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# FROM FACE-TO-FACE TO FACEBOOK: EVALUATING SOCIAL MEDIA'S EFFECTIVENESS IN LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE PROGRAMS

## SHAMIM AKHTER
INTI INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY PERSIARAN PERDANA BBN, PUTRA NILAI,71800 NILAI, NEGERI SEMBILAN, MALAYSIA.EMAIL: shamim.akhter@newinti.edu.my, Orcid: 0000-0002-1815-6973

## RABINDRA DEV PRASAD
INTI INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY PERSIARAN PERDANA BBN, PUTRA NILAI,71800 NILAI, NEGERI SEMBILAN, MALAYSIA.EMAIL: rabindra.prasad@newinti.edu.my, ORCID: 0009-0007-7162-9622

## MENGQIU TAN
SCHOOL OF MARXISM, GUANGDONG UNIVERSITY OF PETROCHEMICAL TECHNOLOGY, MAOMING 525000, CHINA, EMAIL: m.tan@gdupt.edu.cn, ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0009-0009-9164-23942School

## QIANNAN LU
GUANGZHOU COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY AND BUSINESS, CHINA, EMAIL: luqn@gzgs.edu.cn

**Abstract**
The digital revolution has fundamentally transformed language maintenance efforts, shifting from traditional face-to-face methodologies to innovative social media-based approaches. This article examines the comparative effectiveness of digital platforms versus conventional methods in language preservation and revitalization programs. Through analysis of contemporary research and case studies spanning indigenous language preservation initiatives to modern multilingual education programs, this study evaluates the affordances, challenges, and outcomes of social media platforms including TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and specialized language learning applications. Findings suggest that while digital platforms offer unprecedented reach, accessibility, and engagement opportunities, they function most effectively when integrated with traditional approaches rather than as complete replacements. The research highlights critical considerations including technological barriers, cultural authenticity, intergenerational dynamics, and sustainability factors that influence program success. These insights contribute to a nuanced understanding of how language maintenance programs can leverage both digital innovation and traditional pedagogical wisdom to maximize preservation outcomes in our increasingly connected world.
**Keywords:** language maintenance, learning opportunities, digital revitalization, indigenous languages, technology-enhanced learning

## INTRODUCTION

Language maintenance represents one of the most critical challenges facing linguistic communities worldwide, with UNESCO reporting that 40 percent of the world's languages are in danger of disappearing (Ajani et al., 2024). Traditional face-to-face language maintenance programs have long served as the cornerstone of preservation efforts, relying on intimate community connections, elder-youth interactions, and immersive cultural experiences. However, the digital revolution has introduced transformative possibilities for language preservation, with digital media technology emerging as a pivotal tool in addressing the formidable challenges faced by indigenous languages (Ajani et al., 2024). This technological shift has fundamentally altered the landscape of language maintenance, creating unprecedented opportunities for global reach while simultaneously raising questions about cultural authenticity and pedagogical effectiveness.

The emergence of social media platforms as educational tools has coincided with concerning demographic trends in linguistic communities. Recent research indicates that nearly half of U.S. teens are online almost constantly, with platforms like TikTok and Instagram being used more widely by teen girls than teen boys (Bhat, 2024).This digital nativity of younger generations presents both opportunities and challenges for language maintenance efforts, as traditional transmission methods may struggle to compete with the engaging, immediate nature of social media content. The funding provided by the federal government for Indigenous languages is crucial, but dwindling, with the 2024 budget allocating around a third less than in 2019 (Cyca, 2024), making the cost-effective potential of digital platforms increasingly attractive to resource-constrained communities. The extensive adoption of Mobile Phone Use (MPU) has garnered growing attention in all areas, including academics, due to its profound impact on student life (Thapa et al., 2025).

Contemporary language maintenance faces a complex paradox. While digital tools threaten local languages, they also offer potential to keep them alive (Stern, 2018). Recent efforts to rejuvenate Indigenous languages through digital media aim to engage with painful legacies while building toward sustainable futures ((Galla, 2016).

This duality necessitates careful examination of how social media platforms can be strategically leveraged without compromising the cultural integrity and community bonds that traditional programs have successfully fostered.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Traditional Language Maintenance Approaches

Traditional language maintenance programs have historically relied on face-to-face interactions that emphasize community bonds, cultural immersion, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Current grant programs demonstrate this approach, with projects like the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation implementing community-based initiatives that establish language resource centers for users of all ages to access materials for self-directed or group learning (Minhas & Salawu, 2025). The Sustainable Use Model emphasizes working toward ongoing maintenance of language at sustainable levels, including not only active literacy but also levels of orality and identity (Lewis, & Simons, 2017).

