

The Politics of Practical skills and Igbo cultural Heritage in the 21st Century: A Public Policy Approach

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ABSTRACT

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The study investigates whether the indigenous people of Igbo have been able to retain their practical skills and in the 21st century where globalization has eroded many cultures. The study adopts the survey research design. Data for the study are collected through closed ended questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS package. Chi-square (X²) was used to test the hypothesis. The results of the study reveal that there is strong link between practical skills and the preservation of Igbo cultural heritage. The paper recommends the reintroduction of handwork (practical skills) in schools in Nigeria's South-East zone in order to reawaken people's consciousness.

Keywords: Practical skill, culture, cultural heritage, public policy, socioeconomic development.

INTRODUCTION

The early man was forced to engage in a variety of socioeconomic activities in order to survive. Thus, his inquisitiveness undoubtedly led to the discovery of numerous hypotheses, ideas, orientations, and strategies for dealing with certain challenges in his immediate environment. However, through his continuous participation in a plethora of life-challenging socioeconomic activities, early man acquired skills and adopted practical survival strategies. Those practical skills he learned over time not only influenced his overall behavioral pattern, but also became an integral part of his means of livelihood, social identity, and cultural heritage.

Man has expanded his scope of operation and developed a plethora of skills to influence his dynamic world in the modern era. Thus, in a technologically advanced world, man's survival is heavily reliant on his ability to shape and reshape his immediate environment. This is done not only for his comfort, but also to meet the challenges of globalization and the dynamism of today's world.

As Coker (2012) rightly puts it:

... Technological skills ... Provide man mastery over nature ... the level of technological acquisition via-avis cultural development has tendered to influence the political life of any society. The relevance of the above observation by Coker is that all technological innovation by man in our contemporary society was discovered through practical skills.

As a result, practical skill refers to activities performed by hand or with human intervention, requiring guidance, force, or movement, and requiring equipment, tools, or technology (Berdal & Malone, 2000). As Thokozani (2008) correctly pointed out, the essence of acquiring such skill is (practical skill). Is to allow for the effective management of one's daily affairs as well as the fulfillment of personal and social responsibilities. It also entails acquiring and analyzing knowledge and skills and integrating them in such a way that one can effectively manage one's daily affairs while meeting personal and social responsibilities. Thus, a fully developed practical skill becomes a part of an individual and can be passed down from generation to generation if properly harnessed and preserved.

Furthermore, properly preserved skills undoubtedly become part of a community's cultural heritage, which the people cherish and respect. As a result, culture is defined as the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement as a whole (Ikpe, 2010). According to Inglehart (1988), culture is defined as the totality of people's way of life, which includes a variety of factors.

This includes belief systems, customs, norms, value systems, festivals, mode of dress, food cultivated and eaten by the people, crafts, cultural dances, musical instruments invented and used by the people, costumes worn by the people during festivals and occasions, hair styles, cultural songs, solidarity among the people, market days, cultural groups observed by the people (Amala, Age Grades, Women Association), type of food they cook/eat, means/methods of gathering their people for communal functions/during emergency situation.

Given the intersection of practical skill and cultural heritage in all human societies, this paper attempts a thorough examination of the importance of these indispensable tools to the Igbo Nation. This paper seeks to discover the benefits of practical skills and cultural heritage to the Igbo Nation, particularly now that the global and national economies are experiencing unprecedented crises/recessions. The paper also ascertain to know if "Ndi Igbo" people are still aware of the various practical skills they are known for around the world, as well as their rich cultural heritage that distinguishes them from other ethnic groups in the modern Nigerian state. The ultimate goal is to re-awaken individual and collective consciousness of "Ndi Igbo" on a slew of issues pertaining to practical skills in order to halt cultural erosion in the area, which has gained vexing momentum in the twenty-first century.

PRACTICAL SKILLS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF NDI-IGBO

The Igbo people are naturally gifted with a variety of skills that they have acquired through learning, creativity, innovation, and risk-taking. Such gifts (skills) not only distinguish "Ndi-Igbo" from other ethnic nationalities, but also enable the people to achieve enviable heights in any human endeavor in which they find themselves. People from other parts of the world have adopted these rare achievements among the people as part of the Ndi-Igbo identity over the years. Indeed, a critical examination of Ndi-Igbo activities reveals that the people are passionate and have distinguished themselves in the following practical skills, which must be sustained and improved:

a) Trade and Commerce:

This is one of the Ndi-Igbos oldest economic activities, distinguishing them from many other ethnic groups in Nigeria. As a result, Ndi-Igbo engage in a variety of buying and selling activities all over the world. However, evidence suggests that "Ndi-Igbo" buy and sell food/consumable goods, household items, electronic products, clothing materials, and jewelries, among other things. Furthermore, Ndi-Igbo have sons and daughters who import and export goods, which undoubtedly contribute to Nigeria's GDP. This includes petrochemical products, automobile products, consumable building materials, and a variety of other goods and services.

b) Farming:

This is another important Ndi-Igbo occupation. The people are well-known for their involvement in crop cultivation as well as livestock farming. Ndi-Igbo cultivates crops such as Cassava, yam, cocoa yam, three-leaf yam, melon, okra, pepper, and other fruits and vegetables. Thus, Ndi-Igbo cultivate vegetables such as pumpkin ('Ugu'), Bitter Leaf ('Olubu'), 'Ukazi', 'Uha', and Saint Leaf ('Nchanuanwu'). Similarly, despite the people's neglect and the government's failure to encourage their sustenance, various cash crops thrive in Igbo land. Among them are kola nut ('Oji'), Bethel nut ('Akilu'), staple ('Udara'), coconut ('Akibekee'), orange, plantain, banana, 'Ukwa', wall nut ('Ukpa'), 'Achi', 'Ugiri', mango, and cocoa.

