Journal of People & Worldviews (JPW)

ISSN PRINT: 3141-1827
e-ISSN: 3141-1835

Vol 1, No. 3
June, 2026

A Publication of the Department of Philosophy University of Uyo, Nigeria.
In Collaboration with The European University of Nigeria, Abuja and Center of Didactics and Research in Education, Protestant University of Rwanda.

Journal of People and Worldviews is a peer reviewed academic journal devoted to the systematic study of human experience, belief systems, social meaning, and interpretive frameworks across cultures and contexts. The journal provides a scholarly space for examining how people understand themselves, others, and the world they inhabit.

It publishes original research that advances theoretical clarity, empirical insight, and critical reflection across the humanities and social sciences, with particular attention to philosophy, education, psychology, religion, culture, and social thought.

Article Processing Charges

Peer Review Fee, payable at submission: ₦5,000

Article Processing Charge, payable upon acceptance: ₦20,000

Payment Details

Account Name: Journal of People and Worldviews JPW

Bank: Union Bank of Nigeria ,Plc

Account No: 0237920017.

Submission Email

For inquiries or alternative submission arrangements:

submission@journalofpeopleandworldviews.com

Contacts

+2348032325087

eic@journalofpeopleandworldviews.com

submission@journalofpeopleandworldviews.com

Printed & Published by:
Robertminder International Limited
34 Ntiedo Udosen Street, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria
Email: spiritualdiet@gmail.com
Mobile:+234(0)8023439761

EDITORIAL BOARD

CONTENTS

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)
Volume 1, Number 3
Review Article https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21217062 Open Access

A Foucauldian Analysis of Power, Law, and the Construction of Justice

Abstract

The relationship between power and justice has long occupied a central position in legal and political philosophy, traditionally framed within assumptions of neutrality, fairness, and moral objectivity. However, this paper interrogated whether justice is indeed an independent normative ideal or whether it is fundamentally shaped by underlying structures of power. Drawing on the philosophical insights of Michel Foucault, the paper argued that justice is not autonomous but is constructed through historically contingent and institutionally mediated power relations. Through an analytical engagement with Foucault's concepts of power/knowledge, discipline, and the production of truth, the paper established how legal systems function not merely as neutral arbiters but as active places in the creation and reinforcement of normative orders. The paper defended the position that law operates as both an instrument and expression of power, thereby shaping what societies recognise as just. While engaging competing perspectives from Thomas Hobbes, John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, and Lon L. Fuller, the study critically evaluated whether justice can resist power or merely be reconfigured within it. The findings showed that justice, rather than being eliminated, is continually reconstructed through dynamic power relations embedded in legal and social institutions. It concluded that the task of legal philosophy is not to detach justice from power but to interrogate and reshape the conditions under which justice is produced. The paper recommended a critical rethinking of legal neutrality, particularly in contemporary contexts marked by surveillance, governance complexities, and institutional authority, with specific relevance to developing democracies.

Keywords: Power, Justice, Law, Michel Foucault, political Philosophy.

Elijah O. Okpanachi PhD
Department of Philosophy,
Federal University of Lafia,
Lafia.
https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6780-0165
08037550889

Lubem Agishi
Department of General Studies,
Federal Polytechnic, Wannune.
Pro Bono Lecturer,
Department of Philosophy
Federal University of Lafia, Lafia
lubemagishi@fedpolywannune.edu.ng
lubemagishi@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2003-6715
08070452224 | 08129838811

Corresponding Author's Email:
Eltonia4u@gmail.com

Date Received: 12th May, 2026

Date Accepted: 12th June, 2026

Introduction

Justice has historically been conceived as a moral ideal grounded in fairness, equality, and the proper ordering of society. From classical antiquity, philosophers such as Plato regarded justice as harmony within both the individual and the state, a principle that ensures each part performs its appropriate function. Plato famously asserts that "justice is doing one's own work and not meddling with what is not one's own" (433a). This classical understanding establishes justice as a normative standard against which power is to be judged, thereby suggesting a hierarchical relationship in which justice constrains power. Yet, this idealised separation between justice and power has been increasingly questioned within modern legal and political philosophy. Thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes challenge the independence of justice by grounding it in sovereign authority. Hobbes contends that "where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice" (90), implying that justice is contingent upon the existence of power rather than preceding it. This position reorients the discourse by suggesting that justice does not regulate power but is instead a product of it, thereby complicating the classical assumption of justice as an external moral criterion.

The tension between these perspectives raises a fundamental philosophical problem which is whether justice an objective standard that limits power, or is it constructed within the very operations of power itself? This question becomes particularly significant within legal theory, where law is often presented as a neutral mechanism for the administration of justice. It is within this context that the work of Michel Foucault becomes particularly significant. Foucault rejects the notion of power as merely repressive or centralised, instead conceptualising it as diffuse, productive, and embedded within everyday practices and institutions. His analysis challenges the neutrality of justice by demonstrating how legal and social norms are constituted through power relations. This paper, therefore, advances the thesis that justice is not an autonomous moral ideal but is historically and institutionally constructed through networks of power mediated by law.

Conceptual Clarifications

Power has often been narrowly interpreted within political and legal philosophy as the capacity to coerce or compel obedience. Classical theorists typically associated power with sovereignty, command, and domination. However, this understanding proves insufficient when examining the complexities of modern social and legal systems. Michel Foucault fundamentally redefines power by arguing that it is not merely repressive but productive, operating through diffuse networks rather than centralised authority. As he notes, "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 93).

This reconceptualisation shifts the analytical focus from power as possession to power as relation. Power, in this sense, is exercised rather than owned; it circulates through institutions, discourses, and practices. Such a view is particularly relevant to legal theory, where power is often institutionalised in the form of legal authority. The productive nature of power highlights its role in shaping what is considered true or legitimate. Through what Foucault terms the "power/knowledge" nexus, systems of knowledge, including legal doctrines, are both products and instruments of power (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 27). This insight is crucial for understanding how legal definitions of justice emerge, not as objective truths, but as outcomes of historically situated power relations.

Justice has traditionally been conceived as a moral virtue grounded in fairness and equality. In classical philosophy, justice was often understood as an intrinsic good, independent of political contingencies. However, modern legal theory complicates this view by situating justice within institutional frameworks. John Rawls, for instance, defines justice as "the first virtue of social institutions" (Rawls 3), thereby emphasising its role in structuring legal and political arrangements. Rawls' formulation attempts to preserve the moral autonomy of justice while acknowledging its institutional embodiment. His theory of "justice as fairness" posits that principles of justice are chosen under conditions of equality, thereby ensuring impartiality. This framework presupposes that justice can be abstracted from power relations, a presupposition that Foucault critically challenges. From a Foucauldian perspective, such neutrality is illusory, as the very conditions under which principles are formulated are themselves shaped by power. In contrast, Friedrich Nietzsche offers a more radical critique by associating justice with domination. Nietzsche argues that moral concepts, including justice, are expressions of the "will to power" (Nietzsche 211), thereby exposing their contingent and strategic nature. While Nietzsche's account differs from Foucault's, both thinkers converge in rejecting the idea of justice as a fixed moral truth. Instead, justice is seen as historically contingent and shaped by struggles for power.

Law occupies a central position in the relationship between power and justice, serving as both a normative framework and an institutional apparatus. Traditionally, law has been understood as a system of rules designed to uphold justice and regulate social conduct. However, this formalist conception overlooks the ways in which law is embedded within broader power structures. Thomas Hobbes, for instance, defines law as the command of the sovereign, thereby grounding its authority in power (Hobbes 183). This command theory of law highlights the dependence of legal systems on political authority. Yet, it also raises critical questions about the legitimacy of law: if law derives its authority from power, can it still serve as an instrument of justice? This tension becomes more pronounced when considering the institutional dimensions of law. Courts, prisons, and enforcement agencies do not merely apply legal rules; they actively shape social norms and behaviours. Foucault's analysis deepens this critique by demonstrating how legal institutions function as mechanisms of discipline and control. Law, in this sense, is not simply a reflection of justice but a tool for producing compliant subjects. This dual character of law, as both normative ideal and instrument of power, reveals the complexity of the power–justice relationship.

The divergence between classical and contemporary accounts of power and justice highlights a significant conceptual gap. While Hobbes grounds justice in sovereign power and Rawls seeks to regulate power through principles of justice, Foucault disrupts this binary by demonstrating that power and justice are mutually constitutive. Justice is neither wholly independent of power nor entirely reducible to it; rather, it emerges within dynamic networks of power relations. This perspective has profound implications for legal philosophy. It challenges the assumption that law can function as a neutral arbiter of justice, instead revealing its role in constructing normative realities. By situating justice within the operations of power, Foucault provides a framework for critically analysing legal and political institutions. As such, the relationship between power and justice must be understood not as hierarchical but as deeply intertwined, with law serving as the primary medium through which this relationship is articulated.

Foucault's Analytics of Power

A striking historical illustration opens Foucault's analysis: the public execution of Robert-François Damiens in 1757, a spectacle of sovereign punishment marked by brutality and theatrical display. Rather than merely recounting an episode of violence, Michel Foucault uses this case to demonstrate a transformation in the nature of power, from visible, sovereign force to subtle, disciplinary control (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 3-6). The public spectacle, he suggests, gives way over time to less visible yet more pervasive mechanisms of regulation, where power is exercised not through overt violence but through continuous observation and normalisation. This historical transition marks a fundamental shift in how power operates within legal systems. Whereas sovereign power relied on the right to take life or inflict punishment, modern disciplinary power functions through the regulation of bodies and behaviours. The implication is that, law no longer merely prohibits or punishes; it actively shapes individuals into compliant subjects. As Foucault observes, "the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (Foucault *Discipline and Punish* 26). This statement is significant because it reveals that power produces subjects who internalise norms, thereby reducing the need for overt coercion. In this sense, justice cannot be understood apart from the disciplinary mechanisms that sustain it.

Contrary to traditional political theory, which locates power in sovereign authority or state institutions, Foucault advances a radically different conception. Power, he argues, operates at the micro-level of social relations, circulating through what he describes as "capillary" networks (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 39). This metaphor suggests that power flows through the smallest units of society, shaping interactions, behaviours, and perceptions in ways that are often imperceptible. Such a conception challenges the legal assumption that power is exercised primarily through formal institutions such as courts and legislatures. Instead, power is embedded in everyday practices, including education, medicine, and administrative systems.

For example, the classification of individuals as "normal" or "deviant" is not merely a descriptive act but a normative one, reinforced by legal and institutional frameworks. In this regard, law functions as one node within a broader network of power relations, rather than as an autonomous arbiter of justice. An analytical comparison may be drawn with Thomas Hobbes, whose model of power is centralised and hierarchical. While Hobbes locates power in the sovereign who enforces law, Foucault disperses power across social institutions and practices. This shift has profound implications: if power is everywhere, then justice cannot be insulated from it. Rather, justice becomes one of the many effects produced by the operation of power.

The Power/Knowledge Nexus

Consider the role of expert knowledge in modern legal systems, medical reports, psychological evaluations, and forensic analyses often determine legal outcomes. Foucault interprets this phenomenon through the concept of the power/knowledge nexus, arguing that knowledge is both shaped by and constitutive of power (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 52). This relationship implies that what is accepted as "truth" is not independent of power structures but is produced within them. Foucault's assertion that "power produces knowledge… power and knowledge directly imply one another" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 27) is particularly instructive.

The claim should not be read as a denial of truth but as a critique of the conditions under which truth is established. In legal contexts, this means that judicial decisions are not based solely on objective facts but are influenced by institutional frameworks that define what counts as evidence and credibility. Thus, legal "truth" is constructed through processes that are deeply embedded in power relations. This can be seen in how Foucault consistently ties epistemology to power structures (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 27; *Power/Knowledge* 52). The implication for justice is significant: if truth itself is shaped by power, then justice, which relies on truth, is likewise contingent.

Beyond Sovereignty

A conceptual shift becomes evident when one examines Foucault's critique of traditional sovereignty-based theories. Rather than viewing power as emanating from a central authority, Foucault argues that power is relational and exercised through a multiplicity of forces. This perspective undermines the legal fiction of a neutral, central authority administering justice. To illustrate, consider the operation of modern bureaucratic institutions. These institutions do not rely solely on commands from a sovereign but function through procedures, classifications, and regulations that shape behaviour. Foucault describes this as a form of "disciplinary power" that operates through surveillance and normalisation (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 170-177).

The panopticon, as conceptualised by Jeremy Bentham and analysed by Foucault, serves as a metaphor for this form of power, where individuals internalise surveillance and regulate themselves accordingly. This analysis reveals that power is most effective when it is least visible. Unlike sovereign power, which asserts itself through force, disciplinary power operates by shaping desires, habits, and perceptions. Consequently, justice cannot be understood as an external standard imposed on power; rather, it is constituted within the very mechanisms through which power operates.

Legal Systems as Sites of Power Production

A practical observation from contemporary legal systems reinforces Foucault's thesis as legal institutions do not merely apply laws but actively produce social realities. Courts, for instance, do more than adjudicate disputes; they define categories such as guilt, responsibility, and normality. These categories, in turn, shape societal perceptions of justice. Foucault's insight that "the judges of normality are present everywhere" (Foucault *Discipline and Punish* 304) stresses the pervasive nature of disciplinary power. This statement suggests that the authority to define norms extends beyond formal legal institutions to include a wide range of social actors. The implication is that justice is not solely determined within courtrooms but is continuously constructed through various institutional practices. From this standpoint, law emerges as both an instrument and an effect of power. It enforces norms while simultaneously being shaped by the very power relations it seeks to regulate. This dual character challenges the conventional view of law as a neutral framework for achieving justice, revealing instead its role in the ongoing production of normative order.

Law as an Instrument and Expression of Power

A courtroom proceeding often appears as the epitome of neutrality: a judge presides impartially, evidence is weighed objectively, and justice is delivered in accordance with established law. Yet, a closer examination reveals a more complex reality. The procedures governing admissibility of evidence, the authority of legal language, and the hierarchical structure of the courtroom all point to an underlying framework of power. Michel Foucault suggests that, such institutions are not merely venues for justice but are deeply embedded in networks of power that shape outcomes (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 184-194). Here, there is invitation for a reconsideration of law itself. Rather than viewing law as an external standard applied to social life, it becomes necessary to understand law as constitutive of social relations. The courtroom, in this sense, functions not only as a site of adjudication but also as a mechanism for producing authoritative truths. Legal judgments, therefore, are not simply discoveries of justice but constructions shaped by institutional power.

A definitional approach to law often emphasises its normative character, rules that guide behaviour and resolve disputes. However, Foucault's analysis reveals that law also operates as a disciplinary mechanism. The shift from corporal punishment to incarceration, for instance, reflects a transformation in how power is exercised within legal systems. Punishment is no longer primarily about retribution but about regulation and correction (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 231). This transformation aligns with the emergence of what Foucault terms "disciplinary society," where institutions such as prisons, schools, and hospitals work together to normalise behaviour. The prison, in particular, becomes a central site for the exercise of power, not merely confining individuals but reshaping their identities. As Foucault observes, "the prison functions as an apparatus of knowledge" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 252), producing classifications and categories that define deviance and conformity. Scholars such as David Garland extend this analysis by arguing that modern penal systems reflect broader social anxieties about control and order (Garland 28). Garland's interpretation reinforces the view that law is not isolated from society but is deeply intertwined with social power structures, this interplay is evident in how penal institutions embody both legal authority and social control (Garland 28; Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 252).

Consider the process through which laws are created and enforced. Legislatures enact statutes, courts interpret them, and enforcement agencies implement them. At each stage, decisions are influenced by political, social, and economic considerations. Karl Marx famously argued that law reflects the interests of the ruling class, serving as a tool for maintaining existing power structures (Marx and Engels 64). While Marx's analysis emphasises economic power, Foucault broadens the scope to include a wider range of power relations. Law, in this expanded view, does not merely reflect dominant interests but actively shapes social norms. The concept of legality itself becomes a means of distinguishing acceptable behaviour from deviance, thereby reinforcing social order. An additional view is offered by Max Weber, who links legal authority to legitimacy. Weber identifies rational-legal authority as a defining feature of modern societies, where obedience is based on belief in the legality of enacted rules (Weber 215). However, Foucault's critique suggests that such legitimacy is itself produced through power relations, rather than existing independently of them. Thus, the authority of law is not merely accepted but constructed.

A contemporary illustration of law as an expression of power can be found in surveillance practices. Modern policing increasingly relies on technologies that monitor behaviour, collect data, and predict potential threats. These practices extend the reach of legal power beyond traditional boundaries, embedding it within everyday life. Foucault's analysis of the panopticon provides a theoretical framework for understanding this phenomenon. He describes it as a system in which individuals internalise surveillance, leading them to regulate their own behaviour (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 201). The significance of this model lies in its efficiency: power is exercised without the need for constant intervention. Building on this, Giorgio Agamben argues that modern states increasingly operate through states of exception, where legal norms are suspended in the name of security (Agamben 15). This development highlights the fluidity of legal boundaries and the capacity of power to redefine the scope of justice. These analyses collectively demonstrate that legal systems are not static but evolve in response to changing configurations of power (Foucault *Discipline and Punish* 201; Agamben 15). The implication is that justice, as mediated through law, is similarly dynamic. Taken together, these perspectives reinforce the argument that law is not a passive instrument but a useful tool in the production of justice. Justice, therefore, cannot be understood independently of the legal structures that define and enforce it.

The Construction of Justice

One may begin not with an abstract definition but with a practical observation: what counts as "just" varies significantly across societies, legal systems, and historical periods. Practices once considered just, public executions, colonial legal hierarchies, or discriminatory laws, are now widely condemned. This variability raises a critical question: is justice a fixed moral ideal, or is it constructed within shifting configurations of power? Michel Foucault answers by situating justice within historically contingent power relations, arguing that norms emerge through institutional practices rather than universal principles (Foucault *Power/Knowledge* 131). From this standpoint, justice is not discovered but produced. It is the outcome of discursive formations, legal, political, and social, that define what is acceptable, legitimate, and true. This position challenges the classical assumption that justice exists independently of power. Instead, justice becomes intelligible only within the frameworks that power establishes.

Niccolò Machiavelli, writing in the context of political instability, places the survival of the state above conventional moral considerations. In *The Prince*, he famously advises that a ruler must learn "how not to be good" when circumstances demand it (Machiavelli 61). This assertion does not merely reject morality; it redefines justice in terms of political necessity. Machiavelli's position can be interpreted as an early articulation of the idea that power precedes justice.

For him, justice is meaningful only insofar as it contributes to the stability and security of the state. Thus, acts that might traditionally be considered unjust may become justified if they serve political ends. In this sense, Machiavelli anticipates the Foucauldian insight that norms are shaped by practical exigencies rather than abstract ideals. However, Machiavelli differs from Foucault in one crucial respect. While Machiavelli openly endorses the strategic use of power, Foucault seeks to expose the subtle mechanisms through which power operates.

Justice as Legitimacy

A political leader addressing the public rarely invokes power in its raw form; instead, appeals are made to justice, fairness, and legitimacy. This observation underscores an important dimension of justice: its performative character. Justice must not only exist but must be seen to exist. Machiavelli notes that, "men in general judge more by the eye than by the hand" (Machiavelli 70), suggesting that the appearance of justice is often more politically significant than its substance. Foucault deepens this insight by demonstrating how legitimacy is produced through institutional practices. Courts, for example, operate according to procedures that convey impartiality, thereby reinforcing public trust. Yet, these procedures are themselves products of power relations. Jürgen Habermas offers a contrasting view, arguing that legitimacy arises from rational discourse and communicative action (Habermas 107). The tension between these perspectives is instructive. While Habermas emphasises the possibility of rational consensus, Foucault highlights the constraints imposed by power. From a Foucauldian perspective, even discourse is shaped by underlying power structures, limiting the extent to which justice can be genuinely neutral.

A sociological lens further clarifies the function of justice under power. Legal systems do not merely resolve disputes; they organise society by establishing norms and expectations. Émile Durkheim argues that law reflects the moral structure of society, distinguishing between acceptable and deviant behaviour (Durkheim 68). Foucault, however, extends this analysis by showing that law does not simply reflect social norms but actively produces them. The classification of individuals as "criminal," "insane," or "normal" is not a neutral act but a form of power that shapes identities. This process reveals that justice functions as a regulatory ideal, one that guides behaviour while reinforcing existing power structures. Antonio Gramsci (145) adds another dimension by introducing the concept of hegemony, where power is maintained not only through coercion but through consent. Justice, in this framework, becomes a means of securing consent, presenting existing arrangements as natural and legitimate.

At this stage, the central question becomes unavoidable: if justice is constructed through power, does it lose its normative significance? One possible interpretation is that justice is merely an illusion, a rhetorical tool used to mask domination. This view finds support in Nietzsche's claim that moral concepts are expressions of the will to power (Nietzsche 211). Yet, such a conclusion may be overly reductive. Even if justice is shaped by power, it continues to play a crucial role in social organisation. Legal systems rely on the concept of justice to maintain order and legitimacy. Without it, power would appear arbitrary, undermining stability. In this sense, justice functions as a necessary construct, one that both reflects and sustains power relations. Foucault himself does not dismiss justice outright but encourages critical engagement with its underlying conditions. His analysis suggests that while justice cannot be separated from power, it can be reconfigured through changes in power relations. This position allows for the possibility of critique and transformation, even within a framework that acknowledges the pervasive influence of power.

Synthesis: Justice Under Power

Bringing these perspectives together, a clearer answer emerges: justice under power is neither a pure moral ideal nor a mere illusion; it is a constructed, functional, and contested product of power relations. Machiavelli reveals its dependence on political necessity, Foucault exposes its institutional construction, and critical theorists highlight its role in maintaining social order. Thus, justice must be understood as dynamic rather than static, shaped by historical and social contexts. It operates as both a tool of governance and a site of contestation, reflecting the complexities of power in modern societies. The task of legal and political philosophy, therefore, is not to separate justice from power but to critically examine how power shapes the meaning and application of justice.

Critical Evaluation

A useful point of entry into the critical question of resistance is to consider whether justice can retain any normative independence once it is understood as a product of power. Michel Foucault appears, at first glance, to undermine the very possibility of objective justice by situating it within historically contingent power relations. His assertion that "truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint" (Foucault *Power/Knowledge* 131), suggests that justice, which relies upon truth, cannot escape these constraints. Yet, this position raises a serious objection: if justice is entirely constructed by power, does critique itself lose its foundation? Without some justice beyond power, the distinction between just and unjust risks collapsing into mere preference or strategic advantage.

This concern is forcefully addressed by Ronald Dworkin, who argues that law is not simply an instrument of power but a practice of principle. Dworkin insists that legal decisions must be justified through moral reasoning, asserting that individuals possess rights that constrain political authority (Dworkin 225). His notion of "law as integrity" challenges the Foucauldian reduction of law to power by emphasising coherence, fairness, and respect for individual rights. Similarly, Lon L. Fuller defends the "inner morality of law," arguing that legal systems must adhere to principles such as generality, consistency, and publicity in order to function as law (Fuller 39). These positions reveal that even within power-laden systems, there remain internal standards through which justice can be articulated and defended.

Nevertheless, a closer reading suggests that Foucault does not entirely foreclose the possibility of resistance. Rather than denying justice, he reconfigures it as a site of struggle within power relations. Power, in Foucault's account, is not monolithic but relational, implying that where there is power, there is also the possibility of resistance (Foucault *History of Sexuality* 95). This insight allows for a reinterpretation of justice as an evolving construct shaped by contestation and critique. In this light, the contributions of Jürgen Habermas become relevant, as he locates the potential for justice in communicative rationality and public discourse (Habermas 107). While Habermas seeks to ground justice in rational consensus, Foucault would caution that such discourse is never entirely free from power. The tension between these perspectives emphasizes the complexity of the problem: justice can neither fully transcend power nor be reduced to it.

Conclusion

The analysis undertaken in this paper has demonstrated that the relationship between power and justice is far more intricate than traditional legal and political theories suggest. Rather than existing as an external standard that constrains power, justice emerges within the very structures and practices through which power is exercised. Drawing on the insights of Michel Foucault, the study has shown that legal systems function not merely as neutral arbiters but as active sites in the production of normative orders. Justice, in this sense, is historically contingent and institutionally mediated, shaped by the interplay of knowledge, discourse, and authority. In light of these findings, this paper concludes that the task of legal and political philosophy is not to detach justice from power, an endeavour that is both impractical and conceptually flawed, but to critically interrogate the conditions under which justice is produced.

References

Agamben, Giorgio. *State of Exception*. Translated by Kevin Attell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Durkheim, Émile. *The Division of Labour in Society*. Translated by W.D. Halls. New York: Free Press, 1984.

Dworkin, Ronald. *Taking Rights Seriously*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1977.

_____. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. Edited by Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

_____. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

Fuller, Lon L. *The Morality of Law*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969.

Garland, David. *Punishment and Modern Society: A Study in Social Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

Habermas, Jürgen. *Between Facts and Norms*. Translated by William Rehg. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. Edited by Richard Tuck. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511808166

Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince*. Translated by Peter Bondanella. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The German Ideology*. New York: International Publishers, 1970.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.

Plato. *Republic*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992.

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971.

Weber, Max. *Economy and Society*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

Citation: Okpanachi, Elijah O. & Agishi, Lubem. "A Foucauldian Analysis of Power, Law, and the Construction of Justice". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp1-12.

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)

Volume 1, Number 3

Mixed Method Article https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21216834 Open Access

Mastery Learning Instructional Strategy And Students' Academic Achievement In Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works In Technical Colleges In Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Namkere John Udoudo, PhD
Department of Industrial Technology Education
Faculty of Vocational Education, Library and Information Science,
University Of Uyo, Uyo

Corresponding Author's Email:
namkerejudoudo@uniuyo.edu.ng

Date Received: 27th May, 2026

Date Accepted: 12th June, 2026

Abstract

The study determined the effects of mastery learning instructional strategy on students' academic achievement in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works in Technical Colleges in Akwa Ibom State. Two specific purposes and their corresponding research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The quasi-experimental, pre-test, post-test research design was used. The population of the study comprised 177 senior technical two students from the nine public technical colleges in the state from which 68 students (60 males and 8 females) were sampled from two intact classes using purposive and random sampling techniques. Two instruments were used namely Mastery Learning Instructional Packages (MLIP) and Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works Achievement Test (MVMWAT). The mastery learning instructional packages constituted the treatment for the experimental group while the control group was taught with the conventional lesson plans. The instruments were face validated by three lecturers from University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The reliability of the MVMWAT obtained through test-retest method was 0.84. The experiment lasted for four weeks covering four lessons. The mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. It was found that there was a significant difference between the mean post-test scores of students in the two groups in favour of the experimental group. There was no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when exposed to Mastery Learning instructional *strategy and lecture method. It is recommended, among others, that teachers of Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works in Akwa Ibom state technical colleges should henceforth adopt the mastery learning* instructional *strategy in conjunction with the conventional methods in teaching Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works.*

Keywords: Mastery learning instructional Strategy, academic achievement, Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works, Gender.

Introduction

Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works is one of the technical trade courses offered in Nigerian Technical Colleges which is concerned with the study of the automobile, its design, construction, maintenance and repairs. The major goal of Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works programme is to produce competent craftsmen and technicians in auto mechanics trade for Nigeria's technological and industrial development. Graduates of Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works are expected to test, diagnose, service and completely repair any fault relating to the conventional vehicles and also assemble main units and systems by following the manufacturers' specifications. Considering the importance of Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works in facilitating Nigeria's technological development, there is need for the use of appropriate teaching and learning strategies in the teaching of the subject. One of the teaching strategies that is of interest in this study is mastery learning instructional strategy.

Mastery learning instructional strategy is an instructional approach where students need to demonstrate a deep level of understanding of a topic or unit before progressing into another topic or unit. It is an instructional approach where students are allowed unlimited opportunities to demonstrate mastery of content taught. The strategy allows students to repeatedly study the course material until they master it. Mastery of each unit is shown when the student acquires competencies evident by the set pass mark of a diagnostic test (Salihu and Francis, 2018). Mastery learning strategy helps the students to acquire prerequisite skills before moving to the next unit. The teacher also is required to do task analysis and state the objectives clearly and explicitly before designating the activities.

The Mastery learning instructional strategy was developed by Benjamin Bloom and it consists of several steps which include the following: distribution of lesson content into smaller parts, formulation of objectives related to each subdivision, organization of teaching for realizing objectives of each subdivision, administering formative test to evaluate the mastery level and diagnosing the knotty areas, giving remedial instructions to remove the ambiguities and finally, attainment of mastery level by every student (Oginni, *et al,* 2021). Udo, Ovute and Udoudo (2025) pointed out that in using Mastery Learning instructional strategy, the teacher first set the acceptable mastery level for each task and then organizes a variety of individual or group-based instructional techniques to fulfil the requirements of all students. Formative assessment with regular feedback are used to diagnose the weak areas and to improve the instructional process rather than to measure achievement. Corrective assignments are also used to ensure the optimum achievement of learning objectives. Finally, at the end of each unit, criterion referenced tests are used for the evaluation of students' performance.

There are two major models of mastery learning strategies namely individualized or personalized model (also known as Keller's model) and group- based model (otherwise known as Bloom's model). Udo, Madu and Udo (2025) posited that both models adopt the same procedure except that while the individualized model seeks to promote mastery learning of a pre-specified set of objectives for each learner in a subject or course, the Group-Based model seeks to promote mastery learning of a unit of instruction for all members of a class or group in a subject or course. Also, both models use the system of reading and studying prepared study guides. The study guide may take different forms from print-based, to computer-based and internet-based instruction. Proctors (classmates or seniors who have successfully completed the course or an undergraduate who have been chosen for his mastery of the course content), are sometimes provided to give immediate feedback to the students and to assist them in their areas of difficulty. This study used the group based model of mastery learning for the experimental group and lecture method for the control group in order to compare the effectiveness of the two methods on the students' academic achievement in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works.

Academic achievement refers to the learning outcomes of students which include the knowledge, skills and ideas acquired and retained through a course of study within and outside the classroom situation (Hassan, *et al*, 2021). Academic achievement is an indication of how well an individual student has done his cognitive tasks. It is an expression of the general ability of students in their subjects/ courses compared to a specified standard called "Pass Marks". Eze, et al (2016) stressed that the pass mark is usually relative and can be arbitrarily defined as 40% or 50% and it defines whether the academic achievement is high, average or low/poor. When the score is above the pass mark, it is described as a high academic achievement while the one below the pass mark is designated as a poor academic achievement. A high academic achievement can lead to better retention of the subject matter by the students. Students' academic achievement and retention in a subject can be influenced by the students' gender.

Gender is the socially constructed differences between males and females (Iserameiyaa and Ibeneme, 2018). Studies abound on gender differences and students' achievement in science and technology subjects but their findings are conflicting. While some studies such as Iserameiyaa and Ibeneme (2018) and Nkok (2022) reported that there was no significant difference in students' academic achievement and retention in Basic technology with respect to their gender, others like Onuaha, Obionu and Njoku (2025) reported that there was significant difference between males and females in their academic achievement and retention of learning in Radio, Television and Electronic works. In view of these controversial findings, there is need for more investigation with respect to mastery learning strategy and students' academic achievement in Motor Vehicle Mechanics works.

Several studies have been conducted to examine the effects of mastery learning instructional strategy on students' academic achievement in many science and technology subjects such as Chemistry (Amos and Mkpa, 2023; Udo, Madu and Udo, 2025; Udo, Ovute and Udoudo, 2025), mathematics (Toheed & Ali, 2019; Oginni, *et al,* 2021), Basic technology (Iserameiyaa and Ibeneme, 2018) and Radio, Television and Electronic works (Onuaha, *et al,* 2025). However, not much work has been done with respect to Motor Vehicle Mechanics works in Akwa Ibom State technical colleges. It therefore becomes imperative to explore the efficacy or otherwise of mastery learning instructional strategy on technical college students' academic achievement in Motor Vehicle Mechanics works in Akwa Ibom State.

Statement of the Problem

Students of Motor Vehicle Mechanics works are expected to be proficient and to perform creditably in both internal and external examinations. It is however disheartening to observe that students' academic achievement and retention in MVMW in the NABTEB examinations are below expectation as indicated by chief examiners reports from examination bodies like the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) and West African Examinations Council (WAEC). This has been an issue of great concern to technical educators considering the relevance of MVMW to the nations' technological and industrial development. Despite much concerted efforts by teachers to improve students learning outcomes in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works, many students still struggle to understand and retain the concepts taught. Most researchers have attributed the poor students' achievement and retention in Motor Vehicle Mechanics works to the use of poor instructional strategies by most teachers. It is observed that the most commonly used teaching method by teachers of Motor Vehicle Mechanics works in Akwa Ibom State is the lecture method which is a teacher-centred method that does not emphasize mastery of previous lessons before going to a new one. Thus, it may not be effective in facilitating deep learning and understanding among students. On this basis, there is need to explore a new instructional strategy such as mastery learning instructional strategy.

Several studies have shown that the use of mastery learning instructional strategy considerably improve students' academic achievement, in many science and technology subjects such as Mathematics, Chemistry, Basic Science and Technology and Radio, Television and Electronic works. However, there is dearth of empirical evidences on its effectiveness in Motor Vehicle Mechanics works in Technical Colleges in Akwa Ibom State. The absence of research studies that address these issues therefore solicits a study to answer the question: What are the effects of mastery learning instructional strategy on students' academic achievement in Motor Vehicle Mechanics works in Technical Colleges in Akwa Ibom State?

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to determine the effects of mastery learning instructional strategy on technical college students' achievement in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. to find out the difference in the mean achievement scores of students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when taught using Mastery Learning instructional strategy and lecture method.
2. to ascertain the difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when exposed to Mastery Learning instructional strategy and lecture method

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:-

1. What is the difference in the mean achievement scores of students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when taught using Mastery Learning instructional strategy and lecture method?
2. What is the difference between the mean achievement scores of male and female students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when taught using Mastery Learning instructional strategy and lecture method?

Hypotheses: The following null hypotheses formulated to guide the study were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

HO_1: There is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when taught using Mastery Learning instructional strategy and lecture method

HO_2: There is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores of male and female students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when taught using Mastery Learning instructional strategy and lecture method

Research Methodology

The quasi-experimental research design, specifically, pre-test - post-test non-equivalent control group design was adopted in the study. This implies that intact classes were used for the study. This research was conducted in Akwa Ibom State which is one of the 36 states in Nigeria. The State has nine state owned technical colleges and one federal technical college. The population of the study consisted of 177 Senior Technical Two (ST 2) students offering Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works from the nine state owned Technical Colleges in Akwa Ibom State during the 2023/2024 academic session. The sample of the study consisted of 68 students (62 males and 6 females). The sample came from two intact classes in two selected Technical Colleges. Purposive sampling technique was first used to select two out of the nine technical colleges in the state.

The selection was based on schools with a higher number of ST 2 students offering Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works. Based on this criteria, two schools were purposively selected for the study. Thereafter, one intact ST 2 class with 50 students was randomly selected from one of the schools and assigned to experimental group while one intact class with 18 students was selected from the other school and randomly assigned to the control group.

Two researcher made instruments were used in the study. They were: Mastery Learning Instructional Packages (MLIP) and Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works Achievement Test (MVMWAT). The Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works Achievement Test comprised 30 multiple choice items on the relevant topics taught to the students with four options lettered A- D with only one correct answer. Each question was scored 2 points and the total score was 60 marks. The test was first used as pre-test to determine the baseline knowledge of the students in the two groups before the experiment. It was also used as post-test after the treatment and as retention test after being reshuffled after each administration. The instruments used in the study were subjected to face and content validation. The face validation was done by three research experts in the University of Uyo. The reliability coefficient of the Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works Achievement Test (MVMWAT) was 0.89 obtained using test-retest method.

The experiment was conducted in three phases as follows: Pre-treatment phase, Treatment phase and Post treatment phase. In the pre-treatment phase, students in the selected intact classes were randomly assigned by the researcher to either of the two study groups after which they were given the pretest. In the treatment phase, four lessons were covered in four weeks as follows: Automobile lubrication system (Week 1), Water cooling system (Week 2), Automobile ignition system (Week 3) and Automobile fuel system (Week 4). The post treatment phase involved the administration of the post test immediately after the treatment. Data collected from the students were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions raised whereas the hypotheses formulated were tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the difference in the mean achievement scores of students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when taught using mastery learning instructional strategy and lecture method?

Table 1: Mean Pre-test and Post-test scores of students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when taught using Mastery Learning Strategy and lecture method

S/n	Group/ Method	n	Pre Test $\bar{X}$	SD	Post Test $\bar{X}$	SD	Mean Difference
1	Mastery Learning	50	33.84	1.24	50.68	1.73	16.84
2.	Lecture Method	18	34.50	1.25	42.44	1.22	7.94

The result in Table 1 shows that the mean pre-test and post-test scores of students in the experimental group who were taught using mastery learning were 34.50 and 50.68 respectively with standard deviations of 1.24 and 1.17. The corresponding mean pre-test and post-test scores for those in group 2 are 34.50 and 42.44 respectively with standard deviations of 1.25 and 1.22. It could be observed that students who were taught using mastery learning instructional strategy obtained a higher mean difference of 16.84 as against 7.94 obtained by those taught using lecture method.

This result suggests that teaching Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works using mastery learning instructional strategy enhances students' achievement in the subject than using the lecture method.

Research Question 2: What is the difference between the mean achievement scores of male and female students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when taught using mastery learning instructional strategy and lecture method?

Table 2: Mean Pre-test and Post-test scores of male and female students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when taught using Mastery Learning Strategy and Lecture method

Group/ Method	Gender	N	Pre Test $\bar{X}$	SD	Post Test $\bar{X}$	SD	Mean Difference
Mastery	Male	45	33.20	2.10	50.62	3.77	17.42
Learning	Female	5	39.60	2.19	51.20	3.84	11.60
Lecture	Male	15	34.93	3.28	42.53	2.06	7.60
	Female	3	32.33	2.51	42.00	3.46	9.67

The result in Table 2 shows that the mean pre-test and post-test scores of male students in the experimental group were 33.20 and 50.62 respectively with standard deviations of 2.10 and 3.77. It could be observed that male students in the experimental group obtained a higher mean difference of 17.42 as against 11.60 obtained by their female colleagues. Also, female students in the control group obtained a higher mean difference of 9.67 as against 7.60 obtained by their male colleagues. This result suggests that teaching Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works using mastery learning instructional strategy enhances male students' achievement in the subject more than the female students.

Hypothesis 1 (HO_1): There is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores of students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when taught using mastery learning instructional strategy and lecture method

Hypothesis 2 (HO 2: There is no significant difference between the mean achievement scores of male and female students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when taught using mastery learning instructional strategy and lecture method

Data relating to hypothesis 1 and 2 is presented in Table 5

Table 3: Analysis of Covariance test for significant difference in the mean post-test scores of students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when taught with Mastery Learning Strategy and Lecture method

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Corrected Model	908.612	4	227.15	18.87	0.00	
Intercept	2539.07	1	2539.07	210.93	0.00	
PRESTEST	8.73	1	8.73	0.73	0.40	
GROUP	487.57	1	487.57	40.50	0.00	S
GENDER	.19	1	.19	0.016	0.90	NS
GROUP * GENDER	4.96	1	4.96	0.412	0.52	
Error	758.38	63	12.04			
Total	161620.00	68				
Corrected Total	1667.00	67				

*S = Significant at 0.05 level of significance; *NS = Not Significant at 0.05 level of significance

The data in Table 3 shows that the f -value for group or teaching method is 40.50 with p- value (probability value) being 0.00. Since the obtained p- value is less than the stipulated probability level of 0.05, it implies that the value of f is significant at 0.05 level of significance. On this basis, the null hypothesis one is rejected implying that there is significant difference between the mean post test scores of students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when taught using mastery learning instructional strategy and lecture method.

Table 3 shows that the f -value for gender is 0.016 with p- value (probability value) being 0.90. Since the obtained p-value is greater than the stipulated probability level of 0.05, it implies that the value of f is not significant at 0.05 level of significance. On this basis, the null hypothesis is accepted implying that there is no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when exposed to mastery learning instructional strategy and lecture method.

Findings of the Study

The following findings were made in the study

i. There was a significant difference between the mean post test scores of students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when taught using mastery learning instructional strategy and lecture method.

ii. There was no significant difference in the mean achievement scores of male and female students in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when exposed to mastery learning instructional strategy and lecture method.

Discussion of Findings

In the study, it was found that students taught Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works using mastery learning instructional strategy performed better than those taught using lecture method. Testing of the corresponding hypothesis confirmed that there was significant difference between the mean post test scores of students in the two groups. The difference was in favour of those in the experimental group who were taught using mastery learning instructional strategy. This result could be attributed to the fact that mastery learning instructional strategy enables students to understand a unit of instruction very well before proceeding to the next unit. This finding agrees with that of Amos and Mkpa (2023) and Udo, Madu and Udo (2025) who in their separate studies found that mastery learning strategy enhance students' academic achievement more than the lecture method.

It was also found in the study that there is no significant difference in male and female students' mean achievement scores in Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works when taught using Mastery Learning strategy and lecture method. This finding support that of Onuaha, Obionu and Njoku, (2025) who found that there is no significant difference in students' achievement in Radio and Television works when taught using Mastery Learning and lecture method. The present finding however contradicted that of Amos and Mkpa (2023) who reported that male students performed better than their female counterparts in Chemistry when taught using the mastery learning strategy.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that teaching Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works using mastery learning instructional strategy enhances students' academic achievement better than using the lecture method. Also, the Mastery Learning strategy is gender friendly as it does not favour one gender than the other.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study.

i. Teachers of Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works in Akwa Ibom state technical colleges should henceforth adopt the mastery learning instructional strategy in teaching Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works

ii. Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works teachers should de-emphasize the use of the traditional methods of teaching.

iii. The Akwa Ibom State Technical Schools Board and the National Board for Technical Education should recommend Mastery learning instructional strategy as one of the instructional strategies for teaching Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works in order to improve students' achievement and retention in the subject.

References

Amos, U. S. and Mkpa, M. A. (2023). Effects of mastery learning strategy on secondary school students' achievement in chemistry in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District. *International Journal of Latest research in Humanities and Social Science, 1(11), 237-243*

Eze, T. I., Ezenwafor, J. I. and Obidile, I. J. (2016). Effects of problem-based teaching method on students' academic performance and retention in Financial Accounting in Technical colleges in Anambra State. *Scholars Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 4 (6A), 634 – 639. Retrieved on 12/12/24 from http://saspjournals.com/sjahss

Hassan, A. M.; Mannir, M. S.; Akinduro, I. R. and Sanni, T. A. (2021). Effect of mastery learning method on students' achievement and interest in furniture craft in technical colleges in Niger State. *Annals of Technology Education Practitioners Association*, 4(4), 144-149

Iserameiyaa, F. E. and Ibeneme, O. T. (2018). Effect of mastery learning strategy on junior secondary school students' academic achievement in Basic Technology in Edo state, Nigeria. *International Journal of New Technology and Research*, 4(3), 95-101

Nkok, E. A. E. (2022). Interaction effect of gender and teaching method on students' interest, achievement and retention in sexual reproduction in plants. *International Journal of Innovative Social Science Education Research*, 10(4), 56-65

Ogini, O. I.; Akinola, A. S.; Fadiji, A. E. & Amole, P. A. (2021). Effects of mastery learning strategy on secondary school students' performance in Mathematics. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 2(5), 59-63

Onuaha, R., Obionu, P. C and Njoku, S. U. (2025). Effects of mastery learning teaching method on students' academic achievement and attitude in Radio and Television works. *International Journal of Educational Studies,* 3(1), 15-23

Salihu, M. M. & Francis, T. T. (2018). Mastery learning strategy: A panacea for effective curriculum implementation in lower basic schools in Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Education Development* 2(2), 1-11

Toheed, L. & Ali, A. (2019). Effects of mastery learning model on academic achievement of secondary school students in Mathematics. *Global Social Sciences Review,* IV (IV), 232-238

Udo, M. S., Madu, A. O. and Udo, I. A. (2025). Personalised and group-based mastery learning strategies and students' academic achievement in chemistry in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria. *Journal of Philosophy, Policy and Strategic Studies (JPPSS), 1 (8), 166 -176*

Udo, M. S.; Ovute, A. O and Udoudo, N. J. (2025). Effects of Personalised and Group-Based Mastery Learning Strategies on Students' Retention in Chemistry in Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *IDEAS: Uniuyo Journal of Philosophy and Multi-Disciplinary Studies*, 1 (4), 88-98

Citation: Udoudo, Namkere John. "Mastery Learning Instructional Strategy And Students' Academic Achievement In Motor Vehicle Mechanics Works In Technical Colleges In Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW),* 2026: pp13-23.

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)

Volume 1, Number 3

Review Article https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21216508 Open Access

The Role of Innovation, Sustainability, and Strategic Transformation in Manufacturing for Industrial Resilience in Emerging Economies

Abstract

This study examined how the convergence of innovation, sustainability, and strategic transformation is shaping industrial resilience in emerging economies, with manufacturing as the primary analytical lens. Drawing on the Dynamic Capabilities Framework and the Shared Value Theory, the study employed a qualitative systematic literature review methodology guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework. Fifty-one peer-reviewed studies, institutional reports, and policy documents published between 2015 and 2024 were identified and subjected to thematic content analysis. Four dominant themes emerged from the analysis and they are: the transformative role of innovation ecosystems in generating industrial agility; the strategic repositioning of sustainability from compliance obligation to competitive asset; the function of proactive strategic transformation in enabling manufacturers to adapt and sustain value creation amid disruption; and the structural barriers, including infrastructure gaps, institutional fragility, financing constraints, and skills deficits, that continue to constrain progress across all three pillars. The study concluded that industrial resilience in emerging economies is not a product of any single force but emerges from the deliberate, integrated alignment of innovation, sustainability, and strategic transformation into a coherent industrial development system. Governments, manufacturers, and international development partners are called to co-invest in enabling ecosystems that make resilience both achievable and sustainable for the communities that depend on it most.

Keywords: Industrial resilience, emerging economies, manufacturing, innovation ecosystems, sustainable manufacturing, strategic transformation.

Temitope Oluwafemi Ademola
Business Innovation, School of Business
Osiri University, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
+2348077301197, +2348102985374
ORCID NO - 0009-0005-5680-6040

Jide Gboyega Okedeji
Business Innovation, School of Business
Osiri University, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
+2347038024827
ORCID NO - 0009-0000-7648-6180

Oladeji Johnson Olawale
Business Innovation, School of Business
Osiri University, Lincoln , Nebraska, USA
+2348137888012
ORCID NO - 0008-5378-6808

Sandra Afriyie Agyemang
Marketing and Corporate Strategy
KNUST School of Business
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana
+233242258533
ORCID NO - 0009-0006-6049-4729

Rufai Fatai Laide
Business Innovation, School of Business
Osiri University, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
+2347030139313
ORCID N0 - 0009-0005-9026-0651

Jamiyu Abiodun Ibraheem
Entrepreneurship Division
Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu, Ebonyi state, Nigeria
+2348032459428
ORCID NO - 0009-0005-8621-5305

Simiat Oluwatoyin Usman
Business Innovation, School of Business
Osiri University, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
+2348089485533
ORCID NO - 0009-0005-3034-1249

Oluwatoyin Olayinka Odobo
Business Innovation, School of Business
Osiri University, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
+234 8055416853
ORCID NO: 0009-0003-5248-6962

Corresponding Author's Email:
temademola@gmail.com

Date Received: 04th June, 2026

Date Accepted: 12th June, 2026

Introduction

There is a particular kind of pressure that settles on a manufacturing worker in Lagos, Dhaka, or Ho Chi Minh City every morning. It is the pressure of knowing that the machine operated, the orders filled, and the wages earned could all shift unexpectedly depending on forces never chosen and rarely controls. A pandemic disrupts supply chains. A commodity price spike raises her factory's input costs overnight. A distant policy change redirects the investment that sustains her sector. For millions of workers, entrepreneurs, and communities in emerging economies, industrial fragility is not an abstraction; it is the lived experience of daily life. Within this fragility, something remarkable is also happening. Across Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, a generation of manufacturers is learning to innovate faster, operate more sustainably, and transform more strategically than at any previous point in history. The question motivating this study is whether, and precisely how, these efforts are adding up to genuine industrial resilience.

Industrial resilience, understood as the capacity of a manufacturing system to absorb shocks, adapt to changing conditions, and continue delivering value over time, has moved to the centre of development policy conversations in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of globally concentrated supply chains with devastating speed, rendering the resilience agenda unmistakably urgent. The drivers of industrial fragility in emerging economies pre-date that crisis and will outlast it. Commodity dependence, technological gaps, institutional weakness, climate vulnerability, and infrastructure deficits are structural conditions that have constrained the adaptive capacity of manufacturing industries across the developing world for decades (UNIDO, 2022). Addressing them requires more than emergency response; it requires the kind of deliberate, systemic industrial transformation that is the subject of this paper.

Three forces have emerged in the academic and policy literature as particularly consequential for industrial resilience in emerging economies: innovation, sustainability, and strategic transformation. Innovation, encompassing technological development, process improvement, organizational learning, and business model reinvention, enables manufacturers to sense and seize opportunities, reduce operational vulnerabilities, and create new sources of competitive advantage (Teece *et al.*, 1997; Fagerberg *et al.*, 2010). Sustainability, no longer simply a matter of environmental compliance, has become a strategic imperative: manufacturers that embed environmental and social stewardship into their operations are increasingly better positioned to attract investment, access premium markets, and manage long-term resource risks (Elkington, 1998; Porter & Kramer, 2011). And strategic transformation, the deliberate, structural reimagining of how firms and industries organize, compete, and create value, provides the organizational architecture within which innovation and sustainability can be pursued consistently and at scale (Teece, 2007). Understanding how these three forces interact, and under what conditions they generate systemic resilience, is the animating purpose of this paper.

Although substantial scholarly attention has been devoted to each of these forces independently, limited research has comprehensively explored their interconnected influence, particularly within manufacturing industries in emerging economies. This study addresses that gap by synthesizing 51 peer-reviewed studies, institutional reports, and policy documents published between 2015 and 2024. The analysis is anchored in the Dynamic Capabilities Framework (Teece *et al.*, 1997; Teece, 2007) and the Shared Value Theory (Porter & Kramer, 2011), and employs qualitative systematic literature review methodology guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework (Page *et al.*, 2021). The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the research objectives; Section 3 the research questions; Section 4 the statement of the problem; Section 5 the literature review; Section 6 the theoretical framework; Section 7 the methodology; Section 8 the findings and discussion; and Sections 9 and 10 the conclusion and recommendations.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

i. Examine how innovation ecosystems contribute to industrial resilience in the manufacturing sectors of emerging economies.
ii. Analyse how sustainability practices function as strategic assets for enhancing the long-term competitiveness and resilience of manufacturing industries in emerging economies.
iii. Assess how strategic transformation enables manufacturing firms in emerging economies to adapt, reposition, and sustain value creation amid disruptive economic, technological, and environmental pressures.
iv. Identify the structural barriers and enabling conditions that shape emerging economies' capacity to drive industrial resilience through the integrated pursuit of innovation, sustainability, and strategic transformation.

Research Questions

To achieve the objectives above, the study is guided by the following research questions:

i. In what ways do innovation ecosystems contribute to building industrial resilience in the manufacturing sectors of emerging economies?
ii. In what ways can sustainability practices function as strategic resources that strengthen the long-term competitiveness and resilience of manufacturing industries in emerging economies?
iii. In what ways does strategic transformation enable manufacturing firms in emerging economies to adapt and sustain value creation in the face of disruptive pressures?
iv. What structural barriers and enabling conditions shape emerging economies' capacity to drive industrial resilience through the integrated pursuit of innovation, sustainability, and strategic transformation?

Statement of the Problem

Manufacturing industries in emerging economies occupy a paradoxical position in the global development landscape. They are widely recognized as critical engines of economic growth, employment creation, and poverty reduction, yet they remain simultaneously among the most exposed to disruption: vulnerable to commodity price volatility, susceptible to supply chain collapse, technologically dependent on foreign inputs, and institutionally constrained by governance structures not designed with industrial complexity in mind (UNIDO, 2022; World Bank, 2022). The central challenge is therefore not simply to grow manufacturing output but to grow it in ways that are resilient, meaning in ways that enable industries to absorb shocks, adapt to change, and continue delivering value for workers, communities, and economies over the long run.

The academic literature has responded to this challenge with expanding research on innovation in manufacturing, sustainable production systems, and strategic management in developing-country firms. However, three interconnected gaps collectively constitute the problem this study addresses. First, research on industrial innovation in emerging economies has concentrated on technology adoption and productivity catch-up without adequately examining how these processes build systemic resilience over time. Fagerberg *et al.* (2010) observed that innovation's relationship to development outcomes in the developing world is underexplored relative to its importance, and subsequent scholarship has not adequately filled this gap with respect to resilience-building specifically. The innovation literature has largely treated resilience as an output variable rather than as a design principle that shapes how innovation strategies are conceived and pursued.

Second, the sustainability literature in manufacturing contexts has expanded considerably but has typically treated environmental and social performance as compliance concerns or reputational variables, rather than as strategic assets that fundamentally shape competitive positioning and long-run industrial viability. Geissdoerfer *et al.* (2017) themselves acknowledge that the conceptual relationship between circular economy practices and sustainability in manufacturing remains underspecified, particularly in developing-country contexts where implementation conditions differ fundamentally from those in advanced economies. Elkington's (1998) foundational Triple Bottom Line argument that sustainability must be embedded in business strategy rather than treated as a peripheral obligation has not been sufficiently operationalized in the emerging economy manufacturing literature.

Third, and most critically for this study, existing scholarship has not examined innovation, sustainability, and strategic transformation as an integrated system of forces collectively generating industrial resilience. These streams of scholarship have developed largely in parallel. Schlogl and Sumner (2020) document how technological disruption is reshaping the labour market and structural transformation possibilities of developing countries, yet the connection between this disruption and the strategic, sustainability-oriented responses of manufacturing firms remains underexplored. The practical consequence of this scholarly fragmentation is that policy-makers, industrial managers, and development partners working on manufacturing resilience in emerging economies lack the integrated framework they need to design and evaluate coherent, multi-pillar resilience strategies. Closing this gap is the central ambition of the present study.

Literature Review

The literature on industrial development in emerging economies has undergone a meaningful evolution, moving from a preoccupation with aggregate growth rates and structural change toward a more nuanced engagement with the quality, durability, and human dimension of industrial progress. This section reviews scholarly and institutional literature published between 2015 and 2024 across three thematic pillars, namely innovation and industrial resilience, sustainability as a strategic imperative, and strategic transformation in manufacturing. It concludes by identifying the integrative gap that motivates this study.

Innovation has long been recognized as a primary driver of industrial competitiveness, but its specific relationship to resilience has attracted more focused scholarly attention only in recent years. Teece *et al.* (1997), in their

Citation: Ademola, Temitope O.; Okedeji, Jide G., Olawale, Oladeji J., Agyemang, Sandra A., Laide, Rufai F., Ibraheem, Jamiyu A., Usman, Simiat O. & Odobo, Oluwatoyin O. "The Role of Innovation, Sustainability, and Strategic Transformation in Manufacturing for Industrial Resilience in Emerging Economies". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp24-52.

foundational articulation of the Dynamic Capabilities Framework, argued that competitive advantage in rapidly changing environments is not determined by the static possession of valuable resources but by the firm's capacity to develop three interconnected capabilities: the capacity to sense emerging opportunities and threats in the external environment; the capacity to seize those opportunities through targeted investment, organizational change, and business model adaptation; and the capacity to reconfigure the firm's internal resource base and competencies to maintain strategic alignment as conditions evolve. Teece (2007) subsequently elaborated this framework by connecting these capabilities to their organizational microfoundations, the specific routines, decision rules, and leadership practices through which sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring activities are performed. Together these contributions provide a process-oriented account of how innovation-driven adaptive capacity, rather than any specific technological asset, constitutes the basis of durable resilience.

Fagerberg *et al.* (2010) provide a foundational examination of innovation's role in economic development, emphasizing that innovation is not solely a high-technology, advanced-economy phenomenon but is central to how developing-country firms and industries compete and grow. Their analysis of the diversity of innovation processes in developing countries highlights that catching up technologically requires not just importing foreign technologies but building the absorptive and adaptive capacities to modify, improve, and deploy those technologies in local production contexts. This argument is directly relevant to the resilience question: firms and industries with stronger innovation absorptive capacities are better equipped to adapt their production systems when disruption strikes, whether in the form of supply chain collapse, demand shocks, or competitive displacement.

Lundvall (2010) extends this firm-level perspective to the national level through the National Systems of Innovation framework, arguing that the density, quality, and inclusiveness of knowledge linkages within an economy, among firms, universities, research institutions, government agencies, and international partners, determine the collective capacity of an industrial system to learn, adapt, and generate innovation over time. Applied to the resilience question, this framework suggests that the adaptive capacity of manufacturing industries in emerging economies is not purely a firm-level property but a systemic one, shaped by the institutional architecture of knowledge production and diffusion. Countries and regions with richer, more connected innovation ecosystems can absorb and adapt to disruption more effectively than those characterized by fragmented, weakly connected knowledge structures.

The role of global value chain participation in building innovation and resilience capabilities has been examined by Kaplinsky and Morris (2016), who argue that emerging economy manufacturers face a critical strategic choice between thin participation, characterized by low-value-added assembly activities, and thick participation, which involves moving into design, branding, logistics, and other higher-value activities. Their central argument is that firms capable of achieving functional upgrading within global value chains, moving toward higher-value activities supported by dynamic capability development, achieve more durable competitive positions less vulnerable to the commodity-price and labour-cost competition that characterizes thin participation. This upgrading perspective has direct implications for resilience: manufacturers that have upgraded functionally within value chains have diversified their sources of competitive advantage and reduced their dependence on the low-margin positions most exposed to displacement.

The digital dimension of industrial innovation has received particularly intense scholarly attention in the review period. Müller *et al.* (2018) examined the drivers of Industry 4.0 technology adoption among 746 German manufacturers, finding that both the opportunity and challenge dimensions of digital technologies motivate adoption, with the competitive challenge perception being particularly important. For emerging economy manufacturers, the implications are significant: the adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies, including artificial intelligence, advanced robotics, and digital supply chain management platforms, generates new forms of operational flexibility and supply chain transparency that translate directly into adaptive resilience capacity. UNCTAD (2021) documents at the policy level how manufacturers in Southeast Asia that invested in digital innovation capabilities demonstrated superior adaptive capacity during the pandemic supply chain disruptions, confirming the real-world resilience dividend of digital innovation.

However, the literature consistently identifies a distributional fragmentation that limits the sectoral reach of innovation-driven resilience. Schlogl and Sumner (2020), examining the broader structural transformation implications of automation and digitization in developing countries, find that technological change is producing dual-economy dynamics in which a small, technologically sophisticated tier of producers captures the productivity and resilience gains while the mass of smaller, less-connected firms is left outside the innovation frontier. Lundvall (2010) had earlier theorized the systemic conditions under which this concentration occurs, arguing that innovation systems with weak institutional linkages and limited knowledge diffusion mechanisms systematically exclude smaller and less-connected actors. Together, these perspectives indicate that while innovation ecosystems are powerful drivers of industrial agility, their contribution to systemic resilience depends critically on their inclusiveness and the quality of the linkages that connect different tiers of the manufacturing sector.

The reframing of sustainability from an environmental compliance obligation to a strategic competitive asset is one of the most significant intellectual developments in industrial management scholarship over the past two decades. Elkington (1998) laid the conceptual groundwork for this reframing through the Triple Bottom Line framework, arguing that business performance must be evaluated across economic, environmental, and social dimensions simultaneously and that firms which embed sustainability into their core strategy rather than treating it as a peripheral obligation create more durable value. Porter and Kramer (2011) advanced this argument most influentially through the concept of Creating Shared Value, contending that firms which identify and act on opportunities to create economic value in ways that simultaneously address social and environmental challenges generate competitive advantages that are more durable and less imitable than those based on cost minimization or market power alone.

Applied to manufacturing in emerging economies, the Shared Value logic reframes sustainability not as a constraint imposed from outside but as an endogenous source of competitive advantage. Manufacturers that redesign production processes to minimize waste and maximize resource efficiency simultaneously reduce input costs and improve environmental performance; manufacturers that strengthen the supplier ecosystems and local workforces on which their operations depend simultaneously reduce supply chain risk and build community goodwill; and manufacturers that develop products addressing unmet social needs in their markets simultaneously access new revenue streams and generate positive social impact. Porter and Kramer (2011) argue that these are not trade-offs between profitability and social responsibility but genuinely complementary strategies, and the weight of empirical evidence from the review period increasingly supports this claim.

Geissdoerfer *et al.* (2017) provide a rigorous conceptual analysis of the relationship between the circular economy and sustainability in manufacturing, identifying eight distinct relationship types between these two increasingly prominent frameworks. Their analysis reveals that while circular economy practices, including material recovery, remanufacturing, product-as-a-service models, and waste-to-energy systems, overlap substantially with sustainability objectives, they are distinct concepts whose integration is most powerful when pursued within an explicit strategic framework. For emerging economy manufacturers, this integrated approach delivers multiple resilience benefits: reduced dependence on volatile raw material imports, lower waste disposal costs, improved regulatory compliance, and new revenue streams from recovered materials. These benefits compound over time into a structural cost advantage that is particularly valuable in economies where commodity price volatility creates significant input cost uncertainty.

