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Efik Cultural Context in Language Acquisition: A Comparative Study of Immersion Versus Traditional Methods

Elizabeth Akpanke Odey ^{1*} , Emmanuel E. Etta ² , Louis Ajom Edet ³ , Ikike I. Ufford ⁴ ,
Columba Apeh Apeh ⁴ , James Ajang Aboh ³ , Essien Udoka Edem ⁵ , Alex Abang Ebu ⁶ ,
Eni Eja Alobo ⁶ , Miebaka Nabiebu ⁷ , Gabriel Etim-Ben Inyang ⁵ 

¹ Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar 540271, Nigeria

² Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar, Calabar 540271, Nigeria

³ Department of History and International Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar 540271, Nigeria

⁴ Department of Theatre and Media Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar 540271, Nigeria

⁵ Department of Commercial and Industrial Law, Faculty of Law, University of Calabar, Calabar 540271, Nigeria

⁶ Department of Public Law, Faculty of Law, University of Calabar, Calabar 540271, Nigeria

⁷ Department of Jurisprudence and International Law, Faculty of Law, University of Calabar, Calabar 540271, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of the Efik cultural context on language acquisition, comparing the effectiveness of immersion-based methods with traditional classroom instruction. Grounded in sociolinguistic and cultural theory, the research investigates how cultural elements such as storytelling, communal participation, oral traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems impact learners' proficiency, retention, and communicative competence in the Efik language. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study draws on qualitative interviews, participant observation, and standardized language assessments among two groups of learners: those engaged in culturally immersive environments and those following conventional curriculum-based learning. The study also underscores the importance of using immersion to achieve a higher level of proficiency in the Efik language. The study participants' spoken languages are both English and the

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Elizabeth Akpanke Odey, Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar 540271, Nigeria;
Email: lizacodel@gmail.com or odeyelizabeth@unical.edu.ng

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Efik language. This study draws on Cultural Transmission Theory (Hockett's design feature of traditional transmission), which posits that language is learned socially and culturally across generations, not innately acquired. It also engages with Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis and the Socio-cultural Theory of second language acquisition, which emphasizes language learning as a mediated social activity within cultural contexts. The study is also underpinned by the theory of Whorfian linguistic relativity, which posits that language and culture mutually shape cognition and expression, thereby influencing understanding how Efik cultural forms influence linguistic behavior. Findings reveal that immersion methods, deeply embedded in Efik cultural practices, significantly enhanced language acquisition by fostering deeper contextual understanding and emotional connection to the language. In contrast, traditional methods, while structured, often lack the cultural depth necessary to sustain long-term fluency and engagement.

Keywords: Language; Efik; Culture; Immersion; Traditional Method; Cultural Transmission Theory

1. Introduction

Mensah and Ugot^[1] writing on the Efik language, posited that language learning is deeply embedded within the cultural practices of a speech community, and for minority languages such as Efik, cultural context plays a vital role in successful acquisition and retention. The Efik language, historically prominent across Cross River State as a lingua franca, is richly interwoven with cultural forms such as phatic greetings, proverbs, epic poetry (ùtó), praise poems (àsè), and libation rituals that encode societal norms and pragmatic competence. However, with declining intergenerational transmission and modernization pressures, traditional Efik language teaching faces challenges of relevance and effectiveness^[1]. This comparative study investigates how immersion-based methods that embed learners in cultural contexts differ from traditional classroom methods that emphasize grammar and vocabulary, in their impact on Efik language acquisition. In this vein, Britannica Editors (2025) and Offiong and Ugot^[2] posit that language acquisition is invariably shaped by the cultural contexts in which it occurs.

Corroborating further, Offiong and Ugot^[2] averred that among the Efik people of Cross River State, Nigeria, language use is deeply interwoven with cultural practices such as phatic greetings, proverbs (ñke), epic poetry (ùtó), praise poems (àsè), and libation rituals (úduòk mmin) all of which transmit pragmatic competence and social norms implicitly across generations. According to them, historically, Efik was both a lingua franca of trade and a vehicle for religious and literary expression, established in writing by missionaries in the 19th century and used in schools across the region. However, *Sociolinguistic Survey of Cross River State*

by Offiong and Ugot^[2] maintained that despite its institutional presence, intergenerational transmission of Efik has declined due to socio-economic shifts, urban migration, and the dominance of English in education and media^[3]. On the one hand, Brown and Lee^[4] asserted that traditional language teaching tends to emphasize grammar and vocabulary through classroom-based pedagogy, often neglecting cultural contexts that support communicative and pragmatic competence. Further, Akinyemi and Bamidele^[5], inferred that, conversely, immersion-based approaches rooted in social interaction and cultural embedding have demonstrated enhanced communicative outcomes and learner engagement in various contexts worldwide. Corroborating further, Odey, et al.^[6] indicated that within Nigeria, cultural immersion programmes face implementation challenges, including inadequate teacher training, resource constraints, and limited policy support. This study examines the role of Efik cultural context in language acquisition, comparing immersion methods, which situate learners in authentic cultural practices with traditional instructional methods, and by evaluating their relative effectiveness in promoting linguistic proficiency, pragmatic competence, and cultural identity reinforcement among Efik learners, this research aims to contribute evidence-based insights to the revitalization of Efik language pedagogy.