Ndi-Igbo have a comparative advantage in the following farming activities: native cow rearing (Ehi Igbo), poultry, piggery, goat/ sheep rearing, and fish farming. It is not an exaggeration to say that Ndi-Igbo will excel in cattle rearing (the species of cattle native to northern Nigeria) if the governments of the south-east encourage them.

c) **Craftsmanship:**

Igbo land, particularly Aba and Onitsha, has long been regarded as Africa's Japan. This is largely due to the technological prowess of these two Igbo cities. The following crafts are clear reflections of Ndi-Igbo practical skills: shoe and bag making, black smiting, gold smiting, tailoring, bike/bicycle repairing, block molding, carpentry work/wood carving, and arts/ artistic works. It is therefore regrettable that the following profitable crafts have been neglected by Ndi-Igbo as a result of the heinous influence of western culture and exaggerated claims about Christianity and righteousness: house plastering, house tilling, house painting, house roofing, among others.

It is painful to note that youths from Benin Republic, Togo, and other neighboring African countries are now engaged in Igbo land to render the aforementioned services (practical skill) to the people, while the youths roam around major streets in the region sagging their trousers, fixing ear-pieces, and wasting their time romancing social media (Whatsaap, YouTube, Facebook, etc.).

d) **Professional/Formal Skills:**

These are abilities gained through formal education. They include public service as a teacher, lawyer, medical doctor, engineer, civil/public servant, and a variety of other activities. As a result, NdiIgbo have continued to distinguish themselves in all fields of professional endeavor. As a result, they have been able to contribute their fair share to national development.

Cultural heritage, on the other hand, denotes an expression of a community's ways of life that is passed down from generation to generation (Ezemuo, 2016). Cultural heritage, in general, is the legacy of physical science artifacts and intangible characteristics of a group or society that are inherited from previous generations, preserved in the present, and bestowed for the benefit of future generations (Sieff, 2008). This includes, among other things, customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions, norms, values, and belief systems (Verba, 1970).

As a result, the following elements of Igbo cultural heritage have been eroded or distorted by Western civilization or influence:

i. **Igbo Traditional Marriage System:**

Celibacy is frowned upon in Igbo culture and value system (a situation where a man remains single). The primary goal of marriage among Ndi-Igbo is social production. Thus, cultural or traditional marriages in Igbo land must adhere to the people's culture. As a result, the groom must pay the bride price in the presence of his and the bride's family. As a result, family members, villagers, the community, relatives, friends, and well-wishers of both couples must attend the ceremony. Such participation fosters solidarity, family/communal bonding, and so on among the people of Igbo land.

Indeed, traditional marriage (Igbo-style marriage) should take precedence over western-style marriage (Church Marriage). This is due to its involvement of a large segment of the community, as well as the blessings of parents and community members, which it attracts to couples. Traditional marriage among Ndi-Igbo, on the other hand, should serve as a platform to showcase the people's rich cultural heritage, such as the public presentation of Igbo Kola Nuts and Palm Wine/Raffia Wine (Udu aka abuo during the ceremony). It is important to note that the proper wine to be served at Igbo Traditional Marriages should be Palm/Raffia Wine (Udu aka abuo), rather than English wine, as is currently practiced by some Igbo land indigenes who lay claim to their church doctrines.

Unfortunately, such people have utterly failed to reconcile their actions with the biblical account of the type of wine Jesus Christ miraculously obtained from water (Palm wine) during a specific marriage, as recorded in the Holy Bible (traditional marriage). Similarly, traditional marriage Igbo land should continue to attract cultural displays such as Igbo cultural music/dances, shooting of traditional cannon gun, and so on.

This is done not only to inform neighbors/visitors about the significance of this ceremony to the people, but also to promote innovative Ndi-Igbo technology/crafts in contemporary Nigerian society. These cultural displays are not, as some Christendom adherents mistakenly believe, fetishes.

ii. **Celebration of New Born Baby among Ndi-Igbo:**

Ndi-Igbo people are excited about the arrival of a new child into their families, villages, and communities. As a result, the arrival of a new born baby is frequently marked by traditional gun shoots (cannon gun). The customs of the people (particularly in the Ngwa area of Igbo land) require the father of a new born baby to notify his villagers and community of the arrival of his new born baby via cannon gun shoot. The sound of cannon gun shoots (Ntu-na-ala or Nkpo-na-ala) usually draws a large crowd of women who are married according to local customs and traditions. It also draws the family's elders, friends, and well-wishers.

Married women typically display and showcase Igbo cultural dances, as well as the beating of some drums that appear femini in outlook (Udu, Oyo, Igbugbo, Ekpote, etc). This celebration is known as Onunwa in some parts of Igbo land, such as the Ngwa axis. It fosters community unity and love among married women.

It is important to note that the culture and tradition of the people require the father of the new born to appreciate the woman who came to celebrate the arrival of the new born baby in his family with some gifts such as money, cooked food, palm wine, and kola nuts.

Furthermore, the head of the family who has been blessed by God with a new born baby is required by people's custom to notify his in-laws of the birth of the new born baby in his household. As a result, in some parts of Igbo land, the father of the new baby is expected to notify his in-laws with two cannon gun shots upon his arrival at his in-laws' residence and another two gun shots upon his departure.

