposure actively restructures pupils' phonological and grammatical command of Igala and that a corresponding classroom-based intervention is required if that erosion is to be checked.

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