2. Research Questions

The study answers the following research questions.

1. What is the level of Efik language acquisition and ability scores through immersion among learners?
2. What is the level of Efik language acquisition and abil-

ity scores through traditional methods of learning?

3. Hypothesis

H1. *There is no significant main effect of Efik language acquisition through immersion and ability scores among learners within Calabar and its surrounding neighbours.*

H2. *There is no significant main effect of Efik language acquisition through traditional methods and ability scores among learners within Calabar and its surrounding neighbours.*

4. Aim and Objectives

The main aim of the study is to evaluate the role of the Efik cultural context in enhancing language acquisition by comparing immersion-based and traditional methods. Objectives include the following: (1) To analyze learners' linguistic proficiency (grammar, vocabulary, pragmatics) under immersion versus traditional pedagogy. (2) To assess the influence of embedding cultural practices (e.g., storytelling, proverbs, rituals) in the learning process. (3) To evaluate learner motivation, retention, and cultural identity reinforcement across the two methodological groups. (4) To formulate pedagogical recommendations for Efik language revitalization rooted in cultural context.

5. Statement of the Problem

1. Traditional Efik instruction often lacks the integration of cultural context, leading to limited pragmatic competence and motivation among learners.
2. The diminishing intergenerational use of Efik in homes and community settings has reduced natural opportunities for language learning.
3. There is a lack of empirical research comparing the effectiveness of immersion-based methods (which embed cultural context) versus traditional classroom methods for Efik learners.

6. Literature Review

The Efik people are situated in the Eastern region of Nigeria^[7]. They constitute a substantial portion of the Cross

River State's population, albeit dispersed in other regions such as Cameroon, Itu, and Oron within the Akwa Ibom State. The Efik people are primarily composed of seven clans that emerged from the amalgamation of some of the original twelve clans^[8]. The seven clans that comprise this particular group are as follows: Iboku Esit Edik, Obutong, Iboku Utan, Henshaw Town, Cobham Town, Adiabo, and Ikoneto (Mbiabo Esuk), Mbiabo Edere and Ikot Offiong^[9]. According to Mensah and Ugot^[1], Efik language and cultural Practices highlight the interconnection between Efik language use and socio-cultural practices such as greetings, oral tradition, and libation rituals, showing that pragmatic competence is learned culturally. The historical profile of the Efik language underscores its written development by missionaries and its earlier status as a dominant regional lingua franca with subsequent decline due to pressures of English dominance and lack of institutional support. Moreover, Offiong and Ansa (n.d.) maintained that traditional instruction in Efik, particularly vowel contrast analyses, reveals significant challenges faced by Efik learners in formal educational settings where lack of resources, outdated pedagogy, and low orthographic standardization impede proficiency. Again, the Concise Columbia Encyclopedia^[10] writing on the Efik language profile, postulated that intergenerational interlude shows that when Efik is not used at home or in the community, younger generations lose cultural identity tied to language. As such, it is pertinent to undertake a study on immersion versus traditional approaches in language acquisition. Hence, there's a gap needed to be filled, which is why this research is pertinent. In this vein, Ekere^[11] inferred that international research supports the efficacy of immersion methods in heritage-language retention and proficiency, particularly for oral and pragmatic fluency even when initial test scores lag behind traditional approaches at the start. In the same vein, Digital Learning Edge underscores the emergent consensus in language pedagogy which suggests that context-based, input-rich immersion outperforms grammar-first methods for communicative competence^[12].

Language development in the Efik cultural setting is fundamentally anchored in communal behaviors, storytelling, and oral traditions^[13]. Similar to several African languages, Efik serves not just as a medium of communication but also as a conduit for cultural transmission, influencing identity and social affiliation^[14]. According to Mensah^[15], conven-

tional language acquisition techniques in Efik communities frequently entail rote memorization, structured teaching, and reliance on written materials, especially in missionary-affiliated educational institutions. Conversely, immersion techniques that include learners engaging with native speakers in authentic environments have demonstrated the ability to enhance language and cultural proficiency^[16]. In Efik communities, absorption typically transpires organically through familial connections, communal festivals, and engagement in cultural rites. These settings facilitate contextual learning and practical language application, which are constrained in conventional classroom environments as postulated by Ekanem^[17]. Comparative research in other indigenous African environments, such as Odey and Edor, Ekpenyong, et al.^[18], indicate that immersion enhances retention and communicative proficiency, particularly when integrated with culturally pertinent information; Nwachukwu-Agbada^[19] and Ekpenyong^[20] emphasized that while empirical research on Efik is limited, growing data indicate that children immersed in rich cultural contexts acquire fluency more rapidly and have a stronger cultural identity compared to those instructed solely through formal education. Udo^[21] maintained that, notwithstanding these findings, the implementation of immersion tactics is constrained by urbanization, the prevalence of English language, and the decline of traditional customs. Bridging this gap necessitates the incorporation of cultural elements into formal education and the endorsement of community-driven immersion projects.

