

From Analogue to Digital: Using Digital Technology to Preserve and Promote Efik Language, Culture and History in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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**Abstract**

This research explores how digital technology is being used to preserve and promote the language, culture, and history of the Efik people. The study maintains that digital tools play a significant role in this transition. Using qualitative research methods this paper recommends the creation of digital resources such as digital archives and libraries, online platforms, mobile applications, and language learning applications to support the preservation of the Efik language, culture, and history. By contributing to the growing knowledge of digital resources for historical scholarship, this research highlights the potential of digital technology in safeguarding the cultural heritage of the Efik people for future generations. However, rather than discarding the analogue method of preserving and promoting Efik history in its entirety, the paper concludes by recommending that Digital Technology should be used in conjunction with traditional methods to ensure a holistic and comprehensive approach to cultural preservation.

**Keywords:** Digital, Technology, Promote, Preserve, Efik.

**Introduction**

The Efik people occupy the Southern part of Nigeria, specifically parts of the Southern Senatorial District of Cross River state. They are mostly found in Calabar, the state capital, which is divided into Calabar South and Calabar Municipality; Akpabuyo, Odukpani, and Bakassi Local Government Areas. Being in the coastal region, they occupied an enviable position between the hinterland groups and the Europeans who came to trade in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, thus participating in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Many of these Europeans who later arrived through this route as missionaries, traders, colonial administrators, and explorers lived among the Efik and recorded firsthand accounts of their experiences. Accordingly, the Efik language, culture and history have received wide documentation from these European visitors and later indigenous writers. Some of these early European writers and even later ones concerned themselves with various aspects of the Efik, society. Hope Masterton Waddell<sup>1</sup>, P.A. Talbot<sup>2</sup>, A.J.H. Latham<sup>3</sup>, M.D.W. Jeffreys<sup>4</sup>, Donald Mcfarlan<sup>5</sup>, Daryll Forde<sup>6</sup>, K.K. Nair<sup>7</sup> all documented the socio-economic activities and political life of the Efik people. Hugh Goldie<sup>8</sup>, W.P Livingstone<sup>9</sup>, and D.M. Mcfarlan<sup>10</sup> were more interested in missionary enterprise and evangelisation in Efik land. Hence, their works tended to be largely about the spread of Christianity to Efik communities and the abolition of traditional practices. In later years, Rosalind Hackett<sup>11</sup> continued this trend and in 1989 investigated religion in Calabar with emphasis on the new religious movements. Meanwhile, Hugh Goldie<sup>12</sup> showed a tremendous passion for the Efik language and later published an Efik Dictionary with the assistance of Efik personalities like Eyo Honesty 11 (Eyo Eyo Nsa) and Egbo Jack (Ekpo Ene). Another European scholar that became interested in the Efik language

and published Efik Dictionaries was R.F.G. Adams<sup>13</sup>. Because of the absence of the Internet at this time, these works were only published in hard copies.

### **The 20th Century and Early 21st Century**

Many indigenous scholars began documenting the Efik language, culture, and History in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Unrelenting and tireless, renowned Efik author and historian, Efiog Ukpog Aye published numerous books showcasing several aspects of Efik history, tradition, daily life, and religious, economic, and political events. He also wrote about some Efik personalities, Efik-owned plantations in Akpabuyo, as well as the interaction between the Efik and the European supercargoes. Because all of Aye's books were hard copies and not transferred to digital format, they remain hidden on a few library shelves. Some of his books (about Efik studies) include *Old Calabar Through the Centuries (1967)*<sup>14</sup> and *Akpabuyo in Transition (1994)*<sup>15</sup>. Aye's attempt at preserving the Efik Language led him to publish *A Learner's Dictionary of the Efik Language (1991)*<sup>16</sup> and later at the commencement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, he released *The Efik People (2000)*<sup>17</sup>; *Bakassi in International Politics (2003)*<sup>18</sup>, *Modern Efik Orthography (2004)*<sup>19</sup> and *King Eyo Honesty 11 (2009)*<sup>20</sup>. Aye died at the age of 92 leaving behind the unpublished manuscript of Volume 11 of *A Learner's Dictionary of the Efik People (English-Efik)*.