Surprisingly, the sound of cannon gun shots usually attracts the presence of married women and elders in the area (Amala). As a result, the celebrant pays a critical visit to his father-in-law with a few elders from his community. Similarly, he appreciates his father-in-law and the married women who gathered for the celebration by providing them with some gift items as is customary. These cultural practices in some parts of Igbo land not only foster people unity, but also cement marriage as a respected institution in Igbo land.

iii. Care of the Nursing Mother and Nurturing of the New Born

The Ndigbo culture requires that a nursing mother be properly cared for (Omugwo). In addition, the newly born baby must be nurtured in order to avoid diseases of early childhood. The 'Omugwo' period appears to be the best time for women to marry. This is partly due to the fact that in Igbo culture, husbands are required to provide nursing mothers with good, quality, and nourishing food in their homes at this time. Thus, the nursing mother's husband is obligated by custom to provide food items such as stockfish ('Okporoko'), dried fish ('Azu Okpoo'), and meat ('Anu') for the preparation of hot water soup for the nursing mother.

Other ingredients/spices/vegetables used in the preparation of this special native hot water Soap ('Ofe Omugwo') include 'Mpupuru Uziza,' 'Uziza' Leaf, Saint Leaf (Nchuanwu), 'Uda,' 'Uhokiriho' (used in the preparation of hot water yam), and some traditional herbs/roots. These ingredients act as a 'cleanser,' as well as promoting the health of the nursing mother.

iv. Inculcation of Right Values on the Child

This is one of the issues that parents of Igbo descent face in the twenty-first century. Thus, some parents' responsibilities appear to be limited to feeding their children and caring for their social needs (school, clothes, and purchasing toys). However, some parents have utterly failed to instill in their children the importance of speaking Igbo. Rather, some parents encourage their children to speak English and sometimes punish them for speaking Igbo, which is the child's natural mother tongue. Some parents' application or instillation of western values in their Igbo children has continued to have a negative impact on the development of Igbo language and desired behavior in the children.

Consequently, this pitiful situation piqued the interest of Ezeemo (2016), who stated unequivocally:

.... any race that abandons her language for another language has a major challenge. We must learn to promote our language, use it to instruct our children and to impact any form of technology using the Igbo language like India, China, among others...

In addition, the virtues of hard work, respect for elders, honesty, respect for constituted authorities, abhorrence to taboos (incest sex), humility, patience, respect for culture and tradition of the people, history of the family/village/community, familiarization with family relations, and others are instilled in Igbo children. Most Igbo parents completely disregard this stage of child nurturing/training. As a result, the family as a social system and agent of socialization has failed miserably in Igbo land. This pitiful situation explains why some Igbo youths engage in a variety of deviant behaviors.

v. Cultural Festivals:

This is another critical aspect of the Igbo Nation that is currently facing difficulties. A cultural festival is the celebration of events by the people that often reflect the people's customs and traditions. During such festivals, the Igbos demonstrate their rich cultural heritage. Among the festivals are the New Yam Festival, the Ekpe/Ekpo/Nmawu festivals, the initiation into adulthood (Okonko), and the age grade association. The influence of Western civilization or culture has continued to change most Igbo people's perception of these cultural festivals.

These types of culture festivals, which are an important part of the tourism potentials of some states in Nigeria's western region, are mistakenly regarded as fetish and idol worshipping by some Igbo people. This erroneous perception among the majority of Igbo people is largely the result of ignorance and adherence to certain church doctrines. Unfortunately, these Igbos have been oblivious to the fact that most church practices or doctrinal inclinations are rooted in the cultures of the countries where Christianity originated. As a result, the countries that introduced Christianity to Africans in general, and the Igbo Nation in particular, have not abandoned their culture.

Rather, they have succeeded in not only institutionalizing their culture in Christendom, but also in brainwashing their adherents to disregard their rich cultural heritage.

e) Coronation and conferment of Chieftaincy Titles:

These are important cultural activities in the Igbo Nation. Coronation, on the other hand, is the crowning of the King (Eze) by his people. This occurs after the Eze has been duly selected by his people from among other candidates in the community, presented at the Local Government Council by his/her people, and staff of office has been presented to him by the State Government (approval/recognition). As a result, these processes are expected to be transparent in order for the right candidate to emerge from among all contenders and for the community to achieve peace/development.

Indeed, conferring chieftaincy titles is the sole domain of a coroneted Eze in the community.

The Eze is undoubtedly expected to bestow titles (Chieftaincy, Ozo titles, Nze titles, and so on) on the right people in the community. Regrettably, recent events and experiences in some communities have pointed to incorrect selection and, in some cases, imposition of 'Ezes' on the people by the government. Furthermore, in some communities, the process has resulted in communal clashes, the destruction of lives and property, cultural artifacts, the community's cultural heritage, and the people's value system.

The reason for the indiscriminate destruction of these vital aspects of people's lives is not far-fetched. Thus, a critical examination of the requirements for selection as an Eze in any Igbo community and the conferment of Chieftaincy title should be carried out in accordance with the laid down procedure established by the people themselves and government through various Ministries of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs across the five Igbo Speaking States. Regrettably, the process has been tainted. Thus, men of questionable character, men without lawful means of livelihood, men without any practical skill, men without proven integrity/track records, men adjudged to be corrupt and fetish, men with insufficient knowledge of the people's culture, men hiding under the umbrella of traditional institutions to commit crimes, men seeking government protection to commit crimes, corruption – personified individuals, men who have abysmally failed in various human endeavors

This dreadful situation explains in large part why crises and severe lack of development have continued to engulf several communities in Igbo nation. It is also accountable for their actions and support for opposition parties in their states during elections, which goes against their role expectations.

vi. Collective Harvest of Palm Fruits for Communal Projects:

This is a practice in which people agree to harvest palm fruits for self-help projects regardless of whose land the ripe palm fruit is available on. Thus, such communal projects include, among other things, the construction/rehabilitation of roads leading to farms, streams, rivers, roads to markets, and market building. Most Igbo rural communities in Nigeria have recently adopted a collective palm fruit harvesting approach to embark on rural electrification projects, water projects, and scholarships to indigent students in the community at tertiary institutions, the construction of primary health care centers, primary schools, and support to various rural development program implementations by local state and federal governments.