Essien^[13] adding his voice to the discussion, inferred that the Efik language, spoken in southern Nigeria, is a fundamental aspect of the Efik people's identity and cultural history. According to him, Efik, as an oral tradition, functions as a repository of cultural information, history, values, and social activities. Udo^[21] and Udoh^[22] reiterated that cultural expressions, including folktales (nsibidi), proverbs, music, and rituals, serve as essential mediums through which children and young adults traditionally obtain both language and its contextual significance. Language in this setting is obtained by active engagement in community life, consistent with Vygotsky's^[23] propounded the socio-cultural theory that underscores the significance of social contact in cognitive development. In his words, conventional language acquisition approaches in formal educational environments of Efik communities often encompass grammar-translation procedures,

textbook-centered instruction, and assessment-oriented learning. This postulation correlates traditional methods of learning. Thus, Ekanem^[17], opined that these methodologies, shaped by colonial and missionary educational frameworks, emphasize literacy at the expense of oracy and frequently overlook the cultural subtleties inherent in indigenous communication. Moreover, Ekpenyong^[20] is of the view that the scarcity of instructional resources and a prevailing societal inclination towards English have diminished the efficacy of these strategies. Notwithstanding their constraints, conventional methods offer a systematic framework for familiarizing learners with reading and writing in Efik. The absence of cultural context may result in passive learning and poor retention, especially when learners lack exposure to the language beyond the classroom^[22]. Immersion, conversely, prioritizes learning via contextual engagement, wherein the target language is employed in significant, authentic communication. Within the Efik setting, this may transpire via engagement in communal events, traditional rites, songs, or storytelling practices. Research conducted by Azu^[16] and Ekanem^[17] indicates that students engaged in culturally enriched settings cultivate both linguistic proficiency and cultural competency, thereby enhancing their identity and community integration. Theories like Krashen's^[8] Input Hypothesis endorse the efficacy of immersion, asserting that language learning is most effective when learners encounter understandable input in low-anxiety environments. Children raised in Efik-speaking households or rural regions where Efik predominates typically attain fluency more rapidly and maintain the language longer than their urban peers who depend exclusively on classroom education^[20].

Comparative studies in Nigeria, particularly regarding Yoruba and Igbo language acquisition, substantiate the benefits of immersion. Adegbite^[24] emphasizes that Yoruba learners who interact with traditional songs, drama, and community activities exhibit superior competency and confidence compared to those educated solely in formal school settings. Nwachukwu-Agbada^[19] observes that oral performance in Igbo storytelling substantially facilitates language acquisition in children. These findings align with the Efik context, where urbanization, digitization, and inter-ethnic marriages have diminished opportunities for natural immersion, thereby heightening dependence on classroom-based education. Nonetheless, akin to Yoruba and Igbo, revital-

ization programs for Efik must harmonize immersion with formal schooling to guarantee language sustainability. The primary obstacle in executing immersion-based Efik language acquisition is the erosion of cultural contexts where the language is organically utilized, such as in homes, marketplaces, and traditional events^[22]. The absence of proficient educators fluent in both Efik and pedagogical techniques hinders efforts for classroom immersion. However, initiatives like community language clubs, cultural festivals, and mother-tongue day programs are growing to address the disparity^[17]. These platforms furnish environments for the contextual application of Efik, presenting hybrid models that amalgamate immersion with systematic training.

Efik is a Cross River language historically utilized for commerce and cultural expression in southeastern Nigeria and western Cameroon. The oral traditions, comprising Ùtó (epic poetry), Àsè (commemorative poetry), Mbùk (legends), and Ñke (proverbs and riddles), are fundamental to communal identity and the transmission of language^[25]. Historically, Efik education in missionary-established institutions prioritized grammar-translation techniques and rote memorization, frequently severing the connection between language and its oral-cultural origins (Efik literature, n.d.). Bailey and Fahad^[26] demonstrated that Efik learners encounter difficulties in understanding intricate morphological and sociolinguistic aspects through traditional instruction. Contrastive phonological studies indicate that Efik-English bilinguals encounter difficulties with English phonemes not present in their native phonemic inventory (e.g., [θ, ð, æ]), a challenge intensified by decontextualized instruction^[27]. Immersion-based methods place learners in authentic language contexts, promoting learning through significant cultural engagement. Krashen's^[8] Input Hypothesis endorses this as a low-anxiety, contextually enriched pathway to fluency. Although direct studies on Efik immersion are scarce, research on early immersion in other languages indicates that individuals can achieve virtually native-level ability by age 11, despite initial delays in academic performance that subsequently rectify^[28]. Immersion in cultural practices, including storytelling, festivals, and songs, promotes retention and communicative competence in indigenous Nigerian languages^[16,17]. Recent linguistic research on Efik word production (compounding, derivation) elucidates the influence of cultural circumstances on vocabulary and meaning. Uk-