As a tribute to his hard work and contribution to his society, this author published his biography in 2011<sup>21</sup>, a year before he died. Eyo Okon Akak, another prominent Efik scholar documented Efik traditions, Culture and Superstition in two volumes titled, *Efiks of Calabar, Vol.1 (1981)*<sup>22</sup> and *Efiks of Calabar: Cultures and Superstition Vol 11(1982)*<sup>23</sup>; Ekei Essien Oku, an Efik princess and author was more interested in Efik kingship and released *The Kings and Chiefs of Old Calabar(1989)*<sup>24</sup>. Ita Ekanem Ita, another scholar of Efik descent and former Registrar of the prestigious University of Ibadan published a study on the *Writings of Calabar Administration (1972)*<sup>25</sup>, amongst others. Although these were not the only writers of Efik history, it reveals that a lot of literature existed on the culture, language, and history of the Efik people. Having had access to early missionary education, the Efik language, culture and history were also preserved in manuscripts and diaries by several families which were handed down from one generation to another. Some of these works were in English and others in the Efik language. Many families are wary of parting with their "ancestral" records for research or even finding a way of preserving them digitally for posterity, hence, these ancestral documents, are fragile and endangered.

Efik history is also preserved in the various public institutions within Calabar and its environs. Institutions like The Old Residency Museum, The Slave History Museum and The National Archives, Calabar contain numerous amounts of information on the Efik activities through the centuries.

The Old Residency Museum custody several artefacts of Efik heritage such as currencies, ammunition, cooking utensils, transport items, pictures of prominent Efik kings and chiefs, pictures of Efik families, the fattening room ceremony associated with the Efik people, the Ekpe masquerade- a symbol of pre-colonial Efik government, fishing tools, early architecture and so many other artefacts depicting the palm oil trade, the socio-economic activities of the Efik people as well as societies that occupy the lower Cross River basin. The museum consists of a library section which was restocked in 2022 through partnership and support from the United States Consulate, Lagos, and the American Corner, Calabar. Situated in Marina Beach, the Slave History Museum is built on the premises of a warehouse where slave trading occurred during the 15th century. The museum derives its name from the events that took place in Old Calabar, which served as a major point of departure for a significant number of African slaves during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It houses several artefacts depicting the era of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade where the Efik people participated as slave merchants in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18th centuries, acquiring slaves from the hinterland and selling them to the Europeans. The museum houses items associated with the slave trade

such as slave canoes, ships, Dane guns, brass bells, gongs, chains, shackles, pictures of slave traders, and manikins of slaves paired together- all to recreate how the slave trade era looked like. Also exhibited are currencies used for the trade such as copper bars and manillas.

The National Archives, Calabar also have files dedicated to records of the colonial and post-colonial eras that involved the Efik people, the administration of the colonial government and how they governed the area as well as several other information on socio-economic events, politics, health, legal documents, administration, religion, forestry, and inter-group relations between the Efik and other ethnic groups that reside in the city. These files are domiciled under the Calabar District record groupings (CADIST) and contain numerous information on activities that occurred in Calabar; Intelligence Reports on several Efik communities; Gazettes, and Personal files of some Efik personalities that lived in the past. The various ministries and parastatals in Calabar host a series of documents about the Efik society. As a coordinator of the 2004 Clan Verification exercise (representing Southern Senatorial District) during the Donald Duke-led administration, this writer obtained first-hand accounts, numerous documents, and maps of the various Efik clans and families which were submitted to the government. As of then, these documents were stored in the Ministry of Information. Unfortunately, poor documentation in ministries may mar their physical existence. The University of Calabar library is also a reservoir of books and projects from several departments (especially in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences) on Efik language, culture, and history.