Ezeudu and Ezeudu (2019) provide important empirical grounding for these theoretical arguments in an African manufacturing context. Their case study analysis of circular economy principle implementation across four Nigerian industrial sectors, namely telecommunications, water packaging, pulp and paper, and food manufacturing, documents both the resilience benefits and the implementation barriers of sustainability-oriented production in a low-income African economy. The study finds that circular principles, when implemented, generate meaningful improvements in resource efficiency and environmental compliance, but that implementation is constrained by insufficient expert knowledge, inadequate policy support, and limited financing for circular technology investment. This finding is significant for two reasons: it confirms the applicability of circular economy principles in Sub-Saharan African manufacturing contexts, and it identifies the specific enabling conditions that must be in place for sustainability to deliver its theoretical resilience benefits in practice.

The market access dimension of sustainability has emerged as a particularly strategic driver in the review period. UNCTAD (2021) documents how emerging economy manufacturers that proactively adopted internationally recognized environmental and social standards accessed higher-value export markets and attracted international buyers increasingly incorporating environmental due diligence requirements into their sourcing decisions. Porter and Heppelmann (2014) provide an additional dimension to this argument through their analysis of smart, connected products: as digital technologies enable manufacturers to embed sustainability metrics into product performance monitoring and reporting, sustainability performance becomes visible and verifiable to buyers in ways it was not in earlier manufacturing eras, raising both the costs of non-performance and the market rewards for demonstrated sustainability leadership.

Despite this compelling evidence, sustainability adoption remains unevenly distributed across emerging economy manufacturing. The World Bank (2022) identifies weak regulatory enforcement, limited green financing mechanisms, and underdeveloped technical capacity as the primary barriers to sustainability investment in low- and middle-income country manufacturing. Without consistent policy signals that reward sustainable behaviour, and without financing instruments that make green technology investment affordable for smaller manufacturers, sustainability's strategic potential remains largely unrealized across the broad base of the manufacturing sector, even where its value is demonstrated in leading firms. This gap between demonstrated potential and realized practice is one of the most practically consequential findings documented in the reviewed literature.

Strategic transformation, understood as the fundamental and deliberate reimagining of how a firm or industry organizes, competes, and creates value, represents the third pillar through which industrial resilience is shaped in emerging economies. Unlike incremental operational improvement, strategic transformation involves changes to business models, organizational structures, market positioning, and value chain configurations that collectively reorient a manufacturing enterprise toward a more resilient competitive logic (Teece, 2007). The literature consistently distinguishes between reactive transformation, which occurs in crisis response and enables survival but rarely generates sustained competitive advantage, and proactive transformation, which involves anticipating future conditions and repositioning the firm ahead of disruption, creating the organizational and operational capabilities needed to thrive across a range of possible futures.

Teece (2007) elaborated the microfoundations of strategic transformation through the Dynamic Capabilities Framework, connecting the sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring activities of adaptive enterprises to the specific organizational routines, decision-making processes, and leadership practices that make transformation possible and sustainable. The implication for manufacturing strategy in emerging economies is significant, firms that invest in building these microfoundational capabilities, through leadership development, organizational learning systems, and structured processes for market sensing and strategic response, develop a more durable form of resilience than those that rely on episodic crisis adaptation. This distinction between capability-based resilience and crisis-response adaptation is both theoretically important and practically actionable.

Porter and Heppelmann (2014) contribute an important contemporary dimension to the strategic transformation discussion through their analysis of how smart, connected products are transforming competitive dynamics across manufacturing industries. As digital technologies enable manufacturers to embed intelligence into physical products and maintain continuous digital

Citation: Ademola, Temitope O.; Okedeji, Jide G., Olawale, Oladeji J., Agyemang, Sandra A., Laide, Rufai F., Ibraheem, Jamiyu A., Usman, Simiat O. & Odobo, Oluwatoyin O. "The Role of Innovation, Sustainability, and Strategic Transformation in Manufacturing for Industrial Resilience in Emerging Economies". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp24-52.

connections with their products in use, entirely new forms of value creation, service delivery, and competitive differentiation become possible. For emerging economy manufacturers, this transformation presents both an opportunity, to reposition from commodity production toward higher-value product-service offerings, and a competitive threat, as manufacturers in advanced economies exploit digital capabilities to extend their competitive reach into markets previously insulated by geographic and logistical distance. Porter and Heppelmann's (2014) analysis implies that strategic transformation is not optional for manufacturing firms in emerging economies, it is the price of continued market participation in an increasingly digitalized global economy.

UNCTAD (2021) provides policy-level evidence of what proactive strategic transformation looks like across multiple emerging economy manufacturing contexts. The report documents how manufacturers in Vietnam's electronics and garment sectors that invested systematically in product quality management, workforce capability, and supply chain reliability ahead of competitive pressure sustained growth and employment through pandemic-era disruptions that caused severe dislocation to less proactively positioned competitors. The Vietnamese case illustrates the multi-dimensional character of effective transformation: the firms that built resilience did so not through technology investment alone but through the combination of organizational capability development, management system improvement, and supply chain relationship building that Teece (2007) describes as the full scope of reconfiguration activity. UNIDO (2022) reinforces this finding at the macro level, documenting that countries whose manufacturing sectors demonstrated the strongest resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic were precisely those with the most coherent industrial capabilities and most proactive prior transformation strategies.

The enabling role of industrial policy in facilitating strategic transformation is also well documented. UNIDO (2022) finds that manufacturers operating in environments characterized by clear, consistent, and well-enforced investment incentives, skills development programs, and regulatory frameworks demonstrate stronger capacities for strategic transformation than those operating in uncertain or contradictory policy environments. World Bank (2022) reinforces this finding, noting that the quality of the institutional environment, including the reliability of contract enforcement, intellectual property protection, and regulatory stability, is a significant determinant of firms' willingness to invest in the long-horizon capabilities that genuine strategic transformation requires. When manufacturers cannot project the stability of the policy and regulatory environment over the investment horizon required for transformation, they rationally choose adaptive conservatism over strategic boldness, and the manufacturing sector pays the systemic price in continued fragility.

A careful synthesis of the literature reviewed above reveals that while innovation, sustainability, and strategic transformation each contribute meaningfully to industrial resilience, the three have not been examined as an integrated, mutually reinforcing system capable of generating systemic resilience in emerging economy manufacturing. The innovation literature, exemplified by Teece *et al.* (1997), Teece (2007), and Fagerberg *et al.* (2010), focuses on firm-level adaptive capabilities and national innovation systems without adequately incorporating the sustainability and strategic transformation dimensions that give innovation its resilience-building context. The sustainability literature, as developed by Elkington (1998), Porter and Kramer (2011), Geissdoerfer *et al.* (2017), and Ezeudu and Ezeudu (2019), explains what sustainable manufacturing looks like but has less to say about the strategic transformation processes through which firms embed sustainability into their competitive architectures. And strategic management scholarship, though rich in frameworks, has been slow to incorporate the specific structural realities of emerging economy industrial contexts documented by Schlogl and Sumner (2020), Kaplinsky and Morris (2016), and Lundvall (2010).

This integrative gap matters because resilience is inherently a systemic property. It is not the product of technological adoption alone, or sustainability compliance alone, or strategic planning alone, but emerges from the way these forces interact and reinforce one another within a coherent industrial development system. Understanding how that system works, what happens when its components are misaligned or pursued independently, and what enabling conditions support their integration, is essential for generating the kind of actionable, theoretically grounded insights that manufacturing policy and management in emerging economies need. Closing this integrative gap is the animating purpose of the present study.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in two interrelated theoretical perspectives, which are the Dynamic Capabilities Framework developed by Teece *et al.* (1997) and further expanded by Teece (2007), alongside the Shared Value Theory proposed by Porter and Kramer (2011). They provide the conceptual architecture for analysing industrial resilience as a systemic, multi-level property that emerges from the interaction of innovation, sustainability, and strategic transformation in emerging economy manufacturing contexts.

Dynamic Capabilities Framework

Teece *et al.* (1997) argued that competitive advantage in rapidly changing environments depends not on static resource possession but on the firm's capacity to develop and deploy three interconnected capabilities: sensing emerging opportunities and threats; seizing those opportunities through targeted investment and organizational change; and reconfiguring the firm's internal resource base to maintain strategic alignment as conditions evolve. Teece (2007) elaborated this framework at the level of organizational microfoundations, connecting sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring to the specific routines, decision rules, leadership practices, and organizational architectures through which these activities are performed in practice. Together these contributions provide a theoretically rigorous account of how firms build and maintain adaptive capacity, and why this adaptive capacity constitutes a more durable foundation of competitive advantage than any specific technological or resource advantage.

For this study, the Dynamic Capabilities Framework serves as the primary analytical lens for understanding how manufacturing firms in emerging economies build resilience through innovation and strategic transformation. Innovation ecosystems support the sensing and seizing of technological and market opportunities, providing the external knowledge infrastructure through which firms develop and exercise adaptive awareness. Strategic transformation is the organizational expression of reconfiguring, the structural, cultural, and strategic changes through which firms reorient themselves toward more resilient competitive positions. And sustainability, understood through this framework, is not merely an environmental obligation but a dimension of strategic reconfiguration, the process of rebuilding production systems and value propositions around principles that are environmentally and socially sustainable over the long term. Fagerberg *et al.* (2010) and Lundvall (2010) extend the framework's analytical reach to the national and systemic level, providing the tools for understanding how the enabling environment of innovation ecosystems and national institutional structures shapes the capacity of individual firms to build dynamic capabilities.

Shared Value Theory

Porter and Kramer's (2011) Shared Value Theory argues that companies can generate competitive advantage by identifying and acting on opportunities to create economic value in ways that simultaneously create value for society, by addressing social needs, reducing social harms, and strengthening the communities and institutions on which long-term business success depends. This framework directly challenges the assumption that economic and social-environmental objectives are inherently in tension, insisting that the most durable forms of competitive advantage align business success with social and environmental progress. Elkington's (1998) Triple Bottom Line provides a complementary accounting framework that operationalizes the shared value logic by insisting on the simultaneous measurement and management of economic, environmental, and social performance.

Applied to manufacturing in emerging economies, the Shared Value Theory reframes sustainability as a strategic investment rather than a compliance cost. Manufacturers that redesign production processes to reduce environmental impact while improving efficiency, and strengthen local supplier ecosystems and workforce capabilities on which their operations depend, are building competitive positions more deeply embedded in the social and environmental contexts within which they operate, and therefore more resistant to the disruptive forces that regularly threaten manufacturing industries in the developing world. Porter and Heppelmann (2014) extend this argument into the digital era, showing how smart, connected products create new opportunities for manufacturers to embed shared value creation into their core products and services. The joint application of the Dynamic Capabilities Framework and the Shared Value Theory creates a theoretical architecture that can hold multiple levels of analysis simultaneously, equipping this study to examine industrial resilience as the emergent property of a system in which innovation, sustainability, and strategic transformation are meaningfully integrated.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in a systematic literature review methodology. This design is appropriate for synthesizing, interpreting, and critically engaging with the growing body of scholarly and policy evidence on industrial resilience, innovation, sustainability, and strategic transformation in emerging economy manufacturing contexts. Rather than collecting primary data through fieldwork, interviews, or surveys, the study draws on a carefully selected and rigorously screened corpus of secondary sources to develop integrated theoretical insights and evidence-based practical recommendations. Snyder (2019) describes the qualitative systematic literature review as particularly valuable for synthesizing diverse bodies of empirical and theoretical evidence where the research question is integrative in nature, as is the case here, requiring the assembly of insights from multiple disciplinary traditions and methodological approaches into a coherent theoretical contribution.

The qualitative systematic literature review was chosen because it combines the comprehensiveness and transparency of systematic review processes with the interpretive depth and theoretical engagement characteristic of qualitative research traditions. In line with established qualitative research conventions, the PRISMA 2020 framework (Page *et al.,* 2021) was adopted as a structured guide for documenting the literature identification, screening, and selection process. The framework was used not as a statistical meta-analytic tool but as a methodological scaffold for ensuring transparency, consistency, and reproducibility in the review process, consistent with its recommended application in qualitative research synthesis (Page *et al*., 2021).

Data Sources

The study drew exclusively on secondary data from reputable academic and institutional sources. Peer-reviewed journal articles were retrieved from three major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Policy documents, statistical reports, and thematic analyses were sourced from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the World Bank. These sources were selected for their demonstrated relevance to industrial development, innovation systems, sustainable manufacturing, and strategic management in emerging economy contexts. The review was restricted to literature published between 2015 and 2024 to ensure coverage of both the foundational theoretical contributions that frame contemporary debates and the most recent empirical evidence on how emerging economy manufacturers are navigating the contemporary disruption landscape.

Search Strategy

A structured and systematic search strategy was developed to ensure comprehensive and unbiased retrieval of relevant literature. Primary search terms included: industrial resilience, manufacturing resilience, emerging economies, innovation ecosystems, Industry 4.0 in developing countries, sustainable manufacturing, green manufacturing, circular economy in manufacturing, strategic transformation in manufacturing, dynamic capabilities, and global value chain upgrading. These primary terms were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR) with contextualizing geographic terms including Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and developing economies to ensure the geographic coverage appropriate to the study's scope. Hand-searching of reference lists from key retrieved articles was also conducted to identify relevant studies not captured by database searches. The PRISMA 2020-guided selection process is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1
PRISMA 2020 Flow: Study Identification, Screening, and Inclusion Process

Stage	Action	Records	Rationale / Outcome
Identification	Database & institutional repository searches	487 retrieved	Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, UNIDO, UNCTAD, World Bank repositories
Screening	Duplicate removal; title & abstract review	74 duplicates removed; 238 excluded at abstract stage	175 unique records retained for full-text assessment
Eligibility	Full-text assessment against inclusion criteria	91 excluded	Insufficient depth, no emerging-economy focus, or sectoral mismatch with manufacturing
Quality check	Methodological rigour and theoretical grounding review	8 excluded	Opinion-only pieces without analytical or empirical grounding
Included	Final synthesis corpus	51 studies	Qualitative thematic analysis conducted on final set

Note. Total records identified = 487. Final corpus included in thematic synthesis = 51 studies.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included in the final synthesis corpus if they explicitly examined one or more of the following thematic areas: industrial or manufacturing resilience; innovation ecosystems, technology adoption, or Industry 4.0 in manufacturing contexts; sustainable manufacturing, green production, or circular economy in industrial settings; or strategic transformation, business model innovation, or organizational change in manufacturing firms. Studies were required to maintain a primary or substantial focus on emerging economies or developing-country industrial contexts, or to present findings with clearly argued transferability to such contexts. All included sources were required to be written in English and published within the 2015 to 2024 timeframe.

Studies were excluded if they lacked a direct connection to manufacturing or industrial production systems; were purely theoretical without any analytical grounding in empirical evidence or documented case material; appeared as duplicate records across databases; focused exclusively on advanced economy contexts without transferable insights for emerging economy manufacturers; or fell outside the specified publication timeframe. These criteria collectively ensured that the final synthesis corpus was both credible and tightly aligned with the study's analytical objectives.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis, a qualitative method well suited for synthesizing and interpreting findings across multiple textual sources from diverse disciplinary traditions (Snyder, 2019). Each of the 51 included studies was reviewed in full and systematically coded according to recurring themes related to the study's four research questions: innovation and industrial resilience; sustainability and competitiveness; strategic transformation and adaptive capacity; and structural barriers and enabling conditions. Initial codes were developed inductively from the data and subsequently organized into overarching themes through iterative review and theoretical interpretation, consistent with the approach recommended by Snyder (2019) for integrative qualitative syntheses. The themes identified from the analysis were examined using the Dynamic Capabilities Framework (Teece *et al.*, 1997; Teece, 2007) together with the Shared Value Theory (Porter & Kramer, 2011), allowing the study to progress beyond basic descriptive interpretation toward a more comprehensive and theory-driven understanding of the phenomenon being investigated.

Validity, Reliability, and Transparency

Several measures were adopted to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study's findings. Data triangulation was achieved by drawing evidence from diverse source types, including peer-reviewed academic journals, multilateral institutional reports, and policy analyses, ensuring that key findings were supported by multiple independent lines of evidence rather than any single source or methodological tradition. The use of explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, a transparent PRISMA-guided screening process, and systematic thematic coding procedures all strengthened methodological consistency and reproducibility. Reflexivity in thematic interpretation was maintained through consistent reference to the study's theoretical frameworks during coding and synthesis, ensuring that analytical conclusions were grounded in theoretically coherent interpretive logic rather than unsupported inference. Although qualitative systematic reviews do not seek statistical generalization, the structured and transparent approach employed here supports what Snyder (2019) describes as analytical generalization, the drawing of broader theoretical insights from the systematic interrogation of accumulated empirical evidence.

Ethical Considerations

Since the study relied exclusively on secondary data drawn from publicly available academic and institutional publications, no ethical approval involving human participants was required. Ethical standards were upheld throughout through accurate representation of original authors' findings, avoidance of selective citation or misinterpretation, transparent documentation of methodological choices and limitations, and proper acknowledgment of all sources in accordance with APA 7th edition referencing guidelines.

Findings and Discussion

The thematic analysis of the 51 included studies yielded four dominant themes that together provide an integrated picture of how industrial resilience is being built, and constrained, in emerging economies' manufacturing sectors. Each theme is presented and discussed with direct reference to the corresponding research question and to the theoretical frameworks that anchor the study's interpretive logic.

Theme 1: Innovation Ecosystems as the Infrastructure of Industrial Agility

The first and most consistently documented finding across the reviewed literature is that innovation ecosystems function as the primary infrastructure through which manufacturing firms in emerging economies develop the adaptive agility that resilience requires. This finding directly addresses Research Question 1 and aligns with the core proposition of the Dynamic Capabilities Framework (Teece *et al.*, 1997; Teece, 2007) that sensing and seizing capabilities, those most directly supported by ecosystem participation, are foundational to sustained competitive advantage. The evidence demonstrates that manufacturers embedded within functioning innovation ecosystems, characterized by knowledge flows among firms, universities, research institutions, government agencies, and international partners, demonstrate meaningfully greater capacity to anticipate disruption, adapt production systems, and develop new competitive positions than firms operating in isolation.

UNCTAD (2021) provides comprehensive empirical grounding for this finding at the policy level. The report documents how electronics manufacturers in Vietnam and textile producers in Indonesia that participated actively in sectoral innovation programs, global value chain knowledge exchange, and technology-upgrading initiatives demonstrated greater operational flexibility during the COVID-19 supply chain disruptions than manufacturers operating outside these ecosystem connections. These firms were able to shift product lines, qualify alternative suppliers, and meet new buyer requirements more rapidly than their less-connected counterparts, confirming the real-world resilience dividend of innovation ecosystem participation in Southeast Asian manufacturing.

The digital innovation dimension of ecosystem participation deserves particular attention. Müller *et al.* (2018) find that manufacturers who perceive both the opportunities of Industry 4.0

technologies and the competitive risks of non-adoption are significantly more likely to invest in digital transformation than those with narrower perspectives. This finding suggests that the cognitive and market-sensing dimensions of innovation ecosystem participation, exposure to information about digital possibilities and competitive dynamics, are as important as direct technology access in motivating the innovation investments that generate resilience capacity. UNIDO (2022) reinforces this at the macro level, finding that countries with stronger, more diversified manufacturing capabilities and more active digitalization processes demonstrated superior resilience during the pandemic, with digitally advanced firms maintaining operations and employment more effectively than less-connected counterparts.

Lundvall (2010) provides the theoretical architecture for understanding why this ecosystem-level analysis matters for resilience. His national innovation systems framework argues that the quality and density of knowledge flows among actors in an economy determine the collective learning capacity of the industrial system, and by extension its collective adaptive capacity when disruption occurs. Fagerberg *et al.* (2010) provide empirical support for this proposition, showing that the diversity and quality of innovation capabilities in developing countries are key determinants of long-run industrial performance. Together, these perspectives imply that building innovation ecosystems, through university-industry linkages, technology diffusion programs, sectoral training systems, and digital infrastructure investment, is not peripheral to manufacturing resilience strategy but foundational to it.

The critical limitation on this positive narrative is the distributional challenge documented across multiple sources. Schlogl and Sumner (2020) document how automation and digitization are producing dual-economy dynamics in developing countries, with technological capability and the resilience it generates concentrating in large, connected firms while the SME majority remains outside the digital frontier. Kaplinsky and Morris (2016) make a related argument through their global value chain analysis: the functional upgrading that generates more resilient competitive positions within global value chains remains achievable for a minority of manufacturers with the capabilities and connections to pursue it, while the majority remains locked in thin, low-value-added participation. These structural dynamics mean that innovation ecosystems' contribution to systemic resilience is contingent on their inclusiveness. Without deliberate policy effort to ensure that smaller, less-connected manufacturers can access and benefit from innovation ecosystem resources, the resilience gains from innovation adoption will remain concentrated in a narrow elite, leaving the broader manufacturing sector systemically fragile.

Theme 2: Sustainability as a Strategic Resilience Asset, Not a Compliance Burden

The second major finding, one that challenges conventional assumptions about sustainability as a cost burden, is that sustainability practices function as strategic resilience assets for manufacturing firms in emerging economies. This finding directly addresses Research Question 2 and is most powerfully illuminated through the Shared Value Theory (Porter & Kramer, 2011) and the Triple Bottom Line framework (Elkington, 1998), both of which predict that sustainability-oriented strategies generate competitive advantages rather than merely imposing compliance costs.

The circular economy dimension of sustainability, theorized by Geissdoerfer *et al.* (2017) and examined empirically by Ezeudu and Ezeudu (2019) in the Nigerian context, provides the clearest evidence of sustainability's strategic resilience value. Geissdoerfer *et al.* (2017) demonstrate theoretically that circular economy practices generate competitive advantages through multiple mechanisms: reduced dependence on volatile raw material markets, lower waste management costs, new revenue streams from recovered materials, and enhanced regulatory compliance. Ezeudu and Ezeudu (2019) ground these theoretical mechanisms in the empirical reality of Nigerian manufacturing, documenting that circular principles, where successfully implemented, generate meaningful improvements in resource efficiency and environmental compliance even in a constrained regulatory and financial environment. These Nigerian cases are particularly significant for the argument of this paper because they confirm that sustainability can deliver resilience benefits in genuinely difficult emerging economy conditions, not only in the more benign institutional environments of advanced economies.

Porter and Kramer (2011) frame this evidence within a broader strategic logic. The firms and industries that create the most durable competitive advantages through shared value creation are those that treat sustainability not as a peripheral initiative but as a core dimension of their value proposition and competitive strategy. This strategic integration is precisely what distinguishes sustainability-as-resilience from sustainability-as-compliance: compliance-oriented sustainability is reactive, externally imposed, and contributes little to adaptive capacity, while strategy-integrated sustainability is proactive, internally motivated, and generates the cost efficiencies, market access advantages, and risk management capabilities that translate directly into resilience. Elkington's (1998) Triple Bottom Line provides the accounting framework within which this integrated approach can be designed and measured, insisting that economic, environmental, and social performance are not trade-offs to be managed but dimensions of value creation to be simultaneously optimized.

UNCTAD (2021) provides macro-level confirmation of sustainability's market access dimension, documenting how emerging economy manufacturers that proactively adopted internationally recognized environmental and social standards retained export market access and attracted international buyers who increasingly incorporate sustainability criteria into their sourcing decisions. Porter and Heppelmann (2014) further extend this perspective by demonstrating how smart and connected products allow manufacturing firms to track, verify, and communicate sustainability performance to consumers in real time, thereby shifting sustainability from a mere marketing claim to a measurable and strategically valuable competitive capability. As digital product intelligence makes environmental performance data available throughout the supply chain, manufacturers with strong sustainability records gain a new and increasingly important form of competitive differentiation.

Nevertheless, the World Bank (2022) documents the persistent barriers that constrain sustainability adoption across the broad base of emerging economy manufacturing. Weak regulatory enforcement reduces the competitive penalty for non-compliance; limited green financing mechanisms make clean technology investment prohibitively expensive for smaller manufacturers; and technical capacity shortages create implementation gaps even where financial resources and regulatory incentives are in place. These barriers confirm that sustainability's strategic resilience potential is real but contingent. It is realized only where the enabling policy, financial, and technical environment makes sustained sustainability investment both possible and commercially rewarding, a condition that does not yet obtain consistently across emerging economy manufacturing.

Theme 3: Strategic Transformation as Proactive Resilience Architecture

The third major finding concerns the nature and importance of strategic transformation in building industrial resilience. The reviewed literature consistently shows that manufacturing firms and sectors that have achieved genuine resilience are those that have pursued deliberate, proactive strategic transformation rather than merely reactive adaptation. This distinction directly addresses Research Question 3 and is central to the Dynamic Capabilities Framework's account of sustained competitive advantage (Teece, 2007): the capability to anticipate and position ahead of disruption, rather than simply to respond to it, is the distinguishing feature of firms that maintain performance across turbulent conditions.

UNCTAD (2021) provides the most comprehensive empirical documentation of proactive strategic transformation in emerging economy manufacturing. The report's case evidence from Vietnam, Bangladesh, and Indonesia shows that manufacturers which invested systematically in product quality management, workforce capability, and supply chain reliability ahead of competitive pressure were able to sustain growth and employment through pandemic-era disruptions that caused severe dislocation to competitors with less developed adaptive capabilities. The Vietnamese electronics and garment sector cases are particularly instructive because they demonstrate the multi-dimensional character of effective transformation: the firms that built resilience did so through the combination of organizational capability development, management system improvement, and supply chain relationship building that constitutes the full scope of the reconfiguring activity that Teece (2007) identifies as the third dynamic capability. Technology investment alone was insufficient; the human, organizational, and relational investments that enable technology to be deployed adaptively were equally essential.

Müller *et al.* (2018) contribute an important empirical dimension to the strategic transformation discussion by examining the cognitive drivers of transformative investment decisions. Their finding that manufacturers who perceive both the opportunities of digital technologies and the competitive risks of non-adoption are significantly more likely to pursue transformation has implications beyond the digital manufacturing context. It suggests that the capacity for strategic sensing, the first of Teece's (2007) three dynamic capabilities, is a precondition for the proactive transformation investments that build resilience. Firms and industrial systems that lack the market intelligence, leadership capability, and organizational learning infrastructure needed to perceive future competitive conditions accurately will systematically underinvest in transformation, leaving themselves exposed to disruptions that more proactively positioned competitors can absorb and adapt to.

Porter and Heppelmann (2014) extend the strategic transformation argument into the digital era, showing that the smart, connected product revolution is fundamentally redefining competitive boundaries in manufacturing. As product intelligence enables manufacturers to offer continuous monitoring, remote diagnostics, and performance optimization services in addition to physical products, the competitive logic of manufacturing shifts from one-time product sales toward ongoing service relationships. For emerging economy manufacturers, this transformation creates both an opportunity, to reposition toward higher-value service-integrated business models, and a threat, as manufacturers in advanced economies exploit digital capabilities to extend their reach. Porter and Heppelmann's (2014) analysis confirms that strategic transformation in this new competitive environment is not optional but existential for manufacturers seeking to sustain competitive relevance.

UNIDO (2022) reinforces the enabling role of industrial policy in facilitating strategic transformation. The report documents that the COVID-19 pandemic revealed stark differences in manufacturing resilience across countries, with those that had invested most consistently in coherent industrial capability development, including workforce skills, digital infrastructure, and regulatory frameworks, emerging from the crisis with stronger manufacturing systems than those that had not. World Bank (2022) reinforces this institutional dimension: the quality of the enabling environment, including the reliability of contract enforcement, the predictability of regulatory requirements, and the accessibility of long-term financing for capability investment, is a significant determinant of firms' willingness to commit to the long-horizon transformation investments that genuine resilience requires. When policy environments are unstable or contradictory, rational manufacturers choose short-term risk minimization over long-term capability building, perpetuating the structural fragility that undermines industrial resilience.

Theme 4: Structural Barriers and Enabling Conditions

The fourth and perhaps most practically consequential finding concerns the pervasiveness and persistence of structural barriers that constrain the realization of industrial resilience in emerging economies. Across all regions and thematic domains examined, the literature identifies a consistent set of constraints: infrastructure deficits, institutional fragility, financing gaps, and skills shortages that together create an enabling environment insufficiently supportive of the integrated innovation, sustainability, and strategic transformation that resilience requires. This theme directly addresses Research Question 4 and cuts across all three substantive pillars of the study.

UNIDO (2022) provides the most comprehensive assessment of infrastructure as a structural barrier to manufacturing resilience. The report documents how unreliable electricity supply, inadequate transport connectivity, limited digital infrastructure, and weak industrial zone amenities impose substantial operational costs on manufacturers in developing countries and limit their capacity to adopt advanced production technologies, participate in complex supply chains, or respond flexibly to market demands. Countries with stronger infrastructure bases demonstrated significantly better manufacturing resilience during the pandemic, with infrastructure quality correlating strongly with the digitalization level that proved decisive for firm-level adaptive capacity. This macro-level finding confirms the theoretical prediction of Lundvall (2010) and Fagerberg *et al.* (2010) that the systemic infrastructure of an industrial economy, including both physical and institutional infrastructure, is a primary determinant of its collective adaptive capacity.

Institutional fragility creates related but distinct challenges. World Bank (2022) documents how the quality of the institutional environment, including the reliability of contract enforcement, intellectual property protection, and regulatory consistency, is a significant determinant of investment in the long-horizon capabilities that manufacturing resilience requires. Where regulatory frameworks are unclear, inconsistently enforced, or subject to politically motivated change, manufacturers face elevated transaction costs, shortened planning horizons, and reduced incentives to invest in innovation or sustainability beyond what is immediately required for market access. These institutional dimensions of fragility are less visible than infrastructure gaps but no less consequential for manufacturing resilience, and they are more difficult to address quickly through policy intervention.

The financing constraint is a particularly binding structural barrier. World Bank (2022) identifies limited access to long-term, affordable financing as a major constraint on manufacturing investment in low- and middle-income economies, noting that traditional bank lending in most emerging markets is characterized by high interest rates, short maturities, and collateral requirements poorly matched to the risk profile of innovation and sustainability investments. Ezeudu and Ezeudu (2019) document the specific impact of this financing gap on circular economy implementation in Nigerian manufacturing, finding that the upfront costs of circular technology investment represent a prohibitive barrier for most smaller manufacturers despite the long-run financial benefits of circular practices. The combination of high financing costs and short payback horizon requirements in most emerging economy financial markets creates a systematic bias against the long-term, capability-oriented investments that generate resilience.

Schlogl and Sumner (2020) add an important distributional dimension to this structural barrier analysis. Their examination of automation's impact on developing-country labour markets reveals that the structural barriers to resilience-building are not uniformly distributed: large, internationally connected firms have access to international capital markets, global knowledge networks, and policy relationships that enable them to invest in innovation and sustainability, while smaller, domestically oriented manufacturers face the full brunt of infrastructure, institutional, and financing constraints without the same countervailing advantages. This distributional dimension of structural barriers explains why innovation and sustainability adoption remains unevenly distributed across manufacturing sectors in emerging economies, concentrated in a well-resourced elite while the broader base of the sector remains constrained.

Against this landscape of constraints, the literature also identifies enabling conditions that tangibly support industrial resilience when present. UNCTAD (2021) documents how governments that provide coherent cross-sectoral industrial policies, where investment incentives, trade policies, skills development programs, and environmental regulations reinforce rather than contradict one another, create environments in which manufacturing firms can plan and execute resilience-building strategies with greater confidence. Kaplinsky and Morris (2016) show that state-supported upgrading programs within global value chains, when well designed and consistently implemented, can accelerate functional upgrading and the capability development associated with it. UNIDO (2022) documents the value of public-private partnerships in infrastructure provision and industrial zone development as mechanisms for bridging the gaps that neither governments nor private firms can close independently. Together, these findings confirm that industrial resilience requires active, coherent state engagement with the manufacturing ecosystem, not merely market-friendly deregulation.

Conclusion

The central finding of this study can be stated with the clarity its implications deserve: industrial resilience in emerging economies is not a technological achievement, a regulatory outcome, or a strategic result in isolation. It is a systemic property, one that emerges when innovation, sustainability, and strategic transformation are pursued not as parallel agendas competing for attention and resources but as integrated, mutually reinforcing dimensions of a coherent industrial development system. Manufacturing industries in emerging economies are more likely to achieve long-term resilience when they develop strong innovation ecosystems that provide firms with the adaptive knowledge required to identify and exploit new opportunities, as emphasized in the national systems of innovation perspective of Lundvall (2010) and the capability development arguments advanced by Fagerberg *et al*. (2010). In addition, resilience is strengthened when sustainability practices are integrated into core business strategy rather than treated merely as regulatory obligations, reflecting the principles of the Triple Bottom Line framework (Elkington, 1998), Shared Value Theory (Porter & Kramer, 2011), and circular economy thinking

(Geissdoerfer *et al.,* 2017). Furthermore, strategic transformation becomes more sustainable when firms continuously renew and reconfigure their resources and capabilities in line with the dynamic capabilities perspective proposed by Teece (2007), supported by strong organizational structures and effective leadership capacity. Equally important is the presence of an enabling environment characterized by adequate infrastructure, supportive institutions, accessible financing, and skilled human capital, as highlighted in reports by UNIDO (2022) and the World Bank (2022), which collectively make integrated industrial transformation both practical and achievable

This conclusion carries a direct and uncomfortable implication for how industrial development policy is currently designed and delivered. The prevailing tendency to treat innovation policy, sustainability regulation, and industrial strategy as separate policy domains, each with its own ministry, budget, and institutional logic, is itself a structural source of industrial fragility. Fragmented policy creates fragmented industries. Manufacturers that innovate without embedding sustainability lose the strategic resilience that comes from environmental and social alignment. Firms that adopt sustainability practices without the strategic transformation to integrate them into their competitive architecture treat compliance as a cost rather than an asset. And industries that pursue strategic transformation without the innovation ecosystem support to fuel continuous adaptation exhaust their adaptive capacity before disruption has run its course. The integration imperative is therefore not just theoretically compelling; it is empirically demonstrated. UNIDO (2022) confirms that the countries whose manufacturing sectors demonstrated the strongest resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic were precisely those with the most coherent and integrated industrial development systems.

This study also affirms what development practitioners sometimes hesitate to say plainly: that industrial resilience in emerging economies is, at its heart, a human story. The workers who need stable employment, the entrepreneurs who need reliable infrastructure and accessible finance, the communities that need industries which invest in their long-term wellbeing rather than extracting value and moving on, these are the constituencies for whom industrial resilience matters most. The Dynamic Capabilities Framework (Teece *et al.,* 1997; Teece, 2007), the Shared Value Theory (Porter & Kramer, 2011), and the structural transformation analysis of Schlogl and Sumner (2020) all, in their different ways, insist that durable industrial performance is built on the alignment of enterprise success with the broader human and environmental systems within which enterprises operate. For manufacturing policy in emerging economies, this is not merely a theoretical claim. It is a practical guide for action: build systems that work for people, and the resilience will follow.

Recommendations

Governments in emerging economies should move deliberately away from siloed industrial, environmental, and innovation policies toward integrated national manufacturing resilience strategies that explicitly connect innovation investment, sustainability requirements, and industrial competitiveness objectives within a single coherent framework. Drawing on the enabling conditions identified by UNCTAD (2021) and UNIDO (2022), this integration should be institutionalized through inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms or dedicated industrial resilience offices with genuine cross-sectoral authority. Investment incentives should be aligned with environmental performance requirements; skills development programs connected to innovation ecosystem needs; and financing instruments designed for long-term strategic transformation rather than short-term output expansion. The World Bank (2022) evidence on the relationship between institutional quality and manufacturing investment confirms that improving the consistency and reliability of the policy environment is itself a resilience investment, one that pays dividends across all three pillars of the resilience framework. Development finance institutions, bilateral development agencies, and international foundations should significantly scale their investment in financing instruments tailored to the risk profile of manufacturing resilience investments in emerging economies. Drawing on the financing gap analysis of World Bank (2022) and the implementation barriers documented by Ezeudu and Ezeudu (2019), these instruments should include green manufacturing financing facilities, risk-sharing mechanisms for SME innovation investment, concessional financing for circular and clean technology adoption, and blended finance structures that mobilize private capital toward resilience-building priorities. Investment in knowledge exchange, capacity building, and south-south learning networks that allow emerging economies to share and adapt resilience strategies developed in comparable contexts, consistent with the value chain upgrading evidence of Kaplinsky and Morris (2016) and the innovation systems analysis of Lundvall (2010), is an equally important complement to financial support.

Manufacturing firms in emerging economies, regardless of size, should reframe their understanding of sustainability from a compliance obligation to a strategic investment, assessing systematically how circular economy principles (Geissdoerfer *et al.*, 2017), resource efficiency practices, and workforce wellbeing investments create competitive advantages in the form of cost reduction, market access, supply chain stability, and risk management, as documented by Ezeudu and Ezeudu (2019) and Porter and Kramer (2011). Strategic transformation planning should be treated as a continuous organizational practice rather than a periodic crisis response, with dedicated resources for market sensing, adaptive capability development, and transformation strategy execution. The evidence of Müller *et al.* (2018) on the cognitive drivers of digital transformation adoption, and of Teece (2007) on the organizational microfoundations of dynamic capability, together suggest that investment in leadership development, organizational learning infrastructure, and management system quality is as important as investment in technology or physical assets in building the adaptive capacity that resilience requires.

References

Elkington, J. (1998). *Cannibals with forks: The triple bottom line of 21st century business*. New Society Publishers.

Ezeudu, O. B., & Ezeudu, T. S. (2019). Implementation of circular economy principles in industrial solid waste management: Case studies from a developing economy (Nigeria). *Recycling, 4*(4), 42. https://doi.org/10.3390/recycling4040042

Fagerberg, J., Srholec, M., & Verspagen, B. (2010). Innovation and economic development. In B. H. Hall & N. Rosenberg (Eds.), *Handbook of the economics of innovation* (Vol. 2, pp. 833–872). North-Holland. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-7218(10)02004-6

Geissdoerfer, M., Savaget, P., Bocken, N. M. P., & Hultink, E. J. (2017). The circular economy: A new sustainability paradigm? *Journal of Cleaner Production, 143*, 757–768. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2016.12.048

Kaplinsky, R., & Morris, M. (2016). Thinning and thickening: Productive sector policies in the era of global value chains. *The European Journal of Development Research, 28*(4), 625–645. https://doi.org/10.1057/ejdr.2015.29

Lundvall, B.-Å. (Ed.). (2010). *National systems of innovation: Toward a theory of innovation and interactive learning* (2nd ed.). Anthem Press. https://doi.org/10.7135/UPO9781843318903

Müller, J. M., Kiel, D., & Voigt, K.-I. (2018). What drives the implementation of Industry 4.0? The role of opportunities and challenges in the context of sustainability. *Sustainability, 10*(1), 247. https://doi.org/10.3390/su10010247

Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J. M., Akl, E. A., Brennan, S. E., Chou, R., Glanville, J., Grimshaw, J. M., Hróbjartsson, A., Lalu, M. M., Li, T., Loder, E. W., Mayo-Wilson, E., McDonald, S., ... Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ, 372*, n71. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71

Porter, M. E., & Heppelmann, J. E. (2014). How smart, connected products are transforming competition. *Harvard Business Review, 92*(11), 64–88.

Porter, M. E., & Kramer, M. R. (2011). Creating shared value. *Harvard Business Review, 89*(1/2), 62–77.

Schlogl, L., & Sumner, A. (2020). *Disrupted development and the future of inequality in the age of automation*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-30131-6

Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research, 104*, 333–339. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039

Teece, D. J. (2007). Explicating dynamic capabilities: The nature and microfoundations of (sustainable) enterprise performance. *Strategic Management Journal, 28*(13), 1319–1350. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.640

Teece, D. J., Pisano, G., & Shuen, A. (1997). Dynamic capabilities and strategic management. *Strategic Management Journal, 18*(7), 509–533. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(199708)18:7%3C509::AID-SMJ882%3E3.0.CO;2-Z

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2021). *Technology and innovation report 2021: Catching technological waves – Innovation with equity*. https://unctad.org/publication/technology-and-innovation-report-2021

United Nations Industrial Development Organization. (2022). *Industrial development report 2022: The future of industrialization in a post-pandemic world*. https://www.unido.org/idr2022

World Bank. (2022). *World development report 2022: Finance for an equitable recovery*. World Bank. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1730-4

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)

Volume 1, Number 3

Empirical Article https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21216333 Open Access

21st Century Learning Skills Level And Secondary School Students' Academic Achievement In Chemistry In Ukanafun Local Government Area Of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Abstract

This study investigated 21st century learning skills level and secondary school students' academic achievement in chemistry in Ukanafun Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of the study, 2 research questions guided the study and corresponding 2 null hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study. Literature was reviewed based on the variables of the study. A survey research design was adopted for the study. The sample used for the study consisted of 500 students selected from the population of 958 SSII chemistry students using simple random sampling technique. Two instruments were used for data collection which included the Students' 21st century learning skills level Variables Questionnaire (S21STCLSLVQ) and the Chemistry Achievement Test (CAT). The two instruments were validated by expert in the Department of Science Education, Akwa Ibom State University, and a test expert in the same University. Kuder Richardson Formular-20 (KR_{20}) was used to measure the reliability of CAT and the index was 0.89. Cronbach Alpha was used to measure S21ST CLSLVQ and the index ranged from 0.73 to 0.79. The data obtained from the administration of these instruments were analyzed using means, standard deviation, independent t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). All the hypotheses were tested at a .05, level of significance. The result of the findings showed that the influence of critical thinking skill level and technology literacy skill level were found to be significant on chemistry students' academic achievement. The researcher recommended among others that teachers, parents and school administrators should encourage students to actively engage with 21st century learning skills alongside traditional academic knowledge.

Keywords: Chemistry, Secondary School Students, Academic Achievement, and 21ST Century Learning Skills Level.

Isaac M. Joshua, PhD
Department of Physical Science Education
Faculty of Science Education
University of Calabar
Cross River State, Nigeria
ORCID: 0009-0001-4818-7738
GSM: 08064010058, 09040630779

Corresponding Author's Email:
Isaacmfon378@gmail.com

Date Received: 06th June, 2026

Date Accepted: 13th June, 2026

Introduction

Development of any nation is largely determined by its level of advancement and innovation in technology, physics, biology and chemistry. Chemistry is one of the core science subjects taught and learned in Nigeria public senior secondary schools (Ababio 2016) and is concerned with the compositions and structure of matter. The theoretical and practical aspects make chemistry prominent in the global technology-driven society.

Chemistry is very important to humanity and for the development of the nation. Knowledge gained in chemistry exposes students to scientific concepts, principles, and laboratory skills that are essentials for pursuing higher education, develop students' analytical skills, critical thinking abilities, and problem-solving techniques that are applicable in various real-world situations (National Center for Science Education, NCSE 2020). The study of chemistry offers opportunities in developing and understanding of scientific concepts, methods and processes. It fosters creativity and innovative in secondary school students which has significant impact on students' academic achievements (National science foundation NCF, 2020 & World Health Organizations WHO, 2019). Secondary School Students refers to the senior secondary two (SSII) students who offered chemistry among public secondary schools in Ukanafun Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Academic achievement is the extent to which the student reaches their academic goals. It means students' level of attainment at senior school certificate examinations (SSCE) against higher set grades that range from F9 and A1 conducted by West African Examinations Councils (WAEC) in Nigeria. (Joshua, 2023) reported that for the past five years ago, the level of poor academic achievement of secondary school chemistry students in senior school certificate examinations is continually increasing. According to Chief examiners' report on West African Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) from 2020 to 2024, the percentage of students' poor achievement in chemistry are : (30.0% in 2020, 31.7% in 2021, 41.8% in 2022, 57.5% in 2023 & 72.1% in 2024). This indicates low level of students' achievement in chemistry and also shown poor state of chemistry education at secondary school level. Some factors like students lack of interest, poor study habits, teachers' incompetence and 21st century learning skills level has been reported to account for students' poor performance.

This research study is concerned with investigating the influence of 21st century learning skills level on secondary school chemistry students' academic achievement in Ukanafun Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. According to National science foundation (2017), 21st century learning skills refer to the specific abilities and competencies that students possess and utilizing in learning. This includes skills such as critical thinking, creative thinking, technology literacy, communication, and collaboration, while 21st century learning skills level depicts the overall proficiency and understanding that students have in relation to learning. And can encompass a broader range of knowledge and capabilities, such as understanding the impact of learning skills on learning and academic performance, being able to critically evaluate digital information, and possessing the ability to adapt to new and emerging technologies (National science foundation, 2017).

The present study is solely concerned with 2 of these 21st century learning skills; which are critical thinking skills and technology literacy skills. This is because it is relevance at the secondary school level. More so, this study used 21st century learning skills level because it focuses on a more comprehensive understanding and proficiency in relation to learning and achievement as a whole.

Critical thinking skill level is one of the variables of interest in this study. It refers to the students' ability level in analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information. These abilities may have influence on academic success of secondary school students. Facione, (2015) and Lawson (2020) conceptualized critical thinking as involving several components: interpretation, analysis, inference, explanation, evaluation, and self-regulation that enables learners to understand complex information, question assumptions, and solve problems logically. The author highlighting those two categories of students can be observed: Those with strong critical thinking skills, who question information, make connections between concepts, and apply knowledge to new situations.

Those with poor critical thinking skills, who may struggle to understand abstract concepts, rely on rote memorization, and have difficulty applying learned material. According to NEA (2013); Olatoye and Aderogba (2023), Nigerian secondary school students with high critical thinking skills tend to score higher in chemistry exams compared to those with low critical thinking ability. In a related assertion by Nwafor & Obi (2024) Poor critical thinking do not limits students' ability to engage with scientific methods, which is central to learning of chemistry effectively (Nwafor& Obi, 2024) and consequently does not resulting in academic underachievement.

Technology literacy level depicts the overall proficiency and understanding that students have in relation to technology. It can encompass a broader range of knowledge and capabilities, such as understanding the impact of technology on society, being able to critically evaluate digital information, and possessing the ability to adapt to new and emerging technologies (National science foundation, 2017). However, the present study used technology literacy level because it focuses on a more comprehensive understanding and proficiency in relation to technology as a whole. Technology literacy level refers to the degree of attainment in the use of technology (Baboo 2013; NEA, 2013) and the author asserted that the extent of attainment in the use of mobile phone, computer, word processing, and internet facilities by the students can impact academic achievement. Technology literacy refers to the skills acquired by students using Android smarts phones and computers.

Yuli & Achmad (2017) submitted that it is important for students to acquire the basic level of technology literacy in this 21st century, as technology becomes more widespread in workplaces. The authors added that today's workplace is rich in technology ranging from Android smart phones, computers, internet facilities, and online calendars to accounting software, to project management tools. Yuli & Achmad (2017) argued that possessing basic level of digital literacy might make it easier for students to grasp a new type of technology for personal use, and with basic level of technology literacy, students can organize videos call, exchange ideas with peers, and communicate effectively.

In the opinion of Prasad *et al,* (2016) and Partnership for 21st century learning skills, technology literacy level has a significant influence on academic performance of secondary school students. Livingstone (2013) posited that students' performance in science subject in school is affected their technology literacy level. Smith (2015) defines technology literacy as a meaningful use of technology to achieve learning goals and submitted that students' technology literacy level has no significant relationship with their academic success. Ferrari (2013); Kral & Renganathan, (2018) reported that technology literacy level of students does not influence their academic achievement in school. In this study, the technology literacy level of students refers to the degree of attainment in the use of computer, internet facilities, and word processing by the chemistry students for learning**.**

Review of Theoretical Studies

This study is anchored on two theoretical perspectives. First, Brunner's constructivist learning theory which posits that students learn meaningfully by constructing new knowledge from past experience, and through active engagement in the learning process. 21st century learning skills aligns with constructivism by offering experiential and active learning environment that respond to individual student needs. Studies using 21st century learning skills, such as critical thinking skills demonstrate how it can promote learning and achievement in chemistry, support problem-solving, and deepen conceptual understanding (Adeyemi & Olufunke, 2023).

Second, Vygotsky's social learning theory argues that people learn more effectively from engagement and interaction with classmates, teachers, significant objects like toys, books, and technology tools than from engagement alone. 21st century learning skills also aligns with Vygotsky's theory by employing dual channels- critical thinking skill and technology literacy skills that foster meaningful learning processing, thereby enhancing comprehension and achievement. Evidence from Nigerian contexts support this theory, with technology literacy skill and critical thinking ability consistently enhancing chemistry achievement (NSF, 2017; Olatoye & Aderogba, 2023). Relating the two theories to this study, learning and academic achievement is influenced by 21st century learning skills which involve critical, creativity and technology literacy skills.

Review of Empirical Studies

Several studies in Nigeria and Abroad have shown that level of critical thinking skill either enhances or hinder students' achievement in chemistry. For instance, in Lagos State, Adeyemi & Olufunke (2023), found that Students with high critical thinking ability achieve more than students with low critical thinking ability. The gap in this literature is that the study was carried out in Lagos State and not in Ukanafun Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State; the study used 300 students and not 500 students; and Z-test statistical analysis and not a t-test and ANOVA statistical analysis. Similarly, in Owerri education zone of Imo State, Gottfried *et al*, (2021), found that critical thinking ability has a significant influence on students' academic achievement. The study was conducted in Owerri education zone of Imo State while the present study is conducted in Ukanafun Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. in Enugu State, Yusuf & Aramide (2023) found that critical thinking ability did not have a significant relationship with the student's academic achievement.

Beyond critical thinking skills, technology literacy skills level has been reported to influence students' academic achievement in chemistry. Daxuaua (2022) in Shaan, China, found that there was significant relationship between levels of technology literacy and students' academic achievement. In the same vein, Bogelund, *et al,* (2019) found that technology literacy skill has a significant effect on students' academic achievement, but students with higher technology literacy tend to have better achievement. In Chinese and American adolescent, Guo and Reimers (2014), found that students with low technology literacy skills tend to have low levels of academic achievement. In Kogi State of Nigeria, Ovansa, (2017), found that there was no significant effect of the levels of technology literacy on academic achievement means score of students. The gap here is that the study was carried out in Adavi education zone of Kogi State while this study was carried out in Ukanafun education zone of Akwa Ibom State. And the study was done using a given sample size of 300 students not 500 students.

Statement of the Problem

Chemistry plays a vital role in the development of almost all the sectors of the Nations' economy such as health, agriculture, industry and education. Following the relevance of chemistry in the nation's economic development, chemistry education should be held high in the public senior secondary schools.

Unfortunately, in Ukanafun Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Students' academic achievement in chemistry has consistently been reported to be poor, especially, in the West African senior school certificate examination. This research therefore, sought to investigate if the students' poor academic achievement in chemistry is influenced by the 21st century learning skills level such as: critical thinking skill level and technology literacy skill level of chemistry students among secondary schools in Ukanafun Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

Specifically, the study sought to investigate:

1. The difference in the academic achievement of secondary school chemistry students whose level of critical thinking skill is high and low.
2. The influence of high, average, and low levels of technology literacy skills on students' academic achievement in chemistry

Research Questions 1

1. What is the difference in the academic achievement of secondary school chemistry students with high level of critical thinking skill and those with low level of critical thinking skill?
2. What is the influence of high, average, and low levels of technology literacy skills on secondary school students' academic achievement in chemistry?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in academic achievement of secondary school chemistry students whose level of critical thinking skill is high and those whose level of critical thinking skill is low.
2. There is no influence of high, average, and low level of technology literacy skill on secondary school students' academic achievement in chemistry.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey design and the population of the study consisted of all 958 SSII chemistry students from 7 public senior secondary schools in Ukanafun. The sample of the study was made of 500 SSII students selected from the population using a simple random sampling technique. From the study sample, the numbers of chemistry students that assessed themselves as having high and low level of critical thinking skill were 370 and 130 respectively, while those that have high, average and low technology literacy skills were 87, 293 and 120 respectively.

The data used for the study were collected using balloting method during the third term of the 2024/2025 school academic year. The researcher visited the principal of the sampled schools and secured permission to use SSII chemistry students for the study. The students were selected using the balloting method and addressed on how to respond appropriately to the study instrument.

The two study instruments: S21stCLSLVQ and CAT were stapled together and administered to the students in the class. Thereafter, all the study instruments were retrieved on the spot. Hence, 100 percent retrieval of the study instrument was achieved. The approach was repeated in other schools selected for the study until 500 SSII chemistry students needed for the study were sampled.

The research instruments were the students' 21st century learning skill status variables questionnaire (S21stCLSLVQ) used to gather data on students' 21st century learning skills status and the chemistry achievement test (CAT) for gathering of data on students' academic achievement in chemistry. The reliability of the instruments was ensuring by subjecting them to testing. The students' 21st century learning skills status variables questionnaire (S21stCLSLVQ) was tested for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha Analysis and the co-efficient of the reliability was 0.79. The chemistry achievement test (CAT) was tested using the Kuder Richardson formula-20 which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.89.

The independent t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA), statistics were employed for the statistical analysis of data generated using the SPSS version 20 computer program. All hypotheses were tested at a 0.05, level of significance.

Results

Research question 1: What is the difference in the academic achievement of secondary school chemistry students with high level of critical thinking skill and those with low level of critical thinking skill? The research question was answered with the mean and standard deviation of the academic achievement scores of the students in the two students' critical thinking skill groups (high and low). The results are shown in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, there is a difference in the mean scores of students in the two students' critical thinking skill groups. The mean scores are different as observed and hence the influence of high students' critical thinking skill is higher (39.88) than that of low students' critical thinking skill (35.42). This implies that high students' critical thinking skill had a better influence on chemistry students' academic achievement.

Table1: Mean and standard deviation of the mean score of the academic achievement of secondary school chemistry students based on students' critical thinking skill group

Dependent variable	Students' critical thinking skill group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Achievement test	HIGH	370	39.88	9.352
	LOW	130	35.42	8.512
	Total	500	37.69	8.932

Table2: Mean and standard deviation of the mean score of the academic achievement of secondary school chemistry students based on technology literacy skill group55-75=High, 35-54= Average 15-34=Low

Technology literacy skill group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
HIGH	87	41.13	7.881
AVERAGE	293	37.10	9.321
LOW	120	40.93	9.604
Total	500	38.72	9.341

Research question 2: What is the influence of high, average and low levels of technology literacy skills on secondary school students' academic achievement in chemistry? The research question was answered with the mean and standard deviation of the mean score of the academic achievement of the students in the three students' technology literacy skill groups (high, average, and low).

The results are shown in Table 2. As shown in Table 2, there is a difference in the mean scores of students in the three technology literacy skill groups (high, average, and low).

The mean scores are different as observed and hence the influence of high technology literacy skill is highest (41.13) followed by a low technology literacy skill 40.93 and an average technology literacy skill of 37.10. This implies that high-technology literacy skill had the best influence on biology students' academic achievement.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the academic achievement of secondary school chemistry students whose critical thinking skill is high and low. The hypothesis was tested with independent t-test statistics. Levene's test of equality of error variances indicates a non- significant F value (.396, p = .529), which means that equal variance is assumed for the two groups. So the first line of the t-test is used. The results are shown in Table 3. The results in Table 3 indicate that the t-calculated value was 4.794 and a p-value of 0.001 at 0.05 level of significance with 498 degrees of freedom. Since the p-value was less than 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis was rejected. That means there is a significant difference in the mean academic achievement of students whose critical thinking skill is high and low.

Table3: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of high and low students' critical thinking skill level on academic achievement of chemistry students: 21-40=High, 10-20=Low using (SPSS, version 20)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means		
Dependent Variable		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Biology achievement test	Equal variances assumed	.396	.529	4.794	498	0.001
	Equal variances not assumed			5.015	246.140	0.001

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant influence of high, average and low level of technology literacy skill on secondary school students' academic achievement in chemistry. The hypothesis was tested using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistics. The results of the data analyses are shown in Table 4. As shown in Table 4, the calculated F value is 11.079 with a p-value of 0.001 (p=<.05) which is statistically significant at a .05 significance level and (2, 497) degrees of freedom. Since the p-value is .001 (p=<.05), the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there was a significance difference in the academic achievement means scores level of chemistry students whose technology literacy skill is low, average and high.

Table4: One-way analysis of variance of the difference technology literacy skill level and chemistry students' academic achievement: 55-75= High, 35-54=Average, 15-34=Low using (SPSS 20)

Sources of variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1858.354	2	929.177	11.079	0.001
Within Groups	41684.004	497	83.871		
Total	43542.358	499			

Summary of findings

The following major findings were obtained in this study:

i. There is a significant difference in the academic achievement mean score of chemistry students whose students' critical thinking skill is high and those whose critical thinking skill is low.

ii. There was a significance difference in the academic achievement mean score level of chemistry students whose technology literacy skill is low, average and high.

Discussion of findings:

The result of hypothesis one indicated that there was a significant difference between the mean academic achievement scores of students from high and low students' critical thinking skill status. This may be because critical thinking skill enhances students' engagement in chemistry concepts which promote academic achievement of students in secondary school.

This study agrees with an earlier study by, Adeyemi and Olufunke (2023), who examined the influence of critical thinking skill on academic achievement of secondary school students in Lagos state and found that, there was a significant difference in the mean achievement score of students with high and low critical thinking skills. Students with high critical thinking ability achieve more than students with low critical thinking ability. The study also support the study of Gottfried *et al*, (2021) who assessed the impact of critical thinking instruction on secondary school students' academic achievement in mathematics in Owerri education zone of Imo State, and found that critical thinking ability has a significant influence on students' academic achievement. The present study is not in agreement with the findings of Yusuf and Aramide (2023) who examine the influence of critical thinking skills on the academic achievement of students in selected schools in Enugu state and that critical thinking ability of students has no significant relationship with the student's academic achievement. Findings of this study is in support of the assertion of Facione, (2015), Olatoye and Aderogba(2023) who asserted that Nigeria secondary school students with high critical thinking abilities achieve higher in chemistry examinations compared to those with low critical thinking.

Hypothesis two was tested with one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistic. The result from the findings showed that there was a highest mean score in favour of students with high technology literacy skill and hence the influence of high technology literacy skill on students' academic achievement is highest followed by low technology literacy skill and average technology literacy skill respectively. The reason for this result might be that students with high have gain access to learning materials such as textbooks and quiet study space in their homes. For students with low technology literacy skill to acquire high academic achievement means score than students with average technology literacy skill, it could be that their students had actively engaged in teamwork with their peers and do their assignment at home.

The result of this finding is in agreement with the findings of Daxuaua (2022) who examined the relationship between technology literacy skill and students' academic achievement in Shaan, China and reported that there was significant relationship between levels of technology literacy skill and students' academic achievement. This study agrees with the study of Bogelund, et al (2019) and Guo & Reimers (2014) who found a significant impact of technology literacy skill on students' achievement. The findings of the present study is contrary to the finding of Ovansa, (2017) who examined the effect of the levels of technology literacy skill on academic performance of senior secondary school students in the Adavi education zone of Kogi State, Nigeria.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that students' 21st century learning skills have influence on chemistry students' academic achievement.

Recommendations

Keeping in view the findings of this research, the researcher recommended as follows:

i. Administrators should encourage students to actively engage with 21st century learning skills alongside traditional academic knowledge.
ii. Students should study and be engaged with 21st century learning skills such as critical thinking and technology literacy skills, which enhances meaningful learning and academic achievement.
iii. Teachers should design instructional strategies that stimulate students' critical thinking skill and technology literacy skill which equip students for real-world opportunities.
iv. Parents should provide a serene home environment, love, care, and financial support for their children's education as well as be supportive in their studies to motivate learning and enhance academic achievement.

References

Ababio, O. Y. (2016) New school chemistry for senior secondary (9thed) Onitsha, African F. E. P. Publisher Limited.

Adeyemi, S. A., & Olufunke, M. O. (2023). *Effect of critical-thinking-based instruction on academic performance in biology among Nigerian secondary school students. Journal* ***of Science Education and Practice***, **18**(2), 45–59.

Baboo, S.B. (2013). Media literacy in the lifeworld's of Malaysian children. *Journal of Global Studies of Childhood,* 3(1), 72-85.

Bogelund, P. N., Christoffersen, M. N., &Damm, A. P. (2019). Academic achievement and children's technology literacy skill: Evidence from a longitudinal study. *Journal of Science and Economic Issues*, 40(4), 621-635.

Daxuaua, Q. I. (2022). The relationship between technology literacy and academic achievement in Shaan, China. *Journal of psychology* 2(4), 8-12.

Facione, P. A. (2015). Critical Thinking: A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction. *American Philosophical Association*.*6*(3), 170–176.

Facione, P. A. (2015). *Critical thinking: What it is and why it counts. Insight*

Assessment. https://www.insightassessment.com.

Ferrari, A. (2013). DIGCOMP: A frame work for developing and understanding digital competence in Europe. *Luxemburg: publications office of the European union.*https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/Ib-na-26035-enn.pdf.

Gottfried, M. A., et al. (2021). "The Impact of Critical Thinking Instruction on Science Learning Outcomes." Journal of Science Education, 56(3), 250-263.

Guo, L., & Reimers, F. (2014). Technology literacy and academic achievement: A comparative analysis of Chinese and American adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence,*43(6), 991-1004.