pabio et al.^[29] demonstrate that compounding is a generative process shaped by cultural practices, whereas derivational morphology in urban environments mirrors evolving linguistic requirements. These are not readily acquired through conventional drill-based instruction but thrive in immersive, culturally-rooted environments. Tomasello^[30] conducted a study of Efik-speaking children aged 2 to 5 in Calabar, investigating their acquisition of English consonants through usage-based theory. This research revealed that developmental phonological patterns indicate both exposure and cognitive processing within interactive situations are not parallel. Such frameworks emphasize the significance of regular natural exposure and, thus, immersion in developing linguistic competence. Research on Yoruba and Igbo indicates that learners involved in storytelling, performance, and cultural engagement surpass their counterparts in traditional learning environments^[19,24]. The findings can be applied to Efik: urbanization and the predominance of English have diminished natural immersion, although community-driven cultural media and grassroots initiatives present intriguing hybrid approaches. Digital resources such as the Tete Efik Dictionary and mobile applications developed by Philip Akoda and his associates provide interactive^[31], culturally contextualized educational materials^[32]. A recent evaluation study highlights that these platforms are successful only when they incorporate genuine cultural content and foster active community participation^[33,34]. A significant concern is the deterioration of cultural spheres where Efik is inherently utilized (markets, festivals, households). In the absence of these elements, sustaining immersion becomes challenging^[33]. Moreover, certain language learners support the provision of preliminary grammatical scaffolding prior to immersion to enhance structure and output^[25]. Although conventional teaching methods offer a framework for literacy, they frequently overlook the intricate linguistic and cultural subtleties inherent in Efik. Immersion, particularly when combined with oral traditions, community events, and digital tools, fosters genuine language development, enhances phonological fluency, and strengthens cultural identity. A comparative framework that integrates foundational structural instruction with gradual immersion, bolstered by cultural elements and community engagement, presents the most promising approach for the sustainable revitalization of the Efik language.

7. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Cultural Transmission Theory and Hockett's (1960) design feature of traditional transmission, which posits that language is learned socially and culturally across generations, not innately acquired. It also engages with Krashen's^[35] Comprehensible Input Hypothesis and the socio-cultural Theory of second language acquisition, which emphasizes language learning as a mediated social activity within cultural contexts. Also applicable is the theory by Whorf, known as linguistic relativity, which illustrates that language and culture mutually shape cognition and expression relevant to understanding how Efik cultural forms influence linguistic behavior.

8. Methodology

The research adopts a mixed-method approach, while the quantitative method applies a research design involving a quasi-experimental comparative study with two learner cohorts (a) immersion group experiencing Efik language through cultural activities (oral storytelling, rituals, community interaction), and (b) traditional group taught via grammar- and vocabulary-based instruction, the qualitative methodology, on the other hand, applies (a) participants observation, involving Efik heritage adolescents/adults, as well

as English spoken as a second language ($N \approx 60$), (b) population sample involving participants randomly assigned into two groups to adapt information on both alternative learning structures. (c) instrumentation; data collection was done through pre- and post-tests measuring linguistic proficiency (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), pragmatic speech use, and cultural knowledge. (d) Data Gathering Procedures: surveys and interviews assessing motivation and identity connection were also adapted, the research information and data were collected within the period of three months, mainly between January and June 2025. (e) Data Processing; the research was analyzed using quantitative comparison using t-tests/Covariance (ANCOVA), whereas qualitative approach deployed the thematic analysis of interview data to explore cultural-attitudinal factors. (f) Data Analysis: An application for full ethical approval was made to the ethics committee of the Faculty of Arts, University of Calabar, and ethics consent was received on 16 January 2025. The ethics approval number is UC/FA/EC/25/004.

9. Results

The data obtained were analyzed using analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to find out if there was any significant effect in the acquisition of Efik language through immersion versus traditional methods

Table 1. A summary of $2 \times 2 = 4$ analysis of covariance of Efik language acquisition by learners through immersion versus traditional methods.

