

Communicating Cultural Values through Names among the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract: *Igbo names played significant roles in sustaining traditional values and language as well as marking one's identity. Today, most Igbo parents no longer understand the importance of traditional names. They give their children names with no cultural values. This is a threat to Igbo language and value system; and breeds deviant behaviour. As a result, the study assessed relevance of Igbo names towards sustenance of Igbo language and values. The study, which adopted qualitative and quantitative methods, was carried out in Southeast Nigeria using 200 participants. It discovered that Igbo names have great value and tell a lot of stories about the people's cultural values such as ambition, hospitality, morality and peaceful co-existence. Therefore, Igbo names portray complete diction of the child's past, present and future. As such, the Igbo should be encouraged to be alive to their traditional names in order to protect and promote their cultural values.*

Keywords: *Communicating, Cultural values, Names, South-Eastern Nigeria.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The first thing that is a shame African people with
European name....
If yuh hear Seecharan, Ramkhalawan, Lalchan, Balchan,
Well bet yuh life that is an East Indian man!
Jose, Juan, Gonzalez, Manuel, Sanchez, Pablo,
Yuh sure dem fellas from Mexico!
So why my name couldn't be N-jaca [satire on the local
black conscious movement NJAC],
Lumumba, Makeba, or Kenyatta?
If we use these names then we sure to
be on the stairway to true Black Identity.
Now some people walk round in Dashiki, some preach
Ashanti, some Swahili,
But when they dead, go and look at dey tombstone –
Is Patterson, Atkinson, Jackson, Calhearn
That is counterfeit identity,
These people must be lost in world history.
(Source: Fitzpatrick, 2012)

Indeed, there is nothing on earth or even in heaven that exists without a name. So, name is the main conduit that transports cultural values and marks one's identity. The obvious reality that this study provokes is that just as African languages and cultures are going into extinction, so also are their names and identity. This is because names are vehicles for sustaining language while language is the main instrument of communication in any human society (Etuk, 2002; Arthur, 2016).

Meanwhile, Kottak (2000) noted that language voluntarily produced symbols for the expression of ideas, feelings and emotions. Therefore, it is clear that language is a means by which humans express their views, thoughts, ideas and feelings to others. Cultural values are also extended through language. Through language, people organize themselves, differentiate themselves from others and motivate themselves for a certain goal.

In Igbo land, language and names play significant communicative roles in Igbo traditional values. Therefore, the Igbo communicate and sustain their language through names. This is because names have very important attachment in the traditional Igbo society. That is why Trehwella(2012) pointed out that a name is of great importance and value to the owner of the name and the society in which he/she lives.

It is for this same reason that Girvan (2014) appealed to government to promote traditional names to maintain and protect shared cultural values. Names are more than a convenience allowing us to communicate with each other. They contain cultural power and value and also define things (Giovagnoni, 2014).

Generally, Igbo traditional names often have unique stories behind them. From the day or time a baby is born to the circumstances surrounding the birth, several factors influence the names parents choose for their children. Among the Igbo, these traditional names communicate a wealth of information and values about the bearer and his community (Arthur, 2016).

However, it has been observed that some Igbo parents no longer understand the importance of traditional names. Today, some parents give names to their children based on how melodious the name sounds. Sometimes they give names based on the names their friends give to their own children without caring about the meaning of such names or what the names communicate. Others name their children after the name of some celebrities such as Obama, Bush, Parker, Clinton, Thatcher, Livingstone, just to mention a few (Trehwella, 2012). These names cannot tell anything about the child's family history, identity or circumstances of birth.

As a result, social vice in the society is a result of neglect of the cultural values which traditional names had in the past helped to sustain and promote. Language and naming cannot be separated from man because they are what the people use for the purpose of meaningful existence. Sometimes names are used for vetting or curbing confusion in the society. There are times issues need clarification in the society, the native languages in form of names are used for wider coverage and for the message to make the impact it ought to make. The names pave way for a clearer understanding of a particular thing, place, object or idea. Names as symbols are associated to object, places and events as a result of languages. Name is used for the purpose of identification and distinguishing one thing from the others.