Joshua, I.M (2023). Parents' Status Home Environment and Academic Achievement and Technology Literacy Levels of Secondary School Chemistry Students in Ikot-Ekpene Education Zone of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Ph.D Unpublished Dissertation. University of Calabar, Nigeria.

Kral, I., & Renganathan, S. (2018). *Beyond school: digital cultural practice as a catalyst for language and literacy in language Practices of Indigenous Children and Youth.* Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Lawson, D.A. (2020). The relationship between critical thinking and academic achievement. At Affluent Northern Texas Schools .M.Ed Unpublished Dissertation. University of Texas.

Livingstone, S. (2013). Digital learning and participation among youth: critical reflections on future research priorities. *International journal of learning and media,* 2(23), 1-13.

National Education Association(2013). Preparing 21st century students for a global society; An Educators guide to "4Cs".

NCSE (2020).National Center for Science Education. https://www.throught.so.com.

NSF (2020).National Science Foundation Using technology to enhance science education. https://www.nsf.gov/news/special reports/education/technology/.

NSF (2017). National science foundation 'Using technology to enhance science education.'https://www.nsf.gov/news/special reports/education/technology/.

NSF (2018). Science and engineering indicators

Nwafor, J. U., & Obi, C. I. (2024)*.Rote learning versus reflective inquiry in secondary biology classrooms: A comparative study*. ***African Journal***

***of Education and Development,* 12**(1), 77–89.

Olatoye, R. A., & Aderogba, A. A. (2023*).Critical thinking ability and science achievement among Nigerian students***. *International Journal of Educational Research,* 14**(1), 23–35.

Ovansa, J.U., (2017). Effect of technology literacy on academic performance of senior secondary school students (A case study of public senior secondary school students in Adavi L.G.A, Kogi State, Nigeria).*International Journal of Education and Evaluation*, 3(8), 173-183.

Partnership for 21st Century Skills.(2020). Framework for 21st Century Learning.

Prasad, N. V., Blalarj. S., Pandian, A., & Nordin, M.Z.(2016). Literacy, levels and Perception of young children on media Matters. *Researchers world Journal*, 7(1), 64-72.

Smith, C. L. (2015). Technology Literacy Skills Needed in further education and/or work: A Delphi study of high school graduates' perspectives. *https://*:digital commons.Usf.edu /etd/5776.

Ukanafun Britannica (2025). History about Ukanafun Https://www.britannica.com/ ukanafun/nigeria/britannica.

. Vygotsky, L.S (1978).*Mind in society:* The development of higher parents' control process. Cambridge: Harvard University press.

WAEC (2020-2024). West African Examination Council Chief Examiner's Report for May/June. Logos: WASSCE.

WHO (2019). World Health Organization Reports.

Yuli, R. & Achmad, R. (2017). Developing 21st century skills in chemistry classrooms.*Opportunities and Challenges of STEAM integration.* https://doi.org/10-1016/j.heliyon.2022-e08792.

Yusuf, M. O., & Aramide, K. A. (2023*). Enhancing chemistry performance through reflective and problem-based strategies.* ***West African Journal of Education,* 30**(4), 121–134.

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)

Volume 1, Number 3

Review Article https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21216209 Open Access

Resource Governance, Economic Inequality, and Social Instability in Nigeria

Abstract

Despite being one of the most resource-rich countries in Africa, Nigeria is still one of poorest on human development grounds. This paper explored the manner in which lapses in resource governance produce economic impoverishment and amplify social conflict in Nigeria. Employing a qualitative descriptive research design and thematic analysis of secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed journals, government reports, World Bank datasets, and policy documents published between 2020–2026, this study sketches an unbroken link between institutional corruption and inequitable fiscal distribution to rising poverty and multidimensional inequality elicits forms of social purgation class struggle that has characterized contemporary Nigeria. The findings also indicated that governance deficits in the oil sector; such as lack of transparency over revenue management, weak accountability institutions (as existed elsewhere too), and fiscal arrangements which favour exclusionary elite coalitions are arguably the main causes of both inequality and instability. This paper contributed to the resource curse and rentier state literature by showing that this chain is not automatic, but rather that it was the result of conscious institutional choices, therefore it can be changed through policy reform. They included restructuring fiscal federalism, tougher transparency requirements and diversification led by investment.

Keywords: Resource governance, economic inequality, social instability, Nigeria, rentier state.

Hassan Muhammed Salisu, Ph.D
Department of Ecnomics
Federal university, of lafia
ORCID iD: 0009-0000-4469-9069
08035649198

Umar Yahaya
Department of public Health
Nasarawa State University, Keffi
umaryahayaloko@gmail.com
0806 558 4371

Corresponding Author's Email:
hassansalisu1102@gmail.com

Date Received: 29th April, 2026

Date Accepted: 13th June, 2026

Introduction

Nigeria is a leading crude oil producer, producing more than 1.5 million barrels of crude oil per day and possessing proven reserves exceeding 37 billion barrels (Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission [NUPRC], 2023). This ranked Nigeria among the top oil producers in the world and established it as Africa's largest oil exporter. However, more than 63% of Nigerians are considered to be living in multidimensional poverty (World Bank, 2022). With a life expectancy of less than 55 years, sporadic electricity access in most parts of the country and youth unemployment rate reported greater than 40% in some national surveys (National

Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). This "resource curse" has been known for decades, with the disconnect between how much wealth a country possesses and what its citizens can actually enjoy never better understood. It has endured and intensified over five decades of oil extraction, constituting what many academics regard as a classic instance of the resource curse (Ablo, 2020; Ibeanu et al., 2021).

The most authoritatively definition of the resource curse, or paradox is given in the famous work of Auty(1993) who observed that nations rich in non-renewable natural resources experienced lower economic growth and poorer governance outcomes than do poor countries blessed with few natural resources (Ablo 2020). The curse works in Nigeria through a very specific mechanism: governance failure. These institutions have remained chronically weak, captured by political elites, and operate beyond public accountability. Instead of directing resource rents to infrastructure, education, healthcare and productive investment; Nigeria's successive governments have spent the oil revenue essentially on political patronage and engaging in rentier behaviour that has repeatedly concentrated wealth and power in a small elite ruling circle (Nwosu & Ugwuanyi, 2021). The end result, is a nation with plenty of resourceful wealth but enormous mass deprivation.

That deprivation is not equal, as Economic Disparity in Nigeria has strange regional, ethnic and generational dimensions. The environmental toll of oil extraction is borne by communities in the Niger Delta, who make only a tiny share of the revenue it generates. Northern state poverty rates now far exceed their counterparts in the South-West, which has cultivated a commercial and service economy that is less dependent on oil rents. It has not delivered jobs for young Nigerians at an order of magnitude as they exist region-wide (Onyekwere & Adaji, 2023). These inequalities foster conditions of grievance and grievance, if not addressed, translates into social instability.

Nigeria has had an exceedingly long and diverse history of social unrest. Armed militancy in the Niger Delta, the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, farmer-herder conflicts across the Middle Belt, the separatist agitation of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South-East and 2020's mass street protests of #EndSARS represent reactions to a populace whose history with their Nigerian state over decades has been defined by separation from economic advantage of shared national resources. This paper contends that these manifestations of instability are not primarily driven by ethnicity or religion, though those aspects do exist, but are instead structurally generated through governance failures that create and feed inequality.

The study pursues two objectives: which are first, to examine how resource governance failures produce economic inequality in Nigeria; secound to establish how that inequality drives social instability between 2020 and 2024. The study is significant at a moment when the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) 2021 has introduced formal institutional reform whose impact remains contested, and when social tensions across Nigeria show no sign of resolution.

Objectives of the Study

This study is guided by two specific objectives:

i. To examine how resource governance failures in Nigeria generate patterns of economic inequality.

ii. To establish how economic inequality contributes to social instability in Nigeria between 2020 and 2024.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

i. How do resource governance failures in Nigeria generate economic inequality?

ii. How does economic inequality rooted in governance failure drive social instability in Nigeria between 2020 and 2024?

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's status as one of Africa's largest oil producers sits in stark contradiction with the depth and breadth of poverty, inequality, and social conflict that characterise everyday life for the majority of its citizens. Despite generating trillions of naira in oil revenues over five decades, the country's Human Development Index score has remained virtually stagnant, multidimensional poverty affects more than 63% of the population, and youth unemployment exceeds 40% in several national surveys (World Bank, 2022; NBS, 2022). This paradox of resource abundance alongside pervasive deprivation constitutes the central problem this study addresses.

Existing scholarship on Nigeria's resource curse has identified broad patterns of governance failure and elite capture, yet the precise institutional mechanisms linking resource governance deficits to economic inequality and, subsequently, to specific forms of social instability remain under-theorised, particularly in the post-PIA 2021 context. Much of the available literature predates the Petroleum Industry Act and therefore cannot account for the institutional changes, and their limits, that have occurred since its enactment. Moreover, few studies integrate all three dimensions of governance, inequality, and instability within a single analytical framework grounded in recent empirical data (2020-2024).

The problem is also policy-relevant. Nigeria's continued social unrest, manifested in Niger Delta militancy, farmer-herder conflicts, the #EndSARS protests, and IPOB agitation, is widely attributed to economic frustration and perceived exclusion from the benefits of national resource wealth. Without a rigorous, evidence-based understanding of how governance failures translate into inequality and instability, effective policy responses cannot be designed. This study seeks to fill that gap.

Literature Review

Resource Governance

Resource governance refers to the processes, institutions, laws, and policies through which natural resources are managed and distributed within a country. It involves accountability, transparency, revenue allocation, institutional efficiency, and the participation of stakeholders in resource management.

According to Ablo, A. D., resource governance involves the institutional arrangements and regulatory mechanisms established to ensure that revenues generated from natural resources contribute meaningfully to national development rather than benefiting a privileged political elite. Ablo (2020) argued that effective resource governance promotes accountability, transparency, and equitable distribution of resource wealth, especially in resource-dependent economies such as Nigeria and Ghana. The author further maintained that weak governance institutions often encourage corruption, rent-seeking behaviour, and mismanagement of oil revenues, thereby undermining sustainable development.

Similarly, Nwosu, C. and Ugwuanyi (2021) viewed resource governance as the system of political, economic, and legal institutions that regulate the extraction, management, and allocation of revenues derived from natural resources. According to the authors, effective governance requires transparency in revenue management, accountability in public institutions, and equitable fiscal distribution across regions and social groups. They noted that in Nigeria, resource governance has historically been characterised by elite capture, weak accountability mechanisms, and excessive centralisation of oil revenues, which have contributed significantly to poverty, inequality, and social tensions.

The views of both authors indicate that resource governance extends beyond resource extraction to include the management, accountability, and equitable utilisation of resource wealth for socio-economic development. While Ablo (2020) focused more on institutional accountability and transparency, Nwosu and Ugwuanyi (2021) emphasised the political economy dimensions of governance failure and elite domination within resource-rich states.

Economic Inequality

Economic inequality refers to the unequal distribution of income, wealth, opportunities, and access to economic resources among individuals, groups, or regions within a society.

According to Onyekwere, J. and Adaji (2023), economic inequality refers to the wide disparities in income, employment opportunities, living standards, and access to social services among different segments of society. The authors argued that inequality becomes more severe when economic growth and national wealth are concentrated within a small political and economic elite while the majority of citizens remain poor and unemployed. In the Nigerian context, the authors linked rising inequality to youth unemployment, regional disparities, and exclusion from the benefits of national resource wealth.

In another perspective, World Bank (2022) defined economic inequality as the uneven distribution of economic resources and opportunities across individuals and regions, resulting in differences in income, welfare, education, healthcare, and quality of life. The World Bank further explained that persistent inequality undermines inclusive development and increases social vulnerability, particularly in developing economies dependent on natural resources. The report noted that despite Nigeria's oil wealth, millions of citizens continue to experience multidimensional poverty and limited access to essential services.

The definitions provided by Onyekwere and Adaji (2023) and the World Bank (2022) reveal that economic inequality is multidimensional in nature and affects income distribution, employment opportunities, social welfare, and access to development benefits. Both perspectives agree that persistent inequality weakens national development and contributes to social dissatisfaction and instability.

Social Instability

Social instability refers to the condition in which a society experiences persistent unrest, conflict, violence, insecurity, protests, and disruptions resulting from political, economic, or social grievances. According to Ibeanu, O., Orji, and Iwu (2021), social instability refers to the manifestation of collective dissatisfaction arising from governance failure, inequality, unemployment, exclusion, and perceived injustice within society. The authors argued that when citizens perceive that public institutions are corrupt and national resources are unfairly distributed, social tensions often emerge in the form of protests, militancy, insurgency, communal conflicts, and political violence. In Nigeria, the authors linked social instability to governance-induced inequality and the concentration of oil wealth among political elites.

Similarly, Okonkwo, T. C. and Bala (2023) described social instability as a condition characterised by recurring social conflicts, insecurity, violent agitations, and public dissatisfaction resulting from institutional failures and weak governance structures. The authors maintained that ineffective implementation of resource governance reforms, especially within the petroleum sector, contributes significantly to distrust in government institutions and fuels social unrest across different regions of Nigeria.

Theoretical review

The Resource Curse and Rentier State Theory

The resource curse thesis, first systematically articulated by Auty (1993), posits that nations richly endowed with non-renewable natural resources tend to experience lower economic growth, weaker democratic institutions, and poorer development outcomes than resource-scarce counterparts. Early formulations focused predominantly on the “Dutch Disease” effect, whereby booming resource sectors crowd out tradeable manufacturing and agriculture through real exchange rate appreciation, thereby eroding economic diversification (Corden & Neary, 1982, as cited in Nwosu & Ugwuanyi, 2021). Subsequent scholarship, however, shifted attention from purely economic mechanisms to political and institutional pathways through which resource abundance generates developmental failure.

Rentier state theory, developed by Mahdavy (1970) and extended by Beblawi (1987), offers a political economy explanation of why resource-rich states systematically underperform. In rentier states, governments derive the bulk of their revenues from external rents, that is, payments from foreign companies or governments for the right to extract natural resources, rather than from taxing citizens. This fiscal independence from the domestic productive economy structurally weakens the social contract between state and citizen: governments that do not tax have diminished incentives to be accountable to those they govern (Beblawi, 1987, as cited in Nwosu & Ugwuanyi, 2021). The result is a political economy oriented toward elite patronage rather than broad-based public investment. Nigeria exemplifies this dynamic, with successive federal administrations prioritising the distribution of oil rents to politically connected constituencies over investment in infrastructure, education, and healthcare (Ibeanu et al., 2021).

Resource Governance, Corruption, and Fiscal Distribution

The governance of oil revenues in Nigeria has been extensively documented as a site of institutional failure and elite capture. The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), which functioned for decades as a vertically integrated state oil company combining commercial, regulatory, and policy functions without meaningful separation of roles or independent oversight, became a central vehicle for the capture and diversion of oil rents (Nwosu & Ugwuanyi, 2021). NEITI audit reports have consistently identified discrepancies between oil liftings and remittances, with estimates suggesting losses of over USD 9 billion in unremitted revenues between 2014 and 2019 alone (Ibeanu et al., 2021). Transparency International’s successive Corruption Perceptions Index rankings have placed Nigeria near the bottom of governance performance globally, reflecting the systemic nature of the problem rather than isolated incidents.

Fiscal federalism literature has highlighted how Nigeria's revenue-sharing arrangements, particularly the Federal Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) formula, systematically disadvantage states with the greatest service delivery responsibilities while concentrating fiscal resources at the federal centre (Ablo, 2020). The derivation formula, which allocates a percentage of oil revenues to producing states, has been a persistent terrain of political contestation and has itself been subject to elite capture at the state level, failing to translate into meaningful development outcomes in the Niger Delta (Ablo, 2020). These structural features of fiscal governance create conditions in which regions bear the environmental and social costs of resource extraction without receiving commensurate developmental benefits.

Economic Inequality and Social Instability

The theoretical relationship between inequality and social instability is well-established in the political science and conflict studies literature. Gurr's (1970) relative deprivation framework posits that the perception of a gap between what individuals believe they deserve and what they actually receive, particularly when that gap is experienced collectively and attributed to identifiable political actors, is a primary driver of political violence and collective unrest. In resource-rich developing states, this dynamic is amplified by the visibility of resource wealth and the transparency failure that allows elites to capture rents without public accountability (Ibeanu et al., 2021).

Studies of the Niger Delta conflict have demonstrated how the coexistence of extreme resource wealth and community-level deprivation created the structural conditions for militant mobilisation (Nwosu & Ugwuanyi, 2021). Similarly, research on Boko Haram's emergence in the North-East has linked the insurgency's social base to the region's extreme poverty, educational exclusion, and marginalisation from federal resource allocation (Onyekwere & Adaji, 2023). The #EndSARS protests of 2020, while immediately triggered by police brutality, drew on widespread economic grievances, particularly youth unemployment and perceptions of elite impunity, that are directly traceable to governance-induced inequality (Ibeanu et al., 2021). These cases collectively suggest that social instability in Nigeria is not primarily a product of ethnic or religious antagonism, as is often assumed in popular discourse, but is structurally generated by governance failures that produce and sustain inequality.

Gaps in Literature

Despite a rich body of scholarship on Nigeria's resource governance challenges, several gaps remain. First, most existing studies treat resource governance, economic inequality, and social instability as separate analytical domains rather than as interlinked elements of a single governance failure chain. Second, the literature has been slow to incorporate empirical data from the post-2020 period, during which the PIA was enacted and a new set of social instability manifestations, including resurgent IPOB agitation, escalating farmer-herder violence, and the #EndSARS protests, have emerged. Third, few studies systematically assess how institutional reforms such as the PIA 2021 have altered or reproduced existing governance-inequality-instability dynamics. This study addresses these gaps by integrating all three analytical domains within a unified framework and grounding the analysis in evidence from 2020 to 2024.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design using a descriptive approach to examine the relationship between resource governance, economic inequality, and social instability in Nigeria. The qualitative descriptive design was considered suitable because the study focuses on understanding institutional failures, governance practices, socio-economic inequalities, and their implications for social instability within the Nigerian context. The design enabled the researcher to critically analyse existing evidence, policy documents, and scholarly arguments relating to the study variables without manipulating any variable.

The study further employed thematic analysis as the major analytical strategy. This approach made it possible to identify and interpret recurring themes, patterns, and relationships associated with corruption, fiscal centralisation, unemployment, poverty, inequality, militancy, protests, insecurity, and governance deficits in Nigeria between 2020 and 2024. The methodology was appropriate because issues surrounding governance and social instability are complex socio-political phenomena that require detailed interpretation and contextual understanding.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Nigeria with emphasis on the governance of natural resources, particularly crude oil and gas resources, and their implications for economic inequality and social instability across different regions of the country. Nigeria was selected because despite its vast natural resource wealth, especially petroleum resources, the country continues to experience widespread poverty, unemployment, inequality, insecurity, youth restiveness, militancy, kidnapping, and other forms of social conflict.

Sources of Data

The study relied mainly on secondary sources of data. Data were obtained from credible and authoritative publications including peer-reviewed journals, textbooks, government reports, institutional publications, policy documents, conference papers, and international development reports.

Major sources of data included, National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC), Nigeria

Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), World Bank Reports, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Transparency International Reports, and Academic journals and policy publications. The study specifically utilised data covering the period from 2020 to 2024 in order to capture recent developments in Nigeria's resource governance structure, especially after the enactment of the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) 2021.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised all published documents, reports, institutional records, academic materials, and statistical databases relating to resource governance, economic inequality, and social instability in Nigeria. This included documents from government agencies, international organisations, development institutions, and scholarly publications relevant to the study objectives.

Sampling Technique

The study adopted purposive sampling technique in selecting relevant materials used for the analysis. The purposive sampling method enabled the researcher to select only documents, reports, and publications that were directly related to resource governance, inequality, and instability in Nigeria. The technique was considered appropriate because it ensured that only relevant and recent materials were included in the study.

Method of Data Collection

Data for the study were collected through documentary sources and archival materials. The researcher systematically reviewed and extracted information from journal articles, official reports, institutional databases, policy documents, and other scholarly materials related to the study.

The documentary review focused on issues such as Oil revenue management, Corruption and accountability, Fiscal federalism, Poverty and unemployment, Human development indicators, Resource control, Youth unemployment, Militancy and insecurity, and Social protests and communal conflicts

The documentary method was appropriate because it provided access to extensive information and recent evidence relating to governance and socio-economic conditions in Nigeria.

Method of Data Analysis

The study employed thematic content analysis for analysing the collected data. Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to identify major themes and patterns relating to governance failures, economic inequality, and social instability in Nigeria.

The analysis was conducted in the following stages:

Data Organisation

The collected materials were carefully organised according to the major themes of the study such as resource governance, corruption, fiscal distribution, poverty, unemployment, and social unrest.

Coding and Classification

Relevant information extracted from the materials was coded and grouped into thematic categories based on the objectives of the study. The major categories included. Governance failure, Corruption and accountability deficits, Economic inequality, Poverty and unemployment, and Social instability and insecurity

Interpretation of Themes

The identified themes were critically interpreted within the framework of the Resource Curse Theory and Rentier State Theory. The analysis focused on explaining how governance failures in Nigeria's resource sector contribute to inequality and social instability. Descriptive statistics such as tables, trend analysis, percentages, and development indicators were also used to support the qualitative discussion where necessary.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on the Resource Curse Theory and Rentier State Theory. The Resource Curse Theory explains the paradox whereby countries endowed with abundant natural resources often experience poor economic development, corruption, weak institutions, and social instability. The theory was relevant to this study because Nigeria's oil wealth has not translated into sustainable economic development and improved welfare for the majority of the population.

The Rentier State Theory was also adopted to explain how excessive dependence on oil revenue weakens government accountability, encourages elite domination, and discourages productive economic activities. The theory further explains how governments that rely mainly on resource rents rather than taxation become less responsive to citizens' needs and welfare.

These theories provided the conceptual basis for understanding the relationship between resource governance, economic inequality, and social instability in Nigeria.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability, the study relied on information obtained from reputable and internationally recognised institutions such as the World Bank, UNDP, NBS, NUPRC, NEITI, and peer-reviewed academic journals. Information from multiple sources was carefully compared and cross-checked to ensure consistency, accuracy, and objectivity in the findings.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered strictly to ethical research principles by properly acknowledging all sources of information used in the study. All materials consulted were adequately cited and referenced in line with APA 7th edition referencing style. Since the study relied solely on secondary data, no human participants were involved, thereby eliminating issues relating to confidentiality and informed consent.

Justification of the Methodology

The qualitative descriptive methodology adopted for this study was considered appropriate because it provided a comprehensive understanding of the institutional and structural factors linking resource governance, economic inequality, and social instability in Nigeria. The methodology also enabled the researcher to combine theoretical explanations, policy analysis, and empirical evidence in explaining how governance failures contribute to socio-economic challenges and instability in the country. Furthermore, the use of thematic analysis enhanced the depth of interpretation and allowed the study to critically examine recent governance developments and socio-political realities in Nigeria between 2020 and 2024.

Findings

Resource Governance Failures in Nigeria

Nigeria's resource governance architecture is both formally elaborate and functionally ineffective. Notably, Section 44(3) of the1999 Constitution vests all subsurface mineral resources in the federal government thereby centralizing oil revenue control at the center and ensuring a bottom-up approach is unsuitable for any meaningful governance involvement by host communities and subnational governments. Acting in opaque fashion for decades as an institution that combined commercial, regulatory and policy functions without sufficient separation or independent oversight (Nwosu & Ugwuanyi, 2021), the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) has transformed under the Petroleum Industry Act 2021 into a limited liability company as NNPC Limited.

The tenure of resource governance failures in Nigeria is characterized by corruption. NEITI (2021, in Ibeanu et al., 2021) estimates that between 2014 and 2019, Nigeria lost over USD 9 billion from unremitted oil revenues with discrepancies in lifting volumes and declared proceeds spans across several audit cycles. Having pooled and then shared a percentage of oil revenues, the derivation formula has itself been another key terrain for elite capture, allowing state-level political actors to siphon off derivation funds that would otherwise go into developing local communities (Ablo, 2020). In terms of policy and institutional change, the PIA 2021 established a Host Community Development Trust mechanism and sought to commercialize NNPC with an early assessment suggesting marginal improvements in transparency as well as ongoing political capture of institutional processes (Okonkwo & Bala, 2023).

Governance failure is further entrenched through the revenue distribution mechanism of FAAC. Based on the FAAC formula, oil revenues are heavily weighted in favor of the federal center and there is insufficient allocation for states as well as local governments which suffer from heavy expenditure due to their primary service delivery role. This gap between oil revenue generation and key human development indicators in Nigeria over the years 2020 to 2023 is depicted in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Nigeria Oil Revenue and Selected Human Development Indicators, 2020-2023

Year	Oil Revenue (USD Billion)	HDI Score	Multidim. Poverty Rate (%)	Youth Unemployment (%)
2020	8.9	0.535	63.0	40.8
2021	10.2	0.535	63.0	42.5
2022	12.4	0.535	63.0	43.1
2023	14.1	0.539	62.9	41.0

Note. Oil revenue figures are sourced from NUPRC (2023). HDI scores are from UNDP (2023). Multidimensional poverty rates are from World Bank (2022). Youth unemployment figures are from NBS (2022). HDI = Human Development Index; Multidim. = Multidimensional.

As Table 1 shows, oil revenues increased substantially between 2020 and 2023, yet human development outcomes remained almost static over the same period. This disconnect between revenue growth and development improvement is a direct product of governance failure: revenues that are not translated into public investment cannot generate human welfare gains regardless of their volume.

Patterns of Economic Inequality

The economic inequality that governance failures in Nigeria's resource sector has engendered is multidimensional. More significant, at the regional level, more than 80% multidimensional poverty rate in the North-West and North-East geopolitical zones; in contrast to Lagos and the South-West (commercially developed) where less such activity is dependent on oil rents (NBS, 2022). Niger delta provides a more poignant paradox; the region that produces over 90 per cent of national oil revenues, is home to communities with little access to clean water, functional schools and stable electricity and whose environment has been polluted for decades by oil spills and continuous gas flaring (Ablo, 2020).

According to the Gini coefficient, income inequality in Nigeria has consistently hovered around high levels. At the national level, Nigeria's Gini index (World Bank data, 2022) remains above0.43 but gives a false veneer of parity given sharper disparities at subnational levels. A fifth of the population earns neither enough to even bring them into the top income decile of the nation, nor have their incomes grown in real terms since around 1985 when Nigeria began what has been termed a structural adjustment period (Onyekwere & Adaji)). Labor shortage. Youth unemployment which the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) estimates exceeded 42% for those aged 15 to 34 is the most politically explosive aspect of inequality. A large, swelling underclass excluded from the formal economy, in a country which has squandered its oil incomes without creating employment growth at scale also constitutes something of a structural grievance trap.

Table 2

Gini Coefficient and Multidimensional Poverty Index by Geopolitical Zone, Nigeria, 2022

Geopolitical Zone	Gini Coefficient	MPI Score	Poverty Rate (%)
North-West	0.37	0.302	81.4
North-East	0.36	0.298	79.2
North-Central	0.40	0.194	53.0
South-East	0.43	0.079	27.4
South-South	0.44	0.109	35.1
South-West	0.47	0.046	13.5

Note. Data sourced from NBS (2022) and World Bank (2022). MPI = Multidimensional Poverty Index. Gini coefficient ranges from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (perfect inequality). Higher MPI scores indicate higher poverty intensity.

Table 2 reveals the stark regional character of inequality in Nigeria. The North-West and North-East zones, which are furthest from oil-producing areas and most dependent on federal allocation rather than internally generated revenue, record the highest poverty rates and the highest MPI scores. The South-West, with the lowest poverty rate, benefits from a diversified economy centered on Lagos. Gender inequality compounds the picture: women in northern Nigeria face acute exclusion from economic resources, formal employment, and political participation, dimensions of inequality that oil-revenue-driven governance models have done nothing to systematically address (Okonkwo & Bala, 2023).

Manifestations of Social Instability

The structural contours of resource governance failure and economic inequality create a consistent logic within which social instability in Nigeria emerges. This pattern is evidenced by four primary manifestations between 2020 and 2024.

While some aspects of Niger Delta militancy were suppressed following the implementation of the Amnesty Programme of 2009, instances of lower intensity violence have existed during much, if not all, of the study period. Pipeline vandalism, crude oil theft estimated at between 150K and 400K barrels a day in 2022 (NUPRC,20124), sporadic attacks on oil infrastructure signaling that grievances over resource control and environmental injustice have not been addressed by the many reforms of governance. The state has addressed the structural conditions that drive the conflict only partially, through monetary payments to ex-militants but leaving communities bereft of land and water destroyed by oil operations without compensation or meaningful investment in development (Nwosu & Ugwuanyi 2021) while leaving them as sources of ongoing instability.

Between 2020 to 2023, thousands were

killed and hundreds of thousands were forcibly displaced as a result of increasing intensity of Farmer-herder conflicts across the Middle Belt (Onyekwere & Adaji, 2023; Maru, 2021) particularly Benue, Plateau, Kaduna and Nasarawa States. These are not# climate change, land pressure, ethnic conflicts but governance failure wars: Governance (the absence of effective land administration and rural investment and conflict resolution institutions, all products of the oil rent state i.e. a state able to focus on distribution of oil rents rather than agricultural governance) as an amplifier that has led resource competition to morph into chronic deadly violence.

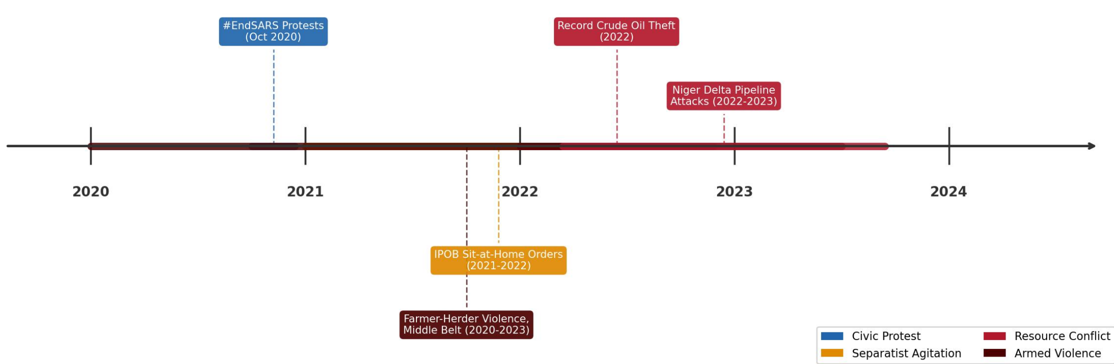
The most visible manifestation of urban, youth-based unrest during the time period studied was the #EndSARS protests in October 2020. While sparked by police brutality, the protests had a national understanding of how predatory toward their citizens the governance system was versus distributive only to the elites.

In the #EndSARS aftermath, surveys revealed that over 70% of respondents attributed their participation in protests to economic frustrations and the perception that oil wealth was stolen rather than shared (Ibeanu et al., 2021). The protests quickly erupted in more than 20 states and showed the breadth of national grievance beyond the immediate policing issue.

From 2021 to 2023, IPOB separatist agitation resurged in the South-East with sit-at-home orders that stifled business activities across five states for long stretches of time. However, the widespread belief that the region has been sidelined from both federal resource allocation and political influence since the civil war is a key component of agitation's political discourse (Okonkwo & Bala, 2023) although this perhaps varies depending on who you talk to.

Figure 1

Timeline of Major Social Instability Events in Nigeria, 2020-2024



Citation: Salisu, Hassan Muhammed & Yahaya, Umar. "Resource Governance, Economic Inequality, and Social Instability in Nigeria". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW),* 2026: pp66-82.

Note. Compiled by the author from Ibeanu et al. (2021), Onyekwere and Adaji (2023), and NUPRC (2023).

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm and identify the specific institutional mechanism through which the curse operates in Nigeria: governance failure that transforms resource wealth into inequality, and inequality into instability. This chain is not automatic or determined by the presence of oil itself. It is produced and sustained by identifiable institutional choices, including the centralisation of resource control, tolerance of corruption, inequitable fiscal distribution, and suppression of accountability, which could, in principle, be made differently.

Rentier state theory helps explain why Nigerian governments have historically preferred distribution to politically connected constituencies over broad-based development investment. When state revenue derives primarily from resource rents rather than taxation, the political incentive to be accountable to the broader citizenry is structurally weakened (Beblawi, 1987, as cited in Nwosu & Ugwuanyi, 2021). Citizens who do not pay taxes in meaningful amounts exert less leverage over governments that do not depend on their productive contribution for fiscal survival. This dynamic has insulated Nigerian governments from accountability pressures that might otherwise redirect oil revenues toward inequality reduction.

Gurr's relative deprivation framework (1970, as cited in Ibeanu et al., 2021) illuminates the pathway from inequality to instability. When citizens perceive a growing gap between what they have and what they believe they should have, particularly in a context where resource wealth is publicly visible and its non-distribution is equally visible through social media, the conditions for collective action are created. Nigeria's geography of inequality makes this dynamic particularly acute: oil wealth is extracted from specific communities whose poverty is stark, and its redistribution through FAAC allocations is widely perceived as corrupt and exclusionary. This combination of visible wealth and experienced deprivation is precisely the configuration that Gurr identifies as most generative of political violence.

The PIA 2021 represents formal acknowledgement that existing governance arrangements are inadequate. Its provisions for NNPC commercialization, host community development trusts, and a new upstream regulatory framework are steps in the right direction. However, early implementation assessments indicate that political capture of the new institutions has already occurred, and the fundamental question of fiscal federalism, which determines how resource revenues are shared across the federation, remains unaddressed by the Act (Okonkwo & Bala, 2023). Without restructuring the incentives that currently reward extraction over accountability, the governance-inequality-instability chain will persist regardless of legislative intent.

Compared to Botswana, which invested diamond revenues in institutions, education, and fiscal discipline to achieve one of the most successful development trajectories in Africa, Nigeria's experience more closely resembles Angola and Chad, where oil revenues reinforced elite governance without generating broad development (Ablo, 2020). The difference lies not in the resource but in the governance choices made around it. Nigeria's challenge is therefore fundamentally political, not economic.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that resource governance failure in Nigeria is not a marginal or technical problem but the structural engine of the country's deepest social crises. The chain from institutional corruption and fiscal centralization, through deepening multidimensional inequality, to the varied forms of social instability that define contemporary Nigeria is traceable, empirically grounded, and theoretically coherent. Data from 2020 to 2024 show that oil revenues continued to grow while human development outcomes stagnated, inequality between regions and income groups persisted, and social unrest took multiple forms across the country. Nigeria's resource curse is ultimately a governance curse.

Several policy recommendations emerge from this analysis. First, the FAAC formula should be restructured to address regional development deficits rather than reinforcing federal fiscal dominance. Second, NEITI's mandate should be strengthened with real enforcement powers and not merely reporting functions. Third, the PIA's host community development provisions should be implemented with genuine community participation and independent oversight. Fourth, oil revenues should be channeled into education, agriculture, and manufacturing to generate productive employment for Nigeria's young population. Fifth, a constitutional review of Section 44(3) should be undertaken to enable greater subnational participation in resource governance.

Future research should examine the specific implementation pathways of the PIA 2021 at the state and community levels to assess whether its provisions are materially altering the governance-inequality-instability dynamics documented in this study. Longitudinal work tracking changes in inequality and instability indicators against governance reform milestones would make a strong contribution to both scholarship and policy.

References

Ablo, A. D. (2020). Local content, corporate governance and accountability in Ghana's oil and gas industry. *The Extractive Industries and Society, 7*(2), 590–597. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2020.01.011

Ibeanu, O., Orji, N., & Iwu, C. G. (2021). Resource governance, inequality and social conflict in Nigeria: Interrogating the political economy of oil. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations, 15*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.5897/AJPSIR2020.1278

National Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Labour force statistics: Unemployment and underemployment report*. Federal Government of Nigeria.

Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission. (2023). *Annual statistics bulletin 2023*. NUPRC.

Nwosu, C., & Ugwuanyi, B. (2021). Oil resource governance and the dilemma of development in Nigeria: A political economy perspective. *International Journal of Development and Management Review, 16*(1), 55–72.

Okonkwo, T. C., & Bala, K. (2023). Assessing the Petroleum Industry Act 2021: Institutional reform or elite capture? *Nigeria Journal of Oil and Gas Law, 4*(1), 34–51.

Onyekwere, J., & Adaji, M. (2023). Inequality, youth unemployment and social unrest in Nigeria: Evidence from the #EndSARS movement. *African Development Review, 35*(2), 201–215. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8268.12659

United Nations Development Programme. (2023). *Human development report 2023/2024: Breaking the gridlock*. UNDP.

World Bank. (2022). *Nigeria poverty assessment 2022: A better future for all Nigerians*. World Bank Group. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1941-3

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)
Volume 1, Number 3
Review Article
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21216009
Open Access

Generative AI and Delivery Accuracy in FinTech IT Projects through Adaptive Governance in Planning and Estimation

Abstract

The rapid integration of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into financial technology (FinTech) organisations has intensified questions about whether prevailing project governance frameworks are equipped to absorb the speed, complexity, and uncertainty that AI-driven systems introduce. This study examined the relationship between generative AI adoption and delivery accuracy in FinTech IT projects, with a specific focus on how adaptive governance mechanisms in planning and estimation mediate and improve project outcomes. Complexity Theory and the Adaptive Governance Framework were referenced as the research adopted a qualitative systematic literature review methodology, synthesising peer-reviewed scholarly works, institutional reports, and industry publications from 2019 to 2024. Findings revealed that FinTech organisations integrating adaptive governance structures, characterised by iterative planning cycles, AI-augmented estimation tools, and real-time feedback mechanisms, demonstrate significantly improved delivery accuracy compared to those employing static, conventional governance approaches. The central finding was that, generative AI, when rooted within an adaptive governance setting, reduces scope creep and estimation error by enabling dynamic project re-scoping grounded in real-time data intelligence. The study concluded that delivery accuracy in FinTech IT projects is not merely a function of technical capability but is deeply contingent on governance agility and the institutional commitment to continuously recalibrate project assumptions. It is recommended that FinTech regulatory bodies and project management standards authorities develop and enforce AI-inclusive governance standards that mandate adaptive planning protocols across all AI-integrated IT projects.

Keywords: Generative AI, FinTech, delivery accuracy, adaptive governance, project planning, estimation, IT project management

Jide Gboyega Okedeji
Business Innovation, School of Business
Osiri University, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
+2347038024827
ORCID NO - 0009-0000-7648-6180

Temitope Oluwafemi Ademola
Business Innovation, School of Business
Osiri University, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
+2348077301197, +2348102985374
ORCID NO - 0009-0005-5680-6040

Oladeji Johnson Olawale
Business Innovation, School of Business
Osiri University, Lincoln , Nebraska, USA
+2348137888012
ORCID NO - 0008-5378-6808

Rufai Fatai Laide
Business Innovation, School of Business
Osiri University, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
+2347030139313
ORCID N0 - 0009-0005-9026-0651

Jamiyu Abiodun Ibraheem
Entrepreneurship Division
Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu,
Ebonyi state, Nigeria
+2348032459428
ORCID NO - 0009-0005-8621-5305

Simiat Oluwatoyin Usman
Business Innovation, School of Business
Osiri University, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
+2348089485533
ORCID NO - 0009-0005-3034-1249

Oluwatoyin Olayinka Odobo
Business Innovation, School of Business
Osiri University, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
+234 8055416853
ORCID NO: 0009-0003-5248-6962

Corresponding Author's Email:
Jidegboyega@gmail.com

Date Received: 11th April, 2026

Date Accepted: 13th June, 2026

1. Introduction

The financial technology sector occupies a particularly dynamic position in the contemporary digital economy, one where the relentless pace of technological innovation intersects with the unforgiving demands of regulatory compliance, customer trust, and operational discipline. Over the past decade, FinTech organisations have built their competitive identities around technology-led disruption, deploying sophisticated tools to reimagine how financial services are designed, delivered, and governed. Among these tools, generative artificial intelligence represents the most consequential technological shift in recent memory. Unlike earlier generations of AI that relied primarily on pattern recognition and historical data classification, generative AI systems, including large language models (LLMs) and multimodal AI platforms, possess the capacity to create, reason, simulate, and predict in ways that are fundamentally transforming how IT projects are conceptualised and executed (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023). However, as organisations move to meet these capabilities into their project lifecycles, a troubling gap has emerged between the promise of AI-enabled efficiency and the increasingly documented reality of deteriorating delivery outcomes.

Delivery accuracy, understood broadly as the ability to complete IT projects on time, within budget, and in alignment with originally defined scope, has long been a persistent challenge across the technology sector. Industry-wide data confirm that a majority of IT projects experience cost overruns, schedule delays, or significant scope deviation (Standish Group, 2020). In the FinTech sector, where regulatory deadlines are immovable and market windows are narrow, these pressures are considerably amplified. The arrival of generative AI into project workflows was initially heralded as a corrective force, one capable of accelerating development cycles, improving requirement articulation, and enabling smarter resource forecasting. However, emerging evidence suggests that the uncritical adoption of generative AI, in the absence of corresponding governance evolution, may compound the very problems it was intended to address (Bughin *et al.*, 2017).

This challenge lies in a governance deficit as most FinTech organisations continue to operate within project governance frameworks designed for a pre-AI environment, frameworks built around assumptions of human-driven estimation, static risk profiles, and linear project progression. These frameworks are ill-equipped to accommodate the dynamic, probabilistic, and often opaque nature of AI-generated project artefacts. Adaptive governance, by contrast, offers a fundamentally different orientation: rather than seeking to control project complexity through rigid planning hierarchies, It embraces iterative feedback loops, distributed decision-making, and the continuous recalibration of project assumptions in response to real-time information (Henfridsson & Bygstad, 2013). When applied to AI-integrated FinTech projects, this governance philosophy holds significant promise for improving delivery accuracy.

This study situates itself at the intersection of three scholarly domains which are generative AI adoption, delivery accuracy in IT project management, and adaptive governance theory. It seeks to understand not merely whether generative AI improves delivery accuracy in FinTech projects, but how the quality and architecture of governance structures mediates that relationship.

2. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

i. Examine the relationship between generative AI adoption and delivery accuracy in FinTech IT projects.
ii. Analyse how adaptive governance mechanisms in planning and estimation mediate the impact of generative AI on project delivery outcomes.
iii. Identify the governance configurations and structural conditions that most effectively support delivery accuracy in AI-integrated FinTech project environments.

3. Research Questions

To achieve the objectives of this study, the research questions are:

i. In what ways does generative AI adoption influence delivery accuracy in FinTech IT projects?
ii. How do adaptive governance mechanisms in planning and estimation mediate the relationship between generative AI and delivery accuracy in FinTech projects?
iii. What governance configurations and structural conditions most effectively support delivery accuracy in AI-integrated FinTech IT project environments?

4. Statement of the Problem

The rapid integration of generative AI into FinTech IT project workflows has produced a paradox that warrants urgent scholarly attention. On one hand, organisations are investing heavily in AI-powered tools for requirement generation, code synthesis, risk modelling, and effort estimation, with the explicit expectation of improving project delivery accuracy. On the other hand, a growing body of practitioner reports and emerging academic work suggests that delivery failure rates in AI-integrated FinTech projects remain stubbornly high and in some cases have deteriorated relative to pre-AI benchmarks (McKinsey Global Institute, 2023). This paradox points to a structural gap in the field's understanding of how governance mediates the AI-delivery accuracy relationship.

A review of existing literature reveals that while considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to the technical dimensions of AI in software engineering including code generation, automated testing, and predictive analytics, the governance layer that sits above these technical capabilities has been largely neglected. Studies tend to focus either on the performance characteristics of specific AI tools or on generic project management frameworks, without adequately theorising the governance architecture required to enable adaptive responses to AI-generated uncertainty. Cram *et al.* (2022) observe that, IT governance research has been slow to incorporate the specific challenges posed by AI systems, particularly in sectors like FinTech where compliance requirements create additional governance complexity.

This gap is especially consequential in the context of planning and estimation as estimation in AI-integrated projects is categorically different from estimation in conventional software projects: AI components introduce a class of technical risk, including model drift, training data sensitivity, and inference unpredictability, that conventional estimation models are not designed to handle (Trendowicz & Jeffery, 2014). Most FinTech organisations continue to rely on estimation frameworks developed in the waterfall and early agile eras, without modification for AI-specific risk profiles. The result is a persistent mismatch between what the governance framework expects and what the AI-integrated project actually delivers, manifesting in chronic underestimation of effort, overoptimistic scheduling, and recurring scope creep. This study is therefore propelled by the recognition that the problem is not fundamentally technological, but governmental, and that identifying the governance configurations most conducive to delivery accuracy constitutes the central intellectual challenge this work seeks to address.

5. Literature Review

The discourse on generative AI, project governance, and delivery performance in FinTech has grown substantially over the past five years, driven by the rapid commercialisation of large language models and the mounting pressure on FinTech organisations to deliver technology-intensive projects at pace and at scale. Scholars have approached these intersecting themes from several directions, including AI-specific productivity research, IT governance scholarship, and project estimation theory. This section synthesises recent and relevant literature from 2019 to 2024, identifying convergences, contradictions, and the residual gap that this study addresses.

The literature on generative AI in software development has expanded substantially since the commercialisation of large language models. Chen *et al.* (2021), in their foundational study of the Codex model, demonstrated that LLM-based code generation tools can achieve meaningful productivity gains for software engineers, particularly in tasks involving boilerplate code, documentation generation, and test case creation. Subsequent research has replicated and extended these findings, consistently identifying productivity gains ranging from 10% to 55% depending on task type and developer experience level (GitHub, 2022; Peng *et al.*, 2023). However, the translation of individual productivity gains into project-level delivery accuracy improvements has proven more elusive. Turpin *et al*. (2023) caution that AI-generated code artefacts introduce a distinctive quality risk, including subtle logical errors, training data biases, and hallucinated library references, that can escape conventional code review processes and surface as defects late in the project lifecycle, disproportionately affecting delivery schedules. This concern is particularly salient in FinTech contexts, where code quality failures carry regulatory and financial consequences far beyond those typical in other industry verticals. A notable absence in the current literature is the lack of studies examining how organisational governance structures either amplify or attenuate these AI-related quality risks at the project level.

Delivery accuracy has been conceptualised in the project management literature as a composite measure encompassing schedule adherence, budget conformance, and scope fidelity (Project Management Institute, 2021). In the FinTech sector, this concept carries additional regulatory dimensions: deadline compliance mandated by financial regulators, API stability obligations arising from open banking frameworks, and data governance requirements all constitute delivery constraints absent or less prominent in other sectors (Arner *et al.*, 2017). The Standish Group's CHAOS reports have consistently documented that IT project failure rates hover around 70%, with fewer than 30% of projects meeting all three delivery accuracy criteria simultaneously (Standish Group, 2020). Within FinTech specifically, Gartner (2022) estimates that AI-integrated IT projects experience an additional 20–35% increase in effort relative to initial estimates, driven primarily by the iterative nature of AI model development and the difficulty of specifying AI-related requirements upfront. Agile methodologies, which have become the dominant delivery framework in FinTech organisations, offer some mitigation through iterative delivery cycles, but are themselves insufficient without a corresponding adaptation of governance structures to accommodate AI-specific uncertainty patterns (Dikert *et al.*, 2016). The literature thus acknowledges the problem of AI-related delivery overruns but has not yet produced an integrated account of the governance conditions that mediate them.

The concept of adaptive governance has received growing attention in IT governance scholarship, particularly in response to the limitations of classical IT governance frameworks such as COBIT and ITIL when applied to agile and AI-integrated project environments. Weill and Ross (2004), whose foundational work on IT governance continues to shape practice, acknowledged that governance frameworks must evolve in response to technological change, though their original models were constructed for a pre-AI context. De Haes and Van Grembergen (2015) argue that effective IT governance in complex environments requires mechanisms for continuous sensing, rapid sensemaking, and flexible response, capabilities that align closely with the Adaptive Governance Framework employed in this study. Cram *et al*. (2022) advance this argument specifically in the AI context, identifying what they term a 'governance lag', the tendency of institutional governance structures to evolve more slowly than the technologies they are meant to oversee. In FinTech, where regulatory environments already impose significant governance overhead, this lag can be especially pronounced. Their research suggests that organisations that proactively redesign their governance architectures to incorporate AI-specific oversight mechanisms demonstrate meaningfully better project outcomes. Despite this, the literature lacks specific empirical evidence linking particular adaptive governance configurations to measurable improvements in delivery accuracy within FinTech AI project portfolios.

Project estimation remains one of the most persistently challenged aspects of IT project management. Trendowicz and Jeffery (2014) note that even sophisticated parametric estimation models struggle to maintain accuracy in the face of novel technologies that fall outside the empirical base from which their parameters were derived. Generative AI represents precisely such a technology, its behaviour in production environments is difficult to characterise through conventional estimation analogies, and its performance is sensitive to factors such as prompt engineering quality and model version that conventional frameworks do not account for. Recent research has begun exploring AI-augmented estimation as a potential response. Menzies *et al.* (2022) demonstrate that machine learning-based estimation models, trained on project historical data and calibrated against AI-specific complexity indicators, achieve lower estimation error rates than conventional models. Critically, their findings also show that this accuracy advantage is contingent on the governance structures surrounding the estimation process where organisations that treat AI estimation outputs as fixed targets rather than as probabilistic ranges subject to iterative revision do not realise the accuracy benefits that the technology theoretically affords. This finding provides an important empirical bridge between generative AI's technical capabilities and the governance design questions this study addresses, and simultaneously marks the specific gap in the literature that motivates the present inquiry.

6. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in two complementary theoretical constructs which are Complexity Theory and the Adaptive Governance Framework. These frameworks provide the conceptual scaffolding necessary to understand how FinTech IT projects, already characterised by technical and regulatory complexity, behave when generative AI is introduced as an active project actor rather than merely a passive tool.

Complexity Theory, as developed in organisational and management science contexts by scholars such as Stacey (2010) and Snowden and Boone (2007), holds that complex systems are characterised by nonlinear dynamics, emergent behaviours, and sensitivity to initial conditions. Projects incorporating generative AI exhibit precisely these characteristics: outputs are probabilistic rather than deterministic, interactions between AI components and human project actors produce emergent risks, and small changes in model parameters or training data can run into large deviations in project outcomes. Complexity Theory therefore provides a theoretically robust lens through which to understand why traditional, linear governance approaches, premised on predictability and control, are ill-suited to AI-integrated project environments. Rather than treating delivery variance as a failure of discipline, Complexity Theory understands it as an expected property of complex adaptive systems, one that demands governance approaches regulated to manage variance rather than eliminate it.

The Adaptive Governance Framework, drawing from the foundational work of Folke *et al.* (2005) in social-ecological systems and subsequently adapted to information systems governance by scholars including Henfridsson and Bygstad (2013), posits that effective governance of complex, dynamic systems require flexibility, learning orientation, and the capacity for rapid institutional reconfiguration. In the context of IT project management, adaptive governance manifests as iterative planning processes, rolling-wave estimation, real-time performance dashboards, and governance boards empowered to make in-flight project adjustments without reverting to slow-moving approval hierarchies. Applied to FinTech projects specifically, this framework anticipates that organisations which institutionalise these mechanisms will be better positioned to absorb the uncertainty introduced by generative AI and convert it into delivery advantage.

The intersection of these two frameworks is particularly generative for this study. Complexity Theory explains why the problem exists, AI-integrated FinTech projects are inherently complex systems that resist conventional governance logics, while the Adaptive Governance Framework prescribes the governance design principles most likely to produce reliable delivery accuracy within that complexity. Both position adaptive governance not as an optional enhancement but as a structural necessity for FinTech organisations seeking to harness generative AI without sacrificing delivery discipline.

7. Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on a systematic literature review approach, appropriate to synthesise and critically interpret existing knowledge on generative AI adoption, adaptive governance, and delivery accuracy in FinTech IT projects. Rather than generating primary data, the research focuses on integrating conceptual, empirical, and policy-based evidence drawn from prior studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. To enhance transparency and methodological rigour, the review process was guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework. In line with qualitative research traditions, PRISMA was not employed as a statistical meta-analytic tool, but rather as a structured guide for documenting the identification, screening, and selection of relevant literature (Page *et al*., 2021). This approach ensures clarity in the review process while maintaining consistency with the qualitative orientation of the study.

Data Sources

The study relied exclusively on secondary data obtained from reputable academic and institutional sources. Peer-reviewed journal articles were retrieved from major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, IEEE Xplore, and the ACM Digital Library, while industry reports and contextual publications were sourced from institutional repositories such as McKinsey Global Institute, Gartner, the Project Management Institute, and the Standish Group. These sources were selected due to their strong focus on AI adoption, IT project governance, and delivery performance research, particularly within FinTech and technology-intensive organisational contexts. The review concentrated on literature published between 2019 and 2024, a period marked by the commercialisation of modern large language models and heightened scholarly attention to AI governance in project environments.

Search Strategy

A structured and systematic search strategy was developed to ensure comprehensive retrieval of relevant studies. Search terms were derived from the study's objectives and theoretical foundations, and included keyword clusters from three conceptual domains which are generative AI and large language models in software and IT project contexts; delivery accuracy, project success, and estimation in IT and FinTech projects; and adaptive governance, IT governance, and project governance frameworks. Boolean operators were used to construct compound search strings, and the search was restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings published in English. The search strategy was applied consistently across all four databases to minimise selection bias. To enhance transparency, the PRISMA-style selection process is summarised below.

Table 1: PRISMA Flow Description of Study Selection

PRISMA Stage	Description
Identification	Records identified through database searches across Scopus, Web of Science, IEEE Xplore, and the ACM Digital Library
Screening	Duplicates removed; titles and abstracts screened for relevance to generative AI adoption, FinTech delivery accuracy, and adaptive governance
Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed against inclusion and exclusion criteria; studies limited to organisational and project-level focus, excluding purely technical or algorithmic papers
Included	Final set of 52 studies included in qualitative thematic synthesis

Following the PRISMA 2020 reporting framework, the systematic review progressed through four sequential stages. The initial database search yielded 847 records across academic databases and institutional repositories. After removing 94 duplicate records, 753 unique studies remained for screening. Title and abstract screening led to the exclusion of 489 records that lacked relevance to generative AI governance, FinTech project management, or delivery accuracy. Full-text assessment was conducted on 264 studies, resulting in the exclusion of 212 studies due to insufficient analytical depth, a purely technical focus without organisational context, or sectoral mismatch. A final quality check confirmed that 52 studies met all criteria for inclusion in the final qualitative synthesis.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were established prior to study selection to maintain analytical rigour. Studies were included if they explicitly examined generative AI in software or IT project contexts, delivery accuracy or project governance in technology-intensive organisations, or adaptive governance frameworks applicable to FinTech or AI-integrated environments. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports, and policy documents written in English and published between 2019 and 2024. Studies were excluded if they focused solely on algorithmic or technical AI performance without organisational or governance context, addressed sectors entirely unrelated to FinTech or IT project management, were purely opinion-based without analytical grounding, or appeared as duplicate records across databases. This filtering process ensured that the final dataset was credible and closely aligned with the study's objectives.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis, a qualitative method well-suited to synthesising findings across multiple textual sources. Each selected study was reviewed in detail and coded according to recurring themes related to AI adoption and project outcomes, governance responsiveness, estimation accuracy, and structural or policy barriers to adaptive governance. The identified themes were interpreted through the lenses of Complexity Theory and the Adaptive Governance Framework, enabling the study to move beyond descriptive summaries toward an integrated understanding of how governance agility interacts with AI capability to determine delivery accuracy. This analytical approach follows the thematic synthesis tradition described by Braun and Clarke (2006) and applied in related IT governance literature.

Validity, Reliability, and Transparency

Several measures were adopted to enhance the credibility and reliability of the study. Data triangulation was achieved by drawing evidence from diverse source types, including academic literature, industry reports, and institutional publications. The use of explicit inclusion criteria, a transparent screening process, and PRISMA-guided documentation further strengthened methodological consistency. Although qualitative systematic reviews do not aim for statistical generalisation, the structured and transparent approach employed in this study supports analytical reliability and allows future researchers to replicate or extend the review.

Ethical Considerations

Since this study relied solely on secondary data, no ethical approval involving human participants was required. Ethical standards were nonetheless upheld through accurate representation of original authors' findings, deliberate avoidance of misinterpretation or selective citation, and proper acknowledgement of all sources in accordance with APA 7th edition referencing guidelines throughout.

8. Findings and Discussion

The findings are organised around four dominant themes that consistently emerged across the 52 reviewed studies. These themes reflect how generative AI and adaptive governance interact within FinTech project environments, the delivery outcomes associated with different governance configurations, and the structural conditions that either enable or constrain delivery accuracy.

Governance Architecture as the Primary Determinant of AI-Delivery Accuracy

The most consistently supported finding across the reviewed literature is that generative AI does not inherently improve delivery accuracy in FinTech IT projects, its impact is profoundly mediated by the quality and adaptiveness of the governance structures within which it operates. This finding challenges the prevalent assumption in practitioner discourse that frames generative AI as a direct driver of efficiency gains. The evidence presents a more nuanced picture: generative AI functions as a capability amplifier, improving outcomes in organisations with adaptive governance structures and compounding delivery failures in those with rigid or inadequate frameworks.

Menzies *et al.* (2022) establish that AI-augmented estimation tools achieve their accuracy advantage only when paired with iterative governance mechanisms that allow estimates to be revised as projects evolve, rather than being locked in at initiation. Similarly, Cram *et al.* (2022) find that FinTech organisations with AI-specific governance layers, including dynamic risk registries and rolling model performance reviews, experience 30–40% lower rates of significant scope deviation compared to industry peers that adopted AI tools without corresponding governance adaptation. Bughin *et al.* (2017) further corroborate this pattern, finding that the organisations reporting the highest rates of AI-related project failure share a specific failure mode: they adopted AI tools at the delivery layer while leaving governance structures unchanged at the strategic and oversight layer. This theme directly addresses the first and second research questions, confirming that AI's influence on delivery accuracy is neither automatic nor unconditional, it is governance-contingent.

Three Adaptive Governance Pathways to Improved Delivery Accuracy

The synthesis of reviewed literature identifies three specific mechanisms through which adaptive governance mediates the AI-delivery accuracy relationship. The first is dynamic re-scoping: adaptive governance frameworks that incorporate rolling-wave planning cycles enable project teams to adjust scope boundaries in response to AI-generated insights without the bureaucratic friction that would render such adjustments impractical in conventional governance structures (Henfridsson & Bygstad, 2013). In FinTech projects specifically, where AI components frequently reveal requirements that were not visible at project initiation, this capacity for governance-sanctioned scope adjustment is a critical determinant of delivery accuracy.

The second mechanism is probabilistic estimation integration where organizations with adaptive governance structures are significantly more likely to use AI-generated effort estimates as probability distributions rather than deterministic point values, enabling more realistic scheduling and resource allocation decisions (Trendowicz & Jeffery, 2014). The third mechanism is real-time performance sensing: adaptive governance frameworks that incorporate AI-powered project monitoring dashboards enable governance bodies to detect delivery risk signals earlier in the project lifecycle, creating the lead time necessary for effective corrective action before budget and schedule overruns become irreversible (De Haes & Van Grembergen, 2015). These three mechanisms describe a governance ecosystem in which generative AI and adaptive governance are mutually reinforcing, directly addressing the third research question.

Estimation Failure as the Primary Locus of Delivery Breakdown

A third theme to emerge from the reviewed literature is that estimation failure, rather than execution failure, constitutes the primary locus of delivery breakdown in AI-integrated FinTech projects. Gartner (2022) estimates that AI-integrated IT projects routinely experience a 20–35% increase in effort relative to initial estimates, driven by the difficulty of specifying AI-related requirements upfront, the iterative nature of AI model development, and the sensitivity of AI system behaviour to deployment environment variables. Trendowicz and Jeffery (2014) note that even the most sophisticated conventional estimation models struggle to capture this class of risk, because their empirical foundations predate the emergence of modern AI systems.

The reviewed literature confirms that this estimation failure is not simply a technical limitation of available tools, it is a governance failure to create the institutional conditions under which estimation can be performed iteratively and probabilistically. Organisations that treat initial estimates as contractual commitments rather than working hypotheses systematically underestimate AI project effort, regardless of the sophistication of the estimation tools employed. This finding supports the centrality of governance architecture as the critical mediating variable and underscores the need for governance reform rather than simply better estimation technology.

Structural and Regulatory Barriers to Adaptive Governance Adoption

Across the reviewed studies, structural and regulatory barriers emerge as decisive factors inhibiting the adoption of adaptive governance in FinTech AI project environments. Commonly identified constraints include compliance obligations that favour predictable, stage-gated project governance models; institutional risk cultures that penalise planning revision as a sign of management failure; legacy IT governance frameworks embedded in organisational policy documents and vendor contracts; and limited senior leadership familiarity with the governance implications of AI adoption (Cram *et al.*, 2022; Weill & Ross, 2004). These barriers significantly affect the pace and scale of adaptive governance implementation, even in organisations that recognise its theoretical value.

At the same time, several studies points that where supportive regulatory guidance, institutional leadership, and AI-specific governance standards exist, FinTech organisations demonstrate considerably greater capacity to adopt adaptive governance practices (De Haes & Van Grembergen, 2015). This finding underpins the conclusion that overcoming governance inertia in the FinTech sector requires intervention at the regulatory and standards level, not merely at the level of individual organisational strategy. The persistence of these structural barriers despite clear evidence of their cost explains why AI-related delivery failure remains widespread even as the field's understanding of the underlying governance dynamics improves.