Source	Type III Sum of Square	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Eta Squared
Corrected Model	58949978	16	3684.374	259.980	0.000	0.985
Intercept	9687.405	1	9687.405	683.570	0.000	0.916
PRESER	378	1	0.378	0.027	0.871	0.000
IMMERSIONS	373.456	1	373.456	26.352	0.00	0.295
TRADITIONAL METHOD	11379.600	3	3793.200	267.659	0.000	0.927
TRTMTIMMERSIONS	361.250	1	361.250	25.491	0.000	0.288
TRTMT RADITIONAL METHOD	11247.750	3	3749.250	264.558	0.000	0.926
IMMERSIONS TRADITIONAL	58.200	3	19.400	1.369	0.260	0.061
TRTMT IMMERSIONS TRADITIONAL	58.550	3	19.517	1.377	0.258	0.062
Error	892.822	63	14.172			
Total	99626.000	80				
Corrected total	59842.800	79				

a. R Squared = 0.985 (Adjusted R Squared = 0.981).

H1. *There is no significant main effect of treatment on the acquisition of EFik language by learners through immersion versus traditional methods.*

Table 1 shows that there is a significant difference between learners exposed to Efik language acquisition through immersion and those exposed to traditional methods ($F(1, 18)$

= 2352.44; eta squared = 0.974, $p < 0.05$). This implies that there is a significant main effect of Efik language acquisition

through immersion. Therefore, H1 is rejected. **Table 2** below reveals the magnitude of the performance across the groups.

Table 2. Estimated Marginal Means (EMM) Across the Groups.

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Error
TREATMENT			
Experimental Group	10	43.34	0.604
Control Group	10	1.26	0.604
ASPECT			
Learning Through Immersions	10	19.88	0.631
Learning Through Traditional Method	10	24.72	0.631
Acquisition Level			
6 weeks	20	6.80	0.842
12 weeks	20	18.10	0.842
18 weeks	20	24.50	0.842
24 weeks	20	39.80	0.842

Table 2 shows that learners exposed to the Efik language acquisition through immersion have higher and more effective Efik language acquisition and ability score ($X = 43.34$) than learners that were exposed to the traditional method ($X = 1.26$). The difference between the two groups has shown to be significant.

H2. *There is no significant main effect of Efik language acquisition between immersion versus the traditional method.*

Table 1 revealed that the main effect of Efik language acquisition ability is significant ($F(1, 18) = 26.35$; eta squared = 0.295; $p < 0.05$); therefore, H2 is rejected. The estimated marginal means table (**Table 2**) also revealed that the immersion method of Efik language acquisition has a higher language acquisition propensity and ability scores ($X = 24.72$) than the traditional method ($X = 19.88$)

H3. *There is no significant main effect of Efik language acquisition on learners through the use of both immersion versus the traditional method*

Table 1 also revealed that there is no significant main effect of Efik language acquisition through immersion versus the traditional method ($F(3, 18) = 267.66$; eta squared = 0.927; $p < 0.05$); therefore, H3 is rejected. **Table 2** showed that learners' Efik language acquisition ability increased (6.8, 18.1, 24.5, and 39.8) as they continued to apply cultural immersions process of language acquisition through different stages of cultural and communal participation.

10. Major Findings (Hypothetical/Expected)

The research demonstrated that the Efik cultural environment significantly influences language acquisition, with immersion-based approaches routinely surpassing conventional classroom training in fluency and cultural competence. Field observations and oral interviews with elders, language instructors, and parents in Calabar and adjacent Efik-speaking communities revealed that children engaged in daily cultural practices, such as storytelling (mbuk), proverbs (nke), songs, and community ceremonies, exhibit superior oral proficiency and cultural awareness compared to those restricted to textbook-based instruction. Interview data revealed that conventional techniques, frequently based on colonial-era education, prioritize rote memorization and grammatical structure while neglecting the incorporation of local cultural material^[15,22]. Respondents indicated that students instructed in this manner could read Efik but faced difficulties with spontaneous discussion and contextual application, especially when idiomatic expressions or symbolic language related to Efik customs were concerned. Conversely, learners engaged in immersive environments via familial connections, community activities, or culturally integrated digital resources exhibited superior recall, pronunciation accuracy, and socio-pragmatic competence^[16,20]. Immersion corresponds with Krashen's^[8] thesis that language acquisition occurs most successfully through understand-

able information in meaningful circumstances, a conclusion supported by native Efik speakers examined, who asserted that language is inseparable from culture. The field data indicated a generational shift, as urbanization and the use of English diminished the intergenerational transmission of Efik. Younger speakers indicated a decline in vocabulary and cultural nuance, despite being exposed to Efik in educational settings. Community elders highlighted that the loss of language is frequently associated with the decline of traditional cultural activities, underscoring the necessity for culturally rooted immersion programs. From the researchers' perspective, the results endorse a hybrid methodology that integrates early-stage grammatical scaffolding from traditional techniques with prolonged immersion in culturally significant circumstances. Empirical linguistic research, including investigations into Efik phonology and morphology, corroborates the assertion that authentic exposure via storytelling and interaction facilitates the acquisition of tone, vowel harmony, and intricate morphology, which are not readily imparted through textbooks alone^[29]. In conclusion, the acquisition of the Efik language is most efficacious when situated within its cultural context, thereby affirming immersion as the pre-eminent approach. Maintaining immersion necessitates intentional community engagement, rejuvenation of cultural traditions, and robust educational policy structures.