However, the adverse effects of the incursions on African culture such as religion, language, values and even African names in this context are very well articulated by Thabo Mbeki, when he challenged African leaders to critically reflect on the legacies of colonialism whose emblems have continued to evoke African past, present and future (Moran, 2009). As a result of this incursion, many Igbo people today do not know the meaning of their child's name. They do not see it relating to their child or culture for any significant purpose. It is this rape of Igbo traditional names and the essential values which the Igbo attached to names that prompted the study on which this paper is based to x-ray how the Igbo use traditional names to communicate cultural values. This is with the aim of unfolding cultural heritage in the area of name giving among the Igbo of Southeast Nigeria. The traditional values of these names serve as a symbol of identity among the Igbo. These names and their value oriented attachment have lasted from the time immemorial to the present generation and will continue to grow from generation to generation if not adulterated. Therefore, there is this need to assess the relevance of these traditional names in order to sustain Igbo language and culture.

As a result of these, the study sets out to determine:

1. Uncover the values expressed through names.
2. Ascertain how the Igbo traditional society value language in name ranking.
3. The influence of the names among Igbo society.
4. Factors that influence the giving of traditional Igbo names.

Basically, the study is expected to revive the cultural values inherent in the Igbo traditional society. It will also reorientate the Igbo on the values attached to names and its significance for the continue survival of Igbo society and its language. It will also serve as a reference document for those who will make a similar study in future.

Justification/Significance/Need of the Study

- 1) The study emphasizes the relevance of Igbo names in promoting Igbo culture and language.
- 2) The study also addresses naming system in Igbo Land which is almost overtaken by Western names. For instance, it complements what most of the churches in Igbo land are concurrently doing in the area of using Igbo names for baptism of church members.
- 3) The research will help to sustain the naming policy of every Igbo child to have Igbo name (native name).
- 4) It equally helps in putting the Igbo race in the sands of time in the area of value re-orientation and attitudinal change.
- 5) The study revives the value inherent in Igbo names especially in this era of moral and spiritual decay.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Historical Perspective of Igbo People

The Igbo, an ethnic group in southeast Nigeria speak Igbo language. The people are found in Abia, Anambra, Delta, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and River states of Nigeria. The Igbo are estimated to be about 16.4 million people (Fardon & Furniss, 1994; Ogbaa, 1999). Ideally, among the Igbo, communities are easily identified through their traditional names.

Values of Names in Igbo Land

The value that Igbo's accord the child is seen to be reflected or expressed in the names they give to their children. Most of the names in Igbo land express the circumstances behind the birth of the child, hope, aspiration and belief of parents. In some cases, some names are given to children according to the order of their

birth in the family. For instance, the first male child in Igbo land is called 'Okpara' while the female counterpart is called 'Ada'. This is why Uzo (2011) posited that for an African, a name does not only represent a person's identity but a name is also regarded as a promise, a vocation and a list of expectations. This was echoed by Echekwube (2005) when he noted that in African names are not just signs but also symbols that evaluate nature, essence, characteristics, functions and orientation of an object, person or place relative to what role it plays in the sight and understandings of the one who gives the name. In other words, names depict intimate relationship between the named and the person that named him/her.

In other words, Igbo names typically held spiritual reverence and are meaningful (Mbiti, 1969; Fitzpatrick, 2012). The meaning of names are tied largely circumstances of birth of the child. And names preserve a memory of historical events and an individual is defined by his name (Maquet, 1972; Igboin, 2014). Therefore, a name holds power to shape a child's self-esteem and his identity and influence how he is seen and treated by others (Satra&Rosenkrantz, 2017). The importance of names is more felt among the Igbo because it is a perfect way of communicating their cultural values.

Value of Language in Igbo Traditional Name Ranking

The Igbo traditionally do not just give names to their children, they give names based on some of the issues we have earlier addressed. But in recent time many Igbo people bear names that do not flow from the traditional basis of name giving. As a result, data indicate that the Igbo accord different values to different names that the Igbo people bear today. Data point out that Igbo people with their first and second in Igbo language are ranked very high in Igbo traditional society. Again, Igbo people with all their names including surnames in Igbo language are accorded the highest ranking. However, Igbo people with surnames in English language or other languages are ranked least. According to the in-depth interviews, sometimes Igbo people doubt how original those Igbo with English surnames are. Sometimes such people may be denied certain privileges in their communities. This is in line with the view of Uzo (2011) when he noted that in traditional Igbo life, there is a lot in a name. The name is more than just a tag or a convenient badge of identity. Igbo names always bear a message, a meaning, a history, a record or a prayer. This is also to say that they embody a rich mine of information on the people's reflection and considered comment on life and reality. As a result, data support the socio cultural model which notes that there is a relationship between names and the exercise of social control and that names direct people's activities and actions. Therefore, names provide a window into the Igbo world of values as well as their peculiar conceptual apparatus for dealing with life. Their range of application spans the whole of life itself. Therefore, an Igbo person with foreign surname loses opportunity to be real Igbo.