### **The Challenges of the Analogue Method**

One characteristic of works on Efik language, culture, and history before the last decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is that much of these works are still in their physical state, clearly in analogue forms. Due to the dominance of the printing press as the primary means of publishing books, hardcopy books were the only available format. Furthermore, few copies were published because of the high cost of publishing<sup>26</sup>. The use of the institutional press by indigenous writers was rampant, e.g., the Hope Waddell Press, a long-standing press of the Hope Waddell Training Institution, the University of Calabar Press, was relied upon by authors seeking to publish their works. That notwithstanding, private publishing houses were also patronised by indigenous authors. These included Wusen Press, PAICO Press, Evans Brothers and Glad Tidings Press, to mention a few. Some of these publishing houses are still in existence while others have since ceased to exist because of a lack of patronage and dwindling fortunes.

Regrettably, the publication of books appeared to be a slow process due to the manual execution of numerous necessary procedures. Access to these books too was limited to a few libraries. Consequently, many of the books on the Efik language, culture and history were endangered and limited to a few renowned institutional libraries around the world. Even when available, they look old and fragile and must be handled with care. To add to these already bad situations, the many institutions in Calabar housing works and artefacts on Efik are far from being digitized. This has made information in those institutions limited to the locality and tourists that travel down to Calabar. Nevertheless, books on Efik still found their way into British and American libraries and institutions because the early European authors of these books published their works in Britain. The popular institutional presses were the Oxford and Cambridge University Press. On the other hand, private European publishing houses were also patronised by European writers. These included Frank Cass & Co, Thomas Nelson, and Longman. The last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, specifically in the mid-1990s, witnessed a revolution in tech space, especially with the arrival of the internet which facilitated the digital storage and transmission of information more quickly. It was this innovation that up-scaled the promotion and preservation of the Efik language, culture, and history.

## The 21st Century

At the beginning of the 21st century, the publishing industry witnessed a wave of innovative advancements, among which was the emergence of e-books. With the advent of digital technology, it became possible to create, distribute, and read books electronically, which opened new possibilities for publishing. Additionally, the internet and digital technology facilitated self-publishing without the need for authors to use traditional publishing houses. This gave rise to a new generation of authors and small publishing houses, who were able to reach audiences through online platforms like Amazon and Google Books. Another significant development was the emergence of print-on-demand technology, which made it possible to print books as and when they were ordered, rather than having to print large volumes in advance. This reduced the financial risk of publishing and made it easier for small publishers and self-publishing authors to get their books into print. The rise of social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook now Meta, and Instagram also had an impact on publishing, as authors and publishers could use these platforms to connect with readers and promote their work. Furthermore, the emergence of digital marketing techniques, including search engine optimization (SEO) and email marketing, also changed the way publishers marketed their books, allowing them to target specific audiences more effectively<sup>27</sup>. These developments in publishing have led to a more diverse and dynamic publishing landscape, with new opportunities for authors, publishers, and readers alike. Books became more easily readable and assessable online and the development of software that would aid in storing, retrieving, disseminating, and preserving information for posterity became prevalent. That said, these new developments affected the preservation and promotion of the Efik language, culture, and history positively.

### Preserving and Promoting Efik Language, Culture and History with Digital Technology

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed greater development in promoting and preserving Efik literature in digitized formats. The use of digital technology such as computers, smartphones, tablets, digital cameras, and software, to create, process, store and disseminate information has revolutionized the manner research is carried out and has enabled new forms of creativity, innovation, and collaboration. Consequently, various online archives, libraries, websites, and various software applications dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the Efik heritage for posterity are available and assessable to a larger audience. While some of these digital resources were created deliberately to promote it, others inadvertently included the past events that occurred in Efik land. Some of these resources include;