Research consistently demonstrates the effectiveness of traditional approaches in creating deep, meaningful language connections. Language revitalization and preservation efforts highlight the importance of Native languages in preserving and strengthening Indigenous culture, identity, and social unity, with language serving as a critical expression of sovereignty Community-run immersion schools for local languages have made significant inroads in strengthening Hawaiian and other local languages, as have local language radio programs in Central American communities (Stern, 2018). These traditional methods excel at providing cultural context, ensuring authentic transmission, and building strong community networks that support long-term language sustainability.

### Digital Platform Affordances for Language Learning

The technological affordances of social media platforms have created new possibilities for language maintenance that traditional methods alone cannot achieve. Research on Instagram and TikTok demonstrates that these platforms offer unique technological features for informal language learning, with TikTok providing affordances that allow learners to record their voice and synchronize with selected video content to concentrate on different dimensions of speaking skills (Lee, 2023). Studies indicate that students using social media for language learning reported higher levels of engagement and demonstrated significant improvement in language proficiency compared to those using traditional methods (Lee, 2023).

The accessibility and reach of digital platforms represent advantages for geographically dispersed communities. Apps and social media remove one of the main barriers for many aspiring speakers: proximity, as it's difficult to learn your language if you don't live on your homeland (Cyca, 2024). Research reveals that students preferred authenticity-centered videos most, with 128 participants (68.45%) preferring authenticity-centered videos compared to research-centered or exam-centered alternatives (Education and Information Technologies, 2024). This preference suggests that digital platforms can effectively deliver culturally relevant content when designed appropriately.

### Comparative Effectiveness Studies

Emerging research provides insights into the relative effectiveness of digital versus traditional approaches. Comparative studies in developing countries show that digital learning offers flexibility and broad access to resources, allowing students to learn at their own pace and cultivate technological skills (Indonesian Journal of Education, 2025). However, constraints such as limited technological infrastructure and lack of training for teachers often act as barriers, while traditional learning remains the top choice as face-to-face interaction supports stronger emotional connections (Purike, & Aslan, 2025).

Research on TikTok's impact on English language learning found that most of the content complies with A1-A2 proficiency levels, particularly demonstrating clear mastery of phonological elements and basic vocabulary, though interactive and mediational components remain underdeveloped ( Patty, & Noija, 2023). Qualitative studies exploring TikTok's impact on EFL pronunciation revealed the platform's effectiveness in providing engaging and informal learning environments, though specific impacts on pronunciation improvement remain underexplored.

## METHODOLOGY

This article employs a comprehensive literature review methodology, examining peer-reviewed research published between 2016 and 2025 to analyze the comparative effectiveness of social media versus traditional approaches in language maintenance programs. The review encompasses multiple databases including academic journals, government reports, and institutional publications focusing on indigenous language revitalization, digital language learning, and comparative educational effectiveness studies.

The analysis framework considers three primary dimensions: accessibility and reach, pedagogical effectiveness, and cultural authenticity. Data sources include empirical studies from diverse geographical contexts, ranging from North American indigenous language programs to international digital learning initiatives. Special attention was

given to recent developments in artificial intelligence and social media platforms that have emerged as significant factors in contemporary language maintenance efforts.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Accessibility and Reach: Digital Advantages

Social media platforms demonstrate clear advantages in terms of accessibility and global reach. Digital technologies have significantly bridged physical and psychological gaps in the digital era, emerging as powerful tools for contributing to the preservation of indigenous languages and countering the loss of languages worldwide (Ajani et al., 2024). Successful examples include grandmother Julia Ouellette, who posts Cree-language videos regularly on TikTok, where she has more than 16,800 followers, offering viewers Cree words or phrases to practice aloud (Cyca, 2024).

The scale of digital engagement presents unprecedented opportunities for language exposure. Research shows that nine-in-ten teens report using YouTube, with roughly six-in-ten teens using TikTok and Instagram (Bhat, 2024). Strategic campaigns can achieve remarkable reach, such as Kimeltuwe in Chile, which started in 2015 and amassed over 216,000 followers on Facebook through initiatives like the "Mapuche interpretation of commonly used emoticons" (Ajani et al., 2024).

This reach potential allows endangered languages to connect with diaspora communities and interested learners worldwide, expanding beyond geographical limitations that constrain traditional programs.

### Pedagogical Effectiveness: Mixed Results

The pedagogical effectiveness of social media platforms reveals complex patterns when compared to traditional approaches. Qualitative research examining how secondary school TESOL teachers in Thailand use TikTok found that the platform helps teachers manage work-related stress and allows them to present authentic selves, facilitating deeper connections with students (Lemana et al.,2024). Studies on digital tools in language learning show that experimental groups using platforms like Quizlet and Busuu demonstrated better performance on working memory tasks than control groups, with overall average scores on Sustained Attention tests reaching 23.3 compared to 22.5 for traditional methods.