Interestingly, the collective harvest of palm fruits for whatever purpose brings together different families and villages in the community. Friends, relatives, village/community daughters married in neighboring communities, and their children attend the event. This strengthens community bonds, social relationships, and promotes peace in the area. It also helps children and youths identify with their relatives and become acquainted with one another. This reduces marriage and sexual relationships, which are against the people's customs and traditions.

Unfortunately, collective harvesting of palm fruit for people-oriented projects is currently a mirage in most parts of Igbo land. Thus, envy, greed, communal conflicts, personality clashes, poverty, and the church's influence on people's culture have completely eroded this event in the majority of the area. These circumstances have had a negative impact on the South-socioeconomic East's development.

BENEFIT OF PRACTICAL SKILLS AND CULTURE TO IGBO NATION

The advantages of practical skills and culture to Ndi-Igbo are numerous. The benefits are discussed in the following perspectives for the sake of charity and concise understanding:

A. Practical Skills:

Practical skills will result to the following benefits to Ndi-Igbo:

i. Food:

The acquisition of practical skills allows Ndi-Igbo to put food on the table. This not only helps Ndi-Igbo produce enough food for their consumption, but it also helps to sustain the region's metropolitan centers such as Enugu,

Umuahia, Aba, Owerri, Onitsha, Awka, and Abakiliki. Perhaps the importance of food to human survival explains why former Nigerian President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo once declared, "If we cannot go to the moon or the Sun like the industrialized nations of the world, we should at least be able to feed our people." As a result, Ndi-Igbo are acutely aware of the importance of engaging in lawful practical ventures capable of providing food for their families. They treasure biblical information such as "he who does not work, should not eat," which has found full expression in the lives of Ndi-Igbo over the years.

ii. Income/Revenue

The participation of Ndi-Igbo in various forms of practical skills (formal and informal) contributes to the generation of income for the people. This acceptable standard enables Ndi-Igbo to educate their children in schools, build houses for their comfort, and care for their social needs.

iii. Status Symbol

Based on Ndi-Igbo unrivaled track record in a variety of human endeavors, their exceptional abilities have distinguished their sons and daughters all over the modern world. Ndi-Igbo have made significant progress nationally and internationally in education, commerce and trade, medical practices, law, science and technology, and other fields, owing largely to their district practical skills.

iv. Poverty Reduction

Practical skill acquisition reduces poverty among those who participate in a variety of activities. However, the acquisition of meaningful skills has enabled people to contribute their fair share to the socioeconomic development of the South-East in particular and Nigeria in general.

v. Internal Security

Several studies have identified poverty, unemployment, and inequality as generational causes of Nigeria's internal security challenges (Bassey, 2007; Mimiko, 2011; Vusi, 2010). These factors, which Nnoli (2006) referred to as the "true enemies of the people," have exacerbated Ndi-misfortune Igbo's in the Nigerian State's political arrangement. As a result, reducing poverty among individuals, families, villages, and communities in Igbo land will have a positive impact on the South-internal East's security sector governance.

vi. Rapid Socio-Economic Development

Ndi-Igbo are well-known for their commitment to global development. As a result, available evidence indicates that development as a concept is human-centered. As a result, a man lacking the necessary and meaningful skills remains a 'Late Comer' in the community when it comes to development issues. As a result, practical skills give socioeconomic development a "human face" and proper meaning in all intellectual discourses. Consequently, stakeholders' encouragement of skills in all lawful ventures is expected to improve Ndi-Igbo socioeconomic development.

B. Culture

The relationship between practical skills and cultural heritage cannot be overstated.

This is due in part to the fact that practical skills (lawful ones) frequently become an integral part of an individual, family, and community. As a result, they are passed down from generation to generation. Cultural heritage benefits the people of Igbo land in the following ways:

i Identity

A true Igbo man can be identified wherever he is by respecting and practicing his rich Igbo cultural heritage. As a result, Igbo culture serves as a source of identity. This identity is manifested through language, dress, tribal mark, excellence in business-related activities, aggressive drive for success in all facets of human endeavors, and perseverance in the face of adversity. As a result, an "Igbo survives in every dry land he finds himself in."

ii Preservation of Heritage

Culture aids in the preservation of people's long-standing heritage and historical artifacts.