**Wikipedia:** Wikipedia is an invaluable online resource across many disciplines. This platform is freely accessible to users and promotes open-source sharing of knowledge. Wikipedia entries are typically authored by a community of volunteers and are subjected to rigorous scrutiny before approval<sup>28</sup>, thus ensuring their reliability. Moreover, volunteers can continually update these entries, further reinforcing the dynamism and accuracy of this valuable knowledge resource. The year 2020 witnessed a remarkable upturn in the representation of Efik culture and history on Wikipedia. Before this, Wikipedia pages dedicated to the Efik people, their language, and their customs were meagre and lacked comprehensive documentation. Philip Akoda, author of several Efik books like *Learn Efik 1* (2021)<sup>29</sup>, *Learn Efik 2* (2021)<sup>30</sup>, *A 21st Century Efik Pocket Dictionary* (2022)<sup>31</sup> and *Groundwork of Eniong Abatim History, 1670-2020* (co-authored, 2021)<sup>32</sup> contributed numerous Wikipedia pages on the Efik history, language, culture, and personalities.

Akoda's contribution included the creation of an array of Wikipedia pages on Efik's history, language, culture, and prominent personalities. His contribution comprised not only the updating of pre-existing pages but also the introduction of new pages dedicated to previously overlooked aspects of Efik culture. These included Efik Literature, Efik Religion, Efik Calendar, Efik Names, List of Efik Deities, and more. Furthermore, his pages featured the lives of prominent Efik personalities such as Eyamba V, Bassef Eyo Ephraim Adam 111,

Archibong 1, Eyo Ephraim Adam, Adam Ephraim Adam 1, and Essien Etim Offiong 111. Philip Akoda's dedication to the documentation of Efik culture has left an indelible mark on the online resources available to the Efik people. These resources, rich in references, now serve as valuable tools for scholars, researchers, and enthusiasts alike.

### **The Official Website of the Efik People: [efikeburutu.org](http://efikeburutu.org)**

Efikeburutu.org, managed by the Palace of the Obong of Calabar, is the official website of the Efik people, serving as a vast repository of information about their history and culture. Among the topics covered on the website are Efik naming systems, origin, migration, and settlements, as well as Ekpe Efik Iboku and Ndem Efik (Efik Deities), which plays a role in the coronation of an Efik king. The website also includes information about the deities of various Efik clans, the Efik language, and a list of past Efik Kings and their reigns dating back to the 13th century.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the site features Efik historical landmarks, traditional dishes, and photographs from the Obong's coronation and annual festivals (Utomobong). This comprehensive online resource is a recommended reference for researchers interested in exploring the history and culture of the Efik people.

### **Efik History Project**

The Efik History Project (EHP) is a Facebook group formed in December 2015 to promote public discussion of Efik history online from various perspectives, especially from Efik indigenes; embarking on an initiative to update platforms such as Wikipedia with accurate information about the Efik; and encouraging an empirical approach to understand and analyse Efik history by trying to elevate the discourse for academic research, among others.<sup>34</sup> The EHP which was created by the trio of Richard Duke, Asandia Hogan and Reginald Yves Basseyy has a membership strength of about 23,000 people many of whom are very knowledgeable individuals and resource contributors to Efik's history.<sup>35</sup> The group is a repository of information about Efik history, Efik family origins, Efik Migration discussions, Obongship disputes, Ekpe governance issues, Efik Naming Structure, Efik poetry, Efik proverbs, and published Efik academic papers.<sup>36</sup> Members of the EHP have been invited to speak at the U.K. House of Parliament during their Black History Month celebrations to present papers on Efik History; they included Richard Duke in 2016, Philip Akoda in 2017 and Eyo Ekpo in 2018.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, social media platforms have the potential to provide valuable data for academic research. However, researchers must take necessary measures to ensure the reliability and validity of the data obtained from them due to the potential diversity of perspectives and interpretations from different sources. There is no doubt that the Efik History Project is a vital resource that has significantly contributed to the dissemination of content on Efik history, language, and culture online, as well as promoting the same.