Influence of Names in Igbo Society

Not only do the Igbo give children names with meaning, but they also give them a family blessing which is associated with that name. This is a precious time for Igbo family. After each child is born, they gather the family together on the 8th day and the father prays for the child, and then pronounces a blessing upon his or her life. They then record the child's name in the chronicle of the family members both living and the dead by presenting him to the ancestors who are believed to be in custody of such list (Trehwella, 2012). As a result, this study sought to dictate the value expressed through Igbo names which have been great influence in Igbo society. It was found that Igbo names following the part of socio cultural model have great influence on status, heritage, aesthetic, religious, moral attitudinal and political values. Report from the in-depth interviews also supports this view. All the interviewees believe that most Igbo struggle so much to maintain the wording of their traditional names. This is because the actual meaning of such names is obvious to them and they are always afraid of what people will say if they go contrary to their names. According to the in-depth interview report, no Igbo man can be a traditional ruler if he possesses a foreign surname. In this way, Igbo name has influence on the political life of the Igbo people. Some Igbo names are historic names and tell a lot story among the family heritage. There have been cases when relatives who never saw each other met in distant lands and as a result of similarity in their names; they discovered that they are cousins. This was revealed through the in-depth interviews. Even when sharing things, names sometimes play a key role in who gets what. At times family names in Igboland determines the role of families in traditional matters. Those families that bear the name *Nwarusi* may be in charge of the community oracle or shrine. A family with the name *Nwauzu* may be involved in blacksmithing while those that bear *Nwanta* may be hunters. In other words, their Igbo traditional names, people do know who to call to perform certain duties at each point in time.

Values Expressed Through Igbo Traditional Names

It was observed that majority of the respondents believed that Igbo traditional names great enhance cultural heritage values of the people. This is the view of some respondents during the interview. Igbo traditional names also enhance religious values, aesthetic values, status values and bravery. However, majority of the respondents do not believe that Igbo traditional names enhances political and health values.

Data from the respondents indicate that the values expressed by Igbo traditional names are ambition, good behavior (such as *Ofordire*), hospitality (such as *Ulo-oma*), morality (such as *Agwabunma*), world view (such as *Ekejiuba*), other people's view of the person (such as *Ugwoegwu*) and value system (such as *Ndukuba*).

In other words, Igbo traditional names give idea about the potentially vast area and the wide variety of subjects which the Igbo placed value on. But the names themselves demonstrate the power of the special technique devised by an illiterate culture to put into record some of the best thoughts and ideas of its heritage. Igbo people had no common writing and *Nsibidi*, the pictorial hieroglyphics did not evolve into a commonly accessible means of recording and communication (Uzo, 2011). Names were then ingeniously pressed into service and became the most effective way of conferring immortality to thoughts that would otherwise not outlive the very breath by which they were uttered.

During the in-depth interviews, majority of the interviewees noted that the type of names people are given sometimes propel them in achieving some level of success and also guide their behaviour. They also observed that Igbo names hold a reflection on how the Igbo view the entire universe, their belief system, their conflicts, their joy and even their sadness.

Factors that Influence the Giving of Igbo Names

Several factors determine how the Igbo name their children. These factors include market days (*Orie*, *Afor*, *Nkwo* & *Eke*), names of deities within the area, natural objects (such as sun, bush & star), circumstances surrounding the child's birth, parents' experiences (such as loss of previous children), Christianity, position of the child in the family (such as first son or first daughter) and festivals being celebrated during the birth of the child. Concerning the circumstances surrounding the child's birth, when children are born when a family which had been very poor just became wealthy, such children may be called *Obianuju*, *Obiageriaku* or *Ukwuaku*. At times a child may be born prematurely or few months after the normal nine months period of delivery. The circumstance could be that the mother passed through a period of prolonged labour. All these situations may determine the type of name a child bears. That means that real Igbo traditional names tell stories. In terms of parents past experiences, it could be that the parents have in the past lost some or all their children. In such case, they may name the new baby *Ozoeme* (bad death should not happen again). Some may name the child, *Ejiemegini* (what do I do with this one) or *Njiturum-onwu* (let me hold him briefly for death to take away). Such names are given with the belief that it will scare off death. According to results of In-depth interviews, most of the time children with such names do not die young. Another factor that determines the types of names give to children among the Igbo is the position of the child in the family. For instance, if the child is the first male child in the family, he is called *Opara*, *Okparaor Okwara*. But if she the first daughter, she is called *Ada* while the second daughter is called *UluorUlumma*. It was gathered that on few occasions, children are named according to the traditional festivals on which they were born. For instance, if a male child is born during new yam festival period, he may be named *Okoroji* or *Nwaji*. There are times when children naturally take their names according to their physical appearances. Those who are born with dreadlocks are called *Dada* while those male whose complexion is very fair are usually called *Nwokocha*. Again, a child with very dark skins may be called *Nwanji*. As a result of all these and to make the picture clearer, it becomes imperative to classified Igbo traditional names.