9. Conclusion

A clear and consequential insight emerges from the synthesis of the reviewed literature. It is that, the transformative power of generative AI in FinTech IT projects lies not in the technology itself but in the governance architecture that surrounds and directs it. Treating generative AI as a technical acquisition while leaving governance structures unchanged is not a neutral decision, it is a structural risk that the reviewed literature consistently associates with elevated rates of delivery failure, cost overrun, and scope deviation. Delivery accuracy in AI-integrated FinTech IT projects is, at its core, a governance outcome before it is a technology outcome.

The core governance deficit the field faces is less a shortage of governance awareness than a shortage of governance agility. The knowledge and practical tools required for adaptive project governance already exist. What remains insufficient in most FinTech organisations is the institutional willingness and regulatory incentive to apply those tools in ways that are genuinely responsive to AI-generated uncertainty, rather than simply bolting AI capabilities onto governance frameworks designed for a pre-AI world. Until this governance transformation occurs, the gap between AI's theoretical efficiency potential and its actual impact on delivery accuracy will persist, regardless of how sophisticated the AI tools deployed become.

The future of delivery accuracy in AI-integrated FinTech projects therefore depends on a strategic shift from static, compliance-oriented governance toward dynamic, adaptive governance architectures explicitly designed to accommodate the probabilistic, emergent, and rapidly evolving nature of AI-driven project work. This shift represents both the central challenge and the primary opportunity identified by this study, one that requires coordinated action from researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike.

10. Recommendations

FinTech regulatory authorities and professional project management standards bodies including national financial regulatory authorities and the Project Management Institute at the global level, should develop, mandate, and enforce AI-inclusive adaptive governance standards as a regulatory prerequisite for FinTech organisations deploying generative AI in project-critical environments. Such standards should require that any AI-integrated IT project operating above a defined scale threshold is governed by a framework that incorporates rolling-wave planning protocols, probabilistic estimation practices, and real-time AI performance monitoring mechanisms. Voluntary adoption of governance reform is insufficient to overcome the structural inertia and competitive incentives that lead organisations to defer the costly but necessary work of governance adaptation, only regulatory mandates with credible supervisory consequences carry sufficient institutional weight to shift industry-wide behaviour at the pace the AI adoption curve demands.

Additionally, FinTech organisations should invest in building internal adaptive governance capability rather than relying solely on the procurement of new AI tools. This means retraining project managers and governance boards in probabilistic thinking and iterative planning methodologies, redesigning project charters and vendor contracts to accommodate rolling-wave estimation, and establishing AI-specific risk oversight functions within existing project management offices. The evidence reviewed in this study makes clear that these governance investments are not peripheral to AI adoption strategy, they are the primary determinant of whether AI adoption generates delivery improvement or delivery deterioration in FinTech project environments.

Finally, financial regulators should ensure that AI governance requirements do not inadvertently support stage-gated, waterfall-style governance through their compliance expectations. Regulatory guidance on AI project governance should explicitly affirm the legitimacy of iterative, adaptive planning approaches and create safe harbour provisions for organisations that can demonstrate adaptive governance capability, even where initial project parameters are subsequently revised. Regulatory frameworks that penalise planning revision create precisely the institutional conditions in which AI adoption leads to delivery failure rather than delivery improvement, the precise outcome regulation should be designed to prevent.

References

Arner, D. W., Barberis, J., & Buckley, R. P. (2017). FinTech, RegTech, and the reconceptualization of financial regulation. *Northwestern Journal of International Law & Business, 37*(3), 371–413. https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/njilb/vol37/iss3/2

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bughin, J., Hazan, E., Ramaswamy, S., Chui, M., Allas, T., Dahlstrom, P., Henke, N., & Trench, M. (2017). *Artificial intelligence: The next digital frontier?* McKinsey Global Institute. https://www.mckinsey.com/mgi

Chen, M., Tworek, J., Jun, H., Yuan, Q., de Oliveira Pinto, H. P., Kaplan, J., Edwards, H., Burda, Y., Joseph, N., Brockman, G., Ray, A., Puri, R., Krueger, G., Petrov, M., Khlaaf, H., Sastry, G., Mishkin, P., Chan, B., Gray, S., Zaremba, W. (2021). Evaluating large language models trained on code. arXiv. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2107.03374

Cram, W. A., Brohman, M. K., & Gallupe, R. B. (2022). IT governance in an age of artificial intelligence. Journal of Information Technology, 37(4), 399–419. https://doi.org/10.1177/02683962221102060

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

De Haes, S., & Van Grembergen, W. (2015). Enterprise governance of information technology: Achieving alignment and value (2nd ed.). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-14547-1

Dikert, K., Paasivaara, M., & Lassenius, C. (2016). Challenges and success factors for large-scale agile transformations: A systematic literature review. Journal of Systems and Software, 119, 87–108. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jss.2016.06.013

Dwivedi, Y. K., Kshetri, N., Hughes, L., Slade, E. L., Jeyaraj, A., Kar, A. K., Baabdullah, A. M., Koohang, A., Raghavan, V., Ahuja, M., Albanna, H., Albashrawi, M. A., Al-Busaidi, A. S., Balakrishnan, J., Barlette, Y., Basu, S., Bose, I., Brooks, L., Buhalis, D.,Wright, R. (2023). Opinion paper: So what if ChatGPT wrote it? Multidisciplinary perspectives on opportunities, challenges and implications of generative conversational AI for research, practice and policy. International Journal of Information Management, 71, Article 102642. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2023.102642

Folke, C., Hahn, T., Olsson, P., & Norberg, J. (2005). Adaptive governance of social-ecological systems. Annual Review of Environment and Resources, 30(1), 441–473. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.energy.30.050504.144511

Gartner. (2022). *Top trends in data and analytics for 2022*. Gartner Research. https://www.gartner.com/en/data-analytics/trends/data-and-analytics-top-trends

GitHub. (2022). GitHub Copilot research: Quantifying GitHub Copilot's impact on developer productivity and happiness. GitHub Inc. https://github.blog/2022-09-07-research-quantifying-github-copilots-impact-on-developer-productivity-and-happiness/

Henfridsson, O., & Bygstad, B. (2013). The generative mechanisms of digital infrastructure evolution. MIS Quarterly, 37(3), 907–931. https://doi.org/10.25300/MISQ/2013/37.3.11

McKinsey Global Institute. (2023). The economic potential of generative AI: The next productivity frontier. McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/the-economic-potential-of-generative-ai

Menzies, T., Krishna, R., & Pryor, D. (2022). The promise and peril of AI-based software effort estimation. IEEE Transactions on Software Engineering, 48(9), 3390–3408. https://doi.org/10.1109/TSE.2021.3071130

Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., & Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. BMJ, 372, n71. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71

Peng, S., Kalliamvakou, E., Cihon, P., & Demirer, M. (2023). The impact of AI on developer productivity: Evidence from GitHub Copilot. arXiv. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2302.06590

Project Management Institute. (2021). *A guide to the project management body of knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)* (7th ed.). PMI. https://www.pmi.org/pmbok-guide-standards/foundational/pmbok

Snowden, D. J., & Boone, M. E. (2007). A leader's framework for decision making. Harvard Business Review, 85(11), 68–76. https://hbr.org/2007/11/a-leaders-framework-for-decision-making

Stacey, R. D. (2010). *Complexity and organizational reality: Uncertainty and the need to rethink management after the collapse of investment capitalism* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203863657

Standish Group. (2020). CHAOS report 2020: Beyond infinity. The Standish Group International. https://www.standishgroup.com

Trendowicz, A., & Jeffery, R. (2014). Software project effort estimation: Foundations and best practice guidelines for success. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-03629-8

Turpin, M., Michael, J., Perez, E., & Bowman, S. R. (2023). Language models don't always say what they think: Unfaithful explanations in chain-of-thought prompting. arXiv. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2305.04388

Weill, P., & Ross, J. W. (2004). *IT governance: How top performers manage IT decision rights for superior results*. Harvard Business School Press.

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)
Volume 1, Number 3
Case Study Article https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21215833 Open Access

Sudoku Induced Cognitive Skills And Decision Making Of Small Scale Businesses In Uyo Local Government Area Of Akwa Ibom State

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent of influence of sudoku induced cognitive skills on decision making of small scale businesses in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom state. In order to achieve this, two (2) specific objectives were set, two(2) research questions where asked and two(2) null hypotheses were raised at 0.05 level of significance to guide the study. The ex post facto survey design was used for the study. The population for this study consisted all 7373 registered small scale businesses in Uyo metropolis. A sample size of 583 small scale business owners was used for this study. The researcher structured questionnaire titled "Sudoku Induced Cognitive Skills and Decision Making Questionnaire (SICSDMQ)" was used to collect data for the study. Richard Kuderson 21 was used to determine the reliability and internal consistency with a high r value of .88. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the t test was used to analyze the null hypotheses. It was discovered that there is a significant influence of working memory on decision making of small scale businesses in Uyo local government area of Akwa Ibom state. It was recommended among others that owners of small scale businesses should engage in sudoku trainings to help improve their businesses.

Keywords: Sudoku, Cognitive, Skills, Decision Making, Small Scale businesses

Abasienie Sampson Bassey(PhD)
Department of Business Education
University of Uyo
08162428134

Corresponding Author's Email: abasieniesbassey@uniuyo.edu.ng

Date Received: 04th June, 2026

Date Accepted: 14th June, 2026

Introduction

Background to the Study

Small-scale businesses (SSBs), including microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), represent a significant share of global economic activity. These firms operate with limited human, financial, and informational resources, yet confront frequent, consequential decisions: pricing, inventory, scheduling, hiring, supplier selection, and customer relationship management. Improving decision quality in these environments can yield outsized benefits (Ade, 2021). Finding a global acceptable definition for SSBs has often proved very problematic due to the varying sizes and depth of individual country economies which have resulted in varying SSB definitions by different institutions and countries. As Bassey & Akpan (2026) noted, defining SSBs depends on the local banking context and economy size while international organizations like the World Bank tend to set high sales, assets and staff employment thresholds for SSBs in developed countries, definitions vary by country according to the size of the economies and structure of the corporate sector. Thresholds set by local institutions (banks and government agencies) in developing economies like Nigeria tend to be lower. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) has through its various circulars and intervention funded programmes generally defined Small Scale Businesses (SSBs) as entities with asset base of N5 million and not more than N500 million excluding land and buildings with employees between 11 and 200. However, the Central Bank of Nigeria has not formally stipulated this definition of SSBs for reporting purposes so commercial banks mostly use account debit turnover to determine categories but even such turnover parameter varies widely from bank to bank (Greg,2024).

The Nigerian commercial banks' survey in 2024 observed that there exist variations in the definitions of SSB in Nigerian which mostly use the account turnover, employees size and ownership criteria noting that "for small enterprises, the median maximum turnover is N60 million, the first quartile is N38 million and the third quartile is N322 million, over five times the median." For medium enterprises, the median turnover is N480million, first quartile threshold is N200million while the third quartile threshold is N2,500 million(Anthony, 2025). The third quartile thresholds for both small and medium enterprises lean more towards the World Bank's SME definition. According to the World bank (2026), The small-scale enterprise (Small Enterprise) is a formal business with up to 50 employees**,** total assets and annual sales of up to $3 million(Henry,2022).

According to Ido & Bassey (2015a), small scale businesses can be defined as any business concern with less than ten (10) staff strength with a capital of fifty(50) million naira. According to the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN, 2025) a small scale business is defined by both personnel and capital base. It is a business with a staff count ranging from 10 to 49 employees and an asset base (excluding land and buildings) valued between ₦5 million and ₦50 million. Bassey, *et al.* (2024a) defined SSBs as a business which is owned, led by one or a few persons, with direct owner(s) influence in decision making, and having a relatively small share of the market and relatively low capital requirement. The earliest manifestations of SSBs in advanced countries were cottage industries that later transformed into industrial complexes and tech factories. SSBs today account for the bulk of output in most countries today. It is also a proven job creator: the share of SSBs in global productivity is over 30% higher in some countries, but generally growing. In China, SSBs employ over 50% of the workforce while in the United States (US), SSBs account for over 50% of Gross Domestic Product (Ido & Bassey, 2015b). In Nigeria, SSBs employ over 60% of the labour force both formal and informal sectors. The need to have a regulatory body to control the activities of SMEs in the country led to the formation of Small and Medium Enterprises Development

Agency of Nigeria (SMEDEN) in 2004 by an act of parliament towards the realization of the goals and objectives of SMEs.

Sudoku game to Bassey, *et al.* (2024b) can also be called the number game, which is defined as a logic based combinatorial number placement puzzle. The objective is to fill a 9 x 9 grids with digits so that each column, each row and each of the nine 3 x 3 subgrids that compose the grid contain all of the digits for 1 to 9. According to Bassey, *et al.* (2024a), Sudoku is a puzzle in which missing numbers are to be filled into a 9 by 9 grid of squares which are subdivided into 3 by 3 boxes so that every row, every column and every box contain the numbers 1 to 9. Ido & Bassey (2016a) also remarked that Sudoku is a logic based combination puzzle which is popular among people of different ages and classes.

In the same vein, Cognitive activities to strengthen specific mental skills—has been shown to enhance performance in various domains (Bassey, 2024). Sudoku, a widely practiced logic puzzle based on constraint satisfaction and deduction, engages several cognitive faculties: working memory, pattern recognition, iterative hypothesis testing, and error correction. Although Sudoku is recreational, the cognitive processes it cultivates closely parallel those required for many business decisions. This paper develops the theoretical and practical case for using Sudoku-based training as a low-cost intervention to improve decision-making among SSB managers and staff (Ekpo,2021).

Working memory (WM) refers to the cognitive system responsible for temporarily storing and manipulating information required for complex tasks such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making(AllIt allows individuals to hold and process relevant information, enabling them to focus on a task, update their knowledge in real-time, and use that information to make decisions. Research has consistently highlighted the importance of WM in both problem-solving and decision-making. Studies convincingly demonstrate that WM, especially the central executive of WM, plays an important role in solving insight problems and other creative tasks (Chuderski & Jastrzębski, 2018: Smirnitskaya & Vladimirov, 2017). A number of studies have also shown that modal-specific WM storages are primarily important for solving insight problems, in particular the visuo-spatial sketchpad for visual insight problems and the phonological loop for verbal insight problems (Chen, 2015). This evidence is most often cited in support of the non-specific approach, which postulates that insight does not entail any special processes that would distinguish it from the solution process of non-insight problems. In other words, the solution of insight and non-insight problems relies on the same analytic processes of heuristic search. At the same time, executive control and WM have been shown to be either less important or even detrimental for insight problem solving (Xing *et al.*, 2019; Khan, 2020). This idea relies on the concept of insight as overcoming an impasse through representational change. In this case, executive control and over-concentration might inhibit representational change. Therefore, loading WM or redirecting attention or control may facilitate the solution of an insight problem. Recent studies revealed the low reproducibility of experiment results which had supported a positive correlation between WM loading or executive control distraction and insight solutions (Drąży *et al*., 2020; Russo, 2022). Modern research in psychology of thinking tends to move away from analyzing the process of insight problem solving towards analyzing insight itself (Moroshkina *et al*., 2020).

Constraint-based reasoning is an important area of automated reasoning in artificial intelligence, with many applications (Benson, 2019). These include configuration and design problems, planning and scheduling, temporal and spatial reasoning, defeasible and causal reasoning, machine vision and language understanding, qualitative and diagnostic reasoning, and expert systems. Constraint-Based Reasoning presents current work in the field at several levels: theory, algorithms, languages, applications, and hardware. According to Ukpa (2021), constraint-based reasoning has connections to a wide variety of fields, including formal logic, graph theory, relational databases, combinatorial algorithms, operations research, neural networks, truth maintenance, and logic programming. The ideal of describing a problem domain in natural, declarative terms and then letting general deductive mechanisms synthesize individual solutions has to some extent been realized, and even embodied, in programming languages(Sampson,2024).

Statement of the Problem

Small scale businesses are the nerve of employment generation in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom state. Majority of school leavers earn their living either through engaging in or are employed by small scale businesses. This has a multiplier effect of boosting the economy and also ensuring employees' lead productive and comfortable lifestyle. It is quite disheartening to note that most small scale businesses do not live beyond their first year anniversary due to poor decision making by the owners. Most small scale businesses do not make use of reliable data in decision making (Ukana,2026). Most of the poor decisions made by the owners of these businesses could be also as a result of poor cognitive processes (Bassey, 2024), due to applying poor techniques and the seeming lack of cognitive wherewithal to tackle the rigorous processes and solve immediate problems that may affect them. Most decisions taken by owners of small scale businesses lack logical dexterity and has resulted to low turnover, customers' dissatisfaction, low net profit and at times huge losses resulting to the death of these firms. Moreover, searches on journals, online search engines, and libraries have shown that there exist limited literature on the subject matter of sudoku induced cognitive functions and decision making. In small scale businesses. It was against these backdrops that this research was conducted to fill in the perceived gaps.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the influence of sudoku induced cognitive skills on the decision making of small scale businesses in Uyo Local Government Area. Specifically, the study determined the level of influence of:

i. Working memory skills on decision making of small scale businesses
ii. Constrained based reasoning skills on decision making of small scale businesses

Research Question

The following research questions was asked by the researcher to guide the study.

i. To what extent does working memory skills influence decision making of small scale businesses?
ii. To what extent does constraint reasoning skills influence decision making of small scale businesses?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are raised at 0.05 level of significance:

i. There is no significant influence of working memory skills on decision making of small scale businesses
ii. There is no significant influence of constrained based reasoning on decision making of small scale businesses.

Literature Review

Concept of Sudoku

Sudoku which means a single number is a widely known logic based number placement puzzle. It was invented by an American architect, Howard Carns, in 1979 with original names "Number in places". It was popular since 1986 when the name "Sudoku" was given by the Japanese puzzle company Nikoli and became an international trend since 2005 (Ido & Bassey, 2015). A Sudoku is a logic-based and not a math-based puzzle. It is possible to make and solve a Sudoku puzzle with letters or even some symbols. According to Ido &Bassey (2016a), Sudoku is a grid of 9x9 cells in which each row, column and 3x3 box can only accommodate digits from 1 to 9 exactly once. Sudoku (originally called Number place) according to Berthier (2024) is a logic-based combinatorial number-placement puzzle. The objective is to fill a 9x9 grid with digits so that each column, each row, and each of the nine 3x3subgrids that compose the grid (also called "boxes", "blocks", or "regions") contain all of the digits from 1 to 9. The puzzle setter provides a partially completed grid, which for a well-posed puzzle has a single solution. Sudoku puzzles are solved by logic and no math is required. As seen on the right, it consists of a grid which is usually made up of nine rows, nine columns, and nine boxes that are separated by thicker, darker lines. Some of these boxes will contain numerals from 1 to 9. To solve the puzzle, a person must fill in all the empty squares without using the same numeral twice in each column, row, or box, and without changing the numerals that are already in the grid.

These puzzles were created to be done using pencil and paper, and there are many books that contain collections of these puzzles with tips and strategies for completing them. They also appear in newspaper and magazines: typically, a different puzzle appears every day and the solution is printed somewhere else or in the next issue. Later, small handheld machines were created that generate Sudoku puzzles for the user to solve. More recently though, the game can be played on the internet or on mobile apps.

According to Ido & Bassey (2016b), Sudoku is an easy to learn logic-based number placement puzzle. The word Sudoku is short for Su-jiwadokushinnikagiru which means "the numbers must be single". The name "Sudoku" is abbreviated from the Japanese suujiwadokushinnikagiru, which means "the numbers (or digits) must remain single." According to Fish (2021), Sudoku puzzle is defined as a logic-based, number-placement puzzle. The objective is to fill a 9x9 grid with digits in such a way that each column, each row, and each of the nine 3 x 3 grids that make up the larger 9x9 grid contains all of the digits from 1 to 9. Each Sudoku puzzle begins with some cells filled in. The player uses these seed numbers as a launching point toward finding the unique solution. It is important to stress the fact that no number from 1 to 9 can be repeated in any row or column (although, the can be repeated along the diagonals).

The puzzle was introduced in Japan by Nikoli in the paper Monthly Nikolist in April 1984 as Suji wa dokushn ni kagiru, which also can be transferred as "the digits must be single" or "the digits are limited to one occurrence" (In Japanese, dokushin means an "unmarried person"). At a later date, the name was abbreviated to Sudoku by Maki Kaji (Kaji Maki), taking only the first kanji of compound words to form a shorter version, "Sudoku" is a registered trademark in Japan and the puzzle is generally referred to as Number place (Nanbapuresu) or, more informally, a portmanteau of the two words, Num(ber) Pla(ce) (Nanpure). In 1986, Nikoli introduced two innovations: the number of givens was restricted to no more than 32, and puzzles became "Symmetrical" (meaning the givens were distributed in rotationally symmetric cells). It is now published in mainstream Japanese periodicals, such as the Asahi Shimbun (Kelvin, 2022).

The cognitive scientist, Grabbe (2020) found that Sudoku involved an area of cognition called working memory. A subsequent experiment by Grabbe showed that routine Sudoku playing could improve working memory in order people. According to Grabbed (2022), in

1997, Hong Kong Judge Wayne Gould saw a partly completed puzzle in a Japanese bookshop.

Over six years, he developed a computer program to produce unique puzzles rapidly (Smith; 2005). Knowing that British newspaper have a long history of publishing crosswords and other puzzles, he promoted Sudoku to the Times in Britain, which launched it on November 12, 2004 (calling it Su Doku). The first letter to the Times regarding Sudoku was published the following day on November 13 from Ian Payn of Brentford, complaining that the puzzle had caused him to miss his stop on the tube. Sudoku puzzles rapidly spread to other newspapers as a regular feature. (Kelvin, 2022).

The roots of the Sudoku puzzle are in the Switzerland. Leonhard Euler created "carrelatin" in the 18th century which is similar to a Sudoku puzzle but without the additional constraint on the contents of individual regions. The first real Sudoku was published in 1979 and was invented by Howard Garns, an American architect. The real world wide popularity started in Japan in 1986 after it was published and given the name Sudoku by Nikoli.

Concept of Small Scale Businesses

The importance of SMEs in contributing to economic development in different countries has been recognized. However, there is no single definition of what constitute small and medium enterprises, which is accepted by all countries (Ido & Bassey, 2016). In USA, the Small Business Act states that a small business is the one which is independently owned and operated and which is not dominant in its field of operation. But also the Law states that in determining what constitutes a small business, the definition will vary from industry to industry to reflect industry differences accurately. For example, in manufacturing and mining industries, small business is the one with 500 employees and $6.5 million in average annual receipts.

The European Commission has also defined micro and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) as following: A micro enterprise is referred as business with employees up to 10, a small one up to 50 employees and a medium enterprise is a business with less than or equal 250 employees.

In Canada, the Industry Canada uses the term SME to refer to businesses with fewer than 500 employees, while classifying firms with 500 or more employees as "large" businesses. Breaking down the SME definition, the industry defines a small business as one that has fewer than 100 employees (if the business is a goods-producing business) or fewer than 50 employees (if the business is a service-based business). A firm that has more employees than these cut-offs but fewer than 500 employees is classified as a medium-sized business.

In Vietnam, by the size of registered capital, 90 percent of the firms have a registered capital less than VND 5 billion (about USD 330,000). Most types of SMEs fall well into the range of VND 1-5 billion. By the averaged size of regular labor force, SMEs are small in size, too. In 2005, the labor force averaged to 32 laborers per enterprise. This is a very slight increase because in 2000, it was only 30 laborers per enterprise. During the same period, the average capital of SMEs increased from VND 3 billion to 7 billion. Therefore, we can see that SMEs have been defined by using different criteria; and different countries have adopted slightly different definitions based on the local context.

Small-Scale Business Decision Context

SSBs typically exhibit constrained resources, informal processes, and high role multiplicity. Decision-making is often decentralized to single owners or small management teams with limited specialized training. Common decision-making challenges include bounded rationality (Simon, 2021), overreliance on heuristics (Johnson, 2017), and susceptibility to cognitive biases. Interventions aimed at improving cognitive processes can therefore yield improvements in planning, resource allocation, and problem solving.

Cognitive Skills Relevant to Business Decisions

Key cognitive skills implicated in effective business decision-making include:

- **Working memory:** This involves holding and manipulating multiple pieces of information simultaneously (James, 2020).
- **Pattern recognition:** This involves identifying regularities and anomalies in data.
- **Constraint-based reasoning:** This is the process of solving problems within fixed rules and limited resources (Bassey & Ebieme, 2026).
- **Hypothesis testing and iterative refinement:** This involves generating, testing, and updating solutions.
- **Error detection and correction:** This is the process of recognizing mistakes and implementing corrections.
- **Metacognition and reflective practice:** This involves monitoring and regulating one's decision processes (Ebieme & Bassey,2026).

Research Methods

This study was conducted in Uyo local government area of Akwa Ibom state. The study adopted a ex post facto survey design. The population of this study consisted of 3737 registered small scale businesses in Uyo local government area (Akwa Ibom state ministry of commerce and Trade,2026). A sample size of 583 owners of small scale businesses were selected through a simple random sampling technique. The sample size was selected through the Taro Yameni formular. The researcher structured questionnaire titled "Sudoku Induced Cognitive Skills and Decision Making Questionnaire (SICSDMQ)" for owners of small scale businesses in Uyo local government area. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, A and B. Section A dealt with the bio data of the respondents while section B covers statements on the core variables and has response option of Very High Extent(VHE), High Extent(HE), Low Extent(LE), Very Low Extent(VLE) in a four (4) point Likert scale. The instrument (SICSDMQ)) was face validated by three (3) researchers in the department of Business Education in University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria. The Richard Kuderson 21 was used to determine reliability of the instrument with a high r score of .88. The Richard Kuderson 21 was used in order to test the internal consistency of the research items and due to its simplicity. The instrument was administered by the researchers and an assistant who was explicitly briefed by the researchers. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while t test was used to analyze the null hypotheses. In answering the research questions, a cut off point of 2.5 was utilized, which means scores of 2.50 and above were seem to have a high or very high extent of influence while scores below 2.50 are seen to be very low or low extent of influence. The researchers sought the consent of the respondents where they were assured anonymity of their responses through keeping their identities hidden. The study also referenced the authors whose works formed the fulcrum of the study in the reference section.

Data Analyses

Answering of Research Questions

Research Question 1: To what extent does working memory skills influence decision making of small scale businesses?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) Rating of Responses to the Influence of Working Memory Decision Making No. 57

S/N	Statement	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remarks
1	I remember paying my staff promptly	311	1.89	HE
2	I do not miss weekly stock taking	2.58	0.69	HE
3	I do not forget to re-stock goods weekly	2.69	0.69	HE
4	I keep proper financial records of transaction	3.01	0.73	HE
5	I keep journals for reminding me on task to be executed in the business on simultaneously track multiple order	3.09	1.1	HE
	Grand mean.	3.62		

Source: Field study (2026)

Data analysis on Table 1 had shown that all the items surpassed the cut off point of 2.50. With a grand mean of

3.62 which also is higher than the mean score of 2.50. It therefore shows that working memory has influence decision making of small scale businesses to a high extent.

Research Question 2: To what extent does constraint reasoning skills influence decision making of small scale businesses?

Table 2: Mean (X) and Standard Deviation (SD) Rating of Responses to the extent influence of constraint based reasoning on Decision Making of small scale businesses

S/N	Statement	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remarks
1	Supplies are justified by purchase day book	3.5	1.12	HE
2	Employee boosting man power and it human resource which are guided	2.6	0.17	HE
3	Staff promotion is timely	3.0	0.18	HE
4	Job description are usually scheduled	2.96	1.61	HE
5	Appraisals are tied to job performance	2.69	1.09	HE
	Grand mean	3.69		

Source: Field study (2026)

Data analysis on Table 2 has shown that all the items surpassed the mean cut off 2.50. Moreover, the grand mean score of 3.69 is higher than the mean cut off point of 2.50. This therefore implies that constrained reasoning skills influences decision making of small scale businesses to a high extent.

Analyses of Null Hypotheses

Null Hypotheses 1: There is no significant influence of working memory skills on decision making of small scale businesses

Table 3: T-test Analysis of the influence of working memory on decision making of small scale business No. 57

Variable	Score	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	t-crit	t-cal	Decision
Working memory	168	3.21	1.09				
				55	1.54	1.78	5*
Decision making	178	2.55	1.11				

Source: Field study (2026)

Data analysis on Table 3 had shown that the t-cal value of was higher than the t-crit value of 1.96, degree of freedom of at 0.05 level of significance. This shows that there exist a significant influence of working memory on decision making of small scale businesses in Uyo local government area of Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no significant influence of constrained based logic on decision making of small scale businesses.

Table 4: T-test Analysis of the influence of constraint reasoning on decision making of small scale business No. 57

Variable	Score	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t-crit	t-cal	Decision
Reasoning	211	2.61	1.69				
				55	1.54	2.8	5*
Decision	178	2.55	1.11				

Source: Field study (2026)

Data analysis on Table 4 had shown that the t-cal value of was higher than the t-crit value of 1.96, degrees of freedom of and at 0.05 level of significance. This shows that there exist a significant influence of constrained logic on decision making of small scale businesses in Uyo local government area of Akwa Ibom State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings are discussed under the following subheadings:

Working Memory and Decision Making of Small Scale Businesses

Data analyses on Tables 1 and 3 had shown that there exist a significant influence of working memory on decision making of small scale businesses in Uyo local government area of Akwa Ibom State. This finding indicates that effective working memory can help businesses owners to remember factors and utilize these factors that will aid their business decision making. This finding is in consonance with the finding of Utuk (2022) who opined that effective memory is a requirement for solving complex business problems. The finding also align with the finding of Bassey (2024) who opined that sudoku skills can make entrepreneurs make concrete decisions that otherwise would be very difficult.

Constrained Based Reasoning and Decision Making of Small Scale Businesses

Data analyses on Tables 2 and 4 had shown that there exist a significant influence of constrained based reasoning on decision making of small scale businesses in Uyo local government area of Akwa Ibom State. This finding indicates that small scale business owners who engage in critical reasoning that are constrained to the businesses do well when taking critical decisions that would make or mar their businesses. This finding is supported by the works of Iche (2021) who opined that critical reasoning that are logical inclined usually help eliminate chances of making wrong decisions.

Conclusion

The paper highlighted the fact that sudoku can help small scale businesses to take decisions that would help businesses to grow. The core skills from sudoku that can help grow small scale businesses through effective decision making processes. The paper shows there exist a significant influence of working memory on the decision making of small scale businesses in Uyo local government area of Akwa Ibom State. The paper also showed a significant influence of constrained based reasoning on decision making of small scale businesses in Uyo local government area of Akwa Ibom State.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion reached, the following are suggested to help small scale businesses grow through sudoku skills:

1. Small-scale business owners should as a matter of urgency enroll in Sudoku trainings, symposium and seminars to help improve their businesses. This can be acquired through social media platforms and social networking by the business owners.
2. The federal ministry of education should include sudoku as a topic in Business Mathematics for business education programmes at all levels.
3. The federal ministry of education should review business education curriculum and lay emphasis on acquiring soft skills that would help graduates of the programme to be self reliant.
4. Finally, the federal government should improve the fundings of education in the country to help develop innovative technologies that would help in dissemination of learning contents, which would be beneficial to the generality of all Nigerians.

References

Barry, A. (2024). *Economics.* Holder's publishers.

Bassey, A. S. (2024). *Sudoku skills and students' academic performance in spreadsheet applications in federal Universities, South-South, Nigeria*. A PhD dissertation at the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike

Bassey, A. S., & Akpan, K. E. (2026). Office Technologies and Workflow Outcomes of Junior Employees in UyoLocal Government Area. *UniUyo Journal of Business Education and Entrepreneurship*, 3(1), 63-72.

Bassey, A. S., Udo, D. D., & Obayi, A. U. (2024). Assessment of Soduku Skills Acquired By Business Education Students' in Federal Universities in South-South, Nigeria. *Aau Journal of Business Educators*, 4(1), 359-366.

Bassey, A. S., Obayi, A. U., & Agbaegbu, C. N. (2024). An Assessment of Sudoku Proficiencies for Spreadsheets Applications among Business Education Students in Federal Universities in South-South Nigeria. *AAUJournal of Business Educators*, 4(2), 182-188.

Bassey, A, S., & Ebieme, E. E. (2026). Integration of Artificial Intelligence into the Business Education Programmes: A Panacea for Building a Technological Driven Workforce. *Studies in Education, 24*(1), 95-102.

Chen, Z. (2015). *Businesses in growing economy.* Xului

Chudersli, K. & Jastrzebski,S. (2018). Sudoku in a university environment for decisions.*Knowledge Upgrade. 4(3).* 35-38.

Drazy, M., James, L., Minie, Z.,& Sky, H. (2020). *Logical reasoning for decisions.* Allen.

Citation: Bassey, Abasienie Sampson. "Sudoku Induced Cognitive Skills And Decision Making Of Small Scale Businesses In Uyo Local Government Area Of Akwa Ibom State". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp99-111.

Ebieme, E, E., & Bassey, A.S. (2026). Evaluating the role of emotional intelligence in employees' job performance in First Bank, Akwa Ibom North-East, Nigeria. *African Journal of Management and Business Research,* 22 (1): 365-383.

Ekpo, A. (2021). Understanding logic in business settings. *Empirical analysis journals. 2(1)*123-131

Fish, A. (2022). *Sudoku games in a simplified version.* Arrhenius

Fish, M. (2021). *Principles of business education.* Apex publishers.

Grabbe, J. (2020). Public *finance.* Dreams.

Henry, F.(2022). *Principles of Philosophy.* Damson press.

Ido, C. F., & Bassey, A. S. (2015). Challenges of business education in achieving employment efficiency. *Journal of Qualitative Education*, *2*(1), 56-61.

Ido, C. F., & Bassey, A. S. (2015). Research in Business Education; A panacea for Employment Generation through Entrepreneurship. *Journal for Sustainable Education*, *6*(1), 160-166.

Ido, C. F., & Bassey, A. S. (2016). Improving business education contents; a prerequisite for achieving economic recovery in Nigeria's post oil era. *Knowledge Review*, *34*(1), 256-24.

Ido, C. F., & Bassey, A. S. (2016). Tvet Partnership and Profitability of Small Scale Business in Akwa IbomState; A Panacea for Economic Growth. *Journal of Association of Vocational and Technical Educators of Nigeria*, *21*(2), 47-55.

James, S. (2020). *Principles of small scale businesses.* Bright shining.

Kelvin, C. (2022). *Business education in Nigeria.* Fountain publishers.

Moroshkina, M.,Den,V., Agboyi,B., &Skrint, V. (2021). A text on business applications. Tyler

Russi, J. (2022). *Business operations in climates.* Adorning publication

Sampson, G. (2024). *Business decision Analysis.* Goodness publishers

Ukana, A. A. (2026). *Principles of computer programming.* McMillan

Ukpa, X. (2021). *Business and leaders.* McGraw Hill.

Citation: Bassey, Abasienie Sampson. "Sudoku Induced Cognitive Skills And Decision Making Of Small Scale Businesses In Uyo Local Government Area Of Akwa Ibom State". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW),* 2026: pp99-111.

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)
Volume 1, Number 3
Conceptual Analysis Article https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21215538 Open Access

From Submission To Empowerment: Gendered Social Conditioning, Education And Female Agency In Ihechi Nkoro's *Ma Vie m'Appartient* And Lynn Mbuko's *Chaque Chose En Son Temps*

Letitia Uloma Egege, Ph.D
University of Uyo
Akwa Ibom State
ORCID ID: 0009-0006-7287-0461
+2348037827663

Corresponding Author's Email:
letitiaegege@uniuyo.edu.ng

Date Received: 05th June, 2026

Date Accepted: 16th June, 2026

Abstract

This paper examined the transformation of the woman from social submission to personal empowerment in *Ma vie m'appartient* by Ihechi Nkoro and *Chaque chose en son temps* by Lynn Mbuko. The study investigated how gendered social conditioning shapes women's life choices in postcolonial African contexts that are marked by early marriage, polygamy, ethnic endogamy and excessive reproductive expectations. Despite growing scholarship on African women's writing, limited attention has been paid to the comparative study of empowerment narratives in contemporary Anglophone and Francophone African fiction. Much less attention has been paid particularly, to interdisciplinary frameworks that connect African feminist criticism with capability and critical consciousness theories. The study therefore, adopted a comparative literary methodology anchored on postcolonial feminist criticism and African gender theory. This draws on the conceptual insights of Deniz Kandiyoti's notion of "patriarchal bargaining", Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's framework of African feminist self-recreation and Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí's critique of colonial construction of gender hierarchies. Through close textual analysis, the study demonstrated that in both texts, education, professional training and networks of female solidarity are key mechanisms through which women renegotiate patriarchal constraints. Nkoro's play highlights resistance to imposed marriage and ethnic exclusivism portrayed by Ezinma's eventual educational and professional self-realization whereas Mbuko's drama presents recovery, mentorship and institutional care as pathways to empowerment as seen through Zénabou's recovery and training as a nurse. Through a comparative reading, it is observed that, although the protagonists initially internalize patriarchal expectations, their encounters with supportive female figures and educational opportunities enable them to reclaim autonomy regarding their bodies, careers and marital choices. Thus, the authors, Nkoro and Mbuko reimagine womanhood not as a predetermined social role but as an evolving process of self-assertion negotiated through education, resilience and conscious agency.

Keywords: African women's writing, comparative literature, postcolonial feminism, education, empowerment.

Introduction

Across many African societies, gender roles have historically been structured by deeply embedded cultural expectations. These regulate women's access to education, marriage and social authority. The norms often produce gendered conditioning that encourage women to internalize submission as an acceptable or even desirable feminine virtue. African women's literature has long engaged critically with these dynamics, exposing the social mechanisms through which patriarchal authority is reproduced. But they equally imagine alternative pathways toward female autonomy. Within the tradition, narratives of female awakening and empowerment frequently unfold through struggles against early marriage, polygamy, ethnic restrictions and the expectation that a woman's primary social value lies in marriage and reproduction. This article therefore, examines transformations of female submission in *Ma vie m'appartient* by Ihechi Obisike Nkoro and *Chaque chose en son temps* by Lynn Mbuko.

Through the trajectories of their respective protagonists, Ezinma and Zénabou respectively, both plays explore the tensions between patriarchal expectations and the possibilities of self-determination by women in contemporary African societies. Both narratives revolve around adolescent girls, Ezinma and Zénabou whose early lives are shaped by social pressures that strip them of their autonomy and restrict their education. In each case, the protagonist trajectory becomes a critique of gender norms that prioritize marriage over self-development. They construct pathways of empowerment rooted in education, solidarity and reclamation of personal agency.

Scholarly discussions of gender and women's agency in African literature have highlighted the ways literary texts interrogate patriarchal norms and advance possibilities for the emancipation of women. African feminist critics such as Molara Ogundipe emphasize that women's liberation must be understood within the socio-cultural and historical conditions that shape African societies. She advocates what she describes as a framework of social transformation that includes women as active participants in societal development. This she calls "Stiwa" (229). In *Chaque chose en son temps*, Zénabou's reinvention through education and service illustrates what Ogundipe affirms as African women's capacity for "critical transformation", whereby education enables them to reconstruct identity beyond patriarchal prescriptions (Ogundipe 11-13).

Similarly, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmǐ challenges Universalist assumptions of gender hierarchies. She argues that many contemporary forms of patriarchal domination in Africa are partly products of colonial epistemologies that restructured indigenous social relations (Oyěwùmǐ). Likewise, Ifi Amadiume affirms that pre-colonial African societies often allowed flexible gender roles but were later rigidified by colonial and postcolonial power structures (Amadiume 15-18). Within literary circles, scholars have also drawn attention to the recurrent thematic concern with marriage, motherhood and female autonomy in African women's writing as illustrated in works such as *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta which decries the suffering imposed on women through marriage and motherhood. Her critique of womanhood signals it as an institution of endurance rather than fulfilment (224-226). Postcolonial gender theory provides insight into how gender oppression intersects with broader structures of power. Scholars such as Gayatri Spivak argue that women in postcolonial societies are often doubly marginalized by patriarchy and socio-economic structures inherited from colonialism (Spivak 271-273). Ezinma's vulnerability after widowhood reflects this intersection as patriarchy strips her of both social status and material security. Nkoro's narrative challenges this marginalization by repositioning women as agents rather victims.

At the same time, broader theoretical approaches to empowerment have emphasized the transformative role of education and consciousness in enabling marginalized subjects to challenge oppressive social structures. Amartya Sen advances the capability approach which foregrounds real freedom as the one individuals have to live the lives they value. Nkoro's *Ma vie m'appartient* and Mbuko's *Chaque chose en son temps* expose capability deprivation (restricted education, lack of choice and early marriage). Also Sen's capability expansion approach highlights the expansion of individual freedoms and opportunities (access to schooling, economic independence and freedom to choose love) as a measure of empowerment (Sen 87). Meanwhile, Paulo Freire's concept of critical consciousness highlights the importance of awareness and reflection in the process of social emancipation. Zénabou's intellectual awakening and regaining of agency align with this concept. (Freire 67).

Building on these theoretical perspectives, the present study offers a comparative analysis of female empowerment in Ihechi Nkoro's *Ma vie m'appartient* and Lynn Mbuko's *Chaque chose en son temps* and demonstrates how their works reconfigure women's agency. The study adopts a comparative literary approach which combines close textual analysis with socio-critical interpretation as methodology. By examining key dramatic episodes, dialogue and character development, the article demonstrates how both authors represent education, female solidarity and professional training as mechanisms through which women challenge patriarchal constraints and recreate themselves.

Patriarchy and Gendered Social Conditioning

In both *Ma vie m'appartient* and Chaque *chose en son temps*, patriarchy hardly operates through overt violence but rather through gendered social conditioning particularly, within the family structure. Nkoro and Mbuko present patriarchy as a system of control sustained by cultural beliefs, family norms, moral expectations and communal surveillance. These are internalized and transmitted by women themselves, especially, mothers. For instance, Ezinma's mother, Enyidiya embodies this mechanism when she repeatedly asserts that a woman's value is in marriage rather than in education: « En tant que femme, ses diplômes ne veulent rien dire parce que, chez-nous, … on ne respecte jamais une femme non-mariée… Chika est comme un arbre qui ne produit pas de fruit. Elle ne sert à rien » (Nkoro 13). [As a woman, her certificates mean nothing because, in our place, we do not ever respect an unmarried woman] (My translation).

Simon De Beauvoir's assertion that « On ne nait pas femme: on le deviant » (*Second sexe II* 13*)* ["One is not born, but rather becomes, woman"] provides a crucial lens to understand Ezinma and Zenabou's trajectories. The female subject is not biologically destined but socialized to accept deprivation, emotional restraint and obedience as virtues while male authority is normalized and rarely questioned. In *Ma vie m'appartient*, Nkoro presents female submission as silence and endurance internalized early in life through family expectations and reinforced by economic vulnerability. Ezinma berates her older educated and independent cousin, Chika: "… à 35 ans, tu es toujours célibataire. Ecoutes-moi bien. Je te dis que tout le village se moque de tes parents … Je serais bientôt une femme mariée de M. Uchenna … (2-3). [… at 35 years old, you are still single. Listen properly to me, I am telling you that the whole village mocks your parents … I will soon be Mr uchenna's married wife …] (My translation). By accusing Chika of becoming a "spinster" despite her success, Ezinma reproduces the very discourse that patriarchy relies upon for its continuity. Chika is shocked at Uchenna's age, wealth-driven appeal and polygamous household and this reveals the moral cost of equating marriage with material gain. (3). She embarks on a mission to Ezinma's parents to advise them to rescind their decision to marry off Ezinma at a young age. This reaction from Chika introduces a counter-discourse grounded in reason, ethics and responsibility. However, Enyidiya, Ezinma's mother confesses proudly to Chika that it is Enyidiya's husband who has made « un bon choix pour notre fille » (9) [a good choice for our daughter] (My translation). Yet Chika's intervention initially fails signaling that cultural conditioning has already normalized submission. Enyidiya, the bride's mother's endorsement of the marriage exposes maternal complicity in sustaining patriarchal structures. Such conditioning restricts her daughter's access to full education and autonomy and reproduces what Amartya Sen describes as capability deprivation, the systemic denial of the freedom required to pursue a valued life. (Sen 87).

A similar logic ensues in Mbuko's *Chaque chose en son temps* set in the secluded village of Garoua. Here, tradition and religion regulate social life and resistance to western-style education. This resistance is deeply gendered: while some boys may attend school under compulsion, girls are withdrawn and married off. Mbuko heightens the critique of gendered social conditioning through the negotiation of Zénabou's proposed marriage to El-hadj Oumar, a wealthy but illiterate merchant. This episode exposes marriage as an economic transaction in which the girl-child becomes an object of exchange between men: the father and the suitor or his proxy. Yet, women are often listed as ideological enforcers: "Elhadj, mon patron demande la main de ta fille en marriage" (Mbuko 39). [Alhadji, my boss asks for your daughter's hand in marriage] (My translation)**".** Although Ahmadou initially hesitates, giving the excuse of Zenabou's schooling, Hamza dismisses female education outrightly: "L'education des jeunes filles, à quoi ça sert?" [Education of young girls, of what use is it? He asserts instead that "la place de la femme est au foyer" [the place of the woman is in the home] (Mbuko 39). This assertion exemplifies patriarchal ideology and reduces women's social value to domestic utility and reproductive availability. Ahmadou tries to resist though weakly, because of the strokes of cane he received from enforcers of the Whiteman's school (39). Nonetheless, this resistance is quickly undermined by the emissary's symbolic bribe: "Voici cinq cents naira. C'est pour tes colas" (40) [Here is five hundred naira. It is for your kola] (My translation). This is a gesture that fuses tradition, hospitality and corruption together (Mbuko 40). Money thus operates here as persuasion and an antidote to morality.

The most striking dimension of this episode is the role of desperation played by Zénabou's mother, Fatou. Driven by economic precarity, Fatou reconstructs early marriage as opportunity. She mobilizes discourses of chastity, wealth and special respectability to pressure her husband, telling him that refusing such money would be irrational: "Tu ne dois pas refuser tant de richesse tout simplement parce qu'elle doit achever ses etudes dans cette école là" [You should not reject so much wealth simply because she has to complete her studies in that school] (Mbuko 42). By Fatou's desperation, Mbuko reveals how women themselves internalize and reproduce oppressive norms when survival is at stake. The roles played by Fatou and Enyidiya corroborate what Amina Mama observes: that women may reproduce patriarchal values, becoming enforcers rather than challengers of gender oppression (Mama 7-9).

When Zénabou is finally in formed, she articulates her developmental vision of not wanting her education to be marred by marriage, invoking her teacher's encouragement to continue to secondary education (Mbuko 44). Then follows her mother's final warning: "Si tu continues tes études jusqu'au lycée, tu ne trouveras plus de mari. C'est sûr!" [If you continue your studies up to the secondary school, you will not find a husband anymore. That is certain] (Mbuko 45). This functions as a powerful disciplinary threat, revealing how education is constructed as a liability rather than as an asset for girls. Ultimately, the mis-socialization of girls is aimed at the man's pleasure without any consideration of the girl-child's emotions. This reflects Egege's analysis of the ironie and paradox of the forced marriages of two half-sisters, Ramla and Hindou in Djaili Amadou Amal's novel, *Munyal*: "Le malheur et l'angoisse des jeunes mariées se juxtapose au bonheur et au plaisir de leurs parents" (3) [The misfortune and agony of the newly marrieds juxtaposes with the happiness and pleasure of their parents]. Due to age, lack of education and personal agency the girls remain helpless. But faced with this pressure from her mother, Zénabou resolves: "Peut-etre que j'aurais mieux fait de ne pas me marier" (Mbuko 46) [Maybe I would do better to not get married] (My translation). The emergence of this resolve marks a critical moment of self-assertion, even if it remains precarious within the patriarchal household.

Mbuko further complicates the social forces surrounding Zénabou's fate through her encounter with Fatimah, a childhood friend already married. The dialogue between them reveals how patriarchal ideology is not only imposed by elderly people, but also circulated among women of the same generation. Fatimah's advice rests on economic pragmatism: marrying El-hadj guarantees that Zénabou "ne mourra pas de faim" [will not die of hunger], equating survival with submission (Mbuko 47). Zénabou's experience reflects a more direct form of coercion. Unlike Ezinma, she has no illusions about education after marriage. Her fate is sealed by familial authority and cultural expectations. Zénabou eventually acquiesces to the early marriage and exemplifies what Deniz Kandiyoti theorizes as "patriarchal bargaining". This implies that women comply with oppressive systems as a survival strategy within restrictive social structures (Kandiyoti 274-75).

The World Health Organization (WHO) concerns on child marriage foregrounds multi-dimensional impact of the practice on maternal and child health. Zénabou becomes a victim of this practice, losing her baby, suffering from VVF and is rejected by her husband and her both parents. The normalization of early marriage and female silence in both texts reflect what Pierre Bourdieu terms symbolic violence, a form of domination so deeply internalized that it appears natural and unquestionable (Bourdieu 1-2). This is the juncture where the two protagonists find themselves presently. Whether there can be a rupture with this phase depends on the level of awakening of their critical consciousness and the expansion of their capabilities.

From Submission to Empowerment

Empowerment in Nkoro and Mbuko is neither rebellion for its own sake nor a wholesale rejection of culture. Rather, it involves a re-negotiation of social norms where tradition is interrogated and selectively transformed. In Nkoro's *Ma vie m'appartient*, it is observed that Ezinma's resistance does not entail a rejection of family itself but a redefinition of familial authority and this echoes Nkiru Nzegwu's view that African feminism seeks reform from within cultural systems rather than a wholesale abandonment of it (Nzegwu 41-43). Her empowerment is thus, articulated through her voice and decision-making which is the act of appropriating of her life, implicit in the title of the text, "*Ma vie m'appartient*" [My life belongs to me]. By reclaiming control over her education, work, marriage, the protagonist disrupts the cultural script that binds women's futures to patience and submission. Nkoro completes Ezinma's journey of empowerment by juxtaposing personal agency with the intersecting forces of patriarchy and ethnic conservatism. Ezinma returns to her parents' home, this time, accompanied by her fiancé, Dare Ajayi, a Yoruba engineer. Unlike her earlier return as a repudiated widow, she now appears as an economically independent, educated adult who claims agency over her life choices. Her parents resist her choice with patriarchal entitlement, rejecting categorically her interethnic marriage. But Ezinma gives a well-articulated speech on her feminist self-awareness. She recalls: « Je vous rappelle que j'ai vingt-cinq ans. J'ai fait une erreur grave quand j'avais seize ans. Cette-fois-ci, je dois décider que faire avec ma vie. Si, en choisissant Dare comme un mari, j'ai fait un mauvais choix, c'est mon affaire … » (82). [I want to remind you that I am twenty-five years old. I made a grave mistake when I was sixteen years old. This time, I should decide what to do with my life. If in choosing Dare as a husband, I made a bad choice, it is my business.] (My translation). At this juncture, education, age and professional competence converge to legitimize consent and choice as moral rights rather than privileges.

The later stages of Zénabou's recovery mark a decisive consolidation of empowerment in Mbuko's *Chaque chose en son temps*. Through Dr Mariama, Mbuko highlights how women empowerment often begins with survival itself particularly in contexts where early marriage and reproductive exploitation prevail. In earlier moments in the text decisions concerning her body, education and marriage were made by parents, emissaries and husband. But Zénabou now explicitly articulates her own aspirations. Her declaration to resume her studies and enroll in nursing school signals a profound shift from passive endurance to conscious self-direction. Dr Mariama's response: « Le choix est à toi, Zénabou » (p. 87). [The choice is yours, Zénabou] functions as an affirmation of autonomy. This moment is not merely symbolic. Dr Mariama's assumption of full responsibility for Zénabou's medical care demonstrates that empowerment is tied to material support. The successful completion of her nursing training and employment in the same hospital as Dr Mariama's complete her empowerment. The institution of the hospital becomes a site of rebirth, ethical commitment and continuity, where empowered women mentor and multiply one another.

Education and Empowerment

Education in these texts is not merely formal but a broader process of critical consciousness echoing Paulo Freire's conception of education as a practice of freedom through which the oppressed develop critical consciousness and reclaim agency over their lives (Freire 67). Nkoro's *Ma vie m'appartient* and Mbuko's *Chaque chose en son temps* portray empowerment not only as an individual escape but as having collective implications. In both texts, female protagonists do not achieve agency alone, rather their transformation is enabled through intervention by some educated women who embody alternative models of femininity, grounded in autonomy, intellectual capacity and ethical responsibility. Zénabou's encounter with Dr Mariama redefines education as emancipation rather than a social threat (Mbuko 85-87). Her reinvention through education and service demonstrates what Molara Ogundipe describes as African women's capacity for "critical transformation" whereby education enables women to reconstruct identity beyond patriarchal prescriptions (Ogundipe 11-13).

In *Ma vie m'appartient* Chika's own university training gives her economic independence. She sponsors Ezinma's return to school enabling her to interrogate the gender norms she had previously internalized. Chika's voice represents the voice of educated resistance and counter-socialization. The narratives in both texts affirm bell hook's assertion that education enables women to transgress domestic confinement and claim social visibility beyond patriarchal expectations (hooks 3-4).

Mbuko in *Chaque chose en son temps* presents a parallel dynamic through the character of Dr Mariama, the female physician who rescues Zénabou when she is abandoned and near to death. Her capability through her own education enables her intervention to Zénabou, restoring her bodily integrity and providing her access to professional training as a nurse (Mbuko 87). Health and education intercept here as capabilities, without which agency is impossible. Ultimately, despite their adversities, both protagonists reclaim agency and social mobility through education. Ezinma's return to school culminates in her becoming a pilot. Likewise, Zénabou's transformation into a trained nurse enables her to also become a care-giver to other women in similar maternal circumstances.

Comparative Theoretical Discussion

This section offers a synthesis of how both authors conceptualize the passage from submission to empowerment through the intertwined lenses of gendered social conditioning, education and female agency. Both plays: *Ma vie m'appartient* by Nkoro and *Chaque chose en son temps* by Mbuko stage a shared movement: from the internalization of patriarchal norms to the reconstruction of the self. But there is a differing in the pathways through which this transformation is achieved.

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, both texts depict patriarchy not as a static tradition but as a system reproduced through family, community and economic pressures. Nkoro presents Ezinma's embrace of early marriage as being motivated by wealth and fear of social stigma. This exemplifies what Deniz Kandiyoti terms "patriarchal bargaining", a strategic submission to gender norms in exchange for security. Similarly, in *Chaque chose en son temps,* Mbuko presents Zénabou's forced marriage as a reflection of the collaboration between economic vulnerability and communal expectations to stifle the woman's choice. Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's insight that gender ideologies are often reproduced within the domestic sphere even as it limits women's possibilities is corroborated in both cases where mothers become key transmitters of these norms.

Both texts present a rupture from submission which is achieved by education and female mentorship. These operate as mechanisms of raising consciousness and social repositioning. Ezinma relocates with Chika and subsequently return to school. This offers her awareness and a shift from passive acceptance to self-assertion. Zénabou's encounter with Dr Mariama equally initiates a process of bodily and intellectual recovery. This leads to her transformation from a silenced subject into an agent capable of redefining her life trajectory: "J'ai hate de reprendre mes etudes. Je voudrais aller à l'Ecole des infirmières" (Mbuko 87). [I am in a hurry to resume my studies. I would like to go to nursing school] (My translation). In both cases, empowerment is measureable not in the abstract but by concrete opportunities, choices and achievements.

However, the novels diverge in their modalities of empowerment. We see the divergence through the illumination of Obioma Nnaemeka's concept of nego-feminism, which conceptualizes women's agency as a process of negotiation, compromise and strategic accommodation rather than outright confrontation (Nnaemeka 357-385). In Mbuko's narrative, Zénabou's trajectory reflects this negotiated empowerment: her recovery and professional development occur within institutional and relational frameworks that do not entirely reject cultural norms but subtly rework them in ways that allow her to reclaim dignity and purpose. On the other hand, Nkoro's portrays Ezinma in light of direct resistance. She ultimately rejects patriarchal authority, challenging ethnic expectations and asserts her autonomy in both career and marriage. The trajectories of both protagonists suggest that empowerment in African women's writing operates along a continuum, from negotiation to confrontation and thereby deconstructing a monolithic understanding of feminist resistance.

Conclusion

This article examined the trajectories of Ezinma and Zénabou in *Ma vie m'appartient and Chaque chose en son temps* respectively, to demonstrate how contemporary African women writers stage the movement from submission to empowerment. This discourse was x-rayed through the intersecting dynamics of gendered social conditioning, education and female agency. Both narratives depict that patriarchal norms manifested in early marriage, polygamy, reproductive and restrictive expectations of the womenfolk are not merely external constraints but are often internalized and reproduced within the family and community. In this sense the novels corroborate the insights of Molara Ogundipe and Oyèrónké Oyěwùmǐ who emphasize the socio-cultural construction of gender hierarchies in African contexts.

However, the study has also shown that these structures are not unsurmountable. Through the encounters of the protagonists with education, mentorship and alternative models of womanhood, both texts articulate a process of transformation which shifts from a passive conformity to a decisive self-determination. Thanks in addition to feminist solidarity which in these cases is neither rhetorical nor abstract but institutional, financial and sustained. In the lens of Paulo Freire, this shift reflects the development of critical consciousness, whereby individuals come to recognize and challenge the forces that shape their subordination. Furthermore, Amartya Sen's capability approach throws the light on how empowerment in these narratives is anchored on the expansion of real opportunities: access to education, professional training and freedom to make meaningful life choices.

The comparative analysis highlights both convergence and divergence in the two texts under study. Nkoro's model of empowerment is rooted in resistance, autonomy and individual self-assertion leading to Ezinma's professional success and marital self-determination, whereas Mbuko emphasizes a more relational and restorative pathway. This is evidenced by Zénabou's empowerment emerging through Dr Mariama's care, institutional (hospital) support: accommodation, feeding, medical care and training; and her eventual role as a caregiver. Despite these differences, both authors speak with one voice in their critique of gendered social norms that confine women to reproductive and domestic roles while insisting on education as a transformative tool. Through the integration of African feminist criticism with interdisciplinary frameworks of capability and critical consciousness, this paper lends a voice to ongoing debates on gender and empowerment in African literary studies. It argues that African women's writing not only exposes the mechanisms of female subjugation but also reimagines empowerment as a dynamic and ongoing process that entails the expansion of capabilities, the raising of critical awareness and the assertion of women's right to define their own lives beyond the constraints of gendered social conditioning.

Works Cited

Amadiume, Ifi. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*. Zed Books, 1987.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Masculine Domination*. Translated by Richard Nice, Stanford.
University Press, 2001

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 1990

Citation: Egege, Letitia Uloma "From Submission To Empowerment: Gendered Social Conditioning, Education And Female Agency In Ihechi Nkoro's *Ma Vie m'Appartient* And Lynn Mbuko's *Chaque Chose En Son Temps*". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp112-122.

De Beauvoir, Simone. *The second Sex.* Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany- Chevalier, Vintage Books (US) 2009.

Egege, Letitia. "Analyse narrative de la domination masculine sur la femme dans *Munyal* et *Walaande* de Djaïli Amadou Amal in *Jos Journal of Foreign Languages and Literatures*, vol. 4, no, 1, pp. 1-15.

Emecheta, Buchi. *The Joys of* Motherhood. Heinemann, 1980.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos, 30th Anniversary ed, Continuum, 2000.

hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress.* Routledge, 1994.

Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Bargaining with Patriarchy", *Gender & Society*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1988, pp. 274-90.

Mama, Amina. *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender and Subjectivity.* Ist ed. Routledge, 1995.

Mbuko, Lynn. *Chaque chose en son temps.* 2nd Ed. Aba, Lynnette Publishers. 2004.

Nkoro, Ihechi. *Ma vie m'appartient.* Okigwe, FASMEN communications. 2013.

Nnaemeka, Obioma. "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing and Pruning Africa's Way." *Signs: Journal Women in Culture and Society,* vol. 29, no 2, 2004, pp. 357-385.

Nzegwu, Nkiru. *Family Matters.* State University of New York Press, 2006.

Ogundipe-Leslie, Molara. *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations.* Africa World Press, 1994.

Oyĕwùmí, Oyèrónké. *The Invention of Women*: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses. University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern speak?" *Marxism and the* Illinois *Interpretation of Culture,* edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Press, 1988. Pp.271-313.

World Health Organization. *Child Marriage: A Global Health Concern.* World Health Organization, 2014.

Citation: Egege, Letitia Uloma "From Submission To Empowerment: Gendered Social Conditioning, Education And Female Agency In Ihechi Nkoro's *Ma Vie m'Appartient* And Lynn Mbuko's *Chaque Chose En Son Temps*". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW),* 2026: pp112-122.