However, effectiveness varies significantly by implementation quality and cultural context. Research indicates that while TikTok has potential to serve as an additional learning tool, increasing engagement and language acquisition, a structured pedagogical strategy is necessary to maximize benefits and address existing challenges. Despite technological advances, over 30 percent of college students agreed that online programs have improved geographic convenience and flexibility, but a similar share said that fully online programs have worsened the quality of instruction and students' communication and collaboration skills (Statista, 2024).

### Cultural Authenticity and Community Connection

Traditional face-to-face programs maintain significant advantages in preserving cultural authenticity and building community connections. Successful traditional programs like the Oceti Sakowin Community Academy create intergenerational support systems that effectively bolster Lakota language proficiency, ensuring preservation and transmission within the community. Research emphasizes that succeeding in language revitalization means influencing daily life at the household level, recognizing that for local languages to thrive, people need to use them consistently in everyday life (Stern, 2018).

Digital platforms face challenges in replicating the depth of cultural transmission achieved through traditional methods. Indigenous social media use has become more influential during Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 eras, with platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube assisting in sharing community and cultural knowledge, events, memes and snippets of language. However, challenges include technical barriers, cultural and social barriers, and financial and resource constraints that affect the full realization of digital potential (Galla, 2016).

### Integration Models: Hybrid Approaches

Emerging evidence suggests that the most effective language maintenance programs integrate digital and traditional approaches rather than relying exclusively on either method. Contemporary research on digital language learning emphasizes the importance of plurilingual pedagogy that promotes learners' plurilingual and pluricultural repertoires through multimodal hybrid languaging practices (El-Henawy & Suárez, 2023). Studies on language awareness in the global age demonstrate that collaborative online learning and engagement of digital tools can complement traditional pedagogies when properly integrated (Weinmann et al., 2024).

Successful integration models leverage the strengths of both approaches while mitigating their respective weaknesses. Programs like FirstVoices, an online Indigenous-language platform, offer stories, songs, and word games along with apps that allow users to text, email, and use social media in indigenous alphabets, effectively bridging digital engagement with cultural content (Cyca, 2024). The San Carlos Apache Tribe's approach combines teacher apprentice programs with digital repository development, ensuring that language teachers have better understanding of how to effectively utilize language materials while community members can build vocabulary and exposure.

### Challenges and Limitations
### Technological and Infrastructure Barriers

Digital language maintenance programs face significant technological challenges that can limit their effectiveness, particularly in underserved communities. Implementing machine learning algorithms on social media platforms can be costly as it involves storage of large amounts of data, model development, continuous system updates, and maintenance costs (Akter et al., 2025). Limited technological infrastructure and lack of training for teachers often act as barriers to effective digital implementation.

The digital divide represents a persistent challenge for equitable access to language maintenance resources. Nearly half of the world's writings remain absent from digital platforms, including not only ancient scripts but also a large number of minority or Indigenous writings still in use today that are neglected by the digital industry (Ajani et al., 2024 Technical barriers combine with cultural and social barriers and financial and resource constraints to limit the full potential of digital language revitalization efforts.

## Quality Control and Standardization Issues

Digital platforms present challenges in maintaining quality control and linguistic accuracy that traditional programs can more easily address. Research indicates that 62 percent of consumers are less likely to engage with or trust AI-generated content, a sentiment that's particularly pronounced among older generations (Coursera, 2025). Studies show that 43 percent of college students believe that the quality of online instruction was worse than that of in-person instruction (Statista, 2024).

The decentralized nature of social media content creation can lead to inconsistencies in language use and cultural representation. While TikTok content shows clear mastery of phonological elements and basic vocabulary, interactive and mediational components remain underdeveloped and could be improved through features such as duet videos, live sessions, and audience engagement in comments ((Patty, 2023).) The challenge of ensuring cultural authenticity while leveraging technological innovation requires careful balance between community control and technological capabilities.

## Implications for Practice
### Program Design Recommendations

Effective language maintenance programs should adopt hybrid approaches that strategically combine digital and traditional methods based on specific community needs and resources. Language technologies are pivotal in harnessing the power of multilingualism, from simple tools facilitating cross-linguistic communication to complex systems that enable access to information in native languages while fostering cross-cultural understanding (Karajeanes et al., 2025). Digital media technology enables meticulous documentation, comprehensive archiving, and seamless digitization of indigenous languages, extending their accessibility to broader and more diverse audiences .

Program designers should prioritize community involvement and cultural authenticity while leveraging digital affordances for reach and engagement. Research demonstrates that demographic details show most moderators and admins were male for both Setswana and Punjabi languages, while users who engaged were mostly from relevant geographical regions, indicating the importance of community-driven content creation.The wiki proves to be a powerful tool, but only because of active motivation and curation by diverse groups of local experts, community leaders, and social media enthusiasts (DEGBORO & OLATUNJI, 2022).