The classification of names which we have done here was mostly derived from data collected through in-depth interviews but is by no means exhaustive. But it is typical enough and shows clearly that in this culture, to name is to make a statement of meaning, ranging from the most simple and matter of fact to the deepest thoughts that probe the mystery of reality.

Theoretical Perspective

The study was anchored on Socio Cultural Model. This model follows from the social categories and social relations perspectives. It recognizes variables such as organizational membership, work roles, reference groups, cultural names and primary group norms and how they interrelate to exercise social control and direct people's actions not consistent with their own internal psychological dispositions. Messages create the impressions that their contents are the socially acceptable models or behavior with regard to particular situations.

The model thus paints a picture of "consensual validation". If you fail to do as the message says, you are branded a deviant. The choice of this theory is based on the topic under review which highlights the importance of communicating cultural values through names among the Igbo.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted qualitative (in-depth interviews) and quantitative (survey) research designs to determine the importance of communicating cultural values through the use of traditional Igbo names. For the survey (quantitative design), questionnaire was used for data collection. Two hundred (200) copies of questionnaire were distributed in Enugu and Ebonyi States. Out of the 200 copies of questionnaire distributed in the two states, 190 were returned representing 95% response rate. Stratified sampling method was used to select respondents for survey while purposive sampling technique was used to select participant for the in-depth interviews. Purposive sampling was used because those interviewed are believed to be those who have profound experience and knowledge about the relationship between names and cultural values. The resultant data from the

survey were analyzed using percentage and tabular form while data from the in-depth interviews were applied descriptively.

Tables

Table1: Do you know Igbo names and the language?

Options	Respondents	percentage
Yes	180	94.7%
No	10	5.3%
Total	190	100

Source: Fieldwork 2017

The table above through the data distributed, it shows that 180 respondents representing 94.7%, know Igbo names and the language while 10 representing 5.3% said they do not know Igbo names and the language.

Table2: Of what value is the Igbo names and culture?

Options	Respondent	Percentage
Source of power	130	68.4%
Identity value	53	26.8%
Unionism	7	4.7%
Total	190	100

Source: Field work 2017

The above shows that 130 respondents representing 68.4% said Igbo names are source of power while 53 respondents representing 25.8% said the Igbo names helps for identity value and 7 representing 4.7% said the Igbo names is source of Unionism.

Table3: what are the influence of Igbo names and language in Igbo speaking communities?

Options	Respondent	Percentage
Heritage	150	78.9%
Moral attitude	30	15.8%
Status	10	5.3%
Total	190	100

Source: Field work, 2017

The table above indicates that 150 respondents representing 78.9% said that the Igbo name and language has in influence in heritage, 30 respondents representing 15.8% said that Igbo names and influence in moral attitude while 10 respondents representing 5.3% said the Igbo names and language has influence in status.

Table4: How often do you use Igbo names and language?

Options	Respondent	Percentage
Daily	130	68.4%
Weekly	33	17.45%
Monthly	27	14.2%
Total	190	100

Source: Field work, 2017

The above data indicates that 130 respondents representing 68.4% said they use Igbo names and language daily, 33 respondents representing 17.45% said they use Igbo names and language weekly and 27 respondents representing 14.2% said they use the Igbo names and language monthly.

Table5: Who discovered the use of Igbo names and language?

Options	Respondent	Percentage
S.E. Onwu	80	42.1%
B.S. Onwu	70	36.8%
A.U. Onwu	40	21.1%
Total	190	100

Source: Field work, 2017

The data displayed above shows that 80 respondents representing 42.1% said S.E. Onwu discovered the use of Igbo names and language, 70 respondents representing 36.8% said B.S. Onwu and 40 respondents representing 21.1% said A.U. Onwu discovered Igbo names and language.