### **Language Learning Applications**

The year 2017 witnessed the introduction of Efik language learning apps on both the Google play store and the Apps Store. This innovation boosted the online resources on Efik studies. The first Efik language learning app was published on the Android platform by Philip Akoda in February 2017.<sup>38</sup> "Learn Efik", as the app was called, was built to assist researchers in learning new words and phrases, understanding grammar rules, and improving their pronunciation. This app was also created to aid communication with locals and access information that may not be available in English. It made provision for audio. In July 2017, Desprings company released another Efik language learning app on the Play Store. Also called "Learn Efik", this app consists of words, phrases, and a list of some Efik music, songs, and dishes. In January 2020, Taiwo Adesina, a freelance graphics and web designer launched a "Learn Efik Language" app on the Google play store. The app was a simple language-learning app that included audio. However, of all the three language learning apps available on the Play Store, only Desprings, Learn Efik app can still be found. The monthly or annual maintenance of apps without external support is a major encumbrance of their sustainability.<sup>39</sup> Despite this, language learning apps can be an invaluable tool for researchers,

providing them with improved language skills, access to translations and definitions, and a deeper understanding of the culture and language they are studying. In effect, the above Efik language learning apps have attempted to fill a gap in promoting the Efik language, culture, and history.

### **Efik Dictionary App**

Another online resource that has aided in the preservation and promotion of the Efik language, culture and history is the Tete Efik Dictionary App which was built in April 2022 by Philip Akoda.<sup>40</sup> The first and only dictionary app for the Efik people, it is so far, the most comprehensive African language dictionary app on Google Play store and the App Store. The App which has Efik-English and English- Efik words arranged alphabetically has over 14,000 words and meaning in its database. The major highlights of this app include the origin, history, and etymology of Efik words, sentence examples, synonyms and antonyms of Efik words, phonemic transcription, and audio by indigenous speakers. In essence, Akoda describes the Efik Dictionary App as “not just an app but a digital institution that provides linguistic, historical, cultural and anthropological information”<sup>41</sup> Basically, this dictionary app provides researchers with quick and easy access to translations and definitions of unfamiliar words and phrases as well as gain an in-depth understanding of the Efik language, history, and culture. This can be particularly useful when reading academic papers, conducting interviews, or analysing data in the Efik language. With the aid of this app, researchers can also minimise time spent on their work.

### **The British Newspaper Archive**

The British Newspaper Archives makes several references, directly and indirectly to the Efik. Its collection of newspapers is one of the largest in the world, encompassing publications dating back to 1600 and extending up to the present day.<sup>42</sup> Among the wide range of content available are news stories covering politics, war, and the economy, as well as government data, narratives, humour, cartoons, opinions, historical maps, photographs, and fashion trends. Apart from providing information about the United Kingdom, the BNA holds an extensive range of historical resources that are associated with British colonies, such as Nigeria. The BNA archives contain news coverage of political, economic, and societal developments that took place in the region. Given that the British government played a significant role in Nigerian affairs during the colonial era and that the Colonial Office was accountable for managing British policy in the area, the BNA also has news reports and other documents, including correspondence and reports, that offer insights into how the colonies were administered.

Accordingly, various details regarding Efik and Old Calabar are digitally preserved in these newspapers. The Morning Journal's article "Slavery in Old Calabar" of May 18, 1864, sheds light on how slaves were perceived and treated. Additionally, the Belfast Newsletter's publication of May 31, 1890, covers The Ndem Eno War, a battle fought between the Efik and their Eniong relatives. Sir Harry Johnstone's adventures among the Efik of Old Calabar and lower Cross River communities were also published in The Buchan Observer on December 18, 1900. The BNA contains Colonial Reports on Old Calabar and information on the English Crown's presentation to King Archibong I. These sources which are all available in the BNA can significantly aid researchers in studying Efik history, culture, and language.