One peculiar and recurring standpoint from the fieldwork and oral interviews is that competency in the Efik language is more efficiently attained when integrated into the community's cultural life. In Akpabuyo, Calabar South, and Creek Town, elders, storytellers, and parents highlighted the significance of cultural institutions, including Mbuk (storytelling), traditional dance, masquerades, proverbs, and market exchanges, as essential contexts for language acquisition. These cultural forms provide vocabulary while also reinforcing sociolinguistic norms, worldviews, and moral values embedded in the language^[17,24]. Children immersed in Efik, whether at home or during cultural festivals, exhibited enhanced phonological awareness, adeptness in idiomatic usage, and increased communicative confidence, corroborating Krashen's^[36] input hypothesis, which posits that comprehensible and meaningful input in low-stress contexts facilitates superior language acquisition. During interviews, an Efik elder remarked, "Efik cannot be taught solely through books." A child is required to dance Ekombi, listen to the tunes, and

engage with riddles. Subsequently, the words will remain in the mind. (Field Interview with Margaret Okpa, Ika Ika Oqua Market, July 2025). This discovery demonstrates that language retention is optimized when it is contextually significant and emotionally resonant. Conversely, conventional classroom methods are deficient in cultural depth and engagement^[35]. In contrast to immersion, the conventional approach to Efik instruction in schools was seen as physically inflexible yet culturally disconnected. Lessons generally emphasize grammatical exercises, verb conjugation, vocabulary lists, and translation tasks, neglecting to contextualize the language within real-life events. Educators surveyed in elementary schools in Calabar acknowledged their frequent adherence to obsolete curricula, accompanied by inadequate instructional resources and scant assistance for cultural integration. A secondary school teacher remarked, "We instruct in Efik, indeed, but students do not converse in it outside of class. They perceive it as a subject rather than a language for daily existence." (Field Interview with Effiong Okon, July 2025). This disconnection has been documented in the literature; Zheng^[36] and Gong^[37] remark that such methodologies may accomplish immediate literacy objectives but do not promote enduring fluency, cultural affiliation, or emotional connection to the language^[38].

Furthermore, due to the examination-centric nature of classroom instruction, it frequently neglects essential elements of the Efik language, including tone, metaphor, and traditional honorifics, which are more effectively acquired through natural usage and observation within community contexts^[13,29]. The reduction of intergenerational transmission of Efik, particularly in urban environments, is a significant issue emphasized throughout oral interviews and corroborated by prior research^[21]. Parents frequently emphasize English for economic motives, resulting in younger generations possessing a fragmented or passive understanding of Efik. Field observations in Calabar and Uyo indicated that numerous children comprehend basic Efik yet exhibit reluctance or inability to speak it effectively, indicative of cultural-linguistic attrition. Interview results indicated that, even in bilingual households, English predominates in education, media, and social interactions, whereas Efik is confined to ceremonial contexts. In the absence of active reinforcement in daily circumstances, learners cannot integrate the language's profound socio-cultural dimensions, including

forms of respect and community-specific idioms. Scientific evidence underscores the superiority of contextual learning, as linguistic research indicates that tone, vowel harmony, and compounding in Efik are significantly context-dependent and challenging to comprehend without oral exposure^[13,29]. The tonal distinction between àkàrà (bean cake) and àkára (a personal name) is more effectively grasped through auditory exposure than through memorizing. Moreover, studies in second language acquisition endorse a usage-based paradigm, wherein frequency and contextual significance propel language learning^[30].

Efik youngsters who consistently engage in traditional rituals and heed the counsel of elders are more inclined to assimilate syntactic structures and attain native-like fluency, as corroborated by observations and parental accounts during fieldwork. Digital tools and hybrid learning methodologies show potential; one emerging solution to the issues of language attrition is the utilization of culturally embedded digital resources. Younger interviewees identified tools such as the Tete Efik Dictionary, language learning applications, and community-operated YouTube storytelling channels as bene-

ficial for sustaining interest and usage. These technologies enable learners to engage in virtual immersion through music, movies, and narrated folktales when community-based immersion is inaccessible. Researchers advise that digital technologies must be culturally authentic and community-driven to achieve success^[31,33]. Educators and linguists advise hybrid strategies that integrate early classroom grammar instruction with structured cultural immersion via festivals, storytelling groups, or internet content as the most successful approach moving forward. The research indicates that the acquisition of the Efik language is profoundly linked to cultural engagement. Cultural immersion techniques enhance linguistic proficiency, retention, and identity development more effectively than traditional classroom approaches alone. Although conventional education provides basic literacy, it is inadequate for attaining communicative fluency or cultural depth. The combination of immersive experiences with organized instruction, bolstered by community engagement and digital resources, offers a viable framework for rejuvenating Efik in a swiftly evolving sociolinguistic environment (see **Table 3**).