Cultural artifacts are still preserved in some parts of Igbo land, such as Anambra and parts of Imo, Abia, and Enugu States, and are displayed during important cultural events. Culture, on the other hand, benefits Ndi-Igbo by assisting the people in preserving their rich cultural heritage for regional and national development.

iii. Influence on Behavioural Pattern:

People's attitudes in the community or larger society are critical for achieving peace and desired development. As a result, Ndi-Igbo culture has the potential to influence the changing behavioral patterns of some people in the area, particularly the youth. As a result, some youths do not respect their parents, elders, or constituted authority, and they are unwilling to engage in meaningful employment. The Ndi-Igbo culture ultimately shapes youth behaviors and coerces some to distance themselves from acts considered antithetical to generally acceptable cultural norms in the area. Aside from youths, Igbo culture has an impact on adults' attitudes, regardless of religious affiliation or faith.

iv. Proper Parenting of Children

The challenges of poor parenting have continued to pique the interest of experts in the modern world. As a result, its devastating effects affect both the family and the larger society. As a result, a true Igbo man raises his children not only with the fear of God, but also with sound moral and cultural principles. Indeed, during moonlight gatherings, Igbos used proverbs, idioms, fiction stories, folklore, and body languages to teach and influence their children's behaviors. When compared to their peers from other ethnic nationalities, children from Igbo families benefit from this traditional method of parenting without a doubt.

v. Social Solidarity:

This is regarded as group unity, oneness, and collective identification of individuals pursuing similar goals. The Igbo culture helps people see themselves as one, speaks with one voice on national issues, and creates avenues for conflict resolution among them. Thus, good leadership at various levels of the Igbo community is required to achieve the desired level of solidarity in the area. For example, Ndi-Igbo cannot realize their dreams on critical national issues such as self-determination, the creation of more states for the region to balance regional politics, the balance of power, and several other terms revolving around restructuring in Nigeria unless the spirit of social solidarity is preserved.

CHALLENGES TO PRACTICAL SKILLS AND IGBO CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Practical skills and Igbo cultural heritage are confronted with plethora of challenges. Some of the challenges can be viewed from the perspective of social, economic and political factors: The factors are viewed as social phenomena which undermine efforts of individuals, community and government to achieve desired objectives on issues relating to practical skill acquisition and promotion/revival of Igbo culture. For better understanding, the challenges are grouped into two:

a. Challenges to practical skills

These are factors which undermine the efforts of the people to engage in meaningful activities for survival. They include:

i. High rate of poverty

Many Igbo families face a high rate of poverty. As a result, many families are unable to provide their children with two square meals per day, let alone train them in practical skills or send them to school, especially the girl child. This heinous trend has forced the region to witness a large number of school dropouts and a large number of youths roaming the villages and streets throughout the region.

ii. Search of White Collar Jobs

Countries around the world are experiencing various forms of unemployment. As a result, several strategies for addressing unemployment in many countries, including Nigeria, appear viable (Ucha, 2010). This necessitates a paradigm shift, particularly for the unemployed. This is critical because most Nigerian youths, particularly in the south-east, prefer white-collar jobs to practical skill acquisition such as poultry farming, piggery, fishery, and crop cultivation for profit (cassava, pumpkin, groundnuts, melon, and maize). Until now, Nigerian youths have refused to accept the current realities of an increasing spate of unemployment. This explains why they have continued to deceive themselves and parade their academic credentials around the country's major cities. The sooner they recognize this reality and act wisely, the better.

iii. Poor articulation of Goals by Families:

Ndi-Igbo must continue to be educated on the value of education through various means and platforms. It is unfortunate that most Igbo families do not value education and have little regard for educated people in their communities. As a result, such families are more concerned with feeding their children in order to survive than with empowering them through western education or practical skill acquisition. It is critical to note that Ndi-Igbo attitudes toward education must change if the region is to compete favorably with other regions in the modern

Nigerian State. This implies that the Ndi-Igbo people must be taught that "education is power." They should be encouraged to invest in education in order for the region to develop quickly. More importantly, the Ndi-Igbo people should be reminded that "the white man who brought Christianity to their land also brought western education." As a result, the same fervor with which Ndi-Igbo abandoned their culture for Christianity should be the same fervor with which they embrace western education in the area, as both were conceptualized as complementary by the white man.

iv. Incessant Communal Conflicts

In Igbo land, this is also associated with abject poverty. This is due to the fact that the majority of communities in Igbo land are agrarian. They rely heavily on agricultural activities for a living. As a result, most communities disagree on who owns the land used for agriculture and the rivers used for fishing (Langa, 2006; Nwadiolor, 2011, Bassy, 2007). This frequently leads to communal conflicts. As a result, communal conflicts frequently result in people fleeing their ancestral homes, the destruction of property, and the loss of human lives. This dreadful situation has a negative impact on practical skill acquisition because affected families frequently face harsh economic conditions that prevent them from training their children in meaningful practical skills.

v. Greed (Get-Rich-Quick Syndrome)

Some Igbos' desire for wealth can be traced back to greed and envy. Indeed, the society's regard for those with questionable wealth acquisition has compelled some people, particularly youths, to engage in criminal activities against the state and humanity. Among these criminal activities are ritual killings, armed robbery, advanced free fraud (419), and drug trafficking. These get-rich-quick schemes have had a negative impact on the emphasis placed on practical skill acquisition in some Igbo communities. As a result, most parents and families no longer take on the responsibility of educating their children in gainful practical skills capable of sustaining them during difficult times. Furthermore, men of questionable character who amassed wealth through illegal and unethical means have continued to receive patronage, admiration, and royal blessing from traditional institutions and the church in most Igbo communities.

This explains why traditional rulers in various communities in Igbo land bestow reputable chieftaincy titles on such people. They are also invited as Chief Launchers and Guests of Honor by some churches in Igbo land during church harvest, church launching programme for building projects, child dedication/building dedication, and appeal funds for various church projects, among other things. The question is, what lesson do the traditional institutions and churches that honor such criminals want local youths to learn? Thus, in this pitiful situation, hard work, honesty, diligence, humility, and genuine means of livelihood have been sacrificed in favor of corruption and fraudulent dispositions.

b. Challenges to Igbo Cultural Heritage:

The following factors undermine Igbo cultural heritage:

i. Globalization/Influence of the western culture:

This Western endeavor to integrate the modern world into the orbit of global capitalism has had a negative impact on Ndi-Igbo culture. As a result, the majority of Igbo people's behavioral patterns are entirely influenced by Western culture and influence, rather than those of Ndi-Igbo. The Ndi-Igbo value system has been completely eroded. This is also to blame for the obnoxious attitudes of young boys, girls, and married women who dress in clothes that expose their private parts in the name of fashion. Respect for parents, elders, and established authority is now a thing of the past.