### Technology Integration Strategies

Successful technology integration requires careful consideration of platform selection, content development, and community engagement strategies. Research shows that vast majorities of participants support using Instagram and TikTok as video teaching tools in EFL classes because they boost students' motivation and interest in learning, add to lesson plans, and broaden language proficiency (Meirbekov et al., 2024). Digital practices should focus on developing L2 vocabulary, enhancing oral performance features, promoting learner engagement and motivation, and providing effective feedback mechanisms.

Technology integration should emphasize gradual implementation with strong pedagogical support. Studies show that digital tools optimizing memory and attention for college students can be effective when properly implemented, with experimental groups showing better performance on working memory tasks. Research on emergency remote language teaching and learning during COVID-19 demonstrates that planning and implementing online language-learning curricula requires different knowledge, resources, and time frames from traditional face-to-face approaches (Weinmann et al., 2024).

## Future Directions
### Emerging Technologies and AI Integration

The future of language maintenance programs will likely be shaped by emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence and machine learning applications. HubSpot reports that 72 percent of marketers agree that AI tools help personalize customer experience, and 58 percent plan to increase investments in AI and automation (Coursera, 2025). AI systems will inevitably improve through larger datasets and integrated multimedia, though those measures will not substitute for the human experience of negotiating common ground linguistically and culturally in social interactions (Pack & Maloney, 2023).

Future developments should focus on creating AI-assisted tools that enhance rather than replace human-centered language transmission. AI holds substantial potential to support preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages through tailored learning tools, enhanced accessibility, and community engagement, but realizing this

potential requires addressing challenges through collaborative efforts, ethical considerations, and sustained investment ((Galla, 2016). UNESCO's efforts in advancing language technologies align with its mandate to preserve endangered languages and promote linguistic diversity within the framework of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

**Research and Evaluation Needs**

Continued research is essential to optimize the integration of digital and traditional approaches in language maintenance programs. More research is needed to identify best practices in integrating platforms like TikTok into formal education while maintaining cultural authenticity and pedagogical effectiveness (Patty, 2023). The specific impact of social media platforms on language learning outcomes remains underexplored, requiring comprehensive studies that examine both quantitative and qualitative measures of success (Journal of Studies in Language Learning and Teaching, 2024).

Future research should emphasize longitudinal studies that track the long-term effectiveness of hybrid approaches across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. Opportunities for AI in language revitalization are identified in collaboration and partnership, innovation and adaptation, and technological advancements, requiring sustained research investment (Galla, 2016). The Missing Scripts project demonstrates the need for global collaboration to ensure indigenous writings and languages exist in the digital sphere, requiring ongoing research and development efforts .

## CONCLUSION

This examination of social media's effectiveness in language maintenance programs reveals a complex landscape where digital and traditional approaches each offer distinct advantages and face unique challenges. While social media platforms provide unprecedented opportunities for reach, accessibility, and engagement, they cannot fully replicate the cultural depth and community bonds fostered through face-to-face interactions. The most promising direction for language maintenance efforts lies not in choosing between digital and traditional approaches, but in developing sophisticated integration models that leverage the strengths of both methodologies.

The evidence suggests that social media platforms excel at expanding access to language resources, engaging younger demographics, and creating global connections among linguistic communities. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook have demonstrated ability to generate significant engagement and reach audiences that traditional programs might struggle to access. However, concerns about quality control, cultural authenticity, and the depth of linguistic transmission remain valid considerations that must be addressed through careful program design and community involvement.

Traditional face-to-face programs continue to demonstrate superior outcomes in areas of cultural transmission, community building, and deep linguistic competency development. The intergenerational knowledge transfer that occurs in traditional settings provides cultural context and authentic language use patterns that digital platforms struggle to replicate. Yet these traditional approaches often face limitations in terms of geographical reach, resource requirements, and appeal to digitally native younger generations.

The future of effective language maintenance programs appears to lie in thoughtful hybrid models that strategically combine digital and traditional elements based on specific community needs, available resources, and cultural priorities. Such approaches require sustained research, community involvement, and careful attention to maintaining cultural authenticity while embracing technological innovation. As the digital landscape continues to evolve with advances in artificial intelligence and emerging social media platforms, language maintenance programs must remain adaptive while preserving the fundamental human connections that make language meaningful within cultural communities.

Success in this endeavor demands recognition that language maintenance is fundamentally about community, identity, and cultural continuity—values that transcend any particular technological platform or traditional methodology. The challenge and opportunity before language maintenance practitioners is to create programs that honor these fundamental values while strategically leveraging all available tools, whether digital or traditional, to ensure the vitality and continuation of the world's linguistic diversity for future generations.

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