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)

Volume 1, Number 3

Review Article

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21215388

Open Access

Translating Trauma Narratives And Aesthetic Challenges In Rendering Testimonial Across Linguistic Boundaries

Abstract

There is something deeply unsettling about the idea that a survivor's most painful words, wrung out of lived suffering, might arrive in another language stripped of the very weight that made them true. Translation has always carried this risk, but nowhere does it feel more urgent, or more ethically loaded, than in the rendering of trauma narratives. When a person speaks from the site of their wound, their language does not simply communicate but performs, fractures, hesitates, and sometimes breaks altogether. These are not stylistic accidents — they are the testimony itself. This paper sets out to examined the aesthetic and linguistic challenges that arise when trauma testimonials are translated across languages, with particular attention to how the formal and emotional textures of survivor speech resist conventional translation strategies. The central question around this inquiry is "to what extent do existing translation frameworks adequately account for the aesthetic dimensions of trauma testimony, and where do they fall short? The problem, as this paper argued, is not merely technical but philosophical and ethical. When translators prioritize fluency over fidelity, or cultural equivalence over experiential authenticity, something of the witness is lost and with it, a portion of the historical and human record. With insights from translation studies, trauma theory, and linguistics, this paper appraised the intersection of these fields to propose a more distinctive understanding of what it means to translate not just words, but wounds.

Dr. Dominica E. Ukpong
Department of Foreign Languages
University of Uyo
ORCID: 009-0002-4730-3407.T**x**

Dr. Boniface Umana I.
Department of Foreign Languages
University of Uyo
bonifaceumana@gmail.com

Dr. Mamina Mba Ndifon
Department of Foreign Languages and Diplomatic Studies
University of Calabar
maminandifon@gmail.com

Corresponding Author's Email:
nkoyodomi@gmail.com

Date Received: 10th June, 2026

Date Accepted: 26th June, 2026

Keywords: Trauma narratives, testimonial translation, linguistic boundaries, aesthetic fidelity, translation ethics.

Introduction

Every time a person speaks, they bring with them the full weight of their history, culture, and their emotional reality. This is true of ordinary speech, but it becomes especially significant when the speaker is a survivor through violence, displacement, loss, or any form of extreme suffering. In such cases, language does not simply report experience but is shaped by it and sometimes broken by it. The words a trauma survivor chooses, the pauses they take, the things they cannot bring themselves to say are part of the testimony.

It is against this backdrop that the translation of trauma narratives presents one of the most demanding challenges in contemporary language studies. Translation, at its most basic, is the act of carrying meaning from one language to another. But meaning is not a fixed object but construed in culture, history and the specific emotional register of a community's way of speaking. When a translator works with a trauma narrative, they are not simply converting words but attempting to carry an experience across a region that is not only linguistic but also cultural, psychological, and ethical.

Across the world, testimonial literature with accounts of genocide, war, forced migration, sexual violence, and colonial brutality has become one of the primary ways in which communities process collective suffering and demand historical accountability. These texts are translated, published, taught, and debated in languages far removed from the ones in which they were first spoken or written. Baldo (2022) observes accordingly that, "the translation of trauma involves not only linguistic transfer but also the negotiation of cultural memory and the ethics of representation" (p. 47). This observation points to something that translation theory has been slow to fully reckon with which is that, testimonial texts carry an ethical charge that ordinary texts do not, and that the translator's choices have consequences beyond the page.

Statement of the Problem

The primary problem this paper addresses is the inadequacy of conventional translation frameworks when applied to trauma narratives. Most established approaches to translation prioritize readability, cultural accessibility, and communicative equivalence. These are reasonable goals in many contexts, but they become problematic when the text being translated derives its meaning precisely from its resistance to smooth communication. Trauma speech is often fragmented, repetitive, and elliptical. To render it fluent is, in many cases, to falsify it. This in line with Valdeón (2020) argument that, translation decisions are never innocent, and "the ideological and aesthetic dimensions of a source text can be systematically suppressed in the process of rendering it accessible to a target audience" (p. 112). This suppression, when it occurs in testimonial contexts, is not a minor editorial choice but an act with real consequences for how suffering is remembered and how survivors are heard.

Aim and Scope of the Study

This paper aims to examine the aesthetic and linguistic challenges that arise in the translation of trauma testimonials across linguistic boundaries. It draws on insights from translation studies, trauma theory, and linguistics to argue that a more ethically and aesthetically sensitive approach to testimonial translation is both necessary and possible. The study is limited to theoretical and textual analysis and does not conduct primary fieldwork. Its scope covers relevant scholarly literature, reflecting current debates in the field.

Conceptual Review

Translation

To understand why translating trauma narratives is so difficult, one must first understand what translation actually does and what it cannot do. At the surface level, translation appears to

Citation: Ukpong, Dominica E.; I. Boniface Umana & Ndifon, Mamina Mba "Translating Trauma Narratives And Aesthetic Challenges In Rendering Testimonial Across Linguistic Boundaries". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW),* 2026: pp123-137.

be a straightforward act with a text existing in one language, and a translator rendering it in another. But this surface appearance is misleading as translation is not a mechanical substitution of words. It is an interpretive act, one that involves choices about meaning, tone, cultural context, and the relationship between the source text and the world it comes from. Every translation is, in some sense, a reading and like all readings, it is shaped by the assumptions, values, and limitations of the person doing the reading.

This interpretive dimension of translation has been recognized and debated for centuries, but it gained particular theoretical depth in the twentieth century, when scholars began to examine not just how translation works but what it does to texts and to the communities that receive them. The field of translation studies emerged as a discipline in its own right, moving away from the older prescriptive question of how one ought to translate and toward the more descriptive and critical question of what actually happens when texts cross linguistic and cultural boundaries.

One of the most enduring issues in translation theory is the debate between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence prioritizes fidelity to the structure and wording of the source text, while dynamic equivalence prioritizes the effect of the translation on the target audience, seeking to produce in the reader a response equivalent to what the original produced in its own readers. This distinction, developed most influentially by Eugene Nida in the mid-twentieth century, has continued to shape how translators and scholars think about their work.

The reality, as many contemporary scholars have argued, is far more complicated as meaning is not portable in the way that the equivalence model implies. It is embedded in the specific grammar, idiom, and cultural logic of a language, and some of it simply does not survive the crossing. Eco (2003) captured this when he described translation as the "art of failure", an acknowledgment that something is always left behind, no matter how skilled the translator is. What matters, then, is not whether loss occurs but what kind of loss is acceptable, and who gets to decide.

The languages into which texts are translated, the texts that are selected for translation, and the strategies translators use are all shaped by cultural and political hierarchies. Venuti (2008) argued that translation in the Anglo-American tradition has historically favoured what he called "domestication" which is the practice of making foreign texts read as though they were originally written in English, smoothing over cultural difference in the process. Against this, he proposed "foreignisation" as an ethical alternative, a strategy that preserves the strangeness of the source text and resists the cultural dominance of the target language.

More recently, scholars have pushed translation theory further by insisting that translation must be understood not only as a linguistic act but as a cultural and ethical one. Tymoczko (2014) argues that translation is always a form of political engagement, that translators make choices that either reinforce or challenge existing structures of power and representation. This is especially true in the context of testimonial literature, where the stakes of representation are high and the consequences of misrepresentation are real. A survivor's account that is translated in ways that flatten its emotional complexity or erase its cultural specificity is not simply a bad translation. It is a form of epistemic injustice which is a failure to take seriously the knowledge and experience that the survivor is trying to communicate.

What emerges from this overview is a picture of translation as something far more than a technical skill. It is a practice that carries ethical weight, particularly when the texts being translated bear witness to human suffering. The translator is not a neutral conduit. They are an agent whose decisions shape how a text is received, how a speaker is heard, and how an experience is remembered. Maitland (2017) makes this point clearly, noting that the translator occupies "a position of considerable power over the text and, by extension, over the voices the text carries" (p. 23). This power is not inherently problematic, but it becomes so when it is exercised without awareness of the ethical responsibilities it entails.

For the purposes of this paper, translation is understood not simply as the transfer of linguistic content from one language to another, but as a complex interpretive and ethical practice that involves negotiating meaning, cultural difference, and the demands of fidelity to a source text and the human experience it encodes. This understanding sets the foundation for examining, in subsequent sections, why trauma narratives in particular pose such acute challenges for translators — challenges that go beyond vocabulary and grammar into the very nature of how suffering is expressed and remembered.

Linguistics

Human beings are the only creatures that use language the way they do, not just to signal danger or attract mates, but to construct entire worlds of

meaning, to remember the past, to imagine the future, and to tell each other who they are. This capacity for language is so fundamental to human life that it is easy to take it for granted. Linguistics is the discipline that refuses to take it for granted because it is the systematic, scientific study of language touching on how it is structured, how it is acquired, how it changes over time, how it varies across communities, and how it functions as a medium of human thought and social interaction.

What makes linguistics particularly relevant to this paper is not just its general concern with language but its attention to the relationship between language and meaning, language and context, and language and power. These are precisely the concerns that arise when one attempts to translate a trauma narrative. To understand why certain things cannot be translated without loss, one must first understand how meaning is made in language and linguistics provides the tools for that understanding.

Linguistics is not a single unified field but a broad discipline with several interconnected branches, each of which illuminates a different dimension of language. Phonology deals with sound systems; morphology with word structure; syntax with sentence structure; semantics with meaning; and pragmatics with how context shapes the interpretation of utterances. Beyond these core areas, sociolinguistics examines how language varies across social groups and contexts, while psycholinguistics explores the cognitive processes involved in language use and acquisition. Each of these branches contributes something to the understanding of how language works, and together they offer a comprehensive picture of language as a human phenomenon.

For the concerns of this paper, the most directly relevant branches are semantics, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics. Semantics is important because it deals with meaning and the question of how meaning is constructed, stored, and communicated is central to any discussion of translation. But semantics alone is not sufficient, because meaning is never purely a matter of words and their definitions. It is always shaped by context, by the relationship between speaker and listener, by what is left unsaid as much as by what is said. This is where pragmatics becomes essential. Yus (2011) explains That, pragmatics is concerned with "the study of meaning in context, including the ways in which speakers communicate more than their words literally say" (p. 3). This insight is crucial for understanding trauma narratives, where what is not said, the silences, the gaps, the refusals to name often carries as much meaning as the words themselves.

Sociolinguistics remind us that language is not a neutral system floating above social life. It is founded in social structures, shaped by relations of power, and marked by the identities of its speakers. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) describe sociolinguistics as the study of "the relationship between language and society, between the uses of language and the social structures in which the users of language live" (p. 1). This matters enormously in the context of testimonial translation, because the language in which a survivor speaks is not just a medium of communication. It is a marker of identity, community, and historical experience. When that language is translated, the social and cultural world it carries does not automatically travel with it.

One of the most important contributions linguistics makes to translation theory is the concept of untranslatability which is the recognition that some meanings are so deeply contained in the structure or cultural logic of a particular language that they resist transfer into another. This is not simply a matter of vocabulary gaps, though those exist too. It is a deeper problem rooted in the fact that different languages carve up reality differently, encode different assumptions about time, agency, and causality, and carry different emotional and cultural associations even for words that appear to be direct equivalents.

Sapir (1929), in one of the foundational statements of what would later become the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, argued that "the worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached" (p. 209). While the strong version of this claim that language entirely determines thought has been largely rejected by contemporary linguists, the weaker version, that language shapes and influences how speakers perceive and organize experience, remains widely accepted and has significant implications for translation. If speakers of different languages do not simply see the same world through different windows but actually inhabit somewhat different conceptual worlds, then translation is not just a technical challenge but a philosophical one.

Halliday's (1994) systemic functional linguistics is also worth noting here, as it offers a particularly useful framework for analyzing how language functions simultaneously as a means of representing experience, enacting social relationships, and organizing discourse. These three functions of what Halliday calls the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions are all at work in trauma testimony, and attending to them helps explain why such texts are so difficult to translate without distortion. A translation that preserves the ideational content of a testimony but loses its interpersonal texture i.e the way the speaker positions themselves in relation to their listener, the emotional register they adopt has not fully translated the text. It has translated only part of it.

Trauma

In everyday speech, people use trauma loosely to describe anything from a difficult childhood memory to a minor embarrassment. But in clinical, psychological, and literary contexts, trauma refers to something far more specific and far more serious. It describes the aftermath of an experience so overwhelming that the mind cannot process it in the ordinary way. It is an experience that exceeds the individual's capacity to integrate it into their existing understanding of the world. The result is not simply pain or sadness, which are normal human responses to loss and difficulty. The result is a rupture, a break in the continuity of the self, in the ability to make sense of one's own experience, and in the capacity to narrate that experience coherently.

Understanding trauma in this deeper sense is essential to this paper, because the argument being made here is not simply that trauma narratives are emotionally difficult to translate. It is that trauma fundamentally alters the structure of language and memory in ways that have direct consequences for how testimonial texts are produced and how they must be read. A translator who approaches a trauma narrative without this understanding is likely to misread the very features that make the text what it is.

The modern clinical understanding of trauma is largely rooted in the work of psychiatrists and psychologists who studied survivors of war, sexual violence, and other extreme experiences. Herman's (1992) landmark study, *Trauma and Recovery*, established a framework that has shaped the field for decades. Herman argued that trauma produces a characteristic set of responses such as intrusion, constriction, and hyperarousal that reflect the mind's attempt to cope with an experience it cannot fully absorb. What is particularly significant for this paper is Herman's observation that trauma disrupts the normal process of memory formation, producing memories that are not stored as coherent narratives but as fragmented sensory impressions, images, sounds, physical sensations that return unbidden and resist integration into a linear account of the past.

This neurological dimension of trauma has been further developed by more recent research. Van der Kolk (2014) demonstrated through extensive clinical work that traumatic memory is stored differently from ordinary memory, in ways that bypass the brain's normal narrative processing systems. As he puts it, "trauma is not stored as a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end" but rather as "isolated fragments of sensation and emotion" (p. 43). This finding has profound implications for testimonial literature. When a survivor's account is fragmented, non-linear, or punctuated by silences, this is not a failure of storytelling. It is a faithful reflection of how the traumatic experience lives in the body and mind. To translate such an account into a smooth, coherent narrative is to impose a false order on an experience that resists order by its very nature.

Beyond its neurological dimensions, trauma poses a specifically linguistic problem. Language is the primary medium through which human beings organize and communicate experience. But trauma is precisely the kind of experience that resists organization. It is, in a sense, what happens when experience exceeds the capacity of language to contain it. This is why survivors so often report feeling that their experience is unspeakable not because they lack the vocabulary but because the very structure of language, with its grammar of cause and effect, its linear sequencing of events, its assumption of a coherent speaking subject, seems inadequate to what they have been through.

Caruth (1996), described this paradox with particular clarity. For Caruth, trauma is characterized by a fundamental belatedness i.e the traumatic event is not fully experienced at the moment it occurs but returns later, in fragments, in ways the survivor cannot fully control or understand. This means that testimony is never a straightforward account of what happened. It is always a partial, mediated, and often painful attempt to give form to something that resists form. Caruth (1996) writes that, "the history of trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only be grasped in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (p. 8). This is a difficult idea, but its implications are clear that trauma testimony is not a transparent window onto the past. It is a complex, layered text whose meaning is inseparable from its form.

There is also an ethical dimension to the study of trauma that cannot be ignored. Engaging with trauma narratives, whether as a researcher, a translator, or a reader involves a relationship of responsibility

Citation: Ukpong, Dominica E.; I. Boniface Umana & Ndifon, Mamina Mba "Translating Trauma Narratives And Aesthetic Challenges In Rendering Testimonial Across Linguistic Boundaries". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp123-137.

toward the person who is suffering the narrative encodes. Kaplan (2005) introduced the concept of "empathic unsettlement" to describe the kind of engaged, ethically aware response that trauma narratives demand from their audiences, a response that neither appropriates the survivor's suffering nor retreats into comfortable distance. This concept is useful here because it applies equally to translators. A translator who approaches a trauma narrative with genuine ethical awareness will resist the temptation to make the text easier, more palatable, or more culturally familiar than it actually is. They will understand that the discomfort the text produces is part of its meaning, and that their responsibility is to preserve that discomfort, not to resolve it.

Trauma Narratives and Aesthetic Challenges

If trauma fundamentally disrupts the way experience is stored and narrated, then trauma narratives are the literary and testimonial forms that emerge from that disruption. They are not simply stories about painful events. They are texts whose very form bears the imprint of the experiences they describe. This distinction matters, because it means that the aesthetic features of a trauma narrative, the way it is written or spoken, the choices the narrator makes about structure, voice, and language are not decorative. They are part of what the text is saying, and in many cases, they are the most honest thing about it.

This is a point that literary scholars and trauma theorists have been making over the past two decades, and it has significant consequences for translation. If the meaning of a trauma narrative is inseparable from its form, then a translation that alters the form has not simply changed the style of the text but changed its meaning. Understanding why this is so requires a closer look at what trauma narratives actually look like and what aesthetic strategies they employ.

Trauma narratives tend to share certain formal characteristics that set them apart from other kinds of storytelling. They are often non-linear, moving back and forth in time rather than following a straightforward chronological sequence. They are frequently interrupted by silences or gaps which are moments where the narrator cannot or will not continue, where language fails or refuses. They often repeat themselves, returning again and again to particular images or phrases as though trying to work through something that resists resolution. And they frequently adopt an uncertain, hesitant voice that qualifies its own claims, that acknowledges the limits of memory and the difficulty of putting certain things into words.

These features are not accidental, and they are not signs of poor storytelling. Whitehead (2004) writes that, trauma fiction and testimony develop "formal and thematic strategies" that reflect "the impact of trauma on memory and identity" (p. 3). The non-linearity mirrors the way traumatic memory actually works not as a coherent story but as a series of intrusive fragments. The silences mark the places where experience exceeds language. The repetitions enact the compulsive return that is one of trauma's defining features. And the hesitant voice reflects the survivor's awareness that their account is always partial, always inadequate to the fullness of what they experienced.

Felman and Laub (1992), made a related point when they argued that testimony is not simply a report of events but a performative act, something that does something in the world rather than merely describing it. For them, the act of bearing witness is itself a form of survival, a way of insisting on the reality of an experience that the world might prefer to forget or deny. This performative dimension of testimony means that how a survivor speaks is as important as what they say. The form of the testimony is part of its truth claim.

Gibbs (2014) has extended this argument by examining how trauma narratives use what he calls "affective contagion" which is the capacity of certain textual features to transmit emotional states from writer to reader, to make the reader feel something of what the narrator felt. This is achieved not through explicit description of emotion but through formal choices, the rhythm of sentences, the density or sparseness of language, the strategic use of repetition and silence. These are aesthetic choices, and they work on the reader in ways that are often below the level of conscious awareness. A translator who does not attend to these features will produce a text that may convey the same information as the original but fails to produce the same effect, and in testimonial literature, effect is inseparable from meaning.

Testimonials in Linguistic Boundaries

Every testimony begins in a particular place, spoken or written in a specific language, shaped by the rhythms and idioms of a specific community, and addressed at least initially to a specific audience that shares enough of the speaker's world to understand what is being said and why it matters. This situatedness is not a limitation of testimony. It is part of what makes it testimony rather than abstract statement. The survivor speaks from somewhere, and that somewhere is encoded in the language they use. The problem arises when that testimony must travel, when it must cross into another language, another cultural context, another set of assumptions about what suffering looks like and how it ought to be expressed. At that point, the linguistic boundary becomes something more than a technical obstacle. It becomes a site of negotiation, of potential loss, and of ethical responsibility.

The concept of a linguistic boundary is worth pausing on, because it is easy to think of it simply as the line between two languages say, between French and English, or between Igbo and Spanish. But linguistic boundaries are never only about language in the narrow sense. They are also about the cultural worlds that languages carry with them, the histories contained in particular words and phrases, the social relationships encoded in grammatical structures, and the emotional associations that accumulate around certain ways of speaking over generations. When a testimony crosses a linguistic boundary, all of these dimensions are at stake, not just the vocabulary.

The concept of untranslatability has a long history in translation theory, but it has taken on new urgency in the context of testimonial literature. Some words simply do not have equivalents in other languages not because the concepts they name are unknown in other cultures but because the specific emotional, historical, and cultural weight they carry cannot be reproduced by any single word or phrase in the target language. The German word *Heimweh*, the Portuguese *saudade*, the Yoruba *àánú* are words that moves toward emotional realities that other languages can approximate but not fully capture. In ordinary literary translation, this kind of untranslatability is a challenge that skilled translators navigate through a combination of approximation, footnoting, and creative adaptation. In testimonial translation, however, the stakes are higher, because the words that resist translation are often precisely the ones that carry the most weight, the ones closest to the heart of what the survivor is trying to say.

Apter (2013) has argued that untranslatability is not simply a problem to be solved but a productive concept that draws attention to the limits of cross-cultural understanding and the irreducible particularity of different linguistic worlds. She describes the "untranslatable" not as something that cannot be translated at all but as something that "loses critically in translation", a formulation that is more honest about the nature of the loss than the simple claim that certain things are impossible to render in another language (p. 3). This is a useful positioning for thinking about trauma testimony, because it shifts the question from whether translation is possible to what is lost in the process and whether that loss is acceptable.

The losses that occur when testimonial language crosses linguistic boundaries are not always obvious, and they are not always the result of carelessness or incompetence on the part of the translator. Some of them are structural built into the differences between languages in ways that no amount of skill can fully overcome. Derrida (1998) touched on this when he reflected on the experience of writing in a language that is not entirely one's own, observing that "one never speaks only one language" and yet "one never speaks several languages" which is a paradox that captures something of the condition of the translator, who must inhabit two linguistic worlds simultaneously without fully belonging to either (p. 7). For the translator of trauma testimony, this condition is particularly charged, because the language they are working with is not just a medium of communication but a record of suffering.

Evaluation

Has the field of translation studies developed frameworks adequate to the complexity of testimonial literature, and where do the most significant failures lie? The dominant frameworks in translation practice have historically been built around the concept of equivalence. Whether this equivalence is understood in formal terms, as fidelity to the structure and wording of the original, or in dynamic terms, as fidelity to the effect the original produces on its readers, the underlying assumption is the same, that meaning can be carried across linguistic boundaries without fundamental loss, provided the translator is skilled enough.

This assumption, as the earlier sections of this paper have argued, is already questionable in ordinary literary translation. In the context of trauma testimony, it becomes untenable as the problem is not simply that some words lack equivalents in the target language, though that is true. The deeper problem is that the meaning of a trauma narrative is not separable from its form in the way that equivalence models implicitly assume. When a survivor's account is fragmented, that fragmentation is not a container holding some separable content that can be poured into a smoother vessel. The fragmentation is the content, the testimony's most honest statement about the nature of the experience it describes. An equivalence-based approach that prioritizes communicative clarity over formal fidelity will, almost inevitably, produce a translation that is more readable than the original but less true.

Bassnett (2014) has been among the most persistent critics of equivalence as a governing concept in translation theory, arguing that it creates a false impression of translatability that obscures the real complexity of what translators do. She contends that translation is better understood as a form of rewriting, a creative act that produces a new text in dialogue with the original rather than a copy of it (p. 5). This is a more honest account of what translation actually involves, and it has the advantage of making visible the choices and responsibilities that equivalence models tend to conceal. But it also raises a difficult question such as, if translation is rewriting, what constraints govern the rewriter? In testimonial contexts, this question is not merely theoretical but has direct consequences for how survivors are represented and how their experiences are received.

The tendency to produce fluent, culturally accessible translations of trauma narratives has resulted, in a number of documented cases, in texts that read smoothly in the target language but have lost the very features that made the original testimony powerful and distinctive. The result is a text that is easier to read but harder to believe, because it no longer bears the formal marks of the experience it claims to represent. Polezzi (2012) has examined this dynamic in the context of migrant and refugee testimonies translated for European audiences, finding that the pressure to produce readable, marketable translations consistently works against the formal integrity of the source texts. She argues that publishers and editors frequently intervene in the translation process to make testimonies more palatable to target audiences, and that these interventions are rarely acknowledged or made transparent to readers (p. 348).

This lack of transparency is itself an ethical problem, because it means that readers receive a mediated version of the testimony without knowing that it has been mediated, without knowing what has been changed and why.

If testimonial literature serves, as Felman and Laub (1992) argued, a function of historical witnessing, of keeping alive the memory of experiences that powerful interests might prefer to forget then translations that soften or domesticate that testimony are not simply aesthetically inferior. They are historically irresponsible contributing to a process of forgetting disguised as accessibility. What would a more adequate framework for testimonial translation look like? Several scholars have begun to sketch the outlines of one, though no fully developed model yet exists. The common thread running through these proposals is the insistence that translators of trauma testimony must bring to their work a combination of linguistic competence, literary sensitivity, cultural awareness, and ethical commitment that goes well beyond what conventional translation training typically provides.

Tymoczko (2014) has argued that translators need to understand themselves as cultural and political agents, not merely language workers, and that this self-understanding should shape every decision they make about how to render a source text. Applied to testimonial translation, this means that the translator must ask not only what a word means but what it does, what work it performs in the testimony, what emotional and political charge it carries, and what is at stake in rendering it one way rather than another.

Cronin (2022) has more recently proposed what he calls a "minor translation practice" an approach that deliberately resists the pull toward dominant languages and dominant cultural frameworks, and that seeks instead to preserve the particularity and strangeness of source texts even at the cost of some accessibility. This is a provocative proposal, and it will not suit every context. But in the specific context of trauma testimony, where the strangeness of the text is often its most important feature, it offers a genuinely useful corrective to the domesticating tendencies of mainstream translation practice.

What is clear from this evaluation is that the field has not yet developed a fully adequate response to the challenges of testimonial translation. The frameworks that exist are partial, and the practices they inform are inconsistent. There is a real and pressing need for more sustained engagement between translation studies, trauma theory, and literary criticism, an engagement that takes seriously the aesthetic, ethical, and political dimensions of the task and develops practical guidance for translators working in this demanding area.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine a problem that sits at the intersection of language, suffering, and responsibility. The central question it posed is whether existing translation frameworks adequately account for the aesthetic dimensions of trauma testimony, and where they fall short has been answered, through the course of the preceding sections, with a qualified but firm no. Existing frameworks are not without value. They have produced translations that have carried important testimonies across linguistic boundaries and made them available to audiences who would otherwise have had no access to them. But they have also, in too many cases, produced translations that are smoother, more readable, and more culturally familiar than the originals and in being so, have lost something that cannot easily be recovered.

What has been lost, this paper has argued, is not merely stylistic. It is substantive because the fragmentation, the silence, the repetition, the hesitancy that characterize trauma testimony are not incidental features of the text. They are the text's most honest response to the experience it encodes. They are the formal traces of what trauma does to language and memory, and they carry meaning that no amount of paraphrase or approximation can fully reproduce. When a translation irons out these features in the name of fluency or accessibility, it does not simply change the style of the testimony but changes its truth claim. It presents to the target audience a version of the survivor's experience that is tidier, more coherent, and more manageable than the original and in doing so, it subtly misrepresents both the experience and the person who lived it.

Recommendations

The first and most fundamental recommendation is that translators working with testimonial literature should develop what might be called a dual literacy. A literacy not only in the source and target languages but also in the psychological and cultural dimensions of trauma. This means engaging seriously with trauma theory, understanding how traumatic memory shapes narrative form, and resisting the instinct to correct or regularize features of the source text that appear irregular but are in fact meaningful.

Publishers occupy a position of considerable influence in the testimonial translation process, and that influence is not always exercised responsibly. The commercial pressures that shape publishing decisions which is the need to produce texts that will sell in competitive markets, the preference for smooth and accessible prose, the tendency to package foreign testimonies in ways that make them palatable to dominant cultural tastes frequently work against the formal integrity of the source texts. Publishers who commission translations of trauma narratives should be encouraged to adopt editorial policies that explicitly protect the formal features of testimonial texts, and to make transparent to readers the translation choices that have been made and why.

For researchers, the most pressing recommendation is for more sustained interdisciplinary work at the intersection of translation studies, trauma theory, and postcolonial criticism. The field has produced important individual contributions, but it has not yet developed a coherent, comprehensive framework for testimonial translation that integrates the insights of all three disciplines. Such a framework would need to address the aesthetic, ethical, and political dimensions of the task simultaneously, and it would need to be grounded in close analysis of actual translation practice rather than purely theoretical speculation. Comparative studies of testimonial texts and their translations across multiple language pairs would be particularly valuable, as would collaborative research involving translators, survivors, and scholars from the communities whose testimonies are being translated.

References

Apter, E. (2013). *Against world literature: On the politics of untranslatability*. Verso.

Baldo, M. (2022). *Translating the unspeakable: Trauma, memory, and ethics in contemporary testimonial literature*. Routledge.

Bassnett, S. (2014). *Translation studies* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Cronin, M. (2022). *Eco-translation: Translation and ecology in the age of the Anthropocene*. Routledge.

Derrida, J. (1998). *Monolingualism of the other; or, the prosthesis of origin* (P. Mensah, Trans.). Stanford University Press.

Dominica E. Ukpong (2019): *Ethical Consideration in Translation, Sapientia: Journal of Philosophy, Vol.6 (April), Department of Philosophy, University of Uyo. pp 125*-133.

Dominica E. Ukpong (2019): *"Translation and Death of Creativity". Journal of Foreign Language Studies (Agora). Department of Foreign Languages. University of Uyo, Uyo. No.5, 2019.pp.141-149.*

Dominica E. Ukpong (2025): *"Plato's' Allegory of the Cave: Interrogating the Subjective and Objective Dimensions of Translation" ideas: Uniuyo Journal of Philosophy and Multidisciplinary Studies. Vol.2, pp 43-49*.

Eco, U. (2003). *Mouse or rat? Translation as negotiation*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Felman, S., & Laub, D. (1992). *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*. Routledge.

Gibbs, A. (2014). "Affect theory and audience." In L. Grossberg & M. Morris (Eds.), *New keywords: A revised vocabulary of culture and society* (pp. 12–17). Blackwell.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed.). Edward Arnold.

Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.

Kaplan, E. A. (2005). *Trauma culture: The politics of terror and loss in media and literature*. Rutgers University Press.

Maitland, S. (2017). *What is cultural translation?* Bloomsbury Academic.

Polezzi, L. (2012). "Translation and migration." *Translation Studies, 5*(3), 345–356.

Sapir, E. (1929). "The status of linguistics as a science." *Language, 5*(4), 207–214.

Tymoczko, M. (2014). *Enlarging translation, empowering translators*. Routledge.

Valdeón, R. A. (2020). "Translation and the shaping of ideology: Aesthetic and political dimensions of cross-cultural transfer." *The Translator, 26*(2), 108–124.

Van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.

Venuti, L. (2008). *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Wardhaugh, R., & Fuller, J. M. (2015). *An introduction to sociolinguistics* (7th ed.). Wiley Blackwell.

Whitehead, A. (2004). *Trauma fiction*. Edinburgh University Press.

Yus, F. (2011). *Cyberpragmatics: Internet-mediated communication in context*. John Benjamins.

Citation: Ukpong, Dominica E.; I. Boniface Umana & Ndifon, Mamina Mba "Translating Trauma Narratives And Aesthetic Challenges In Rendering Testimonial Across Linguistic Boundaries". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW),* 2026: pp123-137.

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)
Volume 1, Number 3
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21215246
Review Article
Open Access

The Imperative Of Justice As Virtue For Good Governance In Nigeria

Abstract

The incessant and alarming cases of senseless killings, massive political malfeasance, herders-farmer's clashes, cultism, banditry, terrorism, assassinations, nepotism, kidnapping, brain drain, rising cost of living, industrial action, unemployment and poverty constitute the evident features of bad governance in Nigeria. Thus, the central task before scholars and other relevant stakeholders is on how to overcome these challenges and attain sustainable socio-political development in which the goods of society will benefit everyone. From the Classical period of philosophy where the focus was on man and the development of society, this study identified justice as a pivotal value that is expedient for the realization of good governance and surmounting the problems in Nigeria. Justice, as a vital tool for realizing good governance, is a *sine qua non* for achieving citizens' fulfillment, happiness, transparency, accountability and stability in the society. The paper holds that virtue of integrity, rule of law, accountability and transparency, which are the cornerstone of civilized democracy can only be attainable in Nigeria if justice is entrench in governance.Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this study examined the place of justice as a virtue for achieving good governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Justice, stability, nepotism, virtue, value, good governance

Ogugua, Jeremiah Chukwu
Department Of Educational Foundations
Federal College Of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State
Phone Number: 08036727081

Itelimo, Morrison (PhD)
Department Of General Studies
Isaac Jasper Boro College Of Education, Sagbama Bayelsa State
Email: itelimorrison@gmail.com
Phone Number: 0803774-2087

Emeronye, Maryann Kelechi
C/O: Department Of Philosophy, University Of Portharcourt
Email:maryann2002@yahoo.com

Corresponding Author's Email: chukwu74@yahoo.com

Date Received: 15h June, 2026

Date Accepted: 24h June, 2026

Introduction

Africa, particularly Nigeria, have continued to swim in the waters of mal-administration, massive political corruption, high rate of unemployment, inefficient institutions, infrastructural decay, poverty, electoral violence, injustice, underdevelopment and general insecurity manifesting in kidnapping, terrorism, banditry, political assassinations, ritual killing, cult and ethnic clashes. Socio-political philosophers and other scholars have attributed the causes of the above problems bedeviling Africa and Nigeria specifically to bad leadership and absence of good governance. Buttressing the above, Ogugua, Nwaogu and Itelimo (2023) clarify that political scholars are united in their views that corruption, bad governance and ineffective leadership constitute the bane of instability, political insecurity, high rate of poverty, injustice, unemployment, weak democratic institutions and high infant mortality. The problem of leadership, bad governance and corruption, for purposes of clarity, did not originate today, but manifested profoundly after the return of democracy in 1999.

Nigerians had hopes that the retun of democracy would usher in the much desired socio-economic development vis-à-vis the delivery of dividends of democracy and strengthening of democratic institutions. But, the hopes of Nigerians were dashed as democracy not only encouraged political malfeasance on a large scale, accelerated the rampant ineffectiveness of democratic institutions such as INEC to conduct free, fair, transparent and credible elections and the Courts to dispense justice impartially.

Buttressing the above, Onuoha and Nwachukwu (2016), Yagboyaju (2019), Ayodele, Aluko and Ogunjimi (2022) unanimously assert that no significant impact has been recorded in the economic and social well-being of majority of the citizens in Nigeria since the return of democracy in 1999. They further contend that the most salient features and dividends of democratic governance in Nigeria since 1999 include; social injustice, acute graduate unemployment, soaring poverty, political assassinations, ethno-religious conflicts, insecurity, general economic and political decay. Shedding more light, Egharevba and Chiazor (2012) reiterate that a critical analysis into the governance situation in most Third World countries including Nigeria, reveal that inept leadership, mismanagement and embezzlement of resources, weak value system, institutional impunity, social injustice, etc., are some of the factors stifling socio-economic transformation, good governance and development. Therefore, they aver that "rather than use available resources in their country justly to ensure the promotion of the well-being of the citizenry, political leaders in Third World countries like Nigeria have embezzled and converted these resources to their private pockets; thereby impoverishing the people" (Egharevba and Chiazor, 2012).

However, it is interesting to note that the above scenario (injustice) played out in Athens and America during the time of Plato and Rawls. For Plato, the incessant plundering of the resources of Athens by the political class and the enthronement of injustice as well as incompetent leadership underdeveloped Athens to a great extent such that majority of the citizenry become impoverished. Thus, it is apt to note that Plato's postulation of the philosopher-king to take charge of his Ideal State stems from his desire to curb injustice, corruption and bad governance cum leadership. Depicting the political injustice in Athens in the days of Plato, Bhandari (2010) posits; "Plato was highly displeased with the degenerating conditions which made Athenian democracy to be on the verge of ruin… orchestrated by political selfishness and incompetent leadership…" (Bhandari, 2010). Bhandari made it explicitly clear that the task before Plato was how to save Athenian democracy from decay and restore confidence of the citizens in the government to assist them in attaining their potentials.

On the other hand, Rawls maintains that the inequitable and unjust distribution of economic benefits in America during his day led to incessant social conflict and political instability between government and the governed. Thus, Rawls was saddled with the responsibility of fashioning a socio-political philosophy capable of amicably resolving socio-economic and political disputes so as to enthrone a stable society anchored on the principles of justice and fairness. From the foregoing, it is glaring that the above philosophers sought for ways to alleviate the plight of the citizens vis-à-vis proffering a lasting solution to socio-political and economic injustice so as to enthrone good governance, happiness and harmonious co-existence between rulers and the ruled. The solution, as envisioned by them, to the myriads of problems in the polity, consists in the use of justice, considered as a vital value, to overcome the challenges of bad leadership and governance in society

Therefore, it is in light of the foregoing thematic issues that the paper conceives justice as a virtue for attaining good governance and this constitutes the focus of the paper. To achieve the desired objectives, the paper is structured into three parts. Section one clarifies the meaning of vital concepts and highlights the consequences of bad governance in Africa, particularly Nigeria as well as its accompanying challenges. Section two undertakes the elucidation of concepts, while section three x-rays justice as a virtue for attaining good governance in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

It is expedient to undertake the elucidation of vital concepts used in the body of the paper so as to remove any form of ambiguity in relation to the meaning of the terms.

Justice: The concept of justice has been variously defined by scholars. Thus, the term has no universally acceptable definition. Etymologically, justice derives from the Latin word "*jus*", which denotes 'fair or right". The above root meaning sees justice as behaviour or conduct that is fair and right. Thus, Ogugua and Agboufa (2020) conceive the term as the act of portraying character, actions and conduct that people can commend and classify as being fair, impartial and reasonable in the society or a political setting. Onuoha and Nwachukwu (2016) define justice as an attitude and value perception which depicts how an individual particularly a decision maker ought to act. The above definition of justice equates the term to be synonymous with equality for all in society. Obanubi (2015) conceives justice as a moral virtue which permits individuals and groups within a society to be treated fairly as well as receive equal distribution of the goods and benefits in society impartially. Hornby (2010) sees justice as the characteristic of being fair and just. Plato (2000) sees justice as a general virtue that makes individuals behave morally with a view to making society good. This means that justice makes individuals in the society to be upright and the actions they exhibit as a result of their uprightness brings about socio-economic transformation, progress and development in such a polity.

Value: This is a term used to describe the quality which makes a thing or object desirable. It is that which defines the worth of an object. Ravi (2015) sees value as the guiding principles of life necessary for all-round development. For him, the term constitutes a vital part of a country's philosophy used to advance transformation in all fronts. Dewey (2000) defines the concept in terms of prize by seeing it as the act of treasuring something dearly. Ramji defines value as what is desired and sought when appreciating an object or a thing. He also relate value to humans by denoting it as a fundamental principle of life that is advantageous to the physical and mental health of a person as well as the social welfare and adjustment in line with the prevailing culture.

From the foregoing definition, it is apt to deduce that value can be conceptualized as acceptable norms of good/right moral conduct expected of humans to be portrayed in our day-to-day interaction with others in the society. Value refers to the ideas and beliefs which people cherish and hold to be desirable; owing to its power to be generally accepted as standards guiding and governing conducts in the society.

Good Governance: Several definitions have been adduced by scholars regarding the meaning of good governance. To this end, Oshaba (2021) sees good governance as a system of governance in which socio-economic and political policies are rooted on broad consensus and the voices of the minorities as well as the most vulnerable are heard not only in the decision-making process, but also in the allocation/distribution of resources and formulation of policy. Arowolo and Aluko (2012) define the concept as the capacity of individuals administering the affairs of a state to formulate and implement sound policies, as well as the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions. Okpaga (2009) conceives good governance is the process through which a state's affairs are managed effectively in the area of public accountability, responsiveness and transparency, all of which must be in the interest of the governed and the rulers. Sharma (2007) conceptualizes the term as the extent to which a government is perceived and accepted as legitimate, while remaining committed to improving the public welfare and being responsive to the needs of its citizens in terms of delivering public services and creating an enabling policy environment for productive activities; and equitable in its distribution of benefits and appointments. Mohideen (1997) cited in Odo (2015) defines good governance as a governing system operated in accordance with legal and ethical principles as conceived by society. The definition further identifies the functional elements of good governance to include accountability, transparency, rule of law, freedom of expression and association, electoral legitimacy to mention but a few.

Virtue: This is one term that scholars have used their different lens to conceptualize. It refers to the strong resolve of an individual to always portray good character at all times. Petruzello (2026) asserts that the concept entails exhibiting good character that is in conformity with morality. From the above defintions, it is clear that virtue connotes the ability or capacity of a person to perform acts that are good. This is why Aristotle (2000) posited that "to know the good is to do the good", while Plato avers that there are four cardinal virtues namely: prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice (Plato, 2000).

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the social contract theory as the theoretical construct. The justification of the usage of the theory emanates from its lucid clarification that governance emanates from a pact entered into by men. One of the proponents of the theory, Thomas Hobbes, avers that prior to the formation of civilized society, men lived in a state of nature where life was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short (Hobbes, 2000). To remedy the situation, Hobbes asserts that a sovereign would be chosen by the people to enthrone peace, security and ensure justice in exchange for their rights.

Implied in the above analysis by Hobbes and other proponents of the theory, is the notion of good governance, which is needed to rid the society of evils such as insecurity, greed and stealing. It is against this backdrop that the paper utilizes the theory for the study.

Achieving Good Governance in Nigeria through Justice

Globally, justice has been regarded as a pivotal virtue for attaining good governance. In fact, during the Classical period of philosophy, Plato was the first to conceive justice as a moral virtue for achieving an ideal society, where harmony, specialization, stability and happiness of the citizenry can be attained. It is instructive to state here that justice, in Plato's understanding, has a curative effect of ridding Athenian society of the evils promoting its destruction and advancing good governance. Following Plato, Aristotle also identifies justice as a veritable instrument capable of making government performs its function of serving as an agency for individuals to attain their potential (Stumpf, 1994). In the Contemporary era, John Rawls also believe in the efficacy of justice in resolving the incessant socio-economic and political conflicts pervading the American society of his day. For him, justice ensures the attainment of a well-ordered society, where just institutions, democratic equality, respect for the rule of law, accountability and transparency thrive in governance. Hence, his two principles of justice together with his notion of the veil of ignorance were vital in promoting a harmonious peaceful society devoid of political instability and social upheavals.

However, the elusiveness of good governance in Nigeria has attracted the attention of scholars and socio-political philosophers. These scholars are united that the absence of good governance is responsible for the many problems and socio-economic backwardness in the country. Highlighting a succinct articulation of happenings in Nigeria, Fayemi (2015) posits:

> …the long years of political misrule and bad governance exemplified by civilian administrations and military dictatorships since the country's political independence has left the nation politically de-mobilized, humanly underdeveloped and economically sterile with an ample population ravaged by poverty. Thus, with the return to democratic rule in the country in 1999, Nigerians had expected that the new wave of political leadership and democratic governance would accelerate the tide of development in the nation. The political leadership was expected to grapple with the socio-economic and political problems of the country, which border on poverty, corruption, lack of good governance, corrupt electoral system, unemployment, and insecurity, among others.

Using the above as a premise, Odo (2015) asserts that some of the above problems are not only getting worse, but appear to defy solutions. Thus, Nigerians have become deeply frustrated and disappointed over unfulfilled hopes of solving persistent economic crises, social tensions and political instability. The emergent political corruption and deceit have created widespread national disaffection, which has been hijacked by some interest groups for their own parochial purposes. Taking a cursory glance of political events in Nigeria from 2015 till date, one would also discover that injustice in federal appointments remain the order of the day as political appointments have been tilted to a particular ethnic nationality to the detriment of other tribes. This political injustice has led to cries of marginalization, particularly from people of the South-East extraction. Justifying the above assertion, Ayodele, Aluko and Ogunjimi (2022) asserts that since 2015, bad governance has remained the bane of underdevelopment in Nigeria. It has promoted massive looting and embezzlement of public funds, entrenched lopsided appointments skewed in favour of a particular region, emasculated Nigerians by hindering the attainment of their potentials, exacerbates hunger, poverty and youth unemployment. The Niger Delta, which generates over 90 percent of the country's revenue is not left out in the injustice as their sources of livelihood have been affected.

Therefore, the solution to these challenges lies in the adoption of justice as a value to be entrenched in governance. The entrenchment of justice will promote accountability, just institutions, transparency, equity and respect for the rule of law. These, in turn will guarantee good governance, which ensures equitable distribution of benefits in society to all in an impartial manner. Showing the relevance of justice in galvanizing good governance, Onuoha and Nwachukwu (2016) also assert that the role of justice in ensuring the realization of an effective democratic society cannot be over-emphasised as justice enables the society to be regulated in such a way that growth and development are achieved. This means that justice is sufficient and necessary for promoting good governance and its centrality consists in the fact that it is a sine qua non for human development and fast-tracking of a well-ordered society, where things are properly done and

Citation: Ogugua, Jeremiah Chukwu; Itelimo, Morrison & Emeronye, Maryann Kelechi "The Imperative Of Justice As Virtue For Good Governance In Nigeria". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp138-146.

people-oriented policies are formulated for the common good of everyone. Justice as a value will make political leaders such as the President, Vice-President, Governors, Law-makers, Ministers and Commissioners to be accountable to the people. This will also promote strong institutions in Nigeria and not strong individuals with the resultant effect being sustainable socio-economic and political development.

Conclusion

The paper examines the importance of justice as a virtue for promoting good governance in Nigeria. Good governance has continued to elude Nigeria since its Independence and this has continued to agitate the minds of scholars and public affairs analysts. The general underdevelopment, unemployment, poverty, kidnappings and rising insecurity plaguing the country have solely been attributed to lack of virtue and bad governance. Thus, the paper holds that values of integrity, rule of law, accountability and transparency, which are the cornerstone of civilized democracy can only be attainable in Nigeria if justice is entrench in governance. As one of the cardinal virtue, justice ensures equitable distribution and allocation of resources, make political leaders accountable to the people, promote just institutions and ensure fairness in political appointments with the resultant effect being socio-economic transformation in attitudes and interaction. The same way that both Plato and Rawls employed justice in achieving stability so can Nigeria harness the benefits in creating a social order devoid of banditry, bad governance, kidnappings, terrorism and political instability.

Recommendations

The paper outlines the following recommendations as vital inputs for achieving a just, humane and stable polity in Nigeria.

1. There should be a revival of family and societal values such as honesty, hardwork and discipline so as to entrench desirable conduct/characters capable of promoting a harmonious, peaceful and stable polity devoid of mediocrity, favouritism, and injustice in Nigeria.

2. Government at all levels, including political appointees, should ensure that transparency and accountability is entrenched in governance. This would justify the confidence of the electorates in their elected representatives to represent them justly and ensure the delivery of the dividends of good governance to the citizens.

3. Government at all levels should ensure that federal character principle is upheld in the distribution of economic benefits, while all employments and appointments into public offices must be based on merit, not on favoritism, tribalism or nepotism.

References

Aristotle. (2000). Nichomachean Ethics. Revised by C. D. C. Reeve. Hack ett Publishers.

Arowolo, D. & Aluko, O. (2012). Democracy, political participation and good governance in Nigeria.

International Journal of Development and Sustainability, Vol. 1 (3), 797-809.

Ayodele, A., Aluko, H. & Ogunjimi, F. (2022). Democracy and administration of social justice in Nigeria: A critical assessment of the fourth republic. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 12, 184-191.

Bhandari, D. (2000). *Plato concept of justice: An analysis*. OUP

Egharevba, M. & Chiazor, I.(2012).Political corruption and national development in Nigeria. Being a paper presented at the *international conference on democracy, governance and curbing corruption in sub-saharan Africa*, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, USA 8-10 August.

Fayemi, A. K. (2015). A philosophical appraisal of leadership and development in Nigeria. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 20 (6), 11-21.

Hobbes, T. (2000). *Leviathan*. Macmillan Publishers.

Hornby, A. (2010). *Oxford advanced learners' dictionary*. OUP.

Obanubi, F. (2015). Social justice, leadership and civil Society: The Nigerian example. Available online at: https://www.intrac.org/social-justice-leadership-civil-society-nigerian-example/ Accessed 20/10/23

Odo, U. (2015). Democracy, good governance and development in Nigeria: The challenges of leadership. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 20 (6), 1-9.

Ogugua, J. & Agboufa, M. (2020). The relevance of justice in promoting a well-ordered society: A philosophical Analysis. *African Social and Educational Journal*, Vol. 9 (3), 1-9.

Ogugua, J., Nwaogu, V. & Itelimo, M. (2023). "Plato's 'philosopher-king' as a model for global political leadership and governance" in *Contemporary Academic Issues on Education, Humanities, Sciences, Social Sciences and Technology*, Okoh, T. et al. Oki Press

Okpaga, A. (2009), "Ideology and the challenges of good governaance and Development in Nigeria" in *Democracy, leadership and accountability in post-colonial Africa: Challenges and possibilities*. Edoh, T. et al (eds). Aboki Publishers

Onuoha, J. & Nwachukwu, S. (2016). The role of justice in an ideal democratic system: Nigeria as a case study. *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization*, 56, 94-103.

Oshaba, G. (2021). The common good and good governance in nigeria: a philosophical reflection. *International Journal of Democratic and Development Studies*, Vol. 5, no. 1, 44-48

Plato. (2000). *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, revised by C. D. C. Reeve. Hackett Publishers.

Petruzello, M. (2026). "Virtue" in *Enclopedia Britannica.* Available online: www.britannica.com. Accessed 23/06/26

Ravi, S. (2015). *A comprehensive study of education*. PHI Learning Publishers.

Sharma, S. (2007). Democracy, Good Governance and Economic Development. *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, Vol.3 No.1, 29-62.

Stumpf, S. (1994). *Philosophy: Problems and History*, 5th edition. Mac-Graw Hill Publishers

Yagboyaju, D. (2019). Aspects of human security, social justice and sustainable development in Africa: Nigeria as a case study. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 9, 270-286.

Citation: Ogugua, Jeremiah Chukwu; Itelimo, Morrison & Emeronye, Maryann Kelechi "The Imperative Of Justice As Virtue For Good Governance In Nigeria". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW),* 2026: pp138-146.

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)

Volume 1, Number 3

Review Article

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21215194

Open Access

Metaphysical Dimensions Of Dance Criticism In Ibibio Mbopo Dance And The Question Of Ontology, Identity And Cultural Meaning

Ikike Inieke Ufford
Faculty Of Arts
Department Of Theatre And Media Studies
University Of Calabar

Ifure Ufford-Azorbo
Faculty Of Arts
Departmenst Of Theatre Arts
University Of Uyo, Uyo.
Phone: +234 703 3854 530; +234 708 6589 969
ORCID: 0009-0002-6653-6046

Corresponding Author's Email: ifureiuffordazorbo@uniuyo.edu.ng

Date Received: 14h June, 2026

Date Accepted: 25th June, 2026

Abstract

Dance criticism has traditionally focused on aesthetic value, choreographic structure, performance quality and socio-cultural relevance. However, the philosophical foundations that underlie dance as an art form have received comparatively limited attention, particularly within African performance traditions. This study examined the metaphysical dimensions of dance criticism using the Mbopo dance of the Ibibio people of Nigeria as a focal point. Drawing on concepts of ontology and identity, the paper investigated fundamental questions concerning the nature of dance, its mode of existence, and the criteria through which a dance retains its identity across different performances and historical periods. The study argued that Mbopo transcends its visible manifestations of movement, rhythm and bodily display to function as a repository of communal memory, cultural values and social philosophy. Beyond its aesthetic appeal, the dance embodies ideals of womanhood, social responsibility, moral conduct and collective identity within Ibibio society. Through an examination of movement vocabulary, rhythmic structures, spatial organization, symbolism and audience reception, the paper demonstrated that the meaning of Mbopo is rooted not only in physical performance but also in the cultural consciousness that sustains it. The paper further contended that effective dance criticism must extend beyond descriptive and evaluative approaches to engage with the metaphysical questions embedded in performance. The study concluded that the metaphysical interpretation of Mbopo offers a productive framework for appreciating African dance traditions as dynamic expressions of both cultural heritage and philosophical thought.

Introduction

Dance occupies a unique position among the performing arts because it communicates primarily through the expressive movement of the human body. Unlike literary texts, paintings, or sculptural works that may exist in tangible and enduring forms, dance manifests itself in performance and disappears once the event has ended. Its transient nature has continued to challenge scholars, critics and philosophers who seek to understand not only what dance means, but also what exactly constitutes its existence. Dance according to Martha Graham is communication, "it springs from deep roots in human beings" (Britton 1963:93). For Edmund Leach, "the syntax of non-verbal 'language' must be a great deal simpler than that of spoken or written language" (1976:10). To this Valery adds that "…the human body (in dance) speaks …it conveys ever so much more than the eloquent, fast, elegant speaker" (Idamoyibo, 2003:67) With dance, every movement is indissolubly linked with an internalized mental representation or concept. Dance movements are influenced by the experiences of history, culture, environment, occupation and the people's aesthetic movement perception. These movements operate within certain accepted cultural norms peculiar to the traditional setup of the society. Questions concerning the nature of dance, its continuity across generations and the criteria by which it is identified have generated significant debates within aesthetics, performance studies and philosophy resulting to dance criticism.

Criticism is a systematic process of analysis and evaluation through which the strengths, limitations and meanings of a work are examined. Traditionally, dance criticism has concentrated on the evaluation of choreographic design, technical proficiency, aesthetic quality, musical accompaniment and audience reception. While these concerns remain fundamental to the appreciation of dance, they do not adequately address deeper philosophical questions regarding the nature of performance itself. Beyond visible movement and artistic execution lies a network of meanings connected to memory, identity, embodiment and cultural consciousness. This possibly informs Copeland's submission that "Good dance criticism is a multifaceted endeavour. It involves at a minimum description, interpretation, and value judgement" (1997:11). Consequently, dance criticism requires a broader analytical framework capable of examining not only what is performed but also the underlying realities that give performance its significance.

Metaphysics, as a branch of philosophy, is concerned with the nature of existence, being, causality, study of ultimate reality, identity and the relationship between material and non-material phenomena provides a useful framework for such an inquiry. It explores questions relating to what it means for something to exist, how entities maintain their identity through change, and the relationship between physical manifestations and intangible realities. Applied to dance studies, metaphysical inquiry raises fundamental questions about the ontological status of dance. Is a dance merely the physical movement of performers in a particular moment? Does it exist in the choreographer's conception, in the bodies that enact it, in audience perception, or in the collective memory of a community? Similarly, how does a dance retain its identity despite alterations in performers, performance contexts, musical accompaniment or choreographic adaptation?

African dances are deeply embedded within the socio-cultural experiences of the communities that produce them. They embody histories, belief systems, moral codes, occupational experiences and philosophical worldviews that transcend the immediate act of performance. Consequently, the meaning of such dances cannot be fully

Citation: Ufford, Ikike Inieke & Ufford-Azorbo, Ifure "Metaphysical Dimensions Of Dance Criticism In Ibibio Mbopo Dance And The Question Of Ontology, Identity And Cultural Meaning". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp138-163.

understood outside the cultural contexts that sustain them. Among the Ibibio people of Akwa Ibom State, Mbopo dance occupies a significant position within the cultural landscape. Traditionally associated with the initiation and celebration of young maidens, the dance serves as a medium through which ideals of womanhood, dignity, social responsibility and communal values are publicly expressed (Ufford-Azorbo, 2012:98). The performance is not merely a display of rhythmic movement; it is a symbolic enactment of cultural expectations and collective identity. Every gesture, costume element, musical pattern and spatial arrangement contributes to a system of meanings recognized and interpreted by members of the community. The dance therefore exists simultaneously as artistic performance, cultural institution and symbolic text.

The continued relevance of Mbopo within contemporary cultural discourse raises important metaphysical questions concerning its existence and identity. Although performance styles may evolve and social conditions may change, Mbopo continues to be recognized as a distinct cultural expression. This persistence suggests that its identity is located in more than its observable movements. Rather, it resides within a complex interaction of bodily expression, communal memory, symbolic representation and cultural continuity. Understanding this relationship requires an approach to criticism that moves beyond descriptive evaluation toward philosophical interrogation. This study therefore examines the metaphysical dimensions of dance criticism through an analysis of Mbopo dance. Specifically, it investigates the ontological status of the dance and the factors that sustain its identity across time and performance contexts.

Conceptual Clarifications of Dance and Dance Criticism

Dance is a performative art that employs the human body as its primary medium of expression through organized movement in time and space. Across cultures and historical periods, dance has served diverse functions including ritual observance, social interaction, entertainment, education, communication, healing, and the expression of emotions and ideas. Although definitions of dance vary according to cultural and disciplinary perspectives, most scholars agree that dance involves purposeful and rhythmically structured bodily movement intended to convey meaning or evoke responses.

Aristotle conceives dance as rhythmic movement capable of representing human actions, experiences and character (Safra 2003:935). This perspective underscores the representational capacity of dance as a medium through which aspects of human life may be interpreted and communicated. Dance is a fundamental means through which individuals express their responses to the world around them, using the body as an instrument of perception and expression. Dance is not merely physical activity but a meaningful artistic practice through which individuals and communities negotiate their experiences and realities. Hawkins (1988:3) therefore concludes that, "Dance is one of man's oldest and most basic means of expression. Through the body, man senses and perceives the tensions and rhythms of the universe around him and using the body as his instrument, he expresses his feeling response to the universe". This is corroborated by Sachs who is of the opinion that dance is "an inherited predisposition" which means that dance is natural and instinctive (Thomas 1995:169). This possibly informs Laban's assertion that "attitude toward or control over a movement is not necessarily a conscious act that the mover decides to do. However, the attitude which produces the movement quality is an aspect of behaviour and can be considered a product of learning, metabolism, perception of the environment..." (Willis, 1996:146).

Within African societies, dance extends beyond aesthetic display to become an integral aspect of communal life. It functions as a cultural language through which values, beliefs, histories and social relationships are articulated and transmitted. African dance traditions are often inseparable from music, ritual, social institutions and communal participation. Consequently, dance is not merely an artistic event but a cultural phenomenon that embodies collective memory and social identity. The meaning of dance therefore emerges not only from movement itself but also from the cultural contexts that shape and sustain it. For Enekwe (1991:28), beauty in Nigerian dance lies in the combination of "purposiveness and high aesthetic concern, its celebration and reflection of communal life...seeking to unite the dancer with the dance, its embodiment of collective beliefs …" Beauty is central to the appreciation of African dance (Primus 1996:5) The typical African dancer remembers all others who had performed the same dances and why those dances were performed. Stories behind the creation of the dances are not as important as who danced it before, for whom and the consideration of the present performance of the dance is done according to laid down rules. The memory sense is, therefore, seen as the experience sense having to do with ancestral memorial connections. This is extremely significant in the appreciation of African dance performance because it is very functional in the spiritual well-being of the people according to their belief. Primus (1996:4) has availed us with a covering principle that "…. Dance without belief …. is without life". The belief of the people that dance was created by an ancestor, spirit or god counts in the epic memory sensory model of dance appreciation and in the main presentation of the dance. To emphasize on the extra-mundane function of dance through the Epic memory, Asante posits that its relatedness to spirituality, ethos, and empathy… sends felt signals to the community who own the dance" (1996:213). Even when the dance experiences some changes and modifications it is considered as a change in the master plan of presentation as creative additions and not creation itself. Africans value the renewal of experience and so creative innovations are tolerated if they reinforce the ideology behind the original creation. This shows that the performers have a good memory and are faithful to the tradition and creative ingenuities and imagination of the ancestors. It is also a reiteration on the renewal of experience which is the rebirth of the society.

Mbopo dance exemplifies this understanding of dance as a cultural text. Traditionally performed within the context of maidenhood initiation and public presentation among the Ibibio people, the dance embodies social expectations relating to morality, femininity, dignity and communal belonging (Ufford, 1997:52). Its movement vocabulary, costume, music and performance conventions function as symbolic vehicles through which cultural ideals are expressed and reinforced. The interpretation of such meanings constitutes an important concern of dance criticism. Dance criticism may be understood as the systematic observation, analysis, interpretation and evaluation of dance performance. It involves more than expressing personal likes or dislikes; rather, it seeks to investigate how a dance communicates meaning, achieves artistic objectives and functions within its social and cultural environment. Through criticism, the dance performance is subjected to informed reflection that enables both practitioners and audiences to develop a deeper understanding of the work.

Dance criticism occupies a unique position because of the ephemeral nature of its subject matter. Unlike literary texts or visual artworks that remain available for repeated examination, dance exists primarily in performance and often disappears once the event has concluded. This transitory quality presents challenges for critical analysis, requiring the critic to engage actively with movement, rhythm, spatial design, symbolism, performer-audience interaction and contextual meanings. Effective criticism therefore demands not only technical knowledge of dance but also sensitivity to the cultural and philosophical dimensions of performance.

The functions of dance criticism serve a descriptive function by documenting and preserving performance experiences that would otherwise disappear with time. Second, it performs an interpretative function by uncovering meanings embedded within movement, music, costume and performance conventions. Third, criticism fulfils an evaluative function through the assessment of artistic quality, technical competence and communicative effectiveness. Finally, criticism contributes to intellectual discourse by encouraging reflection on the cultural, social and philosophical implications of dance practice.

In African performance traditions, dance criticism assumes an additional responsibility of cultural interpretation. Since many indigenous dances embody communal histories, ethical values and cosmological beliefs, criticism must move beyond technical assessment to engage with the deeper meanings encoded within performance. Such an approach is particularly relevant to Mbopo dance, whose significance extends beyond choreography to encompass questions of identity, cultural memory and social philosophy. It is within this broader critical framework that the present study situates its investigation of the metaphysical dimensions of Mbopo dance.