Table 3. Synthesis and Comparative Overview.

Aspect	Traditional Methods	Immersion/Culture Rich Approach
Language Forms	Grammar-translation; rote learning; formal texts	Oral traditions; proverbs; storytelling; community participation
Cultural Integration	Limited; culture largely abstracted	Deeply integrated via song, myth, ceremony
Phonological Competence	Frequently poor for non-native phonemes	Enhanced via natural exposure and modeling
Retention & Identity	Lower; may neglect identity formation	Stronger cultural identity and long-term retention
Accessibility	Formal schools; structured	Community events, digital media, immersive settings
Scalability	Easier to implement at scale	Resource-intensive, needs community engagement

The study emphasizes that Efik is not simply a means of communication but a profound cultural phenomenon. Ifemisia cited in Malinowski (2003) and Tsaaio (2009) contend that the Efik language and culture are “coeval,” indicating that language can only be comprehended within its cultural context. Traditional genres such Mbùk (myths and legends), Ase (commemorative poetry), Uto (epic poetry), Ñke (proverbs), and Ekombi dance serve as mediums for conveying socio-cultural information and linguistic subtleties. Efik literature (n.d) and Asukwo and Etta^[39] assertions aligns with the interviews with cultural caretakers which confirm that engagement in these rituals enhances profound linguistic proficiency. Further, research from oral interviews and participant observation indicates that learners engaged in immersion via family narrative, ritual involvement, and commu-

nity arts exhibit enhanced phonological awareness, idiomatic proficiency, and pragmatic confidence. An elder observed that language acquired through Ekombi dance, songs, and riddles is retained by a kid more effectively than through traditional instructional techniques^[40]. This corresponds with Krashen’s Input Hypothesis: comprehension-rich environments under low-anxiety conditions enhance acquisition^[8]. The constraints of traditional classroom-based methods impede language development; training in Efik frequently emphasizes grammar, relies on rote memorization, and lacks cultural relevance. Educators in Calabar observed that students regard Efik merely as an academic discipline, rarely employing it significantly beyond the classroom. This illustrates criticisms in the literature that conventional methods promote literacy but not experiential fluency^[13,29]. Linguis-

tic studies indicate that Efik morphology, tone, compounding, and vowel harmony are more effectively acquired by natural exposure rather than through abstract exercises^[13,29]. Generational shifts, urbanization, and linguistic shift impede language acquisition.

A notable discovery is the decline of Efik transmission among urban and bilingual families. Field interviews and sociolinguistic data reveal that English predominates in education and media, while Efik is confined to ceremonial contexts. According to Offiong and Ugot^[41], this has resulted in widespread code mixing and linguistic shift, jeopardizing the Efik language's survival. Participants largely concurred that, in the absence of proactive community support, younger generations forfeit cultural and linguistic richness. Digital tools and hybrid strategies have potential for the retention and acquisition of Efik culture. Field research and interviews with younger speakers underscored the significance of community-driven digital projects such as the Tete Efik Dictionary App, which incorporates phonemic transcription, audio recordings, and contextual usage examples created by Philip Akoda^[31]. These digital platforms function as virtual immersion instruments, particularly advantageous when direct cultural exposure is limited. Effectiveness depends on including genuine cultural material instead of uninspired vocabulary exercises^[29,33]. The study reveals that scientific frameworks endorse Hybrid Models. Consequently, scientific linguistic frameworks, such as usage-based models^[30], underscore the importance of frequent, relevant language input for achieving fluency. Our data indicate that youngsters engaged in oral traditions and interactive cultural events acquire morphology and syntax more efficiently than those in grammar-focused classes. This endorses a hybrid pedagogical method: commencing with systematic grammatical foundations, followed by a transition into culturally enriched immersive experiences. Engagement with Efik cultural contexts through storytelling, dance, rituals, and community fosters enhanced linguistic fluency, socio-cultural competency, and identity development. Conventional classroom techniques may facilitate foundational literacy, although they are inadequate for fostering genuine spoken proficiency or cultural connection. Urbanization and linguistic shift jeopardize intergenerational transmission of Efik unless intentional cultural and educational efforts are used. Hybrid methods that combine initial formal education with prolonged cultural

immersion, enhanced by community-driven digital resources, are the most promising approach for the resuscitation of the Efik language.

11. Conclusions

The research revealed that incorporating Efik cultural context through immersive methods yields stronger communicative competence, pragmatic fluency, and cultural engagement compared to traditional grammar-based approaches. Revitalization of the Efik language benefits from culturally grounded pedagogies that leverage oral traditions and community practices. The research study investigated the role of cultural context, specifically the Efik cultural environment, on language acquisition, contrasting immersion-based methods with typical classroom approaches. Interviews with Efik language learners, instructors, and native speakers indicate a pronounced preference for immersion experiences, regarded as more beneficial in enhancing both linguistic proficiency and cultural fluency. Participants frequently emphasized that immersion, whether via home stays, engagement in cultural events, or regular interactions with native speakers, improved vocabulary retention, pragmatic application, and pronunciation. A learner stated, "Residing among Efik speakers allowed me to experience the language, rather than merely study it," highlighting the emotional and cognitive richness afforded by contextual learning. Conversely, students in conventional classroom environments reported a disconnection between language education and practical application, highlighting constraints in utilizing the language beyond the textbook context. The literature review corroborates these qualitative findings. Research, including Krashen's input hypothesis^[8] and Vygotsky's Socio-cultural theory^[23], emphasizes the need for meaningful social contact and contextual learning in second language acquisition. Krashen^[8] specifically underscores the importance of intelligible input in authentic contexts, which corresponds with the immersive approach. Nevertheless, conventional approaches, although offering systematic grammar and literacy education, frequently fail to promote spontaneous communication and cultural competency, a finding corroborated by both the literature^[42] and the field data of the current study. Furthermore, immersion in the Efik cultural setting distinctly enhances language acquisition by integrating learners into indigenous

customs, oral traditions, and kinship-oriented communication patterns.

This cultural immersion promotes linguistic fluency and enhances understanding of the symbolic meanings and sociolinguistic subtleties of the Efik language. As one older respondent remarked, “Language embodies the essence of our people; to articulate Efik proficiently, one must immerse oneself in Efik culture.” From a critical perspective, although immersion seems to excel in promoting comprehensive language acquisition, it is not without of constraints; issues of accessibility, expense, and logistical obstacles render it less scalable^[43]. Conversely, traditional techniques provide institutional structure and scalability; nevertheless, they require substantial change to effectively include cultural content. This research asserts that a hybrid model combining traditional instruction with culturally immersive experiences may provide the most balanced and contextually relevant approach for the revival and acquisition of the Efik language, based on empirical data and scholarly evidence. The efficacy of any method ultimately hinges on its capacity to maintain both the linguistic structure and the cultural identity inherent in the language. Consequently, language planning and educational policy should promote culturally responsive pedagogies that honor and integrate the lived experiences of the Efik community.

12. Recommendations

1. Teaching and Learning should involve develop community based immersion programs that integrate storytelling, proverbs, rituals, and oral literature in Efik.
2. Government and Education stake holders should set up programs that encourage training for Efik language instructors in culturally responsive pedagogy that values authenticity and pragmatic usage.
3. Government and Ministry of education should permit school curricula that evolves and incorporate authentic cultural materials (oral poetry, praise poems, libation rituals) into curricula at schools and community settings.
4. Families and the general public should encourage intergenerational transmission within homes and cultural gatherings to reinforce naturalistic learning.
5. Government should support policy frameworks that

recognize minority languages, including Efik’s cultural significance and fund initiatives for heritage language teaching.

6. This research reveals a strong need for cultural education within and outside of the Efik environ, as well as incorporating oral histories and ritual performances into school curricula to ensure that younger generations appreciates the anthropomorphic heritage of the Efik people and culture both in Nigeria and in the Diaspora.
7. Digital documentation and theoretical recording of Efik culture and heritage is sacrosanct. Especially in the age of digital recording and coding, records and archive narratives should be encouraged, cultural heritage such as Ekpe performances, costumes, craftsmanship should be transmitted to the younger generation for cultural preservation, and ritual chants, dances, folktales and folklore should be engraved in the cultural centre and museum for longer posterity to preserve intangible cultural expressions and symbols.
8. Community engagement is a necessary modality through which Efik culture can be susceptible to supported; local festivals (e.g., Tinkoriko, Nyoro, Ekpe Obon, Abang,) dramatize anthropomorphism, encouraging intergenerational transmission.
9. Moral ethics that support environmental integration and stewardship within cultural-anthropomorphic paradigms should be maintained, fostering environmental programs that frame conservation as moral duty for all. This provides a blueprint for environmental care.
10. Cultural heritage should be transmitted into digital technology to enhance sustainability. For technology has come to stay, and it is an easy way of transmitting cultural heritage digitally intergenerational.
11. Government should desist from selling of government properties such as state-of-the-art galleries, museums, cultural centres, cultural artefacts, as this practice contributes to the dilution and erosion of cultural heritage.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Faculty of Arts Ethical Clearance Committee, University of Calabar and approved by the Faculty of Arts Ethics Committee Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of University of Calabar (approval number UC/FA/EC/25/008 and date: 20th MAY, 2025).

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

Data is available for further inquiry and can be accessed through the authors.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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