As a result, in recent decades, Ndi-Igbo have completely abandoned their home-grown culture, such as cultural festival crafts and various artistic prowess. As a result, the wave of cultural erosion has had a negative impact on the primary school system in all parts of Igbo land, as students are no longer encouraged to engage in craft capable of exposing their talents, promoting their individual well-being, and preserving Ndi-Igbo cultural heritage. Teachers specifically introduced specific school curricular or practical skills on primary school students between the 1960s and the early 1980s. This academic activity or program was colloquially known as "Hard work." As a result, government schools in the eastern part of Nigeria designated a specific day for students/pupils to demonstrate their hard work. During the exercise, however, students present crafts and items that they made with their own hands. This includes brooms (aziza), baskets (ekete), shivers (Mkpasa), local basins (avo), handkerchiefs, beads (mgbaji), local pots (ite aja), plates (oba), cups (otikpo), local buckets (udu miri), and water reservoirs (ite miri), among other things. Interestingly, students were graded based on their creativity and the importance of their crafts in Igbo traditional society. This was factored into their overall evaluation and term result.

Regrettably, in Igbo land, these hardwork – induced academic activities in the primary school system have been completely eroded. Teachers have replaced "handiwork" in the primary school system across Igbo land with payment of money, purchase of toiletries, and a variety of other items. Most families in Igbo land have been further

impoverished as a result of this exploitative approach, as they are forced to pay such fees for their children in primary schools.

This new level of corruption in our primary school system is, without a doubt, surmountable.

ii. Influence of the Nigerian Civil War

The Nigerian Civil War halted the development of Igbo cultural heritage. This is due to the fact that several cultural artifacts were stolen. Similarly, the war completely dislodged the people's culture (traditional rulers). The most important consideration was how to best protect individual lives, children, and families. As a result, little or no attention was paid to the people's culture. In addition, the economy of Nigeria's south-eastern region was suffocated as part of measures taken by the then-Nigerian government to put an end to the region's secessionist agenda. Ndi-Igbo have measured up in the politicoeconomic equation of the contemporary Nigerian State through providence, commitment, hard work, and dedication.

iii. Poor Public Policy Process/Agenda Setting:

Public policy is still an essential tool for achieving rapid development as well as alleviating the plights of the common man. According to some experts, public policy must not only have a positive impact on the lives of a large segment of society, but it must also be capable of addressing critical challenges that threaten development in areas such as education, agriculture, security, employment, science and technology environment, information and culture, and so on (Dye, 1972; Dror 1968; Egonmwan, 1991; Eminue, 2005).

Thus, in some Igbo states, the public policy process (policy initiation/identification, policy formulation, policy implementation, policy monitoring, and policy evaluation) is characterized by poor vision and policy inconsistency. As a result, projects are not prioritized, and this situation has not only hampered meaningful development in the region, but has also had little impact on the people for whom they were implemented.

As a result, the g

As a result, state governments in the region must be more proactive in addressing critical challenges such as a poor road network, insecurity, poverty, a wealth gap, and massive investment in education and agriculture. Thus, the government in the region should avoid playing politics with the implementation of genuine free education policies, scholarship awards to students, impactful youth/women empowerment programs, and an aggressive drive to resuscitate the region's moribund-cum comatose industries. This will strengthen democracy in the region and have a positive impact on the region's cultural content. This is significant, given that culture is still an essential component of both human transformation and desired community development (Woshinsky, 1995; Omobola, 2012).

iv. Lack of Documentation:

According to available evidence, over 95 percent of cultural festivals or ceremonies in Igbo land's history were not documented. As a result of this challenge, some other ethnic groups have made claims on some Ndi-Igbo cultural activities and heritage. Thus, festivals such as the Ekpe/Nmawu cultural festival, Okonko/Ekpe/Odongo cultural initiations, new yam festival, 'Iru Mgbede' cultural exercise, traditional method of family planning on women, carving of Ekpe/Nmawu monuments, processes for local blacksmithing, fabrication of local weeding holes, cultlasses, moulding of local pots, plates, and spoons. These could have served as reference points in Igbo land, consulted and passed down from generation to generation.

The failure of the people to document these events has the implication that the majority of the current generation of youths are unaware of the majority of the people's cultural heritage and will be unable to explain it to their children in the future. Furthermore, most Igbo youths, men, and women are unfamiliar with some cultural Igbo items found in traditional homes in the area. This includes items such as 'Ite-aja, Eku,' 'Akwaremiri,' 'Ike-mbe,' 'Aguba, Mgbaji,' 'Oguntuala,' 'Obii, Efe,' 'Otikpo,' 'Oba,' 'Mgbugba Oguru,' 'Mkpasa,' 'Ugaa-nk

Similarly, youths, women, and some Igbo adults, particularly those who have spent a significant portion of their lives abroad, are unfamiliar with some Igbo cultural dances and musical instruments used during certain events/ceremonies.