Metaphysics, Ontology and Identity in Dance Performance

Dance is often approached as a visible and aesthetic phenomenon, appreciated through movement, rhythm, technique and performance quality. However, beneath its physical manifestations lie deeper philosophical questions concerning existence, meaning and continuity. These questions belong to the domain of metaphysics, a branch of philosophy that investigates the fundamental nature of reality and seeks to explain the conditions under which things exist, persist and acquire meaning. Metaphysical inquiry is therefore concerned with concepts such as being, identity, causality, time, space and the relationship between material and immaterial realities. The relevance of metaphysics to dance emerges from the peculiar nature of performance itself. Unlike many artistic products that continue to exist in material form after their creation, dance is transient. It unfolds within a particular moment and disappears immediately after performance. Yet despite this apparent disappearance, dances remain recognizable across generations and continue to exert influence on individuals and communities. This raises important philosophical questions regarding the nature of dance and the basis of its continued existence. Is dance merely a sequence of bodily movements performed in a given time and space, or does it exist beyond the immediate performance event? Does its existence reside in the choreographer's conception, the performer's body, the audience's perception, or in the collective memory of the community that sustains it?

Such questions fall within the scope of ontology; a major branch of metaphysics concerned with the study of being and existence. Ontology seeks to determine what kinds of entities exist and the conditions that define their existence. In dance studies, ontology examines the status of dance as an artistic entity and attempts to clarify what constitutes a dance work. Philosophical discussions on the ontology of dance often revolve around whether dance should be understood as a physical event, a mental construct, a cultural product, a symbolic system, or a combination of these dimensions. Within African performance traditions, the ontological status of dance cannot be separated from the cultural environment in which it exists. Dance functions not only as physical movement but also as a carrier of communal memory, social values and cultural identity. Its existence extends beyond the visible performance to encompass the beliefs, histories and collective experiences that give it meaning. Consequently, an African dance may be understood simultaneously as a performative event and as a repository of cultural knowledge transmitted across generations.

The Mbopo dance of the Ibibio people provides an illuminating example of this ontological complexity. At one level, Mbopo exists as a ceremonial performance characterized by specific movements, rhythms, costumes and performance conventions. At another level, it exists as a social institution associated with the preparation and public presentation of young maidens. Beyond these dimensions, the dance embodies a system of cultural values relating to morality, dignity, femininity, social responsibility and communal identity. Its existence therefore transcends the immediate actions of performers and extends into the cultural consciousness of the community. From this perspective, Mbopo may be regarded not merely as a dance performance but as a living cultural phenomenon whose meaning is continually renewed through performance and communal participation.

Questions of identity seek to explain how an entity remains recognizable despite the changes it undergoes over time. In dance studies, identity raises concern about the characteristics that make a dance what it is and distinguish it from other forms of performance. If costumes are modified, music rearranged or movement patterns adapted, does the dance remain the same? At what point does alteration become transformation? These questions are particularly significant in traditional performance cultures where dances are continually reinterpreted to meet changing social realities. The identity of a dance cannot be reduced solely to its external features. Rather, it emerges from the interaction of movement vocabulary, performance conventions, symbolic meanings and cultural functions. A dance retains its identity not because every performance is identical to previous ones, but because certain core values, symbols and meanings remain recognizable to members of the community. Identity therefore involves continuity within change rather than absolute sameness.

In the context of Mbopo dance, identity is sustained through the preservation of its cultural purpose and symbolic significance. Although contemporary performances may differ from earlier forms in matters of costume design, staging techniques or musical accompaniment, the dance continues to be recognized because it retains its association with ideals of womanhood, social respectability and communal celebration. The continuity of these meanings enables Mbopo to maintain its distinctive identity despite inevitable adaptations across time and circumstance.

Another important metaphysical concern in dance performance is embodiment. Dance exists through the body, yet the body itself functions as more than a physical instrument of movement. It serves as a medium through which culture, memory and meaning are expressed. The performing body becomes a site where personal experience intersects with collective history. Through movement, dancers reproduce inherited knowledge, reaffirm cultural values and participate in the transmission of communal identity. The body thus acts as both a performer of culture and an archive of cultural memory. This relationship between embodiment, ontology and identity has important implications for dance criticism. A critical approach limited to technical evaluation may fail to capture the deeper meanings embedded within performance. Metaphysical criticism, on the other hand, encourages an exploration of the ways in which dance embodies cultural knowledge, sustains communal identity and negotiates questions of existence and continuity. Such an approach is particularly valuable in the study of African dance traditions, where performance frequently functions as a bridge between the physical, social and symbolic dimensions of life.

Origin and Social Function of Mbopo Dance in Ibibio Cultural Context

Mbopo is one of the most prominent cultural institutions of the Ibibio people of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Traditionally, it is associated with the transition of young maidens into womanhood and their preparation for marriage and responsible participation in community life. Although the institution has undergone modifications in response to social change, its significance within Ibibio cultural history remains profound. Historically, Mbopo served as both a social and educational institution through which young women were prepared for the responsibilities of adulthood. The institution was founded on communal values that emphasized moral conduct, dignity, discipline, respect for elders, domestic competence and social responsibility. Participation in Mbopo was regarded as a mark of honor not only for the maiden but also for her family, whose reputation was reflected in the conduct and accomplishments of their daughter. Beyond its role in preparing young women for marriage, Mbopo functioned as an important mechanism for social cohesion. It reinforced communal norms, strengthened family ties and provided a platform for the transmission of cultural values from one generation to another. Through songs, dances, storytelling, instruction and ceremonial performances, the institution contributed to the preservation of Ibibio cultural identity and collective memory.

Seclusion and Preparation of Maidens

One of the defining features of the traditional Mbopo institution was the period of seclusion undergone by selected maidens. During this period, the young women were temporarily withdrawn from ordinary social activities and placed under the supervision of experienced women within the community. The seclusion period served as an intensive programme of cultural education and personal development designed to prepare them for adulthood. Within the seclusion environment, the maidens received instruction in various aspects of Ibibio life. They were taught appropriate social conduct, domestic management, childcare, interpersonal relations and community expectations regarding womanhood. Instruction often included indigenous knowledge systems, traditional arts, crafts, songs and dances that were considered essential for preserving cultural continuity.

Symbolism of the Outing Ceremony

The climax of the Mbopo institution was the outing ceremony, a public event during which the maidens were formally presented to the community. This occasion combined elements of celebration, performance, recognition and social affirmation. It marked the successful completion of the training process and the symbolic transition from maidenhood to mature womanhood. The outing ceremony was characterized by elaborate displays of dance, music, costume and public pageantry. Every aspect of the event carried symbolic significance. The carefully decorated bodies of the maidens signified beauty, dignity and readiness for adult responsibilities. Their costumes, ornaments and adornments reflected cultural values associated with femininity, honour and social status.

Mbopo as Cultural Education

At its core, the Mbopo institution functioned as a system of indigenous cultural education. Long before the emergence of formal educational structures, African societies developed mechanisms for transmitting knowledge, values and social norms to younger generations. Mbopo constituted one such mechanism within Ibibio society. The institution facilitated the transmission of cultural knowledge through observation, participation and performance. Young women learned not only practical skills but also the philosophical foundations of communal life. Through songs, dances, proverbs, narratives and ceremonial practices, they acquired an understanding of social responsibilities, ethical conduct and collective identity. Dance served as a particularly effective educational medium because it combined physical participation with symbolic communication. Through repeated rehearsal and performance, cultural values became embodied in movement. The body thus became a repository of knowledge through which social meanings were preserved and transmitted. What was learned intellectually was simultaneously reinforced physically and emotionally through performance.

Elements of Mbopo Dance as Vehicles of Cultural Meaning

The significance of Mbopo dance extends beyond its visible aesthetic qualities. Like many African dance traditions, its meaning is embedded in a complex interaction of movement, rhythm, space, costume, symbolism and audience participation. These elements function collectively to communicate cultural values and social ideals while simultaneously creating an artistic experience. Understanding these performative elements is essential for appreciating the deeper philosophical and metaphysical dimensions of the dance. The body, rhythm, space, costume and audience reception are not merely technical components of performance; they are vehicles through which cultural meanings are generated, transmitted and preserved.

The Body as Performance Text

The human body is the primary instrument of dance and the central medium through which Mbopo communicates meaning. Unlike other artistic forms that depend on external materials for expression, dance relies upon the living body to create, sustain and transmit artistic experience. The body becomes both the subject and object of performance, simultaneously producing movement and embodying meaning. Within the traditional Mbopo institution, the body occupies a position of special significance. The maiden's body is carefully nurtured, adorned and presented as a visible representation of cultural ideals associated with beauty, dignity, health and social responsibility. Through movement, posture and gesture, the performer communicates values that extend beyond the immediate act of dancing. Every bodily action becomes a symbolic statement about identity and social belonging.

Rhythm and Musical Structure

Rhythm constitutes one of the most fundamental elements of dance and serves as the organizing principle of movement. In Mbopo dance, rhythm provides the framework within which bodily actions are coordinated and given expressive form. It establishes patterns of movement, regulates tempo and creates the dynamic flow that characterizes performance. African dance traditions are distinguished by their rich rhythmic complexity and their close relationship with music. In Mbopo dance, musical accompaniment functions as more than a background element; it serves as an active partner in performance. The interaction between movement and music creates a dialogue through which emotional, social and cultural meanings are communicated. Drums, songs, hand clapping and other forms of musical accompaniment provide rhythmic structures that guide the dancers and sustain audience engagement.

Space and Movement Design

Dance unfolds within space, and the organization of movement within space contributes significantly to the communication of meaning. In Mbopo dance, spatial design involves the arrangement of performers, the pathways traced through movement and the relationships established between dancers, musicians and spectators. The movement patterns employed in Mbopo are carefully structured to create visual coherence and expressive impact. Circular formations, processional patterns and coordinated group movements often symbolize unity, continuity and communal solidarity. Spatial arrangements help direct audience attention and establish relationships between individual performers and the larger collective.

The dancer's movement through space also reflects cultural attitudes toward social interaction and communal participation. Rather than emphasizing individual display alone, many African dance forms prioritize collective engagement and harmonious interaction among performers. Mbopo exemplifies this tendency through choreographic structures that balance individual expression with communal identity. Movement design further contributes to the aesthetic quality of performance by creating visual patterns that enhance the audience's experience.

Through variations in direction, level, speed and energy, dancers transform physical space into a dynamic field of artistic expression. Space therefore becomes an active component of meaning rather than a passive setting for performance.

Costume, Ornamentation and Symbolism

Costume and ornamentation are essential aspects of Mbopo performance because they communicate social, cultural and symbolic meanings. The visual appearance of the dancers contributes significantly to audience interpretation and appreciation of the performance. Traditionally, Mbopo maidens are elaborately adorned with costumes, beads, body decorations and other forms of ornamentation that emphasize beauty, elegance and cultural identity. These visual elements function as symbols through which the community expresses its ideals concerning womanhood, dignity and social status. The careful attention devoted to costume preparation reflects the importance attached to the public presentation of the maiden.

Communication and Audience Reception

Communication lies at the heart of all performance traditions, and Mbopo dance is fundamentally a communicative act. Through movement, music, costume and symbolism, the dance conveys meanings that are understood and interpreted by members of the community. The performance therefore functions as a cultural dialogue between performers and spectators. Unlike verbal forms of communication, dance relies primarily on non-verbal expressive systems. Gestures, postures, rhythmic patterns and spatial relationships operate as symbolic languages through which ideas and emotions are conveyed. Because these meanings emerge from shared cultural experiences, members of the community are often able to interpret the dance with considerable accuracy (Ufford, 1995:43).

Audience participation is an essential aspect of the communicative process. Spectators do not merely observe; they respond through applause, vocal encouragement, emotional engagement and other forms of participation. Their reactions contribute to the creation of meaning and influence the overall atmosphere of performance. The audience also functions as a custodian of cultural standards. Through their responses, spectators evaluate the effectiveness of the performance and affirm the values represented by the dance. Appreciation, praise and recognition serve as indicators of communal approval, while criticism signals departures from accepted norms.

Metaphysical Issues in Mbopo Dance Criticism

Dance criticism has traditionally concentrated on issues of form, technique, aesthetics and audience response. While these concerns remain important, they do not fully explain the deeper realities that underpin dance performance. Mbopo dance, like many African performance traditions, exists within a network of cultural meanings that transcend its immediate physical manifestation. Beneath the visible dimensions of movement, rhythm and spectacle lie philosophical questions concerning existence, identity, continuity and embodiment. These questions place Mbopo within the domain of metaphysical inquiry and provide a broader framework for dance criticism.

The Ontological Status of Mbopo Dance

One of the central metaphysical questions in dance criticism concerns ontology, that is, the nature of being and existence. Applied to dance, ontology seeks to determine what exactly constitutes a dance work and where its existence may be located. Is a dance simply the bodily movements executed by performers during a particular event, or does its existence extend beyond the moment of performance? The question becomes particularly significant in relation to Mbopo dance. If the dance exists only in performance, then it ceases to exist once the performance ends. Yet Mbopo continues to be recognized, remembered and reproduced across generations. Its existence therefore appears to transcend the immediate performance event.

Several dimensions contribute to the ontological reality of Mbopo. First, the dance exists physically through the bodies of performers who actualize its movements in time and space. Second, it exists conceptually through the cultural knowledge preserved within the community. Third, it exists symbolically through the meanings attached to its performance. Finally, it exists socially through communal recognition and acceptance. The ontological status of Mbopo therefore cannot be reduced to movement alone. The dance is simultaneously a physical event, a cultural institution, a symbolic system and a repository of collective memory. Its existence is sustained through the interaction of these dimensions. Each performance becomes an act of renewal through which the dance is brought into existence once again while remaining connected to previous enactments.

Identity and Continuity in Mbopo Dance

Closely related to ontology is the question of identity. Identity concerns the characteristics that make something what it is and enable it to remain recognizable despite change. In dance studies, questions of identity arise whenever a performance undergoes adaptation, reinterpretation or transformation. Traditional dances rarely remain static. Changes occur in performance venues, costumes, musical accompaniment, choreography and audience expectations. Mbopo dance has likewise experienced modifications resulting from social change, urbanization, religious influences and contemporary performance practices. Yet despite these changes, the dance continues to be identified as Mbopo.

Embodiment, Memory and Cultural Transmission

Another important metaphysical concern in Mbopo dance criticism is the relationship between embodiment and memory. Dance exists through the body, yet the performing body is more than a biological instrument. It functions as a carrier of history, culture and collective experience. In Mbopo performance, the body becomes a medium through which cultural knowledge is transmitted from one generation to another (Ufford, 2004:82). Scholars have long argued that the body serves as a repository of memory and cultural knowledge. Connerton (1989:72) describes the body as "a storehouse of social memory", while Tylor (2003:3) contends that embodied practice constitutes a distinct mode of knowing and transferring cultural memory. Similarly, Sklar (1991:8) emphasizes that "dance knowledge is embodied knowledge", underscoring the role of the dancing body as a living archive of collective experience. From a phenomenological point of view, Merleau-Ponty (1962:146" further argues that the body is "our general medium for having a world", suggesting that memory, identity, and culture are experienced and expressed through embodied action. The gestures, postures, movement qualities and performance conventions embodied by dancers are learned through participation in cultural processes. Through repeated practice and performance, the body acquires the ability to preserve and communicate meanings that might otherwise disappear. This process transforms the body into a repository of communal memory. Each performer inherits movement traditions developed by earlier generations and passes them on through performance. The body therefore serves as an archive in which cultural experiences are stored and reproduced.

The audience also participates in this process of remembrance. Community members recognize familiar movements, symbols and performance conventions because they share a collective understanding of their significance. The appreciation of Mbopo is therefore dependent upon a network of memories that connect performers and spectators to a common cultural heritage.

Movement as Metaphysical Expression

Movement is the defining characteristic of dance, yet its significance extends beyond physical action. Within a metaphysical framework, movement may be understood as a mode of expressing realities that are not directly visible. Through movement, dancers communicate emotions, values, beliefs and experiences that cannot always be articulated through language. Mbopo dance illustrates this capacity of movement to function as metaphysical expression. The gestures, rhythms and bodily patterns employed in performance communicate ideas concerning social identity, moral conduct, communal belonging and cultural aspiration. These meanings are not physically present in the movements themselves but are conveyed through symbolic association and cultural interpretation.

Implications for Dance Criticism

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that Mbopo dance cannot be adequately understood through conventional approaches that restrict criticism to technical execution, choreographic structure or aesthetic appeal. While these aspects remain important, they represent only part of the meaning embedded in the performance. A comprehensive criticism of Mbopo dance must extend beyond observable movement to include the cultural, philosophical and metaphysical dimensions that give the dance its significance within Ibibio society.

One major implication is the need to broaden the scope of dance criticism. Many critical frameworks inherited from Western aesthetic traditions emphasize formal elements such as movement vocabulary, spatial design, rhythm, balance and compositional structure. Although these analytical tools are useful, they may be insufficient when applied to African dances whose meanings are deeply embedded in communal values, spirituality, historical memory and social institutions. In the case of Mbopo, criticism that focuses exclusively on technique risks overlooking the cultural philosophy that informs the performance.

Dance criticism should therefore adopt a culturally grounded approach that takes into account the worldview from which a dance emerges. Mbopo is not merely an artistic display but also a social institution, a pedagogical process and a symbolic representation of communal ideals. Understanding the dance requires knowledge of the values associated with womanhood, morality, social responsibility and cultural continuity within Ibibio society. The critic must be attentive to these underlying cultural contexts in order to produce interpretations that are both meaningful and accurate.

A second implication concerns the role of embodiment in performance analysis. As demonstrated earlier, the body in Mbopo functions as more than an instrument of movement. It serves as a repository of cultural memory and a medium through which inherited knowledge is transmitted across generations. Consequently, criticism should examine how the performing body embodies social meanings, cultural expectations and historical experiences. Such an approach moves criticism beyond the mere description of movement toward an understanding of the body as a site of cultural inscription and symbolic communication.

The metaphysical dimensions explored in this study further suggest that dance criticism should engage more deeply with philosophical inquiry. Questions concerning existence, identity, embodiment and meaning are not external to dance but are integral to understanding its nature. Dance is an ephemeral art form whose physical manifestations disappear almost as soon as they occur. Yet its meanings, memories and cultural effects often endure long after the performance has ended. The critic is therefore challenged to investigate not only what is seen on stage but also the invisible structures of meaning that sustain the performance.

Furthermore, African dance criticism should increasingly draw upon indigenous epistemologies and cultural philosophies. Too often, African performance traditions are interpreted through theoretical models developed in cultural environments that differ significantly from those in which the dances originated. While cross-cultural theories can provide useful insights, they should not overshadow local systems of knowledge. Mbopo dance is rooted in Ibibio conceptions of community, morality, social identity and human development. Critical frameworks that emerge from these cultural realities are likely to produce richer and more nuanced interpretations than those imposed exclusively from outside traditions.

Another important implication relates to the preservation and documentation of African dance heritage. Critical engagement with performances such as Mbopo contributes not only to scholarly interpretation but also to the safeguarding of cultural knowledge. As processes of modernization, globalization and urbanization continue to reshape African societies, many traditional performance practices face the risk of transformation, marginalization or gradual disappearance. Dance criticism therefore assumes a broader cultural responsibility by providing analytical records that document the meanings, functions and philosophical foundations of these traditions. Through rigorous critical inquiry, scholars can help preserve aspects of cultural memory that might otherwise be lost, ensuring that future generations have access not only to descriptions of dance movements but also to the deeper systems of thought and value that underpin them. In this regard, criticism becomes an important instrument for cultural continuity and heritage preservation.

The discussion of Mbopo also highlights the necessity for a more dialogic relationship between critics, performers and communities. Traditional approaches to criticism often position the critic as an external observer whose authority derives primarily from theoretical expertise and aesthetic judgment. However, dances that are deeply embedded within communal and cultural contexts require forms of criticism that engage with the perspectives of cultural custodians, performers and community members who possess experiential knowledge of the tradition. Such engagement enables the critic to access meanings that may not be immediately visible within the performance itself. It also encourages a more inclusive mode of knowledge production in which interpretation emerges through interaction between scholarly analysis and indigenous understanding. By acknowledging the voices of those who sustain and transmit the dance tradition, criticism can achieve greater cultural sensitivity, interpretive depth and contextual accuracy.

Finally, this study underscores the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to dance criticism. The analysis of Mbopo requires insights from performance studies, philosophy, anthropology, cultural studies, aesthetics and history. No single discipline is sufficient to explain the complexity of the dance. An interdisciplinary perspective enables the critic to appreciate the multiple layers of meaning embedded within performance and to account for both its artistic and cultural dimensions.

The implications of this study therefore extend beyond Mbopo dance itself. They point toward a broader reorientation of African dance criticism—one that recognizes dance as a complex cultural phenomenon involving aesthetics, philosophy, memory, identity and social meaning. Such an approach enriches critical discourse and provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding the significance of African performance traditions in contemporary scholarship.

Conclusion

This article advances African dance criticism by demonstrating that Mbopo dance cannot be adequately understood through aesthetic, choreographic, or performance-based analysis alone. Its principal contribution lies in establishing a metaphysical framework for dance criticism that recognizes dance as a site where questions of being, identity, memory, and cultural continuity are enacted and negotiated. Through Mbopo, the study reveals that the significance of dance resides not merely in its observable movements but in the invisible cultural realities those movements embody and sustain. The research therefore challenges conventional critical approaches that privilege form over meaning and argues for a broader interpretive paradigm that integrates philosophical inquiry with performance analysis.

Beyond its contribution to Mbopo scholarship, the study opens new directions for African performance research by positioning indigenous dance traditions as legitimate sources of philosophical knowledge rather than simply objects of artistic evaluation. It proposes that African dance criticism should be grounded in the epistemologies and worldviews from which performances emerge, thereby enabling more culturally responsive and theoretically robust interpretations. The metaphysical perspective developed here provides a model that may be applied to other African dance traditions, offering fresh possibilities for examining how performance preserves communal memory, constructs identity, and sustains cultural existence in changing social contexts.

Works Cited

Asante, K. W. 1996. The Zimbabwean dance aesthetics: senses, canons and characteristics. *African dance: anartistic, and philosophical inquiry…* 203-220.

Briton, J.1963. *Studies in Education: the Arts and Current Tendencies in Education.* London: Evans Brothers.

Connerton, P. 1989. *How Societies Remember* Cambridge: University Press.

Copeland, R. 1997. Between Description and Deconstruction". *Confluences Cross Cultural Fusion in Music and Dance.* Proceedings of the first South African Music and Dance Conference. University of CapeTown. 16-17 July 1997.

Enekwe, Ossie (1991) *Theories of Dance in Nigeria*. Nsukka: Afa Press

Citation: Ufford, Ikike Inieke & Ufford-Azorbo, Ifure "Metaphysical Dimensions Of Dance Criticism In Ibibio Mbopo Dance And The Question Of Ontology, Identity And Cultural Meaning". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW),* 2026: pp138-163.

Hawkins, Alma (1988). *Creation Through Dance. (*Revised ed.) New Jersey: Princeton Books Company Publishers.

Idamoyibo, A. A.2003.Dynamics of African Dance". *Humanities ReviewJournal*. Vol 3, No 1. F. M. Ogunleye "Ed.". Ibadan: Humanities Publishers. 63-73.

Leach, E. 1976. *Culture and Communication: The Logic by Which symbols are connected.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception* . (C. Smith, Trans.) London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Primus, P.1996. African Dance. *African Dance: An Artistic Historical, and Philosophical Inquiry.* Kariamu WelshAsante ed. Trenton: Africa World Press Inc. 3-11.

Safra, J. E. "Ed." 2003. *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (Macropaedia). 25, (15th Edition) Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica,Inc.

Sklar, D. 1991. On Dance Ethnography. *Dance Research Journal: Modes of Enquiry: Approaches to Dance Research* , 23(1), ed. Judy Van Zile. 6-10. https://doi.org/10.2307/1478750

Taylor, D. 2003. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas.* North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Thomas, H. 1995. *Dance, Modernity and Culture: Explorations in the Sociology of Dance*. London: Routledge.

Ufford, I. I. 2004. Interrogating the Past and Forging New Identities: A Study of Ndem Dance Theatre of the Efik People. An Unpublished M.A Thesis. Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan. May,2004.

Ufford, I.G. 1995. Dance Principles and Techniques. An unpublished text on Dance, Department of Theatre Arts, University of Uyo.

----------.1997) Ikon music in Ibibio culture. An unpublished B.A. Ed Long Essay. Department of Music, University of Uyo, Uyo.

Ufford-Azorbo, I 2012. Form and Content of Canoe Dance Theatre of the Peoples of the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Germany: Lap-Lambert Publishers.

Willis, C. 1996. Tap Dance: Manifestation of the African Aesthetic. *African Dance* … 145-160.

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)

Volume 1, Number 3

Empirical Article

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21215121

Open Access

Domestic Openness And Conflict Resolution Strategies Among Married Couples In Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Abstract

This study examined domestic openness and conflict resolution strategies among married couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study specifically investigated the relationship between domestic openness and negotiation strategy as well as compromise strategy among married couples. Two research questions and two corresponding hypotheses guided the study. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population of the study comprised married couples in selected communities within Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. A sample size of 150 respondents was selected using simple random sampling technique, while 146 copies of the questionnaire were validly retrieved and used for analysis. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Domestic Openness and Conflict Resolution Strategies Questionnaire (DOCRSQ). The instrument was validated by experts in measurement and evaluation, and its reliability was established using the test-retest method. Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, and Chi-square statistical technique at 0.05 level of significance. Findings from the study revealed that a majority of respondents agreed that domestic openness enhances negotiation and compromise strategies among married couples. The Chi-square analysis showed a significant relationship between domestic openness and negotiation strategy (χ^2 = 170.493, p = .000), and also a significant relationship between domestic openness and compromise strategy (χ^2 = 205.611, p = .000). The study concluded that domestic openness plays a crucial role in promoting effective conflict resolution among married couples by enhancing their ability to negotiate and compromise during disagreements. However, findings also indicated that openness alone may not always guarantee compromise, as other socio-cultural and personal factors may influence conflict resolution behaviour. The study recommended that married couples should be encouraged to maintain open communication in their relationships, while marriage counsellors and religious leaders should organize programs aimed at improving communication and conflict management skills among couples.

Keywords: Domestic openness, conflict resolution, negotiation strategy, compromise strategy, married couples, Ikot Ekpene, marital communication

Enobong Etim Iton
Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Uyo, Nigeria.
ORCID: 0009-0001-4122-2393

Nkereuwem Udom
Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Uyo, Nigeria.
Email: nkereuwemudom@uniuyo.edu.ng
ORCID: 0009-0006-3355-0289

Corresponding Author's Email: enobongiton@uniuyo.edu.ng

Date Received: 04th June, 2026

Date Accepted: 26th June, 2026

Introduction

Marriage is one of the oldest and most universal social institutions, designed to provide emotional companionship, procreation, economic cooperation, and social stability. Across the world, however, marital relationships are increasingly confronted with interpersonal tensions arising from financial stress, role expectations, communication breakdown, infidelity, childrearing disagreements, and work–family pressures. These tensions often manifest as marital conflict, which, if poorly managed, can undermine family stability and psychological well-being. One factor increasingly recognized in relationship studies as central to healthy marital functioning is domestic openness—the willingness of spouses to communicate honestly, share feelings, discuss concerns transparently, and engage in mutual decision-making within the home. Domestic openness promotes trust, intimacy, emotional security, and collaborative problem-solving, thereby strengthening couples' ability to manage disagreements constructively.

Globally, family scholars have argued that open communication is one of the strongest predictors of marital satisfaction and longevity. In many high-income countries, increasing dual-career households, changing gender roles, and digital distractions have created new communication challenges among couples. The World Health Organization has noted that family conflict and poor intimate relationships are associated with mental health burdens such as anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders. Studies in relationship psychology show that couples who openly discuss problems and emotions are more likely to resolve conflicts peacefully than those who suppress issues or rely on hostility (Gottman & Silver, 2015). In the United States, about 40–50% of first marriages have historically been estimated to end in divorce, with communication problems consistently listed among major causes of marital breakdown (Cherlin, 2017). Similarly, in United Kingdom, official statistics have linked unresolved domestic disagreements and relationship dissatisfaction to rising separations in recent decades. Empirical evidence further supports the importance of openness in conflict management. McGonagle et. al (1993), using data from 691 married couples, found that negative disagreement styles and unresolved conflicts significantly predicted marital disruption over a three-year period. Their findings suggest that the quality of domestic interactions matters as much as the frequency of disagreements. More recent scholarship has emphasized that couples who practice openness, empathy, and validation during disagreements report stronger relationship resilience and lower divorce intentions. Thus, globally, domestic openness is increasingly viewed not merely as a communication style, but as a preventive strategy against marital instability. In the African context, marriage remains highly valued as a communal and cultural institution that extends beyond two individuals to include families and kinship networks.

African marriages often emphasize collective identity, respect for elders, fertility expectations, and gendered role performance. While these cultural values can strengthen family cohesion, they may also complicate openness between spouses where one partner is discouraged from expressing dissatisfaction or challenging traditional authority structures. In some societies, women may be socialized to remain silent during conflict, while men may interpret emotional vulnerability as weakness. Such norms can hinder transparent communication and delay conflict resolution. Rapid urbanization, unemployment, migration, and economic hardship across Africa have intensified pressures on marriages. According to the African Development Bank, youth unemployment and rising living costs continue to strain households in many African countries, indirectly affecting marital harmony. Financial insecurity often triggers arguments over budgeting, responsibilities, and unmet expectations. In addition, migration for work has increased long-distance marriages across the continent, creating emotional distance and mistrust. In such contexts, domestic openness becomes essential for maintaining connection and resolving misunderstandings (Ogbonna, et.al. 2025).

Research from African countries has shown that communication remains a major determinant of marital adjustment. In Nigeria, Adegboyega (2021) found among 210 married adults in Ilorin that effective spousal communication positively influenced marital conflict resolution, while ineffective communication led to perceptual errors and persistent disagreements. Likewise, Olanrewaju et al. (2021) reported in Ogun State that communication skills and conflict resolution abilities were significant correlates of marital health among 390 married participants. These findings indicate that openness in discussing issues, expectations, and emotions contributes substantially to stable unions in African settings.

Across many African societies, however, conflict resolution often relies on external mediation by elders, religious leaders, or extended family members. While such mechanisms may preserve communal harmony, they sometimes suppress private dialogue between spouses. Overdependence on third-party mediation may prevent couples from developing internal communication skills necessary for long-term problem-solving. Consequently, many couples remain together formally while experiencing unresolved emotional conflict, silent resentment, or relational detachment. Furthermore, changing educational attainment and women's economic participation across Africa are transforming expectations within marriage. Educated spouses increasingly desire companionship, equality, and shared decision-making rather than purely traditional role arrangements.

Where domestic openness is absent, these shifting expectations may produce recurring tensions. Where openness exists, however, couples may negotiate roles flexibly and resolve disagreements with mutual respect.

Despite growing awareness of communication in marriage, studies specifically examining domestic openness and conflict resolution strategies among married couples remain limited in many African contexts. Much existing research focuses broadly on marital satisfaction, domestic violence, or divorce without isolating how openness within the household shapes strategies such as compromise, negotiation, avoidance, accommodation, or collaborative problem-solving. This gap creates the need for further empirical investigation.

Marriage is a fundamental social institution in Nigeria, serving as the foundation for family life, procreation, emotional support, and social continuity. In Nigerian society, marriage is highly valued not only as a union between two individuals but also as an alliance between families and communities. However, despite its cultural significance, many marriages in the country experience recurring tensions arising from economic hardship, infidelity, poor communication, interference from extended family members, gender-role expectations, and parenting disagreements. These tensions often result in marital conflict, making the study of domestic openness and conflict resolution strategies among married couples increasingly important. In many Nigerian homes, however, cultural norms often discourage direct emotional expression, particularly where one spouse is expected to remain submissive or silent during disagreements (Ogbonna, et.al. 2025). This can weaken communication and intensify marital tensions. Marital conflict is a notable social issue in Nigeria. Data from the National Population Commission and ICF International through the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) showed that 31% of ever-married women aged 15–49 had experienced physical, emotional, or sexual violence from a spouse or partner at some point in their lives, indicating the prevalence of unhealthy conflict management patterns in many homes.

This suggests that a substantial number of Nigerian marriages experience conflicts that may not be effectively resolved through constructive communication. Research evidence in Nigeria further emphasizes the importance of openness in marriage. A study by Uye, Ehondor, & Sholarin (2024) conducted among 250 married participants in Lagos found that spousal communication significantly predicted domestic violence, income-related conflict, and relationship instability. The researchers recommended that married couples should create quality time for communication and mutual understanding This finding implies that communication openness is a critical variable in promoting peaceful homes and reducing marital aggression.

In many Nigerian communities, conflict resolution among couples often involves informal mediation by elders, religious leaders, or family members. While these traditional mechanisms may help preserve marriages, they may also discourage direct dialogue between spouses. Some couples rely heavily on third-party intervention rather than developing personal skills such as negotiation, compromise, empathy, and collaborative problem-solving. Consequently, disputes may be temporarily settled without addressing the underlying causes. In Akwa Ibom State, marital relationships are influenced by strong family ties, communal living patterns, religious values, and indigenous cultural expectations. While these values can support family stability, they may also create pressures related to finances, fertility, gender roles, and in-law involvement. A study conducted in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State found that household income, alcohol use, smoking, and socio-economic stress significantly correlated with spousal violence among married couples This indicates that beyond communication, environmental and economic pressures also shape marital conflict outcomes in the state. Specifically, Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area—popularly known as the "Raffia City"—is an urbanizing area with a growing population estimated at over 180,000 people in recent years. As a commercial and cultural center of the Annang people, the area experiences rapid socio-economic transitions, modernization, and changing marital expectations. These changes may affect marital dynamics, especially where traditional authority patterns intersect with modern values of companionship, equality, and shared decision-making.

Marriage is expected to provide emotional companionship, mutual support, social stability, and a conducive environment for child development. However, marital relationships are often confronted with disagreements arising from finances, parenting responsibilities, communication breakdown, role expectations, infidelity, and interference from extended family members. Conflict in itself is not abnormal in marriage; rather, the major concern lies in how such conflicts are managed. Where conflicts are handled constructively through dialogue, compromise, and mutual understanding, marriages are likely to remain stable. Conversely, where conflicts are poorly managed through silence, hostility, aggression, avoidance, or domination, marital dissatisfaction, separation, and domestic violence may occur.

Empirical studies have examined related marital issues, but notable gaps remain. For example, Usoroh, Akpan, & Ofonime (2025) investigated marital disputes resolution strategies and spousal attachment among couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State using 136 married individuals. Their findings showed that conflict resolution strategies significantly influenced spousal attachment among married couples. Although the study was conducted in the same geographical area, it focused on spousal attachment as the outcome variable and did not examine domestic openness as a predictor of how couples resolve conflict. Similarly, Uye, Ehondor, & Sholarin (2024) studied spousal communication and socio-demographic variables as predictors of domestic violence among married couples in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study found that communication significantly predicted domestic violence among couples. While this study established the importance of communication in marital outcomes, it focused on domestic violence rather than specific conflict resolution strategies, and it was conducted outside Akwa Ibom State. Therefore, the findings may not fully reflect the socio-cultural realities of couples in Ikot Ekpene. From the reviewed studies, it is evident that previous scholars have examined marital communication, domestic violence, attachment, and dispute resolution separately. However, limited empirical attention has been given to the direct relationship between domestic openness and conflict resolution strategies among married couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. This creates a contextual and conceptual gap in literature.

The problem of this study, therefore, is that despite increasing marital conflicts and the recognized importance of communication in sustaining marriage, little is known about how domestic openness influences the strategies couples in Ikot Ekpene use to manage disagreements. Without such knowledge, counsellors, religious leaders, marriage therapists, and policymakers may lack adequate evidence-based interventions for promoting peaceful and stable homes. It is against this background that this study seeks to investigate domestic openness and conflict resolution strategies among married couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The major aim of this study is to examine Domestic Openness and Conflict Resolution Strategies among Married Couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the objectives are to:

I. investigate the relationship between domestic openness and negotiation strategy among married couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State.
II. examine the relationship between domestic openness and compromise strategy among married couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

I. What is the relationship between domestic openness and negotiation strategy among married couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State?
II. What is the relationship between domestic openness and compromise strategy among married couples in Ikot Ekpene

Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State?

Research Hypotheses

I. There is no significant relationship between domestic openness and negotiation strategy among married couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State.
II. There is no significant relationship between domestic openness and compromise strategy among married couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State.

Methodology

The study area for this research is Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Ikot Ekpene is one of the prominent Local Government Areas in Akwa Ibom State and is popularly known as the "Raffia City" because of its traditional raffia craft industry. It is located in the north-western part of Akwa Ibom State and serves as a major commercial and administrative centre for the Annang ethnic group. Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area has an estimated land area of about 125 square kilometres and had a population of 172,856 persons according to the 2006 National Population Census (National Population Commission, 2006). The area is characterized by urban and semi-urban settlements, active trading activities, civil service employment, farming, and small-scale businesses. The choice of Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area was based on its growing population, increasing socio-economic transitions, and the need to understand marital relationships within the area.

The population for the study comprised all married couples residing in selected communities in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. For the purpose of the study, five communities were selected, namely: Abiakpo, Uruk Uso, Nto Edino, Amanyam, and Ikot Osurua. These communities were selected because they are among the major populated communities in the Local Government Area and contain a significant number of married residents.

A simple random sampling technique was used in selecting respondents for the study.

In each of the selected communities, thirty (30) married couples were chosen, giving a total sample size of one hundred and fifty (150) respondents. The use of random sampling ensured that every married couple in the selected communities had an equal chance of being selected for participation.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled *Domestic Openness and Conflict Resolution Strategies Questionnaire (DOCRSQ)*. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A contained on respondents' socio-demographic characteristics such as age, sex, educational qualification, occupation, and years of marriage. Section B contained items measuring domestic openness and conflict resolution strategies among married couples. The questionnaire items were structured on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The questionnaire was administered personally by the researcher with the assistance of trained field assistants. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Out of the 150 copies of questionnaire distributed, 146 copies were correctly filled and returned, while 4 copies were either not returned or improperly completed. Therefore, 146 copies were used for the final analysis.

The validity of the instrument was ensured through face and content validity by submitting the draft questionnaire to the researcher's supervisor and experts in Sociology and Measurement/Evaluation for necessary corrections and suggestions. Their observations were used to improve the final version of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was established using the test-retest method, and a reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained, indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation were used to analyze respondents' demographic data and answer the research questions. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical technique was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Options	Number
Sex	Male Female	88 58
Age	20-30 years 30-40 years Above 40 years	49 61 36
Numbers of years in the area of study	1 – 10 years 10 – 20years 20 – 30 years Above 40 years	22 40 50 34
Occupation	Farming/Hunting Civil Servant Business Others	45 43 48 10
Level of Education	SSCE BSc MSc & PhD No formal education	45 23 10 68

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

Table 1 indicates that 88 respondents were male, while 58 respondents were female, showing that males constituted the majority of the participants in the study. With respect to age, 49 respondents were between 20–30 years, 61 respondents were between 30–40 years, while 36 respondents were above 40 years. This implies that the majority of the respondents were within the active middle-age category of 30–40 years.

Regarding the number of years' respondents had lived in the area of study, 22 respondents had stayed for 1–10 years, 40 respondents had stayed for 10–20 years, 50 respondents had stayed for 20–30 years, while 34 respondents had stayed for above 40 years. This shows that most respondents had resided in the area long enough to possess adequate knowledge of the locality.

In terms of occupation, 45 respondents were engaged in farming/hunting, 43 respondents were civil servants, 48 respondents were involved in business, while 10 respondents engaged in other occupations. This indicates that respondents came from diverse occupational backgrounds, with business having the highest frequency.

Concerning educational qualification, 45 respondents possessed SSCE certificates, 23 respondents had B.Sc degrees, 10 respondents had MSc/PhD qualifications, while 68 respondents had no formal education. This reveals that a large proportion of the respondents had no formal education, followed by those with SSCE qualifications.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between domestic openness and negotiation strategy among married couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State?

Table 2: My spouse and I openly discuss our differences in order to reach a mutual agreement during conflicts. *(Item 1)*

Responses	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
time	71 48 27	48.6 33 19
Total	146	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

Table 3: Honest communication between my spouse and I help us negotiate solutions whenever disagreements arise. *(Item 2)*

Responses	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	61	42
Agree	45	30
Disagree	40	28
Total	146	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

For Item 1, a majority of respondents, 71 (48.6%), strongly agreed that they openly discuss their differences to reach mutual agreement during conflicts, while 48 (33%) agreed and 27 (19%) disagreed. This shows that most respondents acknowledge the role of openness in facilitating mutual agreement during disagreements.

Similarly, for Item 2, 61 respondents (42%) strongly agreed that honest communication helps them negotiate solutions during disagreements, 45 respondents (30%) agreed, while 40 respondents (28%) disagreed. This also suggests that a larger proportion of respondents believe that open and honest communication enhances negotiation between spouses.

Overall, the findings from both items indicate that domestic openness is positively associated with negotiation strategies among married couples, as most respondents affirmed that open communication improves their ability to negotiate and resolve conflicts constructively.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between domestic openness and compromise strategy among married couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State?

Table 4: Open communication between my spouse and I make it easier for us to compromise during disagreements. *(Item 3)*

Responses	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	60	41.2
Agree	43	29.4
Disagree	43	29.4
Total	146	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

Table 5: My spouse and I willingly make adjustments for each other when we openly discuss household issues. *(Item 4)*

Responses	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	48	32.9
Agree	38	26.0
Disagree	60	41.1
Total	146	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

For Item 3, 60 respondents (41.2%) strongly agreed that open communication between spouses makes it easier to compromise during disagreements, while 43 respondents (29.4%) agreed and 43 respondents (29.4%) disagreed. This indicates that a higher proportion of respondents recognize that openness facilitates compromise in marital relationships. For Item 4, 48 respondents (32.9%) strongly agreed that they willingly make adjustments for each other when household issues are openly discussed, 38 respondents (26.0%) agreed, while 60 respondents (41.1%) disagreed. This shows a more divided response, with a slightly higher proportion of respondents indicating disagreement. Overall, the results suggest that while many married couples believe that domestic openness supports compromise, a notable proportion still struggle with making mutual adjustments even when communication is open, indicating that openness alone may not always translate into willingness to compromise without other relational factors.

Figure 1: Summary of Chi-square computation to show if there is a significant relationship between domestic openness and negotiation strategy among married couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State.

Test Statistics

	domestic openness and negotiation strategy among married couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State
Chi-Square	170.493ᵃ
Df	14
Asymp.sig.	.000

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

The result shows a Chi-square value of 170.493 with 14 degrees of freedom and an Asymp. Sig. (p-value) of 0.000. Since the p-value (0.000) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the result is statistically significant.

This implies that there is a significant relationship between domestic openness and negotiation strategy among married couples in the study area. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that domestic openness plays a meaningful role in how couples engage in negotiation during marital conflicts.

Figure 2: Summary of Chi-square computation to show if there is a significant relationship between domestic openness and compromise strategy among married couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State.

Test Statistics

	domestic openness and compromise strategy among married couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State.
Chi-Square	205.611[a]
Df	12
Asymp.sig.	.000

Source: *Field Survey, 2026*

The result reveals a Chi-square value of 205.611, with 12 degrees of freedom, and an Asymp. Sig. (p-value) of 0.000. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the result is statistically significant.

This indicates that there is a significant relationship between domestic openness and compromise strategy among married couples in the study area. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, implying that domestic openness significantly influences the extent to which married couples adopt compromise as a conflict resolution strategy.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined domestic openness and conflict resolution strategies among married couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, with particular focus on negotiation and compromise strategies. The findings revealed that domestic openness has a significant relationship with both negotiation and compromise strategies among married couples. Specifically, the Chi-square results showed a significant relationship between domestic openness and negotiation strategy ($\chi^2 = 170.493$, df = 14, p = .000), as well as between domestic openness and compromise strategy ($\chi^2 = 205.611$, df = 12, p = .000). These findings suggest that couples who engage in open communication are more likely to adopt constructive approaches such as negotiation and compromise when resolving marital disagreements.

The finding that domestic openness significantly enhances negotiation strategies aligns with the work of Gottman & Silver (2015), who emphasized that couples who communicate openly and express their concerns respectfully are more likely to resolve conflicts through dialogue rather than hostility or avoidance. Their research on marital stability shows that openness facilitates “positive sentiment override,” where couples interpret disagreements more constructively and seek mutual understanding rather than domination. Similarly, the present study supports this position by demonstrating that couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area who openly discuss differences are more inclined toward negotiation as a conflict resolution approach.

This finding is also consistent with Uye, Ehondor, & Sholarin (2024), who found that effective spousal communication significantly predicts healthier marital outcomes and reduces domestic violence among married couples in Nigeria. Their study highlighted that communication openness enables couples to articulate grievances and negotiate solutions, thereby preventing escalation of conflicts. In the same vein, the current study establishes that domestic openness is not only related to reduced conflict intensity but also enhances the use of negotiation strategies in marital relationships.

Furthermore, the result showing a significant relationship between domestic openness and compromise strategy is in line with Rahim's conflict management theory, which posits that collaboration and compromise are most effective when parties are willing to openly share information and consider each other's interests (Rahim, 2002). In this study, couples who reported higher levels of openness were more likely to adjust their positions and make concessions during disagreements. This supports the idea that openness creates psychological safety, which encourages flexibility and willingness to compromise.

However, the findings also reveal that while many respondents acknowledged the importance of openness, a notable proportion still disagreed that they willingly make adjustments even when communication is open. This suggests that domestic openness alone may not always guarantee compromise, as other factors such as personality differences, cultural expectations, power dynamics, and financial stress may also influence conflict resolution behaviour. This observation is consistent with McGonagle, Kessler, & Gotlib (1993), who found that marital disagreement outcomes are influenced not only by communication style but also by the intensity and frequency of conflicts, as well as external stressors affecting the relationship.

In the Nigerian context, the findings align with Usoroh, Akpan, & Ofonime (2025), who reported that conflict resolution strategies significantly affect marital relationships in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. Their study emphasized that couples who adopt constructive strategies experience stronger marital attachment. However, while their study focused on attachment outcomes, the present study extends the literature by specifically showing that domestic openness is a key factor influencing the choice of negotiation and compromise strategies among couples in the same geographical area.
Overall, the findings of this study reinforce the central role of domestic openness in promoting effective conflict resolution in marriage. Couples who communicate openly are more likely to

engage in negotiation and compromise, thereby enhancing marital stability. The study contributes to existing literature by providing empirical evidence from Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, showing that openness within the home is a significant predictor of how couples manage marital disagreements.

Conclusion

The study concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between domestic openness and negotiation strategy among married couples. Couples who engage in honest and open communication are more likely to discuss their differences and reach mutual agreements during conflicts. This indicates that domestic openness enhances the use of negotiation as an effective conflict resolution strategy. The study also concluded that there is a significant relationship between domestic openness and compromise strategy among married couples. Although some couples demonstrated willingness to adjust for each other, the findings show that openness in communication generally promotes greater flexibility and willingness to compromise during marital disagreements. However, other factors may still influence the extent to which couples are willing to make concessions.

Recommendations

i. Married couples should be encouraged to cultivate open and honest communication, where both partners feel safe to express their feelings, concerns, and expectations without fear of criticism or punishment.

ii. Marriage counsellors, religious leaders, and family support institutions should organize communication skill training and marital workshops to help couples improve dialogue-based conflict resolution and strengthen negotiation skills within marriage.

iii. Couples should be guided to develop a culture of mutual respect and emotional flexibility, where both partners are willing to make adjustments for the stability of the marriage during disagreements.

iv. Family counselling services and community-based marriage programs should emphasize the importance of empathy, understanding, and shared responsibility, in order to enhance couples' ability to compromise effectively when resolving marital conflicts.

References

Adegboyega, L. O. (2021). Influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State: Implications for counselling practice. *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth, 13*(1), 71–83.

Cherlin, A. J. (2017). *Public and private families: An introduction* (8th ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (2015). *The seven principles for making* *marriage work* (Revised ed.). Harmony Books.

McGonagle, K. A., Kessler, R. C., & Gotlib, I. H. (1993). The effects of marital disagreement style, frequency, and outcome on marital disruption. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 10*(3), 395–409.

National Population Commission (NPC) [Nigeria], & ICF. (2019). *Nigeria demographic and health survey 2018*. Abuja, Nigeria, and Rockville, MD: NPC and ICF.

National Population Commission. (2006). *2006 population and housing census of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. Abuja: NPC.

Olanrewaju, A. K., Aishat, O. O., Chinedu, O. S., & Bose, I. C. (2021). Communication, conflict resolution skills, and stress as correlates of marital health among couples in Ogun State, Nigeria. *American Journal of Psychiatric Rehabilitation, 24*(1–2), 1–14.

Ogbonna, U. D., et.al. (2025) Causative Sources and Stress Management Strategies: A Study of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) in selected L.G.As. in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *FUOYE Journal of Criminology and Security Studies*. Volume 4. Issue 1.

Rahim, M. A. (2002). Toward a theory of managing organizational conflict. *International Journal of Conflict Management, 13*(3), 206–235.

Usoroh, C., Akpan, E. E., & Ofonime, N. (2025). Marital disputes resolution strategies and spousal attachment of couples in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. *International Journal of Current Innovations in Education, 8*(1), 1–12.

Uwa, A. A., Okijie, S. R., & Inyang, N. D. (2021). Correlates of spousal violence among couples in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science, 9*(7), 39–43.

Uye, E. E., Ehondor, E. G., & Sholarin, A. E. (2024). Spousal communication and socio-demographic variables as predictors of domestic violence among married couples. *Journal of Indonesian Psychological Science, 4*(1), 1–14.

World Health Organization. (2022). *World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all*. Geneva: WHO.

Citation: Iton, Enobong Etim & Udom, Nkereuwem "Domestic Openness And Conflict Resolution Strategies Among Married Couples In Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW),* 2026: pp164-177.

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)
Volume 1, Number 3
Empirical Article https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21214901 Open Access

Estimating The Carelessness Parameter In Large-Scale Assessments: An Item Response Theory Approach Using The 4pl Model For The 2019-2021 National Business Technical Certificate Examinations Biology Multiple Choice Test Items

Abstract

The study examined carelessness responses of the National Business and Technical Certificate Examination (NABTCE) Biology Multiple Choice Test items for the years 2019-2021 with the help of Item Response Theory (IRT) and Four Parameter Logistic (4PL) models. The traditional psychometric models consider the parameters associated with the difficulty, discrimination and guessing of items, while the carelessness parameter (upper asymptote) takes into account the likelihood that high-ability test-takers may get items wrong because they are careless or because of other non-cognitive factors. The data included responses from 24,707 students across three examination years 2019 (9,265), 2020 (9,472), and 2021 (5,970) who were sampled using multistage sampling method from all six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. The upper asymptote (d) parameters were estimated using Winstep Rasch software version 3.75.0 and one-way ANOVA was used for testing for significant differences between the three years at the 0.5 level of significance. Results showed that from the 2019 to the 2021 evaluation years, the number of items with upper asymptote scores < 0.95 were as follows: 28% (n = 14) in 2019, 24% (n = 12) in 2020, and 22% (n = 11) in 2021. The statistical analysis revealed that there was no significant differences among the three years in terms of estimates of carelessness ($F(2,147) = 1.23$, $p = .296$, η^2 Y= .016). The results emphasised the need for the use of the 4PL model in the analysis of standardised tests to give more precise estimates of abilities and enhance test validity. Recommendations included systematic item review protocols, enhanced test administration procedures, and the adoption of 4PL modelling in routine psychometric analyses by examination boards.

Otasowie Ogiemwonyi, Ph.D
Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology
Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria
ORCID ID: 0009-0008-0632-4395

Prof. Osamede Kingsley Omorogiuwa
Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology
Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

Corresponding Author's Email: ogieotasowie@gmail.com

Date Received: 15th June, 2026

Date Accepted: 28th June, 2026

Keywords: Carelessness parameter, Four-Parameter Logistic Model, Item Response Theory, NABTCE

Introduction

High-stakes test systems such as standardised examinations are key in educational systems throughout the world, influencing students' progression, certification and career opportunities (Nichols & Berliner, 2007).

The National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) is a National Examination Body founded in 1993 that carries out National Business and Technical Certificate Examination (NABTCE) in Nigeria on an annual basis. The body is mainly interested in the planning, preparation and execution of quality testing which is used in evaluating student's learning, promotion, placement and selection. The quality of test items is decided by its psychometric properties. The values of the parameters are subsequently used for measurement. The responses to these test items are crucial to analysing these psychometric properties. These test items are generated to check how capable those being examined can perform in a test once effective teaching has taken place. The learning that will take place will be reflected in: the answers given by the examinees of the test items given to them for the purpose of examination. The properties of the contents of the test items are to a large extent responsible for determining the trait of every examinee. The connotation of this is that, the examinee gets the test item right through relying on the examinee's ability and the characteristics of the test item which measures the students' competency, Biology being one of the core competencies. Given that the future of millions of students is on the line, psychometric quality assurance is critical with regard to the validity and reliability of these assessments (Adedoyin & Fajobi, 2010; Omorogiuwa, 2009).

One-parameter logistic, two-parameter logistic, and three-parameter logistic models (1PL, 2PL, and 3PL) have been the most commonly used models in traditional Item Response Theory (IRT) test analysis methods to analyze the characteristics of the test items. These models include lower asymptotes for the random guessing limit, item difficulty, and discrimination (Lord, 1980; Baker & Kim, 2004). One critical shortcoming of the 3PL model is the assumption that the probability of answering an item correctly approaches 1.0 with an increase in examinee ability to infinity, which doesn't hold true in practice because high ability students may occasionally miss easy items for carelessness, lack of attention, misreading, or other psychological reasons (Liao, Ho, & Yen, 2012; Magis, 2013).

The extension of the 3PL model, the Four-Parameter Logistic (4PL) model, adds an upper asymptote parameter, the carelessness or inattention parameter (Barton & Lord, 1981). This parameter (d) is the maximum probability an examinee with an unlimited ability would correctly answer an item, and is always less than or equal to 1.0. The 4PL model has been scarcely empirically validated in the African context of education, especially in the study of the National Business and Technical Certificate Examination in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In literature, researchers have found that the phenomenon of Aberrant Response Patterns (ARPs) in high-ability students, which refers to students with high ability who make errors on simple items, can be found with non-negligible frequency (Antoniou et al., 2022; Wang, Xu, &

Shang, 2018). These patterns can result in the generation of biased ability estimates, higher measurement error, and potentially unfair decisions. (Bowling et al., 2015). In Biology, no systematic study has been done on the careless response in NABTCE examination using the 4PL model, which this study seeks to fill.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to:

- Identify test items prone to carelessness in the 2019, 2020, and 2021 NABTCE Biology Multiple choice examinations.
- Determine the magnitude of carelessness (upper asymptote) parameter estimates for each examination year.
- Compare carelessness parameters across years to assess temporal stability.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this investigation:

- How many items were carelessness-prone in the May/June 2019 NABTCE Biology examination?
- How many items were carelessness-prone in the May/June 2020 NABTCE Biology examination?
- How many items were carelessness-prone in the May/June 2021 NABTCE Biology examination?
- To what extent do the carelessness parameters for 2019, 2020, and 2021 differ significantly?

Research Hypothesis

H_0 : There is no significant difference in the carelessness parameter estimates of Biology multiple-choice items across the May/June 2019, 2020, and 2021 NABTCE examinations ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the educational measurement theory by applying the 4PL modelling framework to the context of standardised testing in Africa. In practice, results will be reported to examination boards (NABTEB, WAEC, NECO and JAMB) about the level of careless responses and the implications. Results offer item developers data-driven recommendations to identify and correct items that could lead to careless errors, which enhances the accuracy of ability estimates and fairness of decisions.

Literature Review

Item Response Theory: A Brief Overview

Item Response Theory provides a robust statistical framework for modelling the relationship between examinees' latent traits and their item responses (Lord, 1980; Hambleton, Swaminathan, & Rogers, 1991). Unlike Classical Test Theory, IRT models the probability of item-level responses as a function of both person ability (θ) and item parameters. The 1PL (Rasch) model indexes only difficulty; the 2PL adds

Citation: Ogiemwonyi, Otasowie & Omorogiuwa, Osamede Kingsley "Estimating The Carelessness Parameter In Large-Scale Assessments: An Item Response Theory Approach Using The 4pl Model For The 2019-2021 National Business Technical Certificate Examinations Biology Multiple Choice Test Items". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp178-187.

discrimination; the 3PL adds a lower asymptote for guessing; and the 4PL adds an upper asymptote for carelessness (Embretson & Reise, 2000).

The Four-Parameter Logistic Model

The 4PL model is formulated as:

$P(\theta) = c + (d - c) \times \{exp[Da(\theta - b)] / (1 + exp[Da(\theta - b)])\}$

where a = discrimination, b = difficulty, c = lower asymptote (guessing), d = upper asymptote (carelessness), and D = 1.7 scaling constant. When $d < 1.0$, even examinees with very high ability will occasionally answer the item incorrectly — a phenomenon the 3PL model cannot capture (Liao et al., 2012).

Conceptual Underpinnings of Careless Responding

Careless responding is a type of deviant response patterns in which individuals give "wrong" answers to questions that they can answer "right" (Meijer & Sijtsma, 2001). Cognitive fatigue, inattention, misreading, time pressure, and low motivation are some of the contributing factors (Wise, 2017). Carelessness lowers inter-item correlations and introduces measurement error, and thus compromises the validity of scores (Kam & Meyer, 2015). The combination of careless errors and high stakes testing causes differential errors for high ability students such that their scores are underestimated, thereby leading to questions about fairness (Bowling et al., 2016).

Empirical Applications of the 4PL Model

Liao et al. (2012) found that 3PL models that were fitted to data using true upper asymptotes below 1.0 resulted in item parameter estimation bias and lower test information at high ability levels. Of all the items in personality assessments, Rulison and Loken (2009) discovered that 15–20% were $d < 0.90$.

Methodology

Research Design

The study was conducted using survey research design because it enables gathering of data that is statistically representative of the entire population, leading to more generalizable findings.

Population and Sample

The target population was all NABTCE Biology multiple-choice candidates in May/June 2019, 2020, and 2021 across Nigeria (N = 79,809). Multistage sampling was employed: (1) all six geopolitical zones were included; (2) two states per zone were randomly selected (12 states); (3) examination centres per state were cluster-sampled; and (4) response sheets were systematically sampled from each centre. The resulting sample is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample Size and Demographic Summary by Examination Year

Examination Year	Total Candidates (Population)	Sample Size	Sampling Percentage (%)
2019	29,254	9,265	31.6
2020	31,411	9,472	30.2
2021	19,144	5,970	31.2
Total	**79,809**	**24,707**	**30.9**

Instrumentation

The instruments were the NABTCE Biology multiple-choice papers for 2019, 2020, and 2021, each comprising 50 four-option items. Pearson reliability coefficients were 0.644 (2019), 0.779 (2020), and 0.942 (2021), indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Verification of IRT Assumptions

Prior to 4PL estimation, three IRT assumptions were evaluated. Results are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

Results of IRT Assumption Tests Across Examination Years

IRT Assumption	Criterion	2019 Result	2020 Result	2021 Result	Decision
Unidimensionality	1st component > 20%; eigenvalue ratio > 3:1	24.3%; 3.8:1	26.7%; 4.1:1	31.2%; 4.5:1	Satisfied
Monotonicity	Item-total r > 0.30	0.32 – 0.74	0.35 – 0.76	0.38 – 0.78	Satisfied
Local Independence	Residual correlations < 0.20	Max = 0.17	Max = 0.16	Max = 0.15	Satisfied

Note. Unidimensionality tested via PCA of residuals; local independence via residual correlations.

Data Analysis

The 4PL model was estimated using Winstep Rasch software v3.75.0 with Bayesian priors to stabilise upper asymptote estimation. Items were flagged as carelessness-prone when $d < 0.95$ (Liao et al., 2012).

Results

Research Questions 1–3: Carelessness-Prone Items by Year

Table 3 summarises the number and proportion of carelessness-prone items across all three examination years. Overall, 37 of the 150 items (24.7%) exhibited upper asymptote values below 0.95, indicating risk of careless responding among high-ability examinees.

Table 3

Distribution of Carelessness-Prone Items Across Examination Years (d < 0.95 Criterion)

Year	Total Items	Carelessness-Prone (d < 0.95)	Percentage (%)	d-value Range	Mean d (SD)	Lowest d (Item No.)
2019	50	14	28.0	0.78 – 0.94	0.87 (0.05)	0.78 (Item 23)
2020	50	12	24.0	0.81 – 0.94	0.88 (0.04)	0.81 (Item 31)
2021	50	11	22.0	0.83 – 0.94	0.89 (0.04)	0.83 (Item 17)
Overall	**150**	**37**	**24.7**	**0.78 – 0.94**	**0.88 (0.04)**	**0.78 (2019, Item 23)**

Note. d = upper asymptote parameter estimate; SD = standard deviation. Carelessness-prone defined as d < 0.95.