Table6: What are the factors influencing the use of Igbo names and language?

Options	Respondent	Percentage
Market days	120	63.2%
Deities	50	26.3%
Natural object	15	7.9%
Festivities	5	2.6%
Total	190	100

Source: Field work, 2017

According to the above table out of the 190 respondents sampled, 120 of them representing 63.2% said Igbo names and language are influenced by market days, 50 respondents representing 26.3% said deities while 15 respondents representing 7.9% said natural object and 5 respondents representing 2.6% said festivities.

IV. FINDINGS / DISCUSSION

- 1) Effective use of Igbo names and Language among the Igbo speaking communities is essential in reviving cultural values as it is attested by 180 respondents from the research data table.
- 2) Igbo community has unique values in child bearing and naming as 150 respondents said that Igbo names and language has influence on heritage.
- 3) Every name in Igbo Land has connotative meaning or attachment as noticed when 120 respondents said that market days influence the use of Igbo names and language.

V. CONCLUSION

Indeed, according Igbo mystical theology, the name holds immense power. Traditional Igbo names often have unique stories behind them. Therefore, it can be said that the Igbo is rich in culture. It is a culture full of various meanings that may not be directly accessible to a stranger. In order to understand better the value of Igbo traditional approach to naming, it is relevant to locate the naming process within certain cultural and religious beliefs that influence it. From the day or time a baby is born to the circumstances surrounding the birth, several factors influence the names parents choose for their children. In Igbo society, these traditional names communicate a wealth of information about the bearer and his/her community.

The naming process plays a very important role in the life of the community. Various members of the community could be involved at various stages. Generally, Igbo traditional names have meaning. In such a name, one could see connection with the past, the present and the future. Some names serves as manifesto one was supposed to implement in his/her life at later stage. As a result, the Igbo have high regard for those who bear complete Igbo traditional names but always frown at those Igbo people whose surnames are in English language.

It can also be said that traditional naming among the Igbo is also opportunity to pour blessings upon the new baby and to link the baby to his/her ancestors, who it is believed have power to protect the baby. In other words, through traditional names the Igbo communicate their ambition, good behavior, hospitality, cosmology, patience, fear, anxiety and other cultural values to their children and the outside world. Therefore, the functionality of the Igbo language was sustained by communication through traditional names. So far, language and communication are two important factors that every living creature cannot do without. Language unifies people of different groups but traditional names are the oil needed to lubricate a language and sustain it over a long time. Traditional name exposes a people's culture and beliefs. One can identify the language of a people in foreign land by easily identifying the name of the people. Names in a particular language therefore are used as means of communication. As such, it is through traditional names that the Igbo preserve their past.

Therefore, it is believed that Igbo people should continue this beautiful African tradition of choosing a name that communicates local language and portrays a complete diction of the child's past, present and future. Igbo parents should be concerned about the meaning that their child's name conveys. In such a way, indirectly, they may influence for better the future of their children and at the same time sustain the Igbo language as a living vehicle of communication. Igbo people should be alive in their names, because sustenance of Igbo traditional names means the sustenance of Igbo language and the continued survival of Igbo people.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- 1) Igbo Language should be among the basic requirements for giving admission into tertiary institutions in South East zone of Nigeria.
- 2) There is need for seminar and workshop to educate the Igbo people on the values inherent in their names and language.
- 3) Barbaric cultures in Igbo land should be transformed to tally with the trend of modern society.
- 4) Those studying Igbo language in South East Nigeria should be giving free education to encourage more scholars in the field.
- 5) There is need for parents to place Igbo names first in child naming within the Igbo speaking areas.

Limitations of the Study

The study focuses on communicating cultural values through names among the Igbo of south Eastern Nigeria. The research was designed to cover the entire Southeast zone of Nigeria but due to the large geographical spread, financial and time constraint. The study was restricted to Anambra, Abia and Ebonyi States with particular reference to Onitsha South and Ogbaru Local Government Areas in Anambra State, Aba South and North Local Government Areas of Abia State and Abakaliki and Ohaukwu Local Government Areas of Ebonyi State.

Direction for Future Research

A research on using Igbo language in promoting peace and unity among Ndi Igbo could be carried out. A research on imperatives of cultural values in nation building could also be carried out as it will help to boost tourist centres which will also serve as a source of revenue generation and also awareness creation for national development.

Sources of Funding of the Study

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