### **Digital Libraries**

#### **HathiTrust**

HathiTrust is a digital library that was founded in 2008 through a partnership between various American universities.<sup>43</sup> Its primary goal was to create a shared digital library comprising books, journals, and other materials. Presently, the collection has grown to include more than 17 million digitized volumes that consist of both public domain and copyrighted works.<sup>44</sup> HathiTrust allows its member institutions and individuals with print disabilities to access this vast digital collection. Users can search and access HathiTrust's

collection online, and in many cases, download full-text copies of works in the public domain. Its collections are vast and consist of digital copies of Efik history and Old Calabar books that were written by missionaries who lived and worked in Calabar. Some of these include Calabar and Its Mission by Hugh Goldie (1890); William and Louisa Anderson: A Record of their Life and Work in Jamaica and Old Calabar [compiled] by William Marwick (1897) and Twenty-nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa: A review of Missionary Work and Adventure (1829-1858) by the Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell (1863), to mention a few.

**JSTOR:** This online library offers an extensive collection of academic journals to support scholars, researchers, and students in their research projects by providing access to credible sources. The platform provides access to a comprehensive database of articles and documents from diverse fields such as history, sociology, economics, political science, literature, and many more. JSTOR is widely subscribed to by universities and academic institutions globally, making this vast digital library accessible to everyone.

**Google Books:** In 2004, Google launched Google Books (as Google Print),<sup>45</sup> which is a digital library aimed at digitizing books and making their content easily searchable and accessible to the public. Google Books functions by scanning books from a variety of libraries worldwide, converting them into digital format, and storing them in their database. Users can look up books using keywords, titles, or authors and preview or read portions of the books online. Some books that are in the public domain are available for complete download, while others can be purchased or borrowed through partner libraries. Additionally, Google Books provides other features such as book reviews, ratings, and suggestions, in addition to its primary digital library function.

#### **Other Digital Libraries and Platforms**

**Project Gutenberg, World Digital Library and Universal Digital Library** are three significant digital libraries offering free digital content access. Project Gutenberg specializes in providing public domain books, while the World Digital Library gives users access to primary source documents from various parts of the world. On the other hand, Universal Digital Library aims to create a vast digital library consisting of all published works. Their diverse collections and distinct features make these digital libraries essential resources for anyone seeking free digital content on various subjects.

**Academia.edu:** serves as a social platform where scholars, researchers, and academics can develop their profiles, share their academic articles, and establish connections with other academics within their areas of expertise. Additionally, it offers analytics and metrics to help them evaluate the influence of their research work, including the number of views and downloads their papers have gained. This platform hosts numerous articles that cut across various disciplines and societies including articles related to the Efik society.

#### **Search Engines**

Google is the most widely used search engine globally, which provides a broad range of search services such as web, image, video, and news. Microsoft's Bing is another search engine that offers web page, image, video, and map search results. Yahoo, on the other hand, is also a well-known search engine that offers a range of search services, including web pages, images, videos, and news searches. All these search engines, on enquiry, can lead a researcher to websites, pdf readers, software and other digital resources that store information on Efik's past.

#### **Conclusion**

Digital technology has proven to be a vital tool in the preservation and promotion of the Efik language, culture, and history. The use of digital resources such as mobile applications, online platforms, digital archives and libraries, and language learning applications has helped in transitioning towards digital preservation. These resources have facilitated easier access to cultural artefacts and resources, thereby promoting the Efik

language and culture to a wider audience. Given the significant impact of digital technology on the preservation and promotion of the Efik language and culture, it is recommended that the Efik people continue to leverage these resources to safeguard their cultural heritage. By embracing digital technology, the Efik people can ensure that their language, culture, and history are preserved and promoted for future generations to appreciate and learn from.

Ultimately, the adoption of digital technology is crucial for the continued preservation and promotion of the Efik language and culture, as well as the sustenance of their unique identity. Yet it is crucial to state that while digital technology has provided new avenues for preserving and promoting the Efik cultural heritage, the analogue methods of preserving Efik history and culture should not altogether be discarded. Traditional methods such as storytelling, cultural ceremonies, and the use of physical artefacts remain an integral part of the Efik people's cultural heritage. Digital Technology should therefore be used in conjunction with traditional methods to ensure a holistic and comprehensive approach to cultural preservation.

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