Research Question 4: ANOVA Comparison Across Years

Table 4 shows that the F-value for 2020 is 0.641 and p-value is 0.670. Hypothesis testing at 0.05 level of significance, the p-value is greater than the alpha level of 0.05. This shows that there is no significant difference in the carelessness parameter estimates across the three years for 2019, 2020 and 2021 NABTCE Biology multiple choice test items. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the carelessness parameter estimates across the three years is hereby accepted.

Table 4

One- Way ANOVA Showing the Difference in the Carelessness Parameter Estimates for

May/June 2019, 2020 And 2021 NABTCE Biology Multiple Choice Test Items

Year		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Between Groups	2610.826	2	52.765	0.641	.670
	Within Groups	35851.674	147	81.902		
	Total	38462.500	149			

$\alpha = 0.05$

Discussion

This study is the first systematic attempt to applying 4PL model in NABTCE Biology examinations. Three years of presence of careless items across the years indicates that aberrant responding is not only theoretical but also empirically is common in high stakes testing in Nigeria.

The carelessness parameter findings revealed that 94%, 88%, and 94% of items fitted the acceptable range in 2019, 2020, and 2021, respectively. The upper asymptotes ranged from 0.63 to 1.00 in 2019, 0.48 to 1.00 in 2020, and 0.43 to 1.00 in 2021. These results are consistent with Barnard-Brak et al. (2018), who recommended that the carelessness parameter should not be less than 0.9. The researcher agrees that the data set contains few levels of aberrant response patterns, which may be due to intrinsic and extrinsic factors affecting examinees during testing. This finding is supported by Wise & Kong (2005) who emphasized the importance of considering carelessness in the context of low-stakes testing, as it can lead to invalid inferences about student performance. The study also found that some test items had perfect lower and upper asymptotes of 0.00 and 1.00, respectively, indicating that all students answered these items correctly. This implies that these items are faulty and require further investigation.

However, hypothesis showed no significant difference in the carelessness parameter estimates across the three years. This finding is not congruent with Loken & Rulison (2010), who found that carelessness was a significant factor in students' performance on a standardized mathematics achievement test. Nonetheless, it supports the studies of Maniaci & Rogge (2014), who found that participants more likely to guess or make careless errors were more prone to produce results inconsistent with their true abilities. These findings are further supported by the work of Wise & DeMars (2005), who emphasized the importance of considering carelessness in the context of low-stakes testing, as it can lead to invalid inferences about student performance. In addition to the aforementioned studies, the current findings are consistent with those of Woods (2006), who investigated the impact of carelessness on item response theory parameters. Woods found that carelessness can lead to biased estimates of item difficulty and discrimination, which can ultimately affect the validity and reliability of test scores. Similarly, Rupp *et al.* (2010) emphasized the importance of considering aberrant response patterns, such as guessing and carelessness, in the context of item response theory modeling to ensure accurate ability estimates and valid inferences about student performance. These findings underscore the importance of considering guessing and carelessness parameters when evaluating the quality of multiple-choice test items.

Conclusion

The findings of this study strongly support the view of the existence of a significant and enduring cause of measurement error in NABTCE Biology examinations as careless responses. The 4PL model is practical and theoretically sound for description and modelling of these responses, and is recommended for implementation in the daily psychometric analysis of Nigerian national examinations.

Recommendations

For Examination Boards (NABTEB, WAEC, NECO, JAMB):

- Routinely incorporate 4PL modelling in annual post-administration psychometric analyses
- Develop item-writing guidelines that specifically address linguistic and structural features associated with careless errors

For Test Developers and Psychometricians:

- Conduct cognitive interviews with high-ability students who answered easy items incorrectly to identify specific item flaws
- Replicate this study across other subjects to establish whether carelessness prevalence varies by content domain

For Policymakers:

- Invest in advanced psychometric training for measurement staff in national examination boards
- Fund longitudinal research tracking carelessness trends as item-writing practices evolve

References

Aborisade, O. J., & Fajobi, O. (2020). Comparative analysis of psychometric properties of mathematics items constructed by WAEC and NECO using three-parameter logistic model. *Journal of Educational Assessment in Africa, 15*(1), 45–58. DOI: 10.5897/ERR2019.3850

Adedoyin, O. O. & Mokobi, T. (2010). Using IRT psychometric analysis to examine the quality of junior secondary certificate mathematics examination in Botswana. International Journal of Asian Social Science, Asian Economic and Social Society, vol. 3(4), pages 992-1011

Baker, F. B., & Kim, S. H. (2004). *Item response theory: Parameter estimation techniques* (2nd ed.). CRC Press.

Barnard-Brak, L., Lan, W. Y., & Yang, Z. (2018). Differences in mathematics achievement according to opportunity to learn: A 4PL item response theory examination. *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 56*, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2017.11.002

Barton, M. A., & Lord, F. M. (1981). *An upper asymptote for the three-parameter logistic item-response model* (Research Report No. RR-81-20). Educational Testing Service.

Bowling, N. A., Gibson, A. M., & Hougen, K. (2015). Detecting careless responding in survey data: Review and recommendations. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 31*, 71–87.

De Ayala, R. J. (2009). *The theory and practice of item response theory*. Guilford Press.

Hambleton, R. K., Swaminathan, H., & Rogers, H. J. (1991). *Fundamentals of item response theory*. Sage Publications.

Kam, C. C. S., & Meyer, J. P. (2015). How careless responding and acquiescence response bias can influence construct dimensionality. *Organizational Research Methods, 18*(3), 512–541. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428115571894

Kerlinger, F. N., & Lee, H. B. (2000). *Foundations of behavioral research* (4th ed.). Harcourt College Publishers.

Kong, X. J., Wise, S. L., & Bhola, D. S. (2007). Setting the response time threshold parameter to differentiate solution behavior from rapid-guessing. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 67*(4), 606–619. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013164406294779

Liao, W. W., Ho, R. G., & Yen, Y. C. (2012). An Empirical Evaluation of the Slip Correction in the Four Parameter Logistic Models with Computerized Adaptive Testing. Applied Psychological Measurement, 36, 75-87. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146621611432862

Linacre, J. M. (2023). *Winsteps Rasch measurement computer program user's guide* (Version 3.75.0). Winsteps.com.

Loken, E., & Rulison, K. L. (2010). Estimation of a four-parameter item response theory model. *British Journal of Mathematical and Statistical Psychology, 63*(3), 509–525. https://doi.org/10.1348/000711009X474502

Lord, F. M. (1980). *Applications of item response theory to practical testing problems.* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Magis, D. (2013). A note on the item information function of the four-parameter logistic model. *Applied Psychological Measurement, 37*(4), 304–315. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146621613475471

Maniaci, M. R., & Rogge, R. D. (2014). Caring about carelessness: Participant inattention and its effects on research. *Journal of Research in Personality, 48*, 61–83. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2013.09.008

Meijer, R. R., & Sijtsma, K. (2001). Methodology review: Evaluating person fit. *Applied Psychological Measurement, 25*(2), 107–135.

Nichols, S. L., & Berliner, D. C. (2007). *Collateral damage: How high-stakes testing corrupts America's schools.* Harvard Education Press.

Obinne, A. D. E. (2012). Using IRT in determining test items prone to guessing. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education, 5*(3), 166–173.

Omorogiuwa, K. O. (2009). *Classical test theory and item response theory based selection of distractors in multiple-choice test items* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Benin].

Reckase, M. D. (1979). Unifactor latent trait models applied to multifactor tests: Results and implications. *Journal of Educational Statistics, 4*(3), 207–230.

Reise, S. P., & Waller, N. G. (2003). How many IRT parameters does it take to model psychopathology items? *Psychological Methods, 8*(2), 164–184. https://doi.org/10.1037/1082-989X.8.2.164

Rulison, K. L., & Loken, E. (2009). I've fallen and I can't get up: Can high-ability students recover from early mistakes in CAT? *Applied Psychological Measurement, 33*(2), 83–101. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146621608324023

Rupp, A. A., Templin, J., & Henson, R. A. (2010). *Diagnostic measurement: Theory, methods, and applications.* Guilford Press.

Waller, N. G., & Reise, S. P. (2010). Measuring psychopathology with non-standard IRT models. In S. E. Embretson (Ed.), *New directions in psychological measurement* (pp. 147–173). American Psychological Association.

Wang, C., Xu, G., & Shang, Z. (2018). A two-stage approach to differentiating normal and aberrant behavior in computer-based testing. *Psychometrika, 83*(1), 223–254. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11336-016-9525-x

Wise, S. L. (2017). Rapid-guessing behavior: Its identification, interpretation, and implications. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice, 36*(4), 52–61. https://doi.org/10.1111/emip.12165

Wise, S. L., & DeMars, C. E. (2005). Low examinee effort in low-stakes assessment: Problems and potential solutions. *Educational Assessment, 10*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326977ea1001_1

Wise, S. L., & Kong, X. (2005). Response time effort: A new measure of examinee motivation in computer-based tests. *Applied Measurement in Education, 18*(2), 163–183. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15324818ame1802_2

Woods, C. M. (2006). Careless responding to reverse-worded items: Implications for confirmatory factor analysis. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment, 28*(3), 186–191. DOI:10.1007/s10862-005-9004-7

Citation: Ogiemwonyi, Otasowie & Omorogiuwa, Osamede Kingsley "Estimating The Carelessness Parameter In Large-Scale Assessments: An Item Response Theory Approach Using The 4pl Model For The 2019-2021 National Business Technical Certificate Examinations Biology Multiple Choice Test Items". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW),* 2026: pp178-187.

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)
Volume 1, Number 3
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21214765
Review Article
Open Access

A Critique of Wittgenstein's Picture Theory of Language

Abstract

Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* redesigned twentieth-century analytic philosophy by proposing that language functions as a representational mirror of the world, a concept known as the Picture Theory of Language. In this view, propositions mirror up reality by projecting logical structures that perfectly correspond to facts in the external universe. However, this idea leaves a massive domain of human experience, including ethics, aesthetics, and existential meaning, shrouded in silence, as they lack empirical states of affairs to picture. The major problem of this study lies in this self-limiting reductionism where the Picture Theory renders language an instrument unable to account for how humans actually communicate. This study aims to systematically critique the Picture Theory, raising the pivotal question of whether a purely representational model can ever truly capture the shifting, contextual essence of human language. The study argued in closing that the Picture Theory is a brilliant but ultimately unsustainable abstraction.

Keywords: Wittgenstein, Picture Theory, Tractatus, representationalism, logical isomorphism.

Ikemesit John Nkanta
Department of Philosophy,
Faculty of Arts,
University of Uyo.
Phone: +2348089357010
ORCID: 0009-0002-0624-1503

Gabriel E. Idang
Department of Philosophy,
Faculty of Arts,
University of Uyo.
Phone: +2348160554939
E-mail:
gabrielidang@uniuyo.edu.ng

Darty E. Darty
Department of Philosophy,
Faculty of Arts,
University of Uyo.
Phone: +2348039267200
E-mail:
dartydarty@uniuyo.edu.ng

Corresponding Author's Email:
ikemesitjnkanta@uniuyo.edu.ng

Date Received: 17th May, 2026

Date Accepted: 23rd June, 2026

Introduction

The publication of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in 1921 introduce a new theory of language setting the terms for one of the most consequential debates in twentieth-century philosophy. The *Tractatus* is a carefully constructed argument, that language works by picturing reality, and that a proposition stands in the same structural relation to a fact as a photograph stands to the scene it captures. This is what has come to be known as the Picture Theory of Language, and for a considerable period, it appeared to offer what philosophy had long been searching for which is a logically strong explanation of how words connect to the world.

The Picture Theory functions only when language is engaged in describing empirical facts. The moment one steps outside into ethics, religion, aesthetics, or even the texture of ordinary conversation, the theory begins to crack. This points to a deeper problem about what it means to assign limits to language in the first place.

Wittgenstein himself opine in the closing proposition of the *Tractatus* that, "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (Wittgenstein 89). The difficulty is that what must be silenced turns out to be nearly everything that human beings actually care about.

Some scholars have observed that the *Tractatus* must be read as an attempt to "articulate the conditions under which language can represent the world at all" (Sullivan and Potter 4). The theory demands a one-to-one correspondence between the structure of a proposition and the structure of a fact, but language, as it is actually used, rarely follow such neat arrangements. This paper is a systematic critique of that representational model while inquiring whether a strictly logical theory of meaning can account for the full range of human communication.

The position of this paper is that it cannot, and that by reducing meaning to structural correspondence, the Picture Theory ends up describing a language that no real human speaker actually uses. The paper proceeds through conceptual clarifications, a detailed examination of the major criticisms against the theory, and an account of Wittgenstein's own radical departure from it in his later work.

Language, Meaning, and Proposition

To engage the Picture Theory critically, one must first understand the specific meanings that Wittgenstein assigned to concepts that are otherwise familiar. Language, in the ordinary sense, refers to the system of words, signs, and grammatical rules through which human beings communicate. Most contemporary linguists would agree with this broad understanding. Writing on the pragmatics of communication (Yus 12), describes language as "a tool shaped by the communicative needs of its users", a definition that already implies flexibility, social context, and purpose. Wittgenstein's view in the *Tractatus*, however, moves in a very different direction. For him because language is not defined by its social function but by its logical structure. It is, in essence, the totality of propositions, and propositions are significant only insofar as they picture possible states of affairs in the world.

A word can mean different things in different contexts, and speakers routinely stretch, bend, and negotiate meaning in the course of real conversation. Wittgenstein, in his early philosophy, was not interested in that kind of meaning. For him, meaning is tied strictly to reference and truth conditions. A proposition has meaning because it corresponds to a possible fact. If it corresponds to an actual fact, it is true, and if it does not, it is false. McGinn (55) captures this well when she notes that in Tractarian philosophy, "the meaning of a proposition is its truth conditions, that is, the conditions under which it is true or false". This is a very narrow conception of meaning, and as the introduction of this paper already stated, its narrowness is precisely what opens it up to criticism.

The concept of a proposition is central to understanding all of this because in everyday speech, a proposition might simply mean a statement or a claim. Within the

Citation: Nkanta, Ikemesit J.; Idang, Gabriel E. & Darty, Darty E. "A Critique of Wittgenstein's Picture Theory of Language". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW),* 2026: pp188-195.

Tractatus, however, it carries a more technical meaning. A proposition is a logical picture of a possible state of affairs which does not just describe but projects. Proops (2) notes that Wittgenstein understood a proposition as "a fact itself, not merely a collection of names", meaning that the arrangement of words in a proposition mirrors the arrangement of objects in reality. This is a striking idea, and it forms the structural backbone of the theory under review.

The Picture Theory of Language

The Picture Theory holds that language represents reality in the same way a picture represents a scene. Every meaningful proposition shares a logical form with the state of affairs it depicts, and it is this shared form, what Wittgenstein calls "pictorial form," that makes representation possible. The theory draws a sharp distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown. Facts about the world can be said, that is, they can be meaningfully captured in propositions. But the logical form that makes such representation possible cannot itself be stated; it can only be shown through the structure of language.

Appelqvist (7) clarifies that the Tractarian picture is not a visual image in any literal sense but rather "a logical mapping that shares its form with what it depicts"s. This understanding depends on the idea that reality is made up of atomic facts, combinations of simple objects, and that propositions are built from names that correspond to those simple objects. The theory is elegant in its internal logic, but its dependence on these foundational assumptions, particularly the existence of simple, unanalysable objects, is one of the fault lines that later critics would talk against. This sets the stage for the major criticisms that the following section takes up.

Major Criticisms of the Picture Theory

One of the most serious objections raised against the Picture Theory concerns the vast territory of human experience that it simply cannot account for. The theory, as established in the preceding section, restricts meaningful language to propositions that picture possible facts. This means that statements about morality, beauty, religious experience, and emotional life fall outside the boundary of what the theory considers meaningful. They cannot be true or false in the way the theory demands, because there are no empirical states of affairs for them to correspond to. The result is that entire dimensions of human concern are quietly pushed out of the domain of sense.

This is not a minor oversight as moral discourse, for instance, is not decorative language that people use loosely but through which communities regulate behaviour, negotiate values, and make binding claims on one another. To declare such language meaningless is to misrepresent how it actually functions. Cahill (38) argues that the Tractarian insistence on factual correspondence results in "a conception of language that is too thin to carry the weight of human moral and evaluative life". This criticism hits at the core of the representational model, because it exposes the fact that Wittgenstein built his theory on a very selective sample of what language does. The Picture Theory explains scientific propositions reasonably well, but science is only one register of human communication, and arguably not the most significant one in everyday life.

A second major criticism targets the internal architecture of the Picture Theory itself. The theory requires that language ultimately decompose into elementary propositions, each of which corresponds to an atomic fact, a combination of simple, unanalysable objects. If there are no such simple objects, then there are no elementary propositions, and the entire structure of logical correspondence collapses.

The difficulty is that Wittgenstein never actually identifies what these simple objects are. He asserts their existence but provides no examples, no method of verification, and no clear account of how one would recognise a simple object if encountered. Zalabardo (112) points out that this silence is philosophically damaging, noting that the theory "rests on an ontological foundation that Wittgenstein himself never adequately defended or demonstrated". This presents the Picture Theory as a rigorous logical account of language, with its most fundamental assumptions remaining entirely unsubstantiated.

Furthermore, the notion that reality is neatly divisible into discrete atomic facts is itself contestable. Human experience does not arrive in tidy, isolatable units. Events are contexts overlap, and facts dissolve into one another in ways that resist the kind of clean logical packaging the theory demands. Glock (70) observes that the atomic picture of reality "reflects a metaphysical preference rather than an observable feature of the world", which means the theory imports a contestable worldview and then builds a theory of language on top of it.

There is also the problem of self-reference, one that Wittgenstein himself acknowledged. The propositions of the *Tractatus*, the very sentences that articulate the Picture Theory, are not empirical propositions picturing facts. They are philosophical claims about the nature of language and reality, precisely the kind of statements the theory ought to classify as nonsensical. Wittgenstein's own response to this was to describe the propositions of the *Tractatus* as ladders to be thrown away once one has climbed them (Wittgenstein 89), but this admission does more to highlight the paradox than to resolve it. A theory that cannot account for its own statements without undermining itself has a serious credibility problem, and this is a tension that no amount of rhetorical grace can fully dissolve.

Wittgenstein's Later Rejection of the Picture Theory

What makes Wittgenstein's philosophical career particularly fascinating is that the most thorough dismantling of the Picture Theory did not come from his critics alone. It came from Wittgenstein himself. After the publication of the *Tractatus*, he stepped away from academic philosophy for nearly a decade, and when he returned, it was with a drastically different set of questions and, more importantly, a drastically different set of answers. The philosopher who had once insisted that language must mirror the logical structure of reality now argued that such a demand fundamentally misrepresents what language is and what it does.

The shift is most fully documented in the *Philosophical Investigations*, published posthumously in 1953, and it represents one of the most dramatic intellectual reversals in the history of modern philosophy. Where the *Tractatus* had treated language as a unified system governed by a single logical form, the *Philosophical Investigations* insists that language is irreducibly multiple, that there is no single essence binding all uses of language together. Wittgenstein introduces the concept of language-games to capture this multiplicity, describing the countless activities in which language is embedded, giving orders, telling stories, making jokes, asking questions, reporting events, and dozens more. Each of these constitutes its own language-game with its own internal rules, and none of them is more fundamental than the others.

This is a direct repudiation of the Picture Theory's central assumption. The *Tractatus* had held that all meaningful language ultimately reduces to elementary propositions picturing atomic facts. The *Philosophical Investigations* rejects that reduction entirely. Wittgenstein puts it that, "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 19), and a form of life is precisely what the Picture Theory had excluded, the social, practical, and deeply human context in which all communication is embedded. Meaning, in this later view, is not something a proposition carries within itself by virtue of its logical structure; it is something that arises from use, from the shared practices and agreements that hold a community of speakers together.

One of the most important ideas in the *Philosophical Investigations* is the concept of rule-following, and it strikes at the heart of the representational model in a way that is worth examining carefully. The Picture Theory assumes that a name hooks onto an object and that this connection is fixed and determinate. But Wittgenstein's later analysis of rule-following reveals that no rule, and by extension no name or sign, determines its own application. The way a word is used is always a matter of practice, of training and agreement within a community, rather than a matter of some pre-established logical correspondence.

Cavell (30), argues that this insight reveals that "language is not a code to be cracked but a practice to be shared" (Cavell 30), and this observation carries significant weight for the critique of the Picture Theory. If meaning is grounded in shared human practice rather than in logical isomorphism, then the entire framework of the *Tractatus* is not merely incomplete. Kuusela (113) notes that Wittgenstein's later method involves what he calls "a therapeutic turn," one in which philosophy no longer constructs grand theories but instead works to dissolve the confusions that such theories generate. This is a remarkable concession from a philosopher who had once believed he had solved the fundamental problems of language in a slim, precisely argued volume. The move from theory-building to therapy reflects just how deeply Wittgenstein had come to distrust the impulse to impose logical uniformity on the uncanny living reality of human communication.

It is also worth noting that the later Wittgenstein does not simply replace one theory with another. He is not saying that there is a better model of language waiting to be discovered but that the search for such a model is itself a philosophical mistake. Hacker (23), observes that the *Philosophical Investigations* aims to show that philosophical problems about language "arise from misunderstandings of the logic of our language, not from the discovery of deep hidden facts". This means that the Picture Theory was not just inadequate according to the later Wittgenstein, but was the product of a philosophical confusion about the very nature of the inquiry. The rejection of the Picture Theory is therefore not simply a moment of philosophical defeat. It is, in many ways, the most intellectually honest move Wittgenstein ever made, and it opens the door for the kind of critical evaluation that the following section undertakes.

A Critical Evaluation of the Picture Theory

Having traced the major criticisms of the Picture Theory and followed Wittgenstein's own departure from it, what remains is to assess the theory honestly, neither dismissing it as a naive blunder nor defending it beyond what the evidence permits. The Picture Theory emerged at a time when the relationship between language and logic was poorly understood, and it offered something genuinely valuable, a rigorous framework for thinking about how propositions relate to facts, and a clear account of why some statements can be verified while others cannot. These contributions did not disappear simply because the theory was later found to be limited.

Russell, whose influence on the early Wittgenstein was profound, had himself been searching for a logically perfect language that could resolve philosophical disputes by exposing their underlying structure. The Picture Theory was, in many ways, the fullest expression of that ambition as Hylton (912) notes that the Tractarian project represented the most sophisticated attempt to establish a strict, rule-governed boundary for meaningful representation within this logical tradition, The theory forced philosophers to think more carefully about the difference between genuine empirical claims and statements that only appear meaningful on the surface, a distinction that remains philosophically important even today.

The theory's foundational dependence on unverifiable simple objects, its exclusion of moral and aesthetic discourse, and the self-defeating nature of its own propositions, are not minor technical glitches but structural problems that go to the heart of what the theory is trying to do. A theory of language that cannot account for the language through which it presents itself is, at minimum, philosophically incomplete. Perhaps the most generous and also the most accurate thing one can say about the Picture Theory is that its failure was productive. It generated the very questions that eventually led Wittgenstein toward a richer and more human understanding of language. In this sense, the theory's collapse was not a dead end but a turning point. Susan Lucas (28) notes that even in its early, rigid formulation, the Tractarian framework contained the embryonic first inkling of Wittgenstein's later conviction that meaning could only truly be discovered by exploring how people actually use language in everyday life. That transition would not have been possible without the Picture Theory first pushing representationalism to its absolute logical limits.

There is also a case to be made that the Picture Theory retains a certain relevance in contemporary discussions of artificial intelligence and formal semantics, fields in which the idea of dotting linguistic structures onto states of the world remains technically useful. Speaks (5) notes that truth-conditional semantics, which bears a clear family resemblance to the Tractarian framework, continues to inform mainstream philosophy of language precisely because it captures something real about how descriptive language works. The Picture Theory, then, is not simply a historical curiosity but a partial truth and one that illuminates a real feature of language while concealing everything that falls outside its narrow focus.

Conclusion

The Picture Theory of Language stands as one of the most ambitious attempts in modern philosophy to explain, with logical precision, how human beings use words to say something true about the world. This study has traced the full attempt from its elegant theoretical foundations in the *Tractatus*, through the serious criticisms it attracted, to Wittgenstein's own eventual abandonment of it in favour of a more grounded and socially entrenched understanding of language. At each stage, the same pattern has emerged, that a theory which sacrifices human context for logical clarity will always fall short of explaining the language real people actually speak.

The central question this paper set out to answer was whether a strictly representational model of meaning can carry the full weight of human communication. The evidence examined across these sections answers that question in the negative. Language is not simply a mirror held up to reality but as the later Wittgenstein understood, a living activity, shaped by practice, community, and the countless forms of life in which human beings participate. Tomasello (4) captures this well when he observes that "human communication is fundamentally cooperative," rooted not in logical structure but in shared intentionality and social engagement. This is precisely what the Picture Theory, for all its rigour, could not see.

What this study achieved is not that the Picture Theory was worthless, but that its worth lies in the questions it forced philosophy to confront. By pushing representationalism to its limits, Wittgenstein inadvertently revealed those limits, and in doing so, opened the door to a richer, more honest philosophy of language, one that this study has sought to honour through critical engagement rather than mere dismissal.

Works Cited

Appelqvist, Hanne. "Why Does Wittgenstein Say That Ethics and Aesthetics Are One and the Same?" *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*. Ed. Oskari Kuusela and Marie McGinn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. 40–58.

Cahill, Kevin M. *The Fate of Wonder: Wittgenstein's Critique of Metaphysics and Modernity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Cavell, Stanley. *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays*. Updated ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Glock, Hans-Johann. *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Hacker, P. M. S. *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Mind*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.

Hylton, Peter. "Ideas of a Logically Perfect Language in Analytic Philosophy." The Oxford Handbook of the History of Analytic Philosophy. Ed. Michael Beaney. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 912–930.

Kuusela, Oskari. *The Struggle Against Dogmatism: Wittgenstein and the Concept of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Lucas, Susan. "Wittgenstein, Frege & The Context Principle." Philosophy Now 106 (2015): 27–31.

McGinn, Marie. *The Routledge Guidebook to Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2013.

Proops, Ian. "Wittgenstein's Logical Atomism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Stanford University, 2022. Web. 10 June 2025.

Speaks, Jeff. "Theories of Meaning." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Stanford University, 2021. Web. 10 June 2025.

Sullivan, Peter, and Michael Potter, eds. *Wittgenstein's Tractatus: History and Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Tomasello, Michael. *A Natural History of Human Morality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte. 4th ed. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. London: Routledge, 1961.

Yus, Francisco. *Cyberpragmatics: Internet-Mediated Communication in Context*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011.

Citation: Nkanta, Ikemesit J.; Idang, Gabriel E. & Darty, Darty E. "A Critique of Wittgenstein's Picture Theory of Language". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp188-195.

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)

Volume 1, Number 3

Review Article https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21214686 Open Access

Marcelian Intersubjectivity and the Quest for National Co-existence

Abstract

In era occasioned by the rise of identity conflicts and cumulative social fragmentation, the question of co-existence remains essential to the survival of multi-cultural societies. Nigeria, with its vast ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity, symbolizes both the potentials and the dangers of such plurality. While legal and political agendas have attempted to manage these transformations, a deeper, more existential crisis endures; one entrenched in the destruction of authentic human relationships and the objectification of the 'Other'. The paper argued that achieving true inter-ethnic diplomacy, national integration, and peaceful co-existence goes beyond a mere change of structures and profuse rhetoric about national harmony. Rather, it requires a re-engineering of how individuals perceive and engage one another across conflict lines. This transformation in perspective is essential for fostering genuine connections and understanding among diverse groups. In the light of this need, the paper explored Gabriel Marcel's existentialist notion of intersubjectivity, as a pathway for reclaiming the moral and interpersonal foundations for national co-existence. His intersubjectivity offers both metaphysical and ethical frameworks that tend to challenge instrumental and depersonalized modes of relating, by calling instead for openness, fidelity, and a shared being. Within the Nigerian context, this reorientation entails both personal and collective responsibility to rehumanize the 'Other' and to rethink of the polity as a space of mutual recognition. The paper concluded that repositioning the 'Other' in our consciousness through Marcelian intersubjectivity offers a viable philosophical contribution to the ongoing quest for meaningful and sustainable national coexistence.

Keywords: The Other, Intersubjectivity, National Co-existence, Relational Ethics, Reconciliation.

Terzungwe Inja
Senior Lecturer at Department of Philosophy
Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi
Phone: 08061117453
ORCID ID: 0009-0008-9653-1530

Paul Terkimbi Chiahemba
postgraduate student Department of Philosophy
Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi
Email: pkumbur94@gmail.com
Phone: 07030636555
ORCID ID: 0009-0004-5942-8404

Corresponding Author's Email: tinja@bsum.edu.ng

Date Received: 12th June, 2026

Date Accepted: 28th June, 2026

Introduction

Nigeria is at a critical point in its history, a country torn between the promise of its pluralistic identity and the enduring reality of disunity. With more than 400 languages and 250 ethnic groups, the nation is widely recognised for its diversity, which unfortunately, is also the source of national tensions. Consequently, the country has become a fertile ground for mistrust, exclusion, and bloody conflicts rather than a source of strength and mutual enrichment. More so, persistent ethno-religious conflicts, regional secessionist movements, and the leadership's ongoing inability to forge a unified national identity based on respect for one another are hallmarks of the nation's post-colonial past (Osaghae 12). Again, at different times, the political elites have taken advantage of ethnic and religious allegiances for partisan gain, further entrenching divisions and reducing co-existence to a fragile and superficial aspirations

Numerous interventions have been proposed, and some implemented. From fiscal, political, and constitutional restructuring to national conferences, and inter-ethnic/interfaith dialogue initiatives. Yet, these measures, while not without merit, frequently address the structural symptoms of disunity without grappling with the deeper philosophical and ethical questions at its core. What does it mean to live with the "Other" in a shared nation-space? What kind of human relationships are needed to sustain a truly inclusive polity? In Nigeria, the Other, be it a person from a different ethnicity, faith, or cultural background, is often not encountered as a subject, but rather as a label, a stereotype, or even a threat. The lived experience of many citizens is thus, one of alienation and objectification, where identity is reduced to difference —and difference is viewed through the lens of fear or competition (Ehusani 56). Within this context of ethical estrangement that this seeks to confront this deeper crisis, by turning to the existential philosophy of Marcel, whose concept of intersubjectivity offers a powerful framework for rethinking national unity and peaceful coexistence. Marcel critiques the modern tendency to reduce human beings to functions, roles, or data. He rejects such an approach as "technocratic objectification" and instead calls for a recovery of the human person as a "thou," not an "it" (Marcel, *The Mystery of Being II* 148). His notion of intersubjectivity rests on the idea of presence, availability (*disponibilité*), and participation in the mystery of the Other's being.

This paper assumes that understanding and applying Marcelian intersubjectivity is a key to freeing present-day Nigeria from its current deplorable social condition. By emphasizing the sacredness of human encounter and the ethical imperative of openness to the Other, Marcel's philosophy challenges us to move beyond mere tolerance or co-existence defined by avoidance. Instead, it calls for a radical reimagining of the community as a space of ethical commitment, relational fidelity, and mutual presence. Such a perspective does not negate the need for political reform or institutional justice; rather, it deepens it by grounding co-existence in the metaphysical reality of a shared humanity. Hence, the task before us is not only political but also philosophical: to reclaim the Other in a Nigerian public life, is not a problem to be solved but a person to be encountered. This paper explores how Marcel's vision of intersubjectivity can contribute meaningfully to this task. The discussion is guided by three central questions: What ethical failures underlie Nigeria's crisis of co-existence? How does Marcelian intersubjectivity reframe our understanding of a community and the Other? And what practical and philosophical insights can this offer toward a more humane and sustainable vision of national unity?

The Crisis of Co-existence in Nigeria

The failure of co-existence in Nigeria is not a simply an accident of history, nor

Citation: Inja, Terzungwe & Chiahemba, Paul T. "Marcelian Intersubjectivity and the Quest for National Co-existence". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp196-208.

is it just a result of flawed institutions. Rather, it is a deeply rooted crisis with moral, historical, and ontological dimensions. While it is often enclosed in terms of political instability, ethnic rivalry, and economic inequality, these manifestations are symptoms of a deeper malaise: the erosion of an ethical and existential bonds that make co-existence not only possible but meaningful. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has struggled to transform its colonial inheritance into a cohesive national identity. The colonial strategy of divide and rule deliberately heightened the ethnic and religious distinctions, embedding mutual suspicion within the fabric of the nascent state (Osaghae 45). Post-independence leaders, rather than transcending these divisions, habitually reproduced them within the agenda of federal competition, zoning, and ethno-regional patronage. As a result, public discourse in Nigeria is frequently filtered through the prism of identity politics, where national belonging is subordinated to ethnic affiliation, and solidarity is fractured along religious and regional lines (Suberu 29).

These divisions are not purely political, they are existential. Nigerians often experience one another not as fellow citizens sharing a common destiny, but as strangers and even enemies who happen to share the same geopolitical space. The Other is rarely encountered as a person to be understood or respected, but more often as a category to be feared, managed, or excluded. In this climate of suspicion, community life is diminished, and the ethical demand to be present to the Other is replaced by withdrawal, indifference, or hostility (Ehusani 62). The resulting culture is one where superficial tolerance is mistaken for genuine peace, and where co-existence is maintained only by silence or distance, and not by understanding or engagement. Violent conflicts across the country illustrate this ethical void. From the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast to the armed herders' attacks in the Middle Belt; from secessionist tensions in the Southeast to environmental agitations in the creeks of the Niger Delta; and religious genocides in Plateau and Kaduna states, the failure of co-existence manifests in bloodshed and displacement. As Terzungwe Inja has observed, the constant conflicts that continue to erupt in all parts of the country are a symptom of a dysfunctional citizenship system —where people who feel discontented with the lack of inclusion in national affairs tend to express themselves through violence (9–11). More so, these conflicts are fuelled not only by material grievances but by an inability or refusal to see the Other as a co-subject in a shared national project. Emmanuel Edeh rightly captures, "Nigeria's crisis is at its core a moral crisis; our failure is not just of policy but of heart and of vision" (14). In essence, Edeh is arguing that Nigeria's path to true healing and development must begin with a renewal of moral consciousness; a reclamation of values that affirm human dignity, mutual responsibility, and the ethical obligations we owe to one another as fellow citizens. Without this, structural reforms alone are insufficient.

What is missing in Nigeria's discourse on unity is a philosophical anthropology that affirms the irreducible value of the human person. A technical, legal, or economic approach to co-existence cannot succeed unless it is grounded in an ethical vision of relationality and presence. Without this, no amount of dialogue or reform will suffice. It is precisely at this point that Marcel's existential ethics becomes a valuable resource. His philosophy calls for a return to being-with-the-Other in a mode of fidelity, trust, and a shared mystery which is a much-needed corrective to Nigeria's depersonalized and adversarial social fabric. This paper contends that the restoration of co-existence in Nigeria must begin not with policies or power-sharing formulas, but with a moral reawakening; a rediscovery of the Other as someone to whom we are bound not by proximity or necessity, but by the very structure of our being. This shift requires a new language of relationship, one that transcends tribalism, sectarianism, and utilitarianism, and that opens up a space for authentic encounter and ethical solidarity.

The Ethical Presence and the Relational Being of Marcel's Intersubjectivity

Marcel's philosophical vision is a robust affirmation of intersubjectivity, a mode of being that resists the fragmentation of modern existence and insists on the ethical and the metaphysical significance of human relationships. Unlike many existential thinkers who centre the self in isolation, Marcel situates the self within a web of relations that are ontologically fundamental and ethically demanding. His concept of being-with-others (*être-avec*) is not a secondary social phenomenon but a constitutive feature of what it means to be human. For Marcel, intersubjectivity is grounded in availability (*disponibilité*), a disposition of openness to the Other that transcends mere functional interaction. Availability is not simply a physical presence or a utilitarian attention; it is a gift of the self, a readiness to be touched, changed, and even inconvenienced by the reality of the Other. This kind of presence, Marcel argues, is an ethical posture, an affirmation of the Other as a mystery to be encountered rather than a problem to be solved (Marcel, *The Mystery of Being I* 37). In a world increasingly defined by objectification, efficiency, and anonymity, Marcel's insistence on presence serves as a quiet but powerful protest.

His distinction between the "I-It" and "I-Thou" modes of relation parallels Martin Buber's thought, but Marcel pushes the implications further by rooting this relationality in a metaphysics of hope and fidelity. The "I-It" relation, according to Marcel, reduces persons to functions, roles, or threats, precisely the kind of reduction that is operative in the Nigerian social context where ethnic and religious identities often become fixed categories rather than living persons. In contrast, the "I-Thou" relation affirms the Other as a subject whose presence calls forth a moral response. Marcel's thought also carries a spiritual dimension. In his view, true intersubjectivity gestures towards the transcendent. To be authentically available to another is to be open not only to that person but to a deeper order of being, a sacred participation in the mystery of existence itself. Hence, for Marcel, relational being is not only ethical; it is metaphysical. It reveals something about the nature of reality: that we are not isolated monads but beings-in-communion (Gallagher 66).

This notion challenges the atomistic individualism and utilitarian calculations that dominates the modern political life. In the context of Nigeria's co-existence crisis, Marcel's intersubjectivity offers a counter-ethic to the prevailing logic of suspicion and self-interest. Where the Nigerian society categorizes the Other based on region, religion, or class, Marcel invites a deeper encounter grounded in presence and mutual recognition. This approach does not erase differences but situates it within a framework of ethical commitment and shared humanity. In a fractured nation like Nigeria, where difference is often weaponized and the Other is viewed as a competitor or threat, Marcel's intersubjective ethics urges a recovery of the human face. It calls for Nigerians to resist the tendency to instrumentalize relationships and instead cultivate a culture of presence, trust, and availability. As such, intersubjectivity is not an abstract philosophical notion. Rather, it is a concrete ethical imperative with transformative implications for how Nigerians might reimagine their social relations and national identity.

Reclaiming the Other in the Nigerian Social Context

The Nigerian social scenery today is one marked by the erosion of trust and the deepening of divisions. As explained earlier, this environment does not reflect a mere failure of governance or economic disparity; it points to a deeper existential and ethical rupture. Within this context, Marcel's notion of intersubjectivity offers a transformative lens through which to critique the prevailing relational structures and propose a path toward authentic co-existence. To "reclaim the Other" in Marcelian terms means to move beyond viewing people as abstract categories or faceless groups such as "Northerner," "Igbo," "Christian," "Muslim," or "herder" and instead encounter them as unique, irreplaceable beings with intrinsic worth. Marcel warns against the "technocratic" view of human beings, where people are evaluated not in terms of their humanity but in terms of their function, utility, or threat (Marcel, *The Mystery of Being I* 88). In Nigeria, this attitude pervades the political and the social discourse, where demographic identities are often treated as political capital or security concerns rather than as human communities with histories, hopes, and dignity.

This objectification of the Other sustains a cycle of alienation and violence. When the Other is perceived not as a subject but as a "case" to be managed whether in counter-insurgency strategy, ethnic quota systems, or economic planning, then moral indifference becomes systematized. Within such a paradigm, atrocities are excused, forced displacements become invisible, and hate speech gradually becomes part of every day's discourse. Marcel's philosophy challenges this by demanding a fundamental reorientation; to see the Other as someone to whom one is ethically bound, not by contract, but by the shared mystery of being (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 53). This reorientation is not sentimental or utopian. Marcel recognizes the reality of fear and difference but insists that true human co-existence is only possible where there is availability, a deliberate choice to remain open and vulnerable in the face of the Other's presence. In Nigeria, this would mean cultivating spaces for both the literal and the symbolic where genuine dialogue can occur, where narratives of pain and identity can be shared without dismissal or politicization. It would involve dismantling the systemic structures that perpetuate "we-versus-them" mentalities —such as exclusionary zoning policies, ethnically based party systems, systematic ethnic marginalization, and discriminatory resource allocation.

Moreover, reclaiming the Other involves the development of a moral imagination capable of empathy and solidarity. This is especially urgent in a country where mass suffering has become a political abstraction. Ehusani notes that, "The Nigerian condition is one of moral desensitization where tragedy no longer shocks, and the death of the Other is merely a statistic" (49). Marcel's thought calls Nigerians to resist this dehumanization by embracing a posture of presence, a concept that entails not just being near someone, but being truly with them in attentiveness, care, and ethical commitment. Most importantly, this reclamation must also confront the spiritual void in the contemporary Nigerian society, where religion often serves sectarian rather than unifying purposes. Marcel's intersubjectivity is implicitly spiritual, grounded in the belief that each person carries a transcendent mystery. Reclaiming the Other, therefore, means acknowledging that every human being reflects something sacred, something beyond comprehension, control, or utility. This act of recognition has the potential to renew Nigeria's moral fabric with a spirit of reverence, humility, and ethical responsibility, virtues that have been largely eroded by the widespread cynicism, pervasive fear, and the dominance of political self-interest.

In essence, Marcelian intersubjectivity invites Nigerians to rehumanize their social fabric. It shifts the conversation from rights and entitlements to relationships and responsibilities. It asks not only, "What should the state do?" but also, "How should we be with one another?" In doing so, it provides a powerful philosophical framework for rebuilding the moral architecture of co-existence in Nigeria, not through enforced unity or ideological conformity, but through a deep, patient, and hopeful engagement with the Other as a co-bearer of the human condition.

Rethinking National Unity

In contemporary Nigerian discourse, unity in diversity is often brandished as a matter of national pride. Government documents, school curricula, and public speeches repeatedly invoke this mantra. Yet a closer scrutiny reveals that this idea is far from the truth in practice. Unity is merely a form of force tolerance; a fragile arrangement of mutual forbearance rather than a genuine acceptance or mutual engagement. Tolerance, in this context, functions as an unwritten agreement to endure the presence of the Other while maintaining existential and psychological distance. While this model may sustain a superficial peace, it ultimately reinforces separation and fails to cultivate the deep, ethical foundations necessary for enduring co-existence. Marcel's notion of presence offers a richer and more demanding alternative. For Marcel, presence is not simply a physical proximity but the act of truly being with another in a way that honours their full humanity. Presence entails vulnerability, attentiveness, and what Marcel calls *disponibilité*, a form of availability that opens the self to the Other without domination or fear (Marcel, *The Mystery of Being I* 109). In this framework, co-existence is not a policy or a programme; it is an existential and ethical act rooted in a shared ontological mystery.

In Nigeria, where ethnic, religious, and regional divisions have calcified over decades of violence, mistrust, and political manipulation, such a shift is both radical and necessary. The model of tolerance, as currently practiced, often institutionalizes distance through structures such as the so-called Federal Character Principle, zoning, and quota systems —mechanisms intended to manage diversity and prevent marginalization— but which inadvertently reinforce separateness and competition. As Eghosa Osaghae argues, these approaches "tend to reduce national identity to a sum of competing sub-nationalities, each demanding its due rather than committing to a shared moral vision" (112). A Marcelian ethics of presence challenges this instrumental view of the Other. It calls for a mode of national unity that is not based on utility, fear, or strategic balance, but on the recognition of the Other as a subject whose life and dignity matter intrinsically. Such a recognition demands policy reform, as well as a deep philosophical reorientation, and the willingness to see national unity not as the erasure of difference, but as the patient work of building relationships across board.

Within the Nigerian context, this involves confronting the painful histories of marginalization and state violence, such as the Biafran War, the Middle Belt conflicts, and the ongoing armed herders' attacks against pastoralist communities across the country. A Marcelian approach does not ignore these traumas; instead, it insists that true presence involves a shared confrontation with suffering. As Marcel notes, "to be present to someone in their suffering is not simply to witness it, but to suffer with them in a way that affirms their irreplaceable worth" (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 75). As such, National healing, therefore, requires more than commissions and white papers, it demands a communal willingness to listen, mourn, and affirm the humanity of those whose stories have long been silenced. In this way, presence offers not just a critique of tolerance but a deeper vision of what co-existence could mean in Nigeria. It reimagines unity not as uniformity or quiet compliance, but as a dynamic and ethical engagement rooted in hope. As Marcel maintains, hope is not optimism but "a trust in being," a belief that human relationships, even when fractured, can be mended through mutual availability and moral courage (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 58). Such hope is essential for a country whose citizens have grown weary of the broken promises and performative unity.

Ultimately, to move from tolerance to presence is to recognize that the Other is not a threat to be contained but a mystery to be welcomed. It is to affirm, in Marcelian terms, that co-existence is not just possible, it is necessary for the realization of our shared humanity. In this lies the true promise of national unity: not a nation stitched together by fear, but a people bound by the profound and sacred responsibility to be present for one another.

The Ethical Turn: From Objectification to Encounter

One of the most profound contributions of Marcel's philosophy to the discourse on co-existence is his critique of objectification and his call for a relational ethics grounded in encounter. Marcel was deeply concerned about what he termed the "technocratic spirit" of modernity; a mode of being that reduces human persons to functions, roles, or data points (Marcel, *The Mystery of Being I* 145). This reduction, he argued, leads to depersonalization, where the Other is seen not as a subject to be engaged but as an object to be managed or feared. In a fragmented society like Nigeria, such objectification manifests in ethnic profiling, religious stereotyping, and regional distrust, all of which hinder the possibility of authentic communal life. In Marcelian terms, objectification is a metaphysical error with ethical consequences. When we relate to others merely as "cases" or "representatives" of a group for example, Tiv, Hausa, Igbo, Fulani, Christian, Muslim, we deny them the fullness of their subjectivity. We place them in categories rather than engage them as persons. This is particularly evident in political rhetoric, where the entire populations are often reduced to statistics or security threats. For instance, the portrayal of certain ethnic groups as inherently violent or the instrumentalization of religious identities for electoral gains reflects a deep ontological and ethical rupture (Osaghae 98).

Marcel offers an alternative vision: the encounter. Unlike objectification, which distances and isolates, encounter draws one into a space of ethical responsibility and mutual recognition. Marcel insists that in genuine human relations, "I am only myself in relation to another who is also a self" (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 85). This perspective is echoed in the African philosophical tradition as well. Thinkers such as John Mbiti, with his oft-quoted phrase "I am because we are," affirm a communal ontology where being is co-constituted through relationship (Mbiti 141). Thus, Marcel's existential intersubjectivity resonates deeply with the indigenous African worldviews, providing a fertile ground for rethinking co-existence in Nigeria. In Nigerian, the ethical turn from objectification to encounter demands a radical redirection on how people perceive and treat each other across fault lines. It is not enough to claim national brotherhood while perpetuating structural injustice or indifference. True encounter requires openness, humility, and the courage to transcend inherited fears. This is especially urgent in areas torn by violence, whether communal clashes in Plateau State, insurgency in the North-East, or separatist agitations in the South-East, where the Other is increasingly seen as a threat rather than a neighbour.

Education and civil treatise must play a central role in this ethical turn. Classrooms, public forums, and media spaces can be transformed into sites of encounter rather than battlegrounds of ideology. This will involve confronting the painful narratives but also creating spaces for shared storytelling, where communities can begin to see themselves reflected in the lives of others. As Marcel reminds us, “To be truly present to someone is to affirm that their life matters as deeply as mine, even if I cannot fully comprehend their experience” (Marcel, *The Mystery of Being I* 152). In this ethical agenda, reconciliation is not a political agreement but an ontological affirmation; a declaration that despite our histories of harm, we remain capable of re-encountering each other in hope. It requires not only structural changes but a profound metaphysical healing, where citizens begin to see each other not as abstract categories but as fellow wayfarers, each bearing the mystery of being. This re-humanization of the Other stands as the moral imperative of national co-existence. Nigeria’s future, Marcel would argue, hinges not only on the ballot box or security apparatus but on the courage to reclaim the Other as a partner in the shared project of being. In a world increasingly driven by alienation, this turn to the ethical is both a return to our deepest humanity and a path toward genuine national healing.

Hope, Brokenness, and the Possibility of Reconciliation

Marcel’s philosophy is rooted not only in a deep awareness of the brokenness of human existence but also in an unwavering commitment to hope. In *Homo Viator*, Marcel’s portrays human beings as wayfarers; existential travellers who remain perpetually *en route*, consciously aware of their vulnerability, limitations, and finitude, yet oriented toward transcendence and deeper meaning. As he notes, “Perhaps a stable terrestrial order can't be put into place unless man keeps an acute conscience of his journeying condition” (*Homo Viator* 432). This notion of brokenness is not pessimism; it is a metaphysical recognition of the human condition and the fragility that defines all meaningful relationships. In the context of Nigeria’s fragmented social context, Marcel’s insights into brokenness and hope offer a powerful framework for imagining reconciliation that is neither naïve nor abstract but ethically grounded and existentially honest.

Nigeria has witnessed decades of ethnic violence, religious intolerance, secessionist movements, and systemic injustice. These ruptures have left deep wounds in the collective psyche of its citizens. To speak of reconciliation in such a setting risk sounding idealistic or even dismissive of the real pain unless it is framed within the recognition of shared brokenness. Marcel's metaphysical anthropology invites us to begin here, with the acknowledgment that all human beings are vulnerable, wounded, and in need of one another. In this shared woundedness lies the first possibility for genuine reconciliation. Marcel distinguishes between two kinds of hope: "functional hope," which is goal-oriented and often contingent on external success, and "ontological hope," which is a deeper disposition rooted in trust in the mystery of being (Marcel, *The Mystery of Being I* 162). Ontological hope does not guarantee outcomes; rather, it affirms the possibility of renewal even in the darkest of times. For a nation like Nigeria, torn by historical grievances and mutual suspicion, what is needed is not simply policy-driven optimism but this ontological hope, a belief that co-existence is still possible, not because of political convenience, but because of a shared humanity that transcends our divisions.

In Marcel's thought, hope is intimately tied to fidelity and presence. To hope is to remain faithfully present to the Other, even when reconciliation seems impossible. This is not sentimental tolerance but a moral stance of availability (*disponibilité*), a willingness to be open, to listen, to forgive, and to journey with others toward healing (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 109). In practical terms, this calls for leaders and citizens alike to cultivate attitudes that resist the logic of retaliation and scapegoating. It requires religious leaders to foster interfaith dialogue that affirms dignity rather than fuels antagonism; it demands that media narratives highlight stories of solidarity and compassion amidst conflict. Furthermore, reconciliation in Nigeria must move beyond institutional frameworks to touch the interpersonal and communal dimensions of national life. Truth commissions, peace accords, and development programmes are necessary, but without a transformation in how people relate to each other on the ground, in markets, schools, places of worship, and neighbourhoods, co-existence will remain superficial. Marcel's emphasis on presence reminds us that healing begins with the small but radical act of choosing to see and affirm the Other.

In the African philosophical tradition, reconciliation is often tied to the concept of *Ubuntu*, "I am because we are." This communal vision harmonizes with Marcel's intersubjective metaphysics. Both recognize that reconciliation is not a return to a past unity but the forging of a new solidarity through ethical commitment and shared vulnerability (Tutu 35). Thus, the path to national coexistence lies not in forgetting our fractures but in walking through them together, guided by hope that is grounded in love and fidelity. Finally, Marcel's philosophy challenges Nigerians to reject despair and embrace the hard but yet noble task of rebuilding relationships. Reconciliation, understood in this existential-ethical sense, is not a destination but an ongoing task, one that requires humility, courage, and above all, the hope that even the most divided society can rediscover its common humanity.

Toward a Philosophy of National Co-existence

As Nigeria continues to grapple with a deeply fractured national identity, Marcel's philosophical insights offer not only a metaphysical and ethical critique but also a constructive vision for reimagining co-existence. This vision does not emerge from abstract theorizing alone but is deeply rooted in the lived reality of human interdependence, suffering, and the hope for restoration. Marcel's legacy, particularly his reflections on intersubjectivity, availability (*disponibilité*), and the primacy of being, provides a transformative lens through which Nigeria's pluralistic tensions can be ethically and metaphysically navigated. One of Marcel's most profound contributions lies in his rejection of objectification, the tendency to reduce persons to functions, roles, tribes, or statistics. In Nigeria, this objectification often takes ethnic and religious forms, where the "Other" becomes a Tiv, Idoma, Hausa, Igbo, Fulani, Christian, or Muslim, before they are seen as a human being. This reductionism facilitates suspicion, resentment, and violence. Marcel's intersubjective philosophy resists such dehumanization by insisting that each person must be encountered as a thou; a subject with depth, dignity, and mystery (Marcel, *The Mystery of Being I* 138). For national co-existence to flourish, this ontological reorientation is paramount. Nigerians must learn to approach one another not from a place of utility or fear, but from a stance of openness, reverence, and ethical presence.

Moreover, Marcel's idea of availability challenges citizens to move beyond passive tolerance toward active engagement. True co-existence requires more than constitutional provisions or political slogans or a change of national anthem; it demands the cultivation of interior attitudes of listening, empathy, forgiveness, and solidarity. It is not enough for different groups to merely "co-habit" in peace; they must be willing to share in each other's struggles and aspirations. Availability becomes the posture through which mutual understanding is nurtured and trust gradually restored.

Another key aspect of Marcel's philosophy is his emphasis on fidelity, a sustained commitment to the Other even in times of difficulty. In Nigeria's volatile environment, where betrayal, political corruption, and distrust are a commonplace, fidelity serves as a revolutionary virtue. It insists that relationships, whether between individuals or communities must be anchored not in convenience but in ethical responsibility. To be faithful in Marcel's sense is to remain present, hopeful, and willing to heal even when the wounds are deep. This fidelity is not only personal but can be social and political. National leaders, institutions, and civil society must demonstrate fidelity to the Nigerian people by creating spaces where reconciliation is not only preached but practiced.

Furthermore, Marcel's legacy compels a rethinking of national identity. The prevailing model of identity in Nigeria often leans on exclusivist categories and historical grievances. But Marcel proposes an identity that is dynamic, relational, and open to the Other. He invites us to think of being not as a static possession but as a gift to be shared. National identity, then, is not something to be defended against the Other but something that must emerge in communion with the Other. In this sense, unity in Nigeria is not a political achievement but a metaphysical and ethical task, one that demands humility, openness, and hope. Marcel's thought does not offer quick fixes to Nigeria's socio-political crises. What it offers is far more radical; a call to reimagine being-together in light of a shared humanity and an ethical commitment. Co-existence, from a Marcelian perspective, is not a negotiation of differences but a transformation of hearts and minds. It is the courage to encounter the Other not as threat or rival, but as a fellow wayfarer on the journey of existence. This reimagining begins in classrooms, churches, mosques, marketplaces, and family homes, where individuals learn not only to tolerate but to see, hear, and be present to one another. It requires a shift from cynicism to hope, from isolation to community, from indifference to compassion. Marcel's metaphysical and ethical vision thus remains urgently relevant, offering a humanizing path forward in Nigeria's quest for peace, justice, and unity.

Conclusion

The above exercise was focused on the Nigerian experience of diversity and how, instead of being a source of strength for national development, it increasingly tends to generate avoidable conflicts, destruction, and underdevelopment. It was observed that to set the country on the path of peace and prosperity in the midst of so much political, religious and ethnic plurality, mere chanting of mantras is inadequate —because the root of the problem seats deeper than mere rhetoric, it is an existential and moral disjuncture. Hence, Gabriel Marcel's notion of intersubjectivity was engaged to provide a social, political, and ethical framework for peaceful co-existence in the country. In the light of the evidence available, even where conflicts have bred high levels of animosity, Marcel's thought seems to provide hope for reconciliation and rebuilding. Thus, by repositioning the 'Other' in our consciousness, through Marcelian intersubjectivity, Nigeria stands a chance of victory over darkness, in the ongoing quest for meaningful and sustainable national coexistence.

Works Cited

Edeh, Emmanuel M. P. *Towards an African Philosophy of Education*. Layola Press, 1985.

Ehusani, George. *Ethics and the Nigerian Condition*. Catholic Institute of West Africa, 1999.

Gallagher, Kenneth T. *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*. Fordham University Press, 1962.

Inja, Terzungwe. "Citizenship in a Dysfunctional State: A Positivist Examination of the Nigerian Experience." *Makurdi Journal of Arts and Culture (MAJAC)*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2013, pp. 92–110.

Marcel, Gabriel. *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*. Harper & Row, 1962.

———. *The Mystery of Being: Volume I: Reflection and Mystery*. Translated by G. S. Fraser, St. Augustine's Press, 2001.

———. *The Mystery of Being: Volume II: Faith and Reality*. Translated by René Hague, St. Augustine's Press, 2001.

Osaghae, Eghosa. *Crippled Giant: Nigeria Since Independence*. Indiana University Press, 1998.

Suberu, Rotimi. *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria*. United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001.

Tutu, Desmond. *No Future without Forgiveness*. Doubleday.

Citation: Inja, Terzungwe & Chiahemba, Paul T. "Marcelian Intersubjectivity and the Quest for National Co-existence". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp196-208.

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)
Volume 1, Number 3
Mixed-Method Article https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21214613 Open Access

Economic Impact Of Fuel Subsidy Removal On Small And Medium Enterprises In Akwa Ibom State

Abstract
SMEs are central to the Nigerian economy, contributing nearly half of national GDP and over 80% of employment, yet they remain highly vulnerable to external policy shocks. This study examined the economic impact of fuel subsidy removal on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, with particular emphasis on operational costs, profitability, and coping strategies. Following the removal of fuel subsidies in 2023, petrol prices rose by over 200%, creating inflationary pressures and escalating the costs of transportation, production, and energy. This study adopted a mixed-methods design, combining a survey of 200 SMEs across agriculture, retail, hospitality, and manufacturing with semi-structured interviews involving 20 SME owners and 10 government officials. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed an average 122% increase in operational costs, with manufacturing firms recording the highest surge (150%). Profitability declined by an average of 64%, with the hospitality sector worst affected (75% reduction). Thematic analysis of qualitative data highlighted coping mechanisms such as price increases, staff reductions, revenue diversification, and limited adoption of alternative energy sources. However, these strategies were often insufficient, as declining consumer purchasing power further weakened demand. While government interventions, including renewable energy subsidies and support funds, were introduced, access remained limited, leaving most SMEs without adequate relief. The findings aligned with Keynesian economic theory, which associates contractionary fiscal policies with reduced aggregate demand, and Porter's theory of competitive advantage, which underscores the need for adaptive strategies. The study recommended targeted SME support, expedited disbursement of funds, low-interest financing for renewable energy, and phased subsidy reforms to minimize economic disruptions.

Keywords: Fuel subsidy, Economic Impact, Profitability, SME support, Renewable Energy, coping strategies, Akwa Ibom State.

Ema Iniobong Emmanuel
Faculty of Management Sciences
Department of Business Administration
National Open University of Nigeria
Mobile: +2348030970241

Corresponding Author's Email: emmyemmanj3@gmail.com

Date Received: 26th June, 2026

Date Accepted: 29th June, 2026

Introduction
Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are widely acknowledged as the backbone of economic development, particularly in emerging economies. In Nigeria, SMEs account for approximately 48% of national GDP and over 84% of employment (NBS, 2023). In Akwa Ibom State, SMEs dominate the local economy, representing more than 98% of registered businesses across agriculture, retail trade, hospitality, and manufacturing (Akwa Ibom Ministry of Commerce, 2023). Beyond their contribution to income and job creation, SMEs play a vital role in poverty reduction, innovation, and community development. However, they remain

highly vulnerable to economic shocks, especially policy changes that directly affect input costs.

One such shock was the removal of fuel subsidies in June 2023, implemented by the Nigerian government as part of fiscal reforms to reduce the budget deficit and free up resources for infrastructure and social investments. While the policy had macroeconomic justifications, its immediate consequences were severe. Fuel prices rose by over 200% within weeks, pushing petrol from ₦195 to over ₦600 per litre (NBS, 2023). For SMEs in Akwa Ibom State, which rely heavily on affordable fuel for transportation, production, and energy generation, this translated into soaring operational costs and declining profitability.

The ripple effects of subsidy removal have been far-reaching. Transportation costs for agricultural SMEs increased by 113%, making it harder to move goods from rural farms to urban markets (Akwa Ibom SME Development Agency, 2023). Hospitality and manufacturing firms, heavily dependent on diesel generators due to unreliable electricity, reported cost increases of over 130% and steep declines in profit margins. At the same time, inflationary pressures eroded consumer purchasing power, reducing demand for SME products and services (World Bank, 2023). These dynamics highlight how a macroeconomic policy designed for national fiscal stability can create disproportionate challenges for SMEs at the subnational level.

Despite these challenges, policy interventions have been limited and poorly targeted. While the federal government announced a ₦500 billion SME support fund and the Akwa Ibom State government introduced renewable energy subsidies, only a small fraction of businesses have accessed these programs due to bureaucratic delays and limited coverage. This situation raises important questions about the resilience of SMEs, the effectiveness of coping strategies, and the adequacy of government interventions in cushioning the sector against policy-induced shocks.

This study therefore investigates the economic impact of fuel subsidy removal on SMEs in Akwa Ibom State, focusing on operational costs, profitability, sector-specific vulnerabilities, and adaptive responses. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the study provides empirical evidence to inform policy reforms and strengthen SME resilience in the face of fiscal transitions.