This includes Egwu Onu-nwa (music/dance performed by married women during the celebration of a new child in the village), Nkwaa Ekpe (performed during the Ekpe cultural festival), Nkwaa Eke (performed during the burial of an influential man in the community, particularly by the Ngwa and Mbaise people), Nkwaa Uko (performed during the burial of a fulfilled woman among Ngwa people), Nkwaa Mgba (played during traditional Wrestling across Igbo land), Ekere-na-udu (played by daughters during burial rites of their deceased mothers, particularly by Ngwa and Mbaise people), Nkwaa Ekpo (played during Ekpo festival, mostly by young people towards Christmas seasons), Uri Ife (played by daughters during burial rites of their deceased mothers, particularly by N (songs during moonlight

gatherings where fictions, folklores, proverbs, idioms, ideas and worlds and thoughts of wisdom are exposed to young children to shape their behaviors in the community).

The overarching goal of these gatherings is to educate people about the importance of Igbo cultural heritage and to elicit desired behaviors in the community. As a result, the impact of the lack of documentation of Ndi-Igbo cultural heritage is enormous. The most troubling aspect of this problem is that over 99 percent of Ndi-Igbo cultural heritage is now extinct and may be difficult to bring back to Igbo land unless academia, traditional institutions, and the government work together.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a survey design was used. The study's design allowed it to interview and describe respondents' behavior and opinions. Enugu, Anambra state, Ebonyi state, Abia state, and Imo state are the five Igbo states studied in Nigeria. The study used stratified random sampling to select 180 respondents from the entire state, with each group consisting of 36 people. The five Igbo states were selected for the study on the premise that they are the only states in the Nigerian federation that shares the same language, culture, tradition, and cultural heritage. 120 respondents were sampled for the study. Using SPSS software, the Chi-square (X^2) test was used to test the research hypothesis. Tables are used to present the findings, which are then discussed in narrative text.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Data generated for the study were coded and analyzed using the SPSS software to proof or disproof the hypothesis formulated for the study:

Ho: There is no significant relationship between practical skills and sustaining the Igbo cultural heritage.

Table 1: Chi-square (X^2) Frequency Table

Responses	Practical skills	Sustaining the cultural heritage	Igbo	Total
SA	50 (40)	10 (20)		60
A	10 (31.66)	42 (17.66)		52
D	40 (30)	5 (15)		45
SD	20 (15.3)	3 (7.6)		23
TOTAL	120	60		180

Source: Authors' field survey, 2020.

Table 2: Chi-square computation on the degree of practical skill and the sustenance of Igbo cultural heritage

Fo	Fe	Fo-Fe	(Fo-Fe) ²	(Fo-Fe) ²
50	40	10	100	2.5
10	20	-10	100	5
10	34.66	-24.66	608.11	17.54
42	17.66	24.34	592.43	33.54
40	30	10	100	3.33
5	15	-10	100	6.66
20	15.3	4.7	23.09	1.44
3	7.6	-4.6	21.16	2.78
				72.36

Source: Authors' field survey, 2020.

At the 0.05 level of significance, the obtained $X^2 = 72.36$ is greater than the critical value of 7.8. As a result, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. As a result, there is a strong link between practical skills and the preservation of Igbo cultural heritage. According to the findings, there is a link between practical skills and Igbo cultural heritage. This finding lends credence to the notion that the Igbo people are naturally gifted

with a variety of skills acquired through learning, creativity, innovation, and risk-taking. Such gifts (skills) not only distinguish "Ndi-Igbo" from other ethnic nationalities, but also enable the people to achieve enviable heights in any human endeavor in which they find themselves. People from other parts of the world regard these rare achievements among the people as part of the Ndi-Igbo identity. Indeed, a critical examination of Ndi-Igbo activities reveals that the people are passionate and have distinguished themselves in practical skills of trade, commerce, farming, and craftsmanship, as well as professional/formal skills that they have improved and sustained over time.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Ndi-Igbo people have made significant advances in all areas of human endeavor. Igbo sons and daughters have distinguished themselves in several areas of life as a group naturally endowed with entrepreneurial gifts, earning Ndi-Igbo an unparalleled status at both the national and global political scene. As the global and national economies continue to face challenges, Ndi-Igbo must respond to their helplessness by clinging to the virtues for which they are known. As a result, the time has come for Ndi-Igbo to encourage one another to learn practical skills capable of providing food for their families. As a result, the current economic crisis at the national and international political levels does not necessitate Ndi-Igbo seeking implementable prognosis or remedies elsewhere. Rather, social formation is based on the dexterity and entrepreneurial prowess of Igbo sons and daughters, who are nationally and globally recognized in various spheres of life. As a result, now is the time for Ndi-Igbo to demonstrate their natural endowments in practical skills such as craftsmanship, technology, trade and commerce, agriculture, and a variety of other professions. More importantly, the current economic crises on both the national and international levels should restructure Ndi-Igbo mindsets in order to fully utilize their rich cultural heritage. Thus, development-induced cultural practices and Ndi-Igbo heritage capable of improving people's living standards should be restructured. Cultural activities such as festivals, ceremonies, and gatherings that bring people together to articulate development programs in their areas, on the other hand, should be revived; such programs should be integrated into the overall tourism package of states in the region.

Furthermore, Ndi-Igbo should be aware of the current globalization process, which is a euro-centric agenda aimed at integrating the entire world into the orbit of global capitalism. As a result, Ndi-Igbo people should embrace their culture. This will not only set them apart from other ethnic groups, but will also allow them to capitalize on the advantages they have over other regions in Nigeria. This necessitates the region's policymakers implementing sound public policy programs.

The following evidence-based and implementable policy recommendations are offered to encourage the need for Ndi-Igbo to acquire practical skills and to promote the people's rich cultural heritage:

1. State Governments in the South-East should establish Department of Igbo Language in their State Universities and Colleges of Education. This will enable the region produce required/ qualified manpower to teach Igbo Language at Primary and Secondary School levels in the region.
2. The South-east Governments should make Igbo Language a compulsory subject for all students from the regional primary and secondary school levels. This will not only re-enforce the importance of Igbo Language in the area, but also encourage parents to teach their children Igbo cultural values, norms and orientation with the language. This policy will further help in the revival of Igbo cultural heritage and inculcation of right values large segment of Igbo society.
3. State Governments in the region should further give scholarship to a minimum of two hundred (200) students at State Universities and Colleges of Education for the study of Igbo Language and Culture. This will not only boost the number of qualified manpower to handle challenges of Igbo Language which has almost become extinct, but also help the region to harness rich cultural heritage into the gallery before they become extinct. The establishment of regional Arts and Gallery will assist the region to carry out in-depth investigations concerning the whereabouts of some cultural items/artifacts stolen by unknown individuals into national and international museums. Hence, Ndi-Igbo must claim ownership of cultural items identified as creative arts that originated in Igbo land no matter wherever they are found in any museum or gallery in the world.
4. There is the need for the establishment of regional Arts and Culture Gallery by the people of the South-East. This will enable the region to commence gradual gathering of few remaining cultural items and artifacts into the gallery before they become extinct. The establishment of regional Arts and Gallery will assist the region to carry out in-depth investigations concerning the whereabouts of some cultural items/artifacts stolen by unknown individuals into national and international museums. Hence, Ndi-Igbo must claim ownership of cultural items identified as creative arts that originated in Igbo land no matter wherever they are found in any museum or gallery in the world.
5. State Governments in the South-east should reposition Tourism Bureaus, Agencies and Boards for development. The Bureau, Agency or Board should as a matter of urgency commence the immediate integration of all Igbo cultural festivals to form part of tourism package of Ndi-Igbo in and outside Nigeria. This will attract

employment/reduce insecurity, lead to influx of tourists during such cultural festivals in different parts of the South-East. Thus, the appointment of the Chairman and Members of the Tourism Agency, Bureau or Board should be based on merit and practical experience as politicization of political positions have adversely impacted on the development of the region.

6. Government in the region should be more pro-active and committed in the recognition of people as traditional rulers in the region. Through the Ministries of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, South-East Governors should reject the pressure from any quarter to appoint fraudulent persons and men of questionable characters as Traditional Rulers in their communities. This is pertinent because, a corrupt person cannot provide agenda-driven leadership in any human endeavor. Hence, Traditional Rulers must be people of high moral standard, willing to preserve the cultural heritage of the people and committed to educate his subjects on various customs and traditions of the people.

7. To revamp the economy of the South-East geo-political zone, the five states of the region must develop regional short, medium and long term development plan, with specific emphasis on education, agriculture, tourism, road infrastructure, commerce and trade. Thus, heavy investment in these critical sectors will undoubtedly reposition the region, resuscitate the economic misfortune of the area, create jobs for the youths and reduce increasing spate of restiveness and its attendant consequences on internal security programme implementation in the region.

8. The Ohaneze Ndi-Igbo should sponsor awareness campaign that will aim at educating electorates in the South-East geo-political on the need to elect qualified, honest and competent individuals to represent Ndi-Igbo at Local, State and National Level in Nigeria. This action will change the mind-set of elected Public Officials and make them more accountable to the people. Thus, a situation where elected officials from the region erroneously assume that they are representing their people at State and Federal levels simply to receive salaries, ultimate results to voter apathy and further retard meaningful development in their respective areas.

9. The Ohaneze Ndi-Igbo should work closely with State Governors from the South-East region and provide rational advice on policy process, especially those capable of improving the living standard of the people. Thus, such advisory role should be extended to appointment of qualified individuals to assist in public policy agenda-setting and implementation frame work at the state level.

10. To further encourage practical or vocational skills among youths of the South-east region, State Governments should re-introduce "Headwork" at Primary and Secondary School system. The State House of Assembly in the five States of the South-east should enact law which will compel students at this level of education and State Ministries of Education and all employees of the State recruited as teachers, to ensure that creativities, virtue of hard work, humility and diligence are inculcating on school children in the region. This will resuscitate discipline, commitment to duties and further stop unlawful extortion of money from poor parents in the name of "Hand-work" which is elusive in schools across the region.

11. Governments in the South-East should emulate their counterpart in the developed world, who usually runs to the academia when confronted with severe political and economic challenges. However, formation of think-tank with the academia will improve on policy process in the States, deliver evidence-based dividend of democracy to the people and further encourage Ndi-Igbo to train their children at tertiary institutions, despite harsh economic situation in the contemporary Nigerian State.

12. The South-East Governors should work assiduously to ensure adequate security of lives and property in the region. This will not only repose the confidence of the people on their administrations, but also attract huge foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to the region. Thus, violent security challenges in the region will undoubtedly scare investors away from the region and this will adversely impact on the general well-being of the people.

Limitations of the study and future outlook for researchers

The main limitation of the study is in its methodological orientation. The study relied solely on quantitative data. Future researches can combine a hybrid method to investigate the subject to generate more insight. Geographically, the study is limited to five Eastern states of Nigeria. Its results can therefore not be generalized to other states of the federation given the country's ethnocentric differences. Future researches can also seek to investigate whether the forces of globalization has eroded the cultural values of other regions.

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