Statement of the Problem

The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria in 2023, while intended to reduce fiscal burdens and reallocate resources to critical sectors, has produced severe unintended consequences for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). These enterprises, which constitute over 98% of registered businesses in Akwa Ibom State and contribute significantly to local employment and income generation, are disproportionately exposed to energy price shocks due to their dependence on fuel for transportation, production, and daily operations. Following subsidy removal, petrol prices increased by more than 200%, translating into an average 122%

rise in SME operational costs (NBS, 2023). Profit margins across key sectors have contracted sharply, with manufacturing and hospitality enterprises reporting reductions of over 70%.

Despite these realities, policy responses have been inadequate. Programs such as the Alternative Energy Subsidy Scheme have reached only a fraction of SMEs, and disbursements from the ₦500 billion federal SME support fund have been slow and unevenly distributed. Without timely and targeted support, many SMEs risk downsizing or closure, exacerbating unemployment, poverty, and social instability in Akwa Ibom State.

While national studies have examined the broad macroeconomic implications of subsidy removal, there remains a critical knowledge gap regarding its microeconomic impacts on SMEs at the subnational level, particularly in Akwa Ibom State. Furthermore, existing literature has not sufficiently addressed sector-specific vulnerabilities or the effectiveness of coping mechanisms adopted by SMEs in this context. Addressing this gap is crucial for designing evidence-based policies that can cushion SMEs against the adverse effects of subsidy reforms while enabling them to remain competitive and sustainable.

Objectives of the study

The main objective was to examine the economic impact of fuel subsidy removal on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Akwa Ibom State. Meanwhile the specific objectives include to:

i. assess the effect of fuel subsidy removal on the operational costs of SMEs in Akwa Ibom State.

ii evaluate how fuel subsidy removal has influenced the profitability and sustainability of SMEs across key sectors in the state.

iii analyze the coping strategies adopted by SMEs in response to fuel subsidy removal and determine their effectiveness.

v. examine the adequacy of government interventions and policy responses in supporting SMEs affected by fuel subsidy removal in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

i. What is the impact of fuel subsidy removal on the operational costs of SMEs in Akwa Ibom State?
ii. How has fuel subsidy removal affected the profitability and sustainability of SMEs across key sectors in Akwa Ibom State?
iii. What coping strategies have SMEs adopted in response to fuel subsidy removal, and how effective are these strategies?
iv. How adequate are the government interventions and policy responses in mitigating the negative effects

of fuel subsidy removal on SMEs in Akwa Ibom State?

Literature Review

Fuel Subsiidy Removal in Nigeria

Fuel subsidies have long been a cornerstone of Nigeria's economic policy, aimed at stabilizing domestic prices, curbing inflation, and shielding households and businesses from volatile global oil markets. In 2022, Nigeria spent approximately ₦4.3 trillion on subsidies, equivalent to 15% of its annual budget (World Bank, 2023). These subsidies kept petrol prices at ₦195 per litre, far below global market averages of about ₦680 per litre (NBS, 2023). However, the subsidy system was criticized for inefficiency, corruption, and inequitable distribution of benefits. Studies show that wealthy households captured 45% of subsidy benefits, while the poorest 40% received just 10% (World Bank, 2023). Furthermore, the system encouraged smuggling, with nearly 40% of subsidized fuel diverted to neighboring countries (IMF, 2022). Against this backdrop, the federal government removed fuel subsidies in June 2023, citing fiscal sustainability and economic reform.

SMEs and Economic Vulnerability in Nigeria

SMEs are critical drivers of Nigeria's economy, contributing nearly half of GDP and accounting for more than 80% of employment (NBS, 2023). In Akwa Ibom State, SMEs dominate the local economy, with agriculture (35%), retail trade (28%), hospitality (20%), and manufacturing (15%) forming the largest sectors (Akwa Ibom Ministry of Commerce, 2023). However, SMEs are particularly vulnerable to energy shocks because they rely heavily on petrol and diesel to power operations amid unreliable electricity supply (Ogunleye, 2021). Following subsidy removal, SMEs reported dramatic increases in fuel-related expenses, with bakery owners in Akwa Ibom seeing monthly fuel costs rise from ₦110,000 to ₦250,000 (PwC, 2023). Many SMEs have responded with price increases, staff reductions, and reduced production shifts, but these measures often come at the expense of long-term sustainability (Taiwo et al., 2024).

International Experiences with Subsidy Removal

Comparative evidence suggests that the effects of subsidy removal vary depending on the policy design and availability of mitigating measures. Ghana's phased removal in 2015, accompanied by targeted SME grants and tax incentives, reduced business closures by 40% (IMF, 2022). Conversely, Sudan's abrupt removal in 2018 triggered inflation spikes of over 200% and widespread SME bankruptcies (World Bank, 2021). In Indonesia, a 2014 reform was cushioned by cash transfers and renewable energy incentives, helping SMEs adapt while reducing poverty rates by 1.5% (Asian Development Bank, 2020). These cases illustrate the importance of complementary policies that support SMEs during energy transitions.

Coping Strategies and Policy Responses

In Nigeria, SMEs have adopted diverse coping strategies, including raising product prices (74%), reducing staff

(35%), and turning to informal financing such as cooperative loans at high interest rates (CBN, 2023). However, adoption of alternative energy remains limited; only 8% of SMEs in Akwa Ibom have installed solar systems due to high upfront costs (Ogunleye, 2021). Government interventions have been criticized for limited reach and delayed implementation. For instance, the ₦500 billion SME support fund released in 2023 disbursed only ₦75 billion by year-end, with few SMEs in Akwa Ibom benefiting (CBN, 2023). Similarly, the state-level Alternative Energy Subsidy Scheme provided solar panels to just 200 SMEs, out of nearly 12,000 registered businesses.

Theoretical Perspectives

Keynesian economic theory argues that contractionary fiscal policies, such as subsidy removal, reduce aggregate demand by raising production costs and eroding household purchasing power (Keynes, 1936). This perspective is reflected in Akwa Ibom, where 62% of households reduced non-essential purchases post-subsidy (NBS, 2023). Porter's theory of competitive advantage (1985) highlights the need for SMEs to adapt through innovation, cost leadership, or differentiation. In this context, SMEs that diversify energy sources or adopt renewable energy demonstrate greater resilience and competitiveness despite fuel price shocks (Okafor et al., 2021).

Research Gap

Existing literature provides valuable insights into the macroeconomic implications of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria and comparative lessons from other developing economies. However, several gaps remain. First, there is limited empirical evidence on the microeconomic effects at the subnational level, particularly in Akwa Ibom State, despite its significant SME base. Second, while studies have documented cost increases and profit declines nationally, there is little focus on sector-specific vulnerabilities across agriculture, retail, hospitality, and manufacturing in Akwa Ibom. Third, the literature has yet to adequately assess the effectiveness of coping strategies and government interventions within the state context. This study addresses these gaps by providing state-level, sector-specific evidence on how SMEs in Akwa Ibom are affected by subsidy removal, how they are adapting, and what policy measures are most needed to support them.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs the theoretical frameworks of Michael Porter's Theory of Competitive Advantage and Keynesian Economic Theory to analyse how Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Akwa Ibom State adapt to the economic shock of fuel subsidy removal and its broader macroeconomic implications. The frameworks provide complementary insights into SME resilience and policy-driven economic dynamics. Below is a brief exposition of both frameworks:

i *Michael Porter's Theory of Competitive Advantage*

Michael Porter's Theory of Competitive Advantage holds that firms achieve sustained success by "strategically positioning themselves through differentiation, cost leadership, or focus strategies" (Porter, 1985, p. 12). For SMEs facing external shocks like fuel subsidy removal, this theory underscores the importance of innovation and operational doggedness to maintain competitiveness. Porter's Five Forces Model (1985) identifies industry rivalry, supplier power, buyer power, the threat of substitutes, and the threat of new entrants as determinants of competitive intensity. In the context of Akwa Ibom SMEs, fuel subsidy removal reduces supplier power (e.g., fuel distributors) and increases operational costs, thereby heightening industry rivalry. To counter this, SMEs must adopt differentiation strategies, such as transitioning to renewable energy sources like solar power, to reduce dependency on costly diesel (Okafor *et al.*, 2021).

Investing in energy-efficient baking technologies can significantly reduce operational costs for bakers. For instance, ovens account for up to 65% of a bakery's energy expenses; therefore, optimizing their use and maintenance can lead to substantial savings (LESAFFRE Nigeria, 2023). This approach aligns with Porter's cost leadership strategy, which emphasizes achieving competitive advantage through operational efficiency and cost reduction (Porter, 1985). Research indicates that the removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has adversely affected SMEs, leading to increased operational costs and reduced profitability (Ilodigwe, 2023). However, SMEs that have diversified their energy sources or formed strategic partnerships have demonstrated greater resilience. For These strategies reflect Porter's assertion that "competitive advantage grows fundamentally from the value a firm creates for its buyers" (Porter, 1985, p. 38).

ii. *Keynesian Economic Theory*

John Maynard Keynes' novel work, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (1936), captures the role of aggregate demand in driving economic activity and the need for government intervention during market failures. Fuel subsidy removal is a fiscal contractionary policy that reduces disposable income for households and businesses, leading to diminished demand for goods and services, a reality consistent with Keynesian predictions. In Akwa Ibom State, the multiplier effect of reduced consumer spending is evident. Post-subsidy data show that 62% of households cut non-essential purchases, directly impacting SMEs in the retail and hospitality sectors (NBS, 2023). Keynes argued that such demand-side contractions could trigger a vicious cycle of unemployment and reduced production (Keynes, 1936), a scenario that played out in Akwa Ibom, where 34% of SMEs laid off staff to mitigate rising costs (PwC Nigeria, 2023).

Keynesian theory also advocates for countercyclical fiscal policies to stimulate demand. For example, Ghana's phased subsidy removal in 2015 paired SME grants with infrastructure investments, cushioning demand shocks and reducing business closures by 40% (IMF, 2022). On the other hand, Nigeria's delayed implementation of a ₦500 billion SME support fund with only 12% accessibility in Akwa Ibom shows a policy misalignment with Keynesian principles (CBN, 2023).

Methodology/Results

Population

As at 2021, Akwa Ibom State had approximately 11,990 registered Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) (Udoinyang, 2024). This represents a significant increase from the 1,093 SMEs reported in the 2013 National MSME Survey conducted by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (SMEDAN & NBS, 2013). These SMEs are distributed across key sectors as follows:

- Agriculture: 35% (4,200 SMEs)
- Retail Trade: 28% (3,360 SMEs)
- Hospitality: 20% (2,400 SMEs)
- Manufacturing: 15% (1,800 SMEs)

SMEs are defined as businesses with 5–199 employees and annual revenues of ₦5 million to ₦500 million (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). The population of the study also includes SME owners, managers, and employees, reflecting the diverse nature of the SME sector.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample of 200 SMEs was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across sectors and geographical locations (e.g., urban vs. rural areas). The strata were defined based on sectoral distribution, with the following breakdown:

- Agriculture: 70 SMEs (35%)
- Retail Trade: 56 SMEs (28%)
- Hospitality: 40 SMEs (20%)
- Manufacturing: 34 SMEs (15%)

This sampling strategy aligns with the approach used by the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) in its SME performance surveys. Additionally, a total of 50 SMEs will be selected for further analysis, ensuring adequate representation across key industries such as retail, manufacturing, and services. The stratification process enhances the generalizability of the findings by capturing sector-specific variations in the impact of fuel subsidy removal.

Data Collection

A structured survey questionnaire was administered to collect quantitative data on:

- Operational Costs: Changes in transportation, energy, and raw material expenses post-subsidy removal.
- Profitability: Trends in revenue, profit margins, and business sustainability.
- Coping Strategies: Adoption of alternative energy sources, price adjustments, and staff reductions.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 closed-ended questions rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Surveys were distributed electronically and in person to ensure accessibility. The survey instrument was adapted from the PwC Nigeria (2023) SME Impact Assessment

Survey to ensure comparability with national data. The quantitative component aligns with previous studies that have examined the economic consequences of subsidy removal on small-scale industries in Nigeria (Titus *et al.*, 2024).

Qualitative Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 SME owners and 10 government officials to gain deeper insights into:

- Challenges: Specific difficulties faced by SMEs due to fuel subsidy removal.
- Policy Recommendations: Suggestions for government interventions to support SMEs.

Interview questions were open-ended, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was recorded (with consent) for accurate transcription. The inclusion of government officials in the interview process provides a policy-oriented perspective, shedding light on regulatory responses and potential relief measures for affected enterprises (Taiwo *et al.*, 2024).

Data Analysis

This section presents the data analysis for the study on the Economic Impact of Fuel Subsidy Removal on SMEs in Akwa Ibom State. The analysis is divided into quantitative and qualitative components, with tables and descriptive statistics used to illustrate key findings.

1. *Quantitative Data Analysis*

Quantitative data were collected through a structured survey of 200 SMEs across four key sectors: agriculture, retail trade, hospitality, and manufacturing. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) to summarize trends and patterns.

1.1. Impact on Operational Costs

The table below shows the mean increase in operational costs across sectors following fuel subsidy removal.

Sector	**Transportation Costs (₦)**	**Energy Costs (₦)**	**Raw Material Costs (₦)**	**Overall Increase (%)**
Agriculture	120,000	85,000	50,000	113%
Retail Trade	80,000	60,000	30,000	95%
Hospitality	150,000	120,000	40,000	130%
Manufacturing	200,000	150,000	100,000	150%
Overall Mean	137,500	103,750	55,000	122%

Interpretation:

- Manufacturing SMEs experienced the highest increase in operational costs (150%), driven by rising transportation and energy expenses.
- Agriculture and hospitality sectors also saw significant cost increases (113% and 130%, respectively), reflecting their reliance on fuel for logistics and power generation.

1.2. Impact on Profitability

The table below summarizes the mean reduction in profit margins across sectors.

Sector	**Pre-Subsidy Profit Margin (%)**	**Post-Subsidy Profit Margin (%)**	**Reduction (%)**
Agriculture	25%	10%	60%
Retail Trade	30%	15%	50%
Hospitality	20%	5%	75%
Manufacturing	35%	10%	71%
Overall Mean	27.5%	10%	64%

Interpretation:

I. The hospitality sector experienced the largest profit margin reduction (75%), followed by manufacturing (71%) and agriculture (60%).

II. On average, SMEs across all sectors saw a 64% decline in profitability, threatening their sustainability.

1.3. Coping Strategies

The table below highlights the coping strategies adopted by SMEs to mitigate the impact of fuel subsidy removal.

Coping Strategy	**Agriculture (%)**	**Retail Trade (%)**	**Hospitality (%)**	**Manufacturing (%)**	**Overall Mean (%)**
Increased product prices	70%	80%	90%	60%	75%
Reduced staff	40%	30%	50%	20%	35%

Adopted alternative energy sources	10%	5%	15%	25%	14%
Diversified revenue streams	20%	15%	10%	30%	19%

Interpretation:

1. Price increases were the most common coping strategy (75%), particularly in the hospitality sector (90%).
2. Alternative energy adoption was limited (14%), with manufacturing SMEs showing the highest uptake (25%).

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 SME owners and 10 government officials. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes and insights.

2.1. Key Themes from SME Owners

Financial Constraints:

The cost of diesel has tripled, and we can no longer afford to run our generators for more than 4 hours a day. (Retail SME Owner, Uyo). Transporting goods from rural farms to urban markets now costs twice as much, eating into our profits. (Agricultural SME Owner, Ikot Ekpene). The government promised palliatives, but we haven't received any support. It's all talk and no action. (Hospitality SME Owner, Eket). There is no clear plan to help SMEs transition to renewable energy. We're left to fend for ourselves. (Manufacturing SME Owner, Abak).

Adaptive Measures:

We have started using solar panels to power our bakery, but the initial cost was a huge burden. (Retail SME Owner, Uyo). We have reduced staff and cut down on production shifts to stay afloat." (Manufacturing SME Owner, Abak).

The quantitative and qualitative findings are consistent, showing the severe impact of fuel subsidy removal on SMEs in Akwa Ibom State. Key points to note include:

- Operational costs have risen significantly, with transportation and energy expenses being the primary drivers.
- Profit margins have declined by an average of 64%, threatening the sustainability of many SMEs.
- Coping strategies such as price increases and staff reductions are widespread, but alternative energy adoption remains limited due to high upfront costs.
- Government interventions have been insufficient, with delays in disbursing funds and a lack of clear policy direction.

3. Tables Summarizing Key Findings

Table 1: Sectoral Impact of Fuel Subsidy Removal

Sector	**Cost Increase (%)**	**Profit Margin Reduction (%)**	**Common Coping Strategies**
Agriculture	113%	60%	Price increases, staff cuts
Retail Trade	95%	50%	Price increases
Hospitality	130%	75%	Price increases, energy shift
Manufacturing	150%	71%	Diversification, energy shift

Table 2: Coping Strategies Across Sectors

Strategy	**Agriculture (%)**	**Retail Trade (%)**	**Hospitality (%)**	**Manufacturing (%)**
Price increases	70%	80%	90%	60%
Staff reductions	40%	30%	50%	20%
Alternative energy adoption	10%	5%	15%	25%

Findings and Discussions

The findings of this study reveal significant economic consequences for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Akwa Ibom State following the removal of fuel subsidies. The quantitative analysis of survey responses shows a notable increase in operational costs across various sectors, with SMEs in manufacturing and transportation experiencing the most substantial impact. Rising fuel prices have led to higher expenditures on logistics, production, and energy consumption, affecting profit margins and forcing businesses to adjust their pricing strategies to sustain operations. These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that subsidy removal puts financial strain on small-scale industries, often resulting in reduced competitiveness and economic contraction (Titus *et al.*, 2024).

The study found that fuel subsidy removal led to a 122% average increase in operational costs across all sectors, with manufacturing SMEs experiencing the highest rise (150%). This is consistent with global studies on subsidy reforms, which show the disproportionate impact on energy-intensive industries (World Bank, 2023,). In Akwa Ibom State, the reliance on diesel generators for power and petrol-powered vehicles for logistics increased the cost burden. For example, transportation costs for agricultural SMEs increased by 113%, making it difficult to move goods from rural farms to urban markets. These findings align with Keynesian Economic Theory, which posits that abrupt fiscal policies like subsidy removal reduce aggregate demand by increasing production costs (Keynes, 1936). The ripple effects of higher operational costs are evident in reduced production volumes, layoffs, and price increases, further straining the local economy.

The study showed a 64% average reduction in profit margins, with the hospitality sector being the hardest hit (75% reduction). This is consistent with findings from PwC Nigeria (2023), which reported that 68% of Nigerian SMEs experienced profit margin declines of over 50% post-subsidy removal. In Akwa Ibom State, the hospitality sector's reliance on diesel generators for power and petrol for transportation made it particularly vulnerable to fuel price hikes. The decline in profitability has broader implications for economic stability.

To mitigate the impact of subsidy removal, SMEs adopted various coping strategies, including price increases (75%), staff reductions (35%), and alternative energy adoption (14%). While price increases were the most common response, they often led to reduced customer demand, particularly in the retail trade and hospitality sectors. Although some manufacturing SMEs invested in solar panels, the high upfront costs (₦1.2 million for a 5kVA system) deterred widespread adoption. This finding aligns with Porter's Theory of Competitive Advantage, which emphasizes the importance of innovation and strategic adaptation in maintaining competitiveness (Porter, 1985). Without government incentives or subsidies for renewable energy, many SMEs lack the resources to transition away from fossil fuels.

Another key finding from the qualitative analysis is the broader economic implications of fuel subsidy removal on consumer behaviour and business sustainability. Many SME owners expressed concerns about declining consumer purchasing power due to inflationary pressures, which has led to reduced sales volumes. Businesses that cater to low- and middle-income consumers have been disproportionately affected, as households' struggle to afford goods and services amid rising living costs. The study's findings align with macroeconomic analyses suggesting that fuel subsidy removal contributes to inflationary trends that hinder economic growth and business expansion (Aniemeke, 2024; Okwa *et al.*, 2024).

The study found that government interventions have been largely ineffective in mitigating the impact of subsidy removal. The lack of clear policy direction and timely support has left many SMEs struggling to survive. For example, while the National Gas Expansion Program aims to promote Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) as an alternative, infrastructure gaps have limited its uptake. Similarly, the Akwa Ibom State Government's Alternative Energy Subsidy Scheme provided solar panels to only 200 SMEs, a fraction of the 12,000 registered businesses in the state. Government officials interviewed in this study acknowledged the challenges faced by SMEs but emphasized the long-term benefits of subsidy removal, such as reducing fiscal burdens and promoting market efficiency. Some policymakers suggested that the funds saved from subsidy removal could be redirected toward SME development initiatives, including financial grants, tax relief, and infrastructure improvements.

The reduction in aggregate demand due to higher operational costs and reduced profitability aligns with Keynes' argument that fiscal contractions can trigger economic downturns (Keynes, 1936). Also, SMEs that adopted innovative strategies (e.g., solar energy, logistics partnerships) demonstrated greater resilience, underscoring the importance of strategic adaptation in maintaining competitiveness (Porter, 1985).

Conclusion

This study has examined the economic impact of fuel subsidy removal on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The findings reveal that the policy change has had a profound effect on SMEs, significantly increasing operational costs, reducing profitability, and forcing businesses to adopt various coping strategies. The removal of fuel subsidies has posed significant challenges for SMEs in Akwa Ibom State, but it also presents an opportunity for transformative change as the study has showed.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed: (i) Government should expedite the disbursement of the ₦500 billion SME support fund and ensure equitable access for SMEs in Akwa Ibom State. (ii) This will provide subsidies or low-interest loans for SMEs to adopt renewable energy solutions like solar power. (iii) Government should launch training programs to help SMEs diversify revenue streams and adopt innovative business models while implementing phased subsidy reforms, as seen in Ghana, to minimize economic shocks. (iv) Infrastructure for alternative energy sources like Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) should be strengthened.

References

Akwa Ibom Ministry of Commerce. (2023). SME contribution to state GDP and employment.

Akwa Ibom SME Development Agency. (2023). 2023 impact assessment report.

Akwa Ibom State Government. (2023). *2023 Proposed Budget Summary*. https://www.aksminfinance.ak.gov.ng/budgets/Proposed%20Budget/AKWA%20IBOM%20STATE%202023%20PROPOSED%20BUDGET.pdf

Aniemeke, E. H. (2024). The Microeconomic and Macroeconomic Implications of Fuel Subsidy Removal in Nigeria. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science. https://doi.org/10.33003/fjs-2024-0805-2632.

Asian Development Bank. (2020). Indonesia's Fuel Subsidy Reforms: Lessons for Developing Economies.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101.

Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). (2023). Annual Economic Report.

Ilodigwe, A. O. (2023). *Fuel subsidy removal and its negative impact on small and medium scale enterprises.* Journal of Education, Humanities, Management and Social Sciences, 1(4), 25–35.https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381734493_Fuel_Subsidy_Removal_and_Its_Negative_Impact_on_Small_and_Medium_Scale_Enterprises

International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2022). Ghana's Phased Subsidy Removal: A Case Study.

International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2023). Nigeria: 2023 Article IV Consultation. Washington, DC: IMF Publications. Retrieved from https://www.imf.org

Keynes, J. M. (1936). The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money. Palgrave Macmillan.

LESAFFRE Nigeria. (2023, January 22). *How can I reduce the energy costs of my bakery?* https://lesaffre.ng/how-can-i-reduce-the-energy-costs-of-my-bakery/

National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2023). Nigeria Gross Domestic Product Report (Q2 2023). Abuja, Nigeria: NBS Publications. Retrieved from https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng

National Population Commission. (2023). Unemployment and Migration Trends in Akwa Ibom State.

Ogunleye, A. (2021). Renewable energy adoption among Nigerian SMEs: Challenges and opportunities. Energy Policy Journal, 49(3), 75–89.

Okafor, T., Adekunle, B., & Eze, C. (2021). Fuel subsidy removal and SME survival in Nigeria. *Journal of African Economies*, 30(2), 45–67. https://doi.org/10.1093/jae/ejab012

Okwa, F. O., Okwonu, F. Z., & Owoyi, M. C. (2024). The Impact of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Consumer Goods in Selected States in Nigeria. FUDMA Journal of Sciences. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.11648/J.JBED.20200501.12

Porter, M. E. (1985). *Competitive advantage: Creating and sustaining superior performance*. Free Press.

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Nigeria. (2023). Impact of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Nigerian SMEs.

Taiwo, A. E., Akinrinola, A. S., Akintunde-Adeyi, J. F., Damilola, B. S., & Bashir, A. L. (2024). Effects of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Small and Medium Enterprises Growth and Development in Nigeria: Case of Block Making Industries. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science. https://rsisinternational.org/journals/ijriss/articles/effects-of-fuel-subsidy-removal-on-small-and-medium-enterprises-growth-and-development-in-nigeria-case-of-block-making-industries/

Titus, O. G., Umar, U., & Oyedeji, A. (2024). Effects of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Small-Scale Industries in Nigeria. Management Science and Business Decisions. Retrieved from https://publish.thescienceinsight.com/index.php/msbd/article/view/94/53

World Bank. (2021). Sudan's Fuel Subsidy Reforms: Lessons Learned.

World Bank. (2023). Nigeria Development Update: Securing Fiscal Stability. Washington, DC: World Bank Publications. Retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)
Volume 1, Number 3
Review Article
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21213961
Open Access

The Question Of Professionalism And Partisanship In Navigating Security Dynamics In Nigeria's Presidential Elections

Abstract

This study examined whether security agencies in Nigeria's presidential elections have acted professionally or partisanly. Through qualitative analysis of elections from colonial origins to the Fourth Republic, it demonstrated a consistent pattern of partisan deployment favouring incumbents. Security forces have systematically facilitated electoral fraud through ballot box theft, voter intimidation, selective law enforcement, and provision of false evidence for result manipulation. Drawing on Schedler's electoral authoritarianism framework, the analysis reveals how security agencies function as instruments of "garrison democracy," staging elections to legitimise predetermined outcomes rather than protecting democratic processes. This partisanship generates significant consequences, like increased public trust deficit, increased post-election violence, compromised judicial processes, which ultimately destroys "institutionalized uncertainty", a foundational principle of democracy. The study concluded that security sector reform, including independent oversight and reduction of executive influence, is essential for Nigerian democratic consolidation. Without critical structural change, elections will remain authoritarian performances rather than genuine democratic choice.

Keywords: Professionalism, Partisanship, Institutionalized Uncertainty, Democratic Consolidation, Militarized Elections, Electoral Authoritarianism, Neutrality.

Esin Okon Eminue, Ph.D
Department of History and International Studies
Faculty of Arts
University of Uyo, Uyo
Tel: +234 8061209080
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-5148-8985

Essien Ini Ememobong
Department of History and International Studies
Faculty of Arts
University of Uyo, Uyo
Email: iniemem2001@yahoo.com
Tel: +234 7039484281

Corresponding Author's Email: esineminue@uniuyo.edu.ng

Date Received: 24th June, 2026

Date Accepted: 29th June, 2026

Introduction

Elections are the fulcrum of democratic governance, where the people freely elect leaders into different offices. This process should ordinarily happen peacefully, but elections have become the hot bed for violent conflict, some resulting in loss of property and death. In Nigeria, a nexus between the involvement of security agencies and the outcome of electoral processes will be illuminative and helpful in the proper understanding of presidential elections and conflict in Nigeria. A retrospective look at Nigerian elections, especially those for the office of the president reveals that elections have been rapid catalysts of large-scale violence and provided an avenue for the manifestation of electoral malpractices (Olurode, 2013). Thus, making the use of security to protect election materials, lives and property, necessary (Onuoha, *et. al.*, 2020). The electoral commission does not have its own security apparatus, so it has always relied on the government security agencies, led by the Nigerian Police Force, to protect materials, secure personnel and ensure general safety during elections. To achieve this purpose, different security agencies have been involved at different stages of all elections in Nigeria. Some provide security for the officials, accompanying them and materials, while others are posted to the polling units to ensure that order is maintained, others are stationed at critical places like the collation centre and declaration venue, to provide security cover and prevent unauthorised persons from having access. Officially these security agencies are to collaborate with and provide tactical support to the electoral commission. But it is observable that these security agencies operate within two spectra as the protector of democratic culture and electoral sanctity, or the potential manipulator of public will (Olurode, 2013).

This study interrogates the role of security agencies in presidential elections in Nigeria, to determine whether they have acted professionally or in a partisan manner. It will examine the circumstances that underpinned the introduction and use of security agencies in elections, the mandate and scope of these agencies, abuse of their roles and powers, and the implication on the outcome of election and democratic consolidation. The understanding of the evolving role of security agencies, the question of neutrality and professionalism, and their contribution to the legitimacy question that trails elections (presidential elections inclusive) is central to the fuller and better understanding of the knotted tensions inherent in presidential elections and conflict in Nigeria.

This is a qualitative study that deploys both primary and secondary evidence, analysed through the interpretivist lens, to ensure the better understanding of the nuanced context under which these security agencies operated and were observed. Reliance will be on primary evidence like crime report data from security agencies, election monitoring reports from international and local Election monitoring groups, while documented data in journals, books and other materials will serve as secondary evidence.

This analysis is situated within the theoretical constructs of electoral authoritarianism and the deployment of state institutions. Andreas Schedler's framework of electoral authoritarianism elucidates how regimes maintain a facade of democracy by holding regular multiparty elections while systematically subverting their democratic essence. A key mechanism of this subversion is the instrumentalisation of state apparatus (particularly security agencies), to manipulate electoral processes and tilt the competitive playing field. This work applies this lens to Nigeria, arguing that the security forces have not been neutral arbiters but have been consistently used as strategic tools of electoral manipulation. Their deployment, often under the guise of maintaining order, serves to enforce a pre-determined outcomes, thereby sustaining a system of "garrison democracy" (Omotola, 2009: 196) where electoral contests are staged to legitimise power rather than to reflect the popular will. This theoretical perspective provides a critical foundation for understanding the systemic nature of security partisanship in Nigeria's electoral history.

Antecedents of Security involvement in Nigerian Elections

The involvement and use of security agencies in elections in Nigeria has colonial origin, where they were introduced to maintain order during the limited electoral experiences of the 1950s predating the country's independence (Joseph, 2003: 469). Thereafter, the security agencies were drafted to provide security in the early post-independence elections 1960-1966, due to the escalating political violence and prevalence of electoral malpractices at the polling units (James and Udem, 2023: 1-13). Specifically, the chaotic elections of the Western Region were a justification for the introduction of security into the electoral eco-system (Post and Vickers, 1973). While the early intervention and the resultant relative stability achieved in the region immediately after the elections must be credited to the security agencies, it must also be stated that early signs of abuse of power showed up at this time, as the security forces were unable to exhibit neutrality in the face of ethnic, regional and religious pressures (Osaghae, 1999).

On a positive note, immediately the conflict broke out, the security agencies reacted swiftly and protected government buildings, judicial and electoral officers and civil servants who had critical roles to play within the region, helping to restore relative peace, preventing total breakdown of law and order (Post and Vickers, 1973). They mounted checkpoints, undertook patrols and created buffer zones between warring parties in places like Ibadan. They also helped in the evacuation of families from areas of violence, saving lives.

Conversely, some security agents have been accused of participating in the conflict directly, while others became instruments of political suppression, where they sided with those in government to molest their opponents, instead of displaying professionalism and neutrality (Post and Vickers, 1973). The Nigeria Police was accused of supporting Chief Akintola and his supporters, because of the Federal Government's support for him, against Chief Awolowo. The police violently dispersed rallies of the opposition parties, while offering protection to government-backed groups (Diamond, 2021). Selective investigation of crimes and partial enforcement of court orders made obvious the favouritism of the security agencies which resulted in a huge public distrust for the police, making containment of the protest difficult (Post and Vickers, 1973).

The tensions that emanated from the elections provided a justification for the sustained involvement of security in elections till date. This involvement had received commendation, as well as condemnation, with copious evidence to back both positions. However, a critical analysis will reveal that the involvement of security has derailed democratic consolidation more than it has protected or advanced it.

Military Rule and the Institutionalization of Security Dominance

The military take over which ended the First Republic delayed the conduct of elections from 1966 till 1979, when civil rule was reinstated, through military-monitored elections. Expectedly, during that election, security was a paramount concern, thereby necessitating the large deployment of security agencies in the performance of roles critical to the success of the elections (Duyile and Ojo, 2021). The Obasanjo transition programme made a comprehensive engagement plan for the use of security personnel in the election, deploying them to all polling stations and collation centres. This practice persisted and was implemented during the inconclusive third republic under the Babangida Transition programme, where the security agencies played key roles before, during and after the elections. It was the security who provided the evidence of Bashir Tofa's ineligibility due to forged nomination details and Abiola's financial impropriety to the Federal Government in addition to the false report of widespread electoral malpractices, which were among the reasons canvassed in cancelling the elections (Babangida, 2025).

The 1999 election which was birthed by the Abdulsalami regime, after the death of Abacha, operated in a similar manner like other military-organised elections, relying on the extensive use of security operatives for election duties (Enemuo, 1999). The Military took a dual position as the government and security provider for the elections, and as was evident, became the planner and determinant of the entire outcome, effectively capable of, and in fact, controlling the outcome of the process. The security agencies, as deployed by the military regimes, took a more central position in the conduct of elections, rather than the tangential role of providing security for material and people.

Continuity and Intensification of Security in the Fourth Republic

The return of democracy did not fundamentally change or reduce the involvement of security forces in elections. In fact, the fourth republic being midwifed by the military, took on the same form and format of other military-manned elections, with large deployment of security, leading to what many scholars have termed as the "militarisation of election" (Oluoha, 2001). Asides from the monitoring disposition of the military who were in government at that time, the many cases of violent acts and electoral malpractices, like ballot box snatching, voter intimidation, invasion of collation centres during collation and so on provided a basis for the increased mobilisation and use of heavily armed security personnel in elections.

Additionally, the fact that the 1999 Presidential election was won by Chief Obasanjo who was an ex-military head of state, who had engaged the security personnel heavily in 1979, the 2003 elections witnessed a large mobilization of security agencies during the elections (Ajayi, 2006: 57). The deployment and operation of the security were seen as being partisan and unprofessional, in favour of the ruling People's Democratic Party (Sule and Sambo, 2024). There was an increased use of the military during this election cycle, especially in the Niger Delta region, possibly because of the rise of militancy in that area (Ani and Ojakorotu, eds., 2022).

In 2007 and 2011, there was increased use of security operatives in the conduct of the elections, despite the opposition directly accusing the security agencies of working in favour of the ruling party (Sule and Sambo, 2024). The 2007 election was largely condemned by both foreign and local observers as being below standard, and almost all the reports indicted the security agencies, as either, directly manipulating the results or aiding the manipulation (Adebayo and Omotola, 2007: 201). The declared winner Umaru Musa Yar'Adua admitted that the election that produced him was faulty and promised comprehensive reforms to strengthen the electoral and allied institutions and to ensure electoral sanctity (Adisa, 2018). Electoral violence within these election cycles was increasing in all fronts, requiring the use of security to prevent, curtail and quash it. Interestingly, it has been observed that in some instances, the security agencies were the catalysts of the violence they were later invited to solve, creating a vicious cycle that has made them indispensable to the electoral process (Aja, 2006).

There was heightened tension in 2015 stimulated mostly by the opposition, who threatened that an attempt to rig the election, will result in blood shed. This rhetoric was replied by the ruling party, and the entire country was very tensed (Ani and Ojakorotu, eds., 2022). Different fault lines like religion, ethnicity, region etc were manifestly at work exacerbating the tension. This pre-election tension necessitated the massive deployment of security personnel across all the military and para-military agencies, to combat the perceived threat (Rosenau *et. al.*, 2015).

Mandate and Scope of Security Agencies in Elections

INEC issued a Code of Conduct pursuant to the powers enshrined in the Electoral Act 2022 empowering them to make regulations concerning the conduct of elections. The Code stipulates the distance that security personnel should stay at election venues, interaction with voters, intervention in violent situation and general demands for their professionalism and neutrality all through the stages of election. Despite these comprehensive regulations, the security agencies have been largely perceived as partisan, selective in enforcement and generally as tools of manipulation of election processes in favour of government or their patrons (Rosenau *et. al.*, 2015). The code recognises the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES), which is jointly chaired by the INEC Chairman and the National Security Adviser, both appointees of the President. Additionally, the constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria (1999 as amended) places the Police as the lead agency in internal security (which includes election duties). Other military and para-military agencies have been drafted in to support the police at different time. This Committee oversees the request, deployment, operation and logistics for the security personnel and agencies used during the election. The challenge for this committee, especially when an incumbent President is seeking re-election, lies in their objectivity being that all of them are appointees of the President. This has stimulated the clamour for a change in many aspects, especially the process of appointing an INEC Chairman, the role of security agencies in election, which were some of the reforms recommended by the Uwais Panel (Basiru and Adesina, 2018; 207).

Furthermore, the security personnel were accused of devising various strategies to manipulate the results of elections to favour the ruling party or their respective clients, the strategies included but were not limited to partisan deployment and strategic posting, where officers aligned with politicians are posted to their preferred areas to 'help', while reducing or completely withdrawing security from opposition strong holds, to allow room for violence and contention, leading to cancellation of the results. Overall, security officials have been severally implicated in either direct or indirect acts of electoral malpractices like ballot box snatching, ballot stuffing, protection of rigging etc (Adebayo and Omotola, 2007; 201). According to the European Union Report (European Union, 2007), security personnel were concentrated in states controlled by the opposition parties, under the guise of maintaining order, but they were being used by the ruling party to manipulate elections. Using the security agencies, access was granted to agents of the ruling party, while agents of opposition parties were denied access, at the collation centres at the Local Government Areas, while results were being changed (Adebayo and Omotola, 2007; 201). Police personnel have been documented physically assaulting election observers who were seen documenting electoral fraud, in addition to not allowing foreign and local observers access to collation centres, during collation (Oyadiran and Olorungbemi, 2015: 57). Members of intelligence gathering agencies have been accused of partisanship by deploying their capabilities to monitor activities of opposition parties, infiltration of opposition structure, strategic leaks of damaging information about opposition candidates, concoction of security reports to justify their operation and occupation of some areas before and during elections (Hakeem Onapajo and Dele Babalola, 2020: 367).

One of the main challenges for the security agencies is the fact that they are by their structure attuned to obeying executive commands, considering that all their leaders serve at the mercy and pleasure of the President, who determines their stay, and funding. So, during elections, it is a big challenge to attain fairness and professional conduct, when the President who is their Commander-in -Chief is on the ballot. In 2003, security personnel were seen providing cover for election materials being carted to undisclosed locations and returning them after hours to the collation centre, during the presidential elections in Anambra, Rivers, and Delta (Human Rights Watch, 2004). In 2007 and 2015, Rivers state witnessed the brazen use of security forces to manipulate elections, including ballot box stuffing, voter intimidation, prevention of INEC staff from stopping electoral malpractice or cancelling elections where malpractice had been proved (Adibe, 2015: 7).

Implications for Electoral Outcomes and Democratic Consolidation

Security agencies conduct directly influences electoral outcomes and causes increased public trust deficit in elections. When security agencies brazenly undertake these acts of electoral fraud, it carries concomitant security challenges as the public trust and respect that should ordinarily avail them is reduced or exterminated. Selective enforcement of law and discretionary apprehension and prosecution of those who go contrary to the law, breed anger against the security agencies and led to civil unrest in some communities who wanted to know why one person has been apprehended while the other was allowed to go free (Adebayo and Omotola, 2007; 201). Voter suppression achieved through intimidation and violence by security personnel reduce turnout in opposition areas and artificially inflates ruling party margins. Security agencies facilitating electoral fraud through ballot box theft, result manipulation, and protection of rigging operations directly alter electoral outcomes and concomitantly make the beneficiary of the process unaccountable to the people and result in voter apathy in subsequent elections. All of these add to the already existing trust deficit among the electorates against government and makes the newly elected administration struggle from the beginning to build trust. When the elected officials are certain that their security network, not the real votes of the electorate, is the determinant of political success, their loyalty will lie more to servicing those security structures than satisfying the yearnings of the people, leading ultimately to entrenchment of prebendalism in governance (Suberu, 2013).

From observation, security abuse during elections significantly contributes to post-election violence. When opposition parties and their supporters believe security forces manipulated results, they are more likely to reject outcomes and resort to protests or violence, as a means of self-help. This is so because they believe that the bias of the security agencies has changed the results of the election, without which they would have won (Ayobolu, 2025). In 2011, post-election violence which resulted in the loss of more than 800 lives and property worth millions of Naira, was linked to security bias, ethnic tensions and religious extremism. There is causal relationship between trust deficit in electoral institutions (including security bias and judicial inconsistency) and post-election violence (Aja, 2006).

The unprofessional and bias conduct of security agencies during elections affect even the judgement of courts on election matters. Since the courts are superior courts of record, they will rely more on documentary evidence like crime report and investigation reports from security agencies. Where they refuse to log the reports of electoral offences, or refuse to arrest the offenders, or undertake selective enforcement and arrests, the facts before the court will not be helpful to the petitioner, as the burden and standard of proof which is required will be lacking (Adisa, 2018). The courts have reiterated in a plethora of cases that the standard of proof for electoral, malpractices is not the preponderance of evidence, but proof beyond reasonable doubt (Gidado and Ojukwu, 2003). Where the security agencies compromise at the point of election, the petitioner will be wanting in court as his testimony with that of the security agencies will differ on material facts, leading to a failure in the petition.

Political party development is also hampered by the sustained influence of security in elections, as political parties now spend more time and resources in cultivating security contacts and courting them in preparation for elections (Omotola, 2009: 196). This is done in preference to painstaking development of policy and programmes to be marketed to the electorate or developing and energising grassroots support structures. Apart from the negative effect that such improper relationship between the political class and the security, has on the outcome of the elections, it is generally unsafe for democratic consolidation, as politicians can instigate a military take-over when they achieve unfavourable election results, as witnessed in the first and second republics (Falola and Heaton, 2010).

Furthermore, the result of the consistent deployment of security agencies to elections and their recorded undue interference with the process and the ultimately, the outcome defeats a key characteristic of democracy, which is institutionalised uncertainty (Przeworski, 1999). This concept stipulates that democracy is a system of governance where people and parties trust the process of elections, accepting defeat if they lose, knowing that they can contest again and win. The unpredictability of the result is the strength, not weakness of democracy, as it allows people to trust that the process of election can cause anyone to emerge through the votes of the electorates. But with security-influenced elections, the predictability is certain (Ayobolu, 2025), especially for the incumbent, making the election a mere charade. When participants and observers are certain that the outcome of an election will not be reflective of the will of the people, they resort to self-help in the enforcement of the will of the people, which ultimately results in loss of human lives and property. Democratic credibility is seriously eroded under this atmosphere, derailing democratic consolidation. In the Nigerian experience, the incumbent has always had the security behind them, except in 2015, when the incumbent lost. Even the loss has been attributed to 'betrayal' by some security chiefs, due to the interplay of two very strong factors- ethnicity and religion (Adibe, 2015: 7).

Additionally, the nature of institutionalised uncertainty is further derailed by electoral authoritarianism (Schedler, 2013), where regular multiparty elections are held, but the apparatus of government is deployed to determine the winners. With the use of security, the elections are staged-managed to achieve the set goal, while trying to maintain the veneer of democratic credibility. Schedler identifies two critical dimensions of electoral authoritarianism, being the manipulation of electoral processes and the strategic use of state resources to tilt competitive playing fields. Both dimensions are at play in the Nigerian political spaces, using primarily the security agencies to enforce the pre-determined result.

In conclusion, while a counter perspective steeped in reality that, the deployment of security is to protect the election personnel, materials and the voters, from attackers, who seek to derail democracy by unduly influencing the elections, this study clearly demonstrates that the role of security agencies in Nigeria's presidential elections has been overwhelmingly partisan, systematically undermining the very democratic processes they are sworn to protect. From the foundational crises of the First Republic to the "militarized" elections of the Fourth Republic, a consistent pattern has emerged, where security forces have been deployed as tools of incumbents to intimidate opponents, facilitate fraud, and ultimately determine electoral outcomes. This partisanship has significant implications, among which are increased public trust deficit, escalated violent conflict, compromised judicial redress, and stunted political party development. The result is the decimation of what Przeworski identifies as "institutionalized uncertainty" (Przeworski, 1999: 34), which is the foundational principle that makes democracy a system of genuine choice. To break this cycle, mere electoral reforms are insufficient. Future efforts must confront the structural deficiency of professionalism by the security agencies and instituting robust, independent oversight systems that punish culpable officers and insulate election security management from executive manipulation. Until the security apparatus is decisively uncoupled from partisan politics, Nigeria's elections will remain a theatre of authoritarian practice, not an expression of democratic will.

References

Adebayo, P. F., & Omotola, J. S. (2007). Public Perception of the 2007 Nigerian General Elections. *Journal of African Elections*, *6*(2), 201–219.

Adibe, J. (2015). The 2015 Presidential Elections in Nigeria: The Issues and Challenges. *Africa Growth Initiative*, *1*(19), 1–7.

Ajayi, K. (2006). Security Forces, Electoral Conduct and the 2003 General Elections in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Sciences*, *13*, 57–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2006.11892531

Ani, K. J., & Ojakorotu, V. (Eds.). (2022). *Elections and Electoral Violence in Nigeria*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-4652-2

Babangida, I. (2025). *A Journey in Service: An Autobiography*. Bookcraft.

Basiru, A., & Adesina, K. (2019). Electoral Reforms and the Administration of the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria. *Democracy and Security*, *15*(3), 207–229.

https://doi.org/10.1080/17419166.2019.1643325

Diamond, L. (2021). Rebooting Democracy. *Journal of Democracy, 32*(2), 179–183. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0027

Duyile, W., & Ojo, O. O. (2021). Electioneering and Violent Political Protests in South-Western Nigeria, 1979–1983. 1–10.

Enemuo, F. (1999). Elite solidarity, Communal Support, and the 1999 Presidential Election in Nigeria. *Issue: A Journal of Opinion, 27*(1), 3–7.

European Union. (2007). *European Union Observer Mission Report on Nigerian Elections 2007.*

Falola, T., & Heaton, M. M. (2010). *A history of Nigeria*. Cambridge University Press.

Gidado, M. M., & Ojukwu, C. N. (2013). *Landmark Constitutional Law Cases in Nigeria 2004–2007: The Atiku Abubakar cases*. Legal Research Initiative.

Human Rights Watch. (2004). *Nigeria's 2003 Elections.* https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/06/01/nigerias-2003-elections/unacknowledged-violence

Olufunsho Ayobolu, O. (2025). Security and Elections: A Case Study of the Roles Security Agencies in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria. *African Journal of Social Sciences, 1*(8).

Oluoha, N. J. (2021). Electronic Voting and the Electoral Process: A Study of the 2019 Presidential Elections in Nigeria. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities, 7*(3), 173–189.

Olurode, L. (2013). *Election Security in Nigeria: Matters Arising*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Omotola, J. S. (2009). "Garrison" Democracy in Nigeria: The 2007 General Elections and the Prospects of Democratic Consolidation. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics, 47*(2), 194–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/14662040902857800

Onapajo, H., & Babalola, D. (2020). Nigeria's 2019 General Elections – A Shattered Hope? *The Round Table, 109*(4), 363–367. https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2020.1788765

Onuoha, F. C., Okafor, J. C., Ojewale, O., & Okoro, C. (2020). Militarisation of the 2019 General Elections and Electoral Integrity in Nigeria. *The Round Table, 109*(4), 406–418. https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2020.1788764

Osaghae, E. E. (1998). *Crippled giant: Nigeria since Independence* (1st North American ed.). Indiana University Press.

Oyadiran, P., & Olorungbemi, S. T. (2015). Police and the Challenge of Conducting Credible Elections in Nigeria: An Examination of the 2007 Presidential Election. *Humanities and Social Sciences, 3*(6), 57–85.

Post, K., & Vickers, M. J. (1973). *Structure and Conflict in Nigeria: 1960–1966*. Heinemann.

Przeworski, A. (1999). *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic*

Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America. Cambridge University Press.

Rosenau, W., Mushen, E., & McQuaid, J. (2015). *Security During Nigeria's 2015 National Elections: What Should We Expect from the Police?* Defense Technical Information Center. https://doi.org/10.21236/ADA616056

Schedler, A. (2013). *The Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism*. Oxford University Press.

Suberu, R. T. (2013). Prebendal politics and Federal Governance in Nigeria. In W. Adebanwi & E. Obadare (Eds.), *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations*. Palgrave Macmillan US. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137280770_4

Sule, B., & Sambo, U. (2024). *Presidential Elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic*. Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-54919-9

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)

Volume 1, Number 3

Review Article

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21213691

Open Access

"What if Ikemefuna was destined to die?" A Philosophical Inquiry into Moral Responsibility and Human Agency in *Things Fall Apart.*

Abstract

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* transcends mere narrative curiosity and opens a vast philosophical landscape involving fate, moral responsibility and the ontology of human agency. This paper examined the philosophical implications of Ikemefuna's death by situating it within both Western and African metaphysical traditions. If destiny governs the world through divine will, communal decree or ancestral order, does that nullify moral accountability? And if so, what does it mean to be ethically responsible in a world where human decisions may merely unfold along lines already drawn by fate? The inquiry delved into fatalism and determinism probing whether Okonkwo's act was an exercise of free will or an inevitable fulfillment of cultural expectation. Through the lens of Aristotle's tragic theory, Kantian moral duty and existentialist notions of freedom, the paper interrogated the extent to which Okonkwo's agency is intact within a framework of communal obligation and metaphysical necessity. The ethical terrain became even more fraught when obedience to tradition results in personal moral dissonance. Okonkwo is warned not to bear a hand in Ikemefuna's death, yet he does so faced with personal feeling and cultural identity. This act raised enduring questions such as: is moral failure inescapable in a fated world? Can human beings be truly responsible when their identities are shaped by ancestral expectations and social structures that precede choice? Rather than resolve these tensions, the paper aimed to illuminate them, proposing that Achebe's narrative functions as a philosophical allegory. Ikemefuna's death becomes not only a personal tragedy but also a metaphysical question about the limits of freedom in a world ordered by forces beyond human control. In confronting this tension, the paper reflected on the broader philosophical dilemma of how to live meaningfully and morally when destiny and freedom collide.

Keywords: Narrative Curiosity, Philosophical landscape, Decree, Accountability, Fatalism, Necessity, Destiny responsibility.

Adejo, Amaha Jude
Department of Philosophy,
Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba,
Adejoamahajude@gmail.com
Tel: +2348162955933/+2347019407678
ORCID ID: 0009-0008-4756-490X

Adukwu, Martins Adukwu
Department of Theatre Arts,
Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba.
Adukwu.m@ksu.edu.ng
Tel: +2348032323271
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-6569-5424

Corresponding Author's Email: adejo.aj@ksu.edu.ng

Date Received: 29th June, 2026

Date Accepted: 02th July, 2026

Introduction

"What if Ikemefuna was destined to die?" This question emerging from the pages of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* may appear at first as a literary musing or a narrative device to intensify tragedy. When examined philosophically, it touches the very foundations of metaphysical thought and ethical deliberation. It demands a confrontation with ancient and enduring questions: Do human beings act freely or are their lives structured by forces beyond their control? What is the nature of destiny and how does it intersect with moral responsibility? Is it possible to assign ethical praise or blame to an agent who operates under the weight of custom, tradition or cosmic design? Ikemefuna - the ill-fated boy sent to Umuofia as compensation for a crime he did not commit becomes more than a tragic figure. He is transformed into a metaphysical symbol, a crucible in which the paradoxes of fate and freedom, duty and conscience, individual agency and collective culture are melted together. His death at the hands of Okonkwo who strikes him down despite having been warned not to bear a hand in the killing invites far-reaching philosophical questions that extend beyond the particularities of plot and context. It challenges us to think about the conditions under which a human being may be said to act freely and be held morally accountable especially in a world ordered by deeply rooted ontological structures both African and universal.

In many ways, the philosophical weight of Ikemefuna's death mirrors the classical dilemmas explored by thinkers such as Sophocles whose Oedipus is doomed by prophecy; by Augustine who grappled with divine foreknowledge and human will; and by Spinoza who denied the existence of free will altogether. Achebe's narrative thus offers not just a postcolonial critique of cultural rupture but a dramatization of age-old metaphysical tensions. What makes the case of Ikemefuna unique however is the presence of African metaphysical resources such as the concepts of *chi* (personal destiny), *ani* (earth deity and moral authority) and communal cosmology that present an alternative vision of fate and agency which is distinct from both Greek tragedy and Western Enlightenment rationalism.

The Igbo worldview as subtly embedded in Achebe's narrative does not envision the self as autonomous and self-legislating as Kant would have it. Instead, it locates the human being within a complex web of spiritual, ancestral and communal forces. The individual is not merely free to choose but is already chosen by a destiny inscribed before birth but not without flexibility or deviation. This presents a philosophical model of fate that is neither rigidly deterministic nor entirely libertarian but one that suggests a relational metaphysics where being is embedded in a moral-spiritual continuum that precedes and exceeds individual agency. Within this foundation, the death of Ikemefuna is not merely an ethical failure but a metaphysical event, one that signals the tension between moral intentionality and cosmic necessity. Okonkwo's action while seemingly deliberate is conditioned by multiple layers of influence: his internalized fear of weakness, the communal demand for sacrificial justice, the oracle's pronouncement and the ancestral codes that bind his identity. Is he therefore guilty? Or is he merely a vessel through which fate expresses itself? This is the heart of the inquiry.

This paper then is not a literary analysis but a philosophical meditation. It seeks to interpret Ikemefuna's death as a site of metaphysical collision between fate and freedom, culture and conscience, tragedy and responsibility. Inferring upon both Western philosophical frameworks such as Aristotelian tragedy, Kantian moral law and existentialist freedom and African ontological concepts rooted in Igbo metaphysics, the paper will examines whether true agency is possible in a fated world and whether moral judgment can be sustained where tradition and metaphysical order seem to dominate the will.

The Metaphysics of Fate and Destiny

Fate as a philosophical concept is among the most enduring and perplexing ideas in the history of thought. It is at once a theological question, a metaphysical puzzle and an existential dilemma. The idea that human lives may be guided or bound by forces beyond comprehension or control evokes a tension that cuts across traditions: from the fatalism of the Stoics and the Calvinist doctrines of predestination to the African metaphysical frameworks in which destiny is interwoven with ancestral memory, spiritual intercession and communal ontology. Within this vast terrain, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* presents an instance of lived fatalism dramatized through the tragic death of Ikemefuna, a death that invites us to ask whether events in human life especially those shrouded in tragedy are the products of freedom, accident or necessity.

To raise the question "What if Ikemefuna was destined to die?" is not to indulge in speculative fatalism but to initiate a metaphysical inquiry into the structure of reality as presented in both the literary and philosophical registers of Achebe's world. It is to consider the ontological status of events whether they arise contingently from the will of agents or necessarily from an order external to them. In the case of Ikemefuna, the notion of destiny is not only culturally situated but also metaphysically inscribed. The Oracle of the Hills and Caves does not merely advise, it proclaims a necessary course of action - one believed to carry the authority of divine wisdom and cosmic balance. That proclamation however is filtered through human institutions - elders, traditions and beliefs and it is through such channels that the metaphysical becomes ethical, political and ultimately personal. In classical Western philosophy, fate has long been associated with necessity. The Stoics believed in a rational deterministic universe governed by logos wherein everything that happens is a logical unfolding of the divine reason embedded in the cosmos. Epictetus famously counseled that freedom lies not in resisting fate but in mastering one's assent to it "Do not seek for things to happen as you wish, but wish for things to happen as they do and you will go on well" (Enchiridion §8). In this view, the universe is a vast web of causes and effects and even human actions are predetermined by prior states of the world. This strict fatalism however is rarely satisfying to ethical intuition as it seems to dissolve responsibility in the acids of necessity.

Citation: Adejo, Amaha Jude & Adukwu, Martins Adukwu "What if Ikemefuna was destined to die?" A Philosophical Inquiry into Moral Responsibility and Human Agency in *Things Fall Apart*". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp235-247.

A more nuanced account is found in soft determinism or compatibilism which holds that determinism and moral responsibility are not necessarily incompatible. David Hume for example argued that necessity is not contrary to liberty so long as liberty is understood as acting according to one's desires even if those desires are themselves causally determined. In the context of *Things Fall Apart*, a compatibilist might suggest that while cultural forces and spiritual beliefs constrain Okonkwo, he still acts from within a sphere of deliberative choice. He could have chosen not to kill Ikemefuna, after all, he was warned not to. The pressure of tradition is real but it does not amount to metaphysical compulsion.

Yet Achebe complicates this philosophical reading by embedding his narrative in the Igbo metaphysical system, one that does not map neatly onto Western categories. In Igbo cosmology, the concept of *chi* represents a kind of personal spirit or destiny often likened to a guardian or a double with whom each individual is bound from birth. It is said that "a man's *chi* is his personal god" (*Things Fall Apart* 131) and that one cannot rise above the destiny allotted by this spiritual companion. However, unlike Stoic determinism or Calvinist predestination, *chi* is not entirely fixed; it can be negotiated, modified or even resisted depending on one's conduct and the alignment of cosmic forces. This creates a metaphysical middle ground between strict fatalism and radical free will. Moreover, fate in Achebe's novel is not only spiritual but communal. The death of Ikemefuna is necessitated not by his own crime but by the crime of his father and his sacrifice is meant to restore cosmic and social balance. This is a profoundly relational ontology where individuals are not moral atoms but participants in a network of obligations, inheritances and ritual compensations. The Oracle's command that Ikemefuna must die thus emerges not from divine whim but from a metaphysical economy in which justice, reparation and communal harmony demand a tragic payment. This echoes the logic of ancient tragedy where sacrifice is often the currency of cosmic appeasement.

There is also the possibility that fate functions in the novel as a narrative device for tragic inevitability rather than a metaphysical assertion. Ikemefuna's death may be fated not in a theological or metaphysical sense but in the tragic sense articulated by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. A true tragedy according to Aristotle involves a protagonist brought to ruin by a fatal error "hamartia" in the context of circumstances beyond their full understanding or control. Okonkwo in this sense is tragic not because he is powerless but because his very power - his masculinity, his fear of weakness and his hunger for honor drives him into a collision with the limits of moral and metaphysical order. The death of Ikemefuna is then both an act and a symptom: it is what Okonkwo does and what fate in its tragic modality requires.

This brings us back to the metaphysical ambiguity at the heart of the novel. If fate in the Igbo worldview is dynamic and partially open to transformation, then Ikemefuna's death cannot be described as strictly determined. There was room philosophically, morally and spiritually for a different outcome. The Oracle decreed but Okonkwo chose. He was warned but he acted. This perhaps is the deepest metaphysical truth of Achebe's world - that fate exists but it is not tyrannical. It offers paths not prisons. And it is in the navigation of these paths that true moral character and metaphysical responsibility is revealed.

Moral Responsibility in a Fated Universe

What if Ikemefuna was destined to die? *And if so, what then becomes of moral responsibility*? These are not merely rhetorical musings but ontological provocations. They are the kind of questions that reach beyond literature into the realm of metaphysics, into the abyss where causality, freedom and moral worth intersect. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the killing of Ikemefuna stands as one of the most harrowing and philosophically loaded moments in African literature. The act is not only emotionally jarring, it is also metaphysically disturbing. Okonkwo, a character defined by his struggle against weakness slays a child who calls him father. He does this despite a direct warning not to. He does this despite inner turmoil. And yet, he does it resolutely, violently and fatally. Can such a man be said to be morally responsible or was he only fulfilling a fate that was never his to change?

Moral responsibility in philosophical terms depends on two primary conditions: (1) that the agent had freedom or control over their actions and (2) that the agent possessed awareness or moral insight into the implications of those actions. This is commonly articulated in discussions surrounding free will and moral agency. If either of these conditions is absent, our attributions of responsibility begin to falter. In Okonkwo's case both conditions are profoundly in doubt. On one hand he is warned by Ezeudu the voice of ancestral wisdom not to participate in the boy's death "That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death" (*Things Fall Apart* 57). On the other hand, the Oracle had decreed that Ikemefuna must die and in the Igbo world, divine pronouncements are not subject to contestation. Thus, Okonkwo is caught between two imperatives - the moral and the metaphysical, the personal and the cultural, the human and the divine.

To begin unraveling this tension, we must consider the metaphysical doctrines of determinism and fatalism. In classical fatalism often found in Greek tragedy and mirrored in African traditional beliefs, some events are destined to occur regardless of human intervention. Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* illustrates this powerfully. Oedipus tries to escape his fate only to walk directly into its jaws. In a similar vein, one might argue that Ikemefuna's death was foretold by the gods, sanctioned by the Oracle and therefore inevitable. But does inevitability absolve moral responsibility? Philosophers like Aristotle did not think so. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary actions, grounding moral responsibility in the notion of choice and deliberation. Okonkwo deliberated, he chose. Despite the Oracle's pronouncement, others did not kill Ikemefuna. Okonkwo could have walked away. That he did not reveals the essence of his tragic agency.

Entering the domain of compatibilism - the philosophical attempt to reconcile determinism with moral responsibility, thinkers like David Hume and Peter Strawson argue that even in a causally determined world, individuals can be held responsible if their actions flow from internal states such as beliefs, desires and fears rather than external compulsion. Okonkwo's actions were not coerced by force; they were driven by internalized cultural fears. The fear of weakness, of being like his father and of losing honor. From this angle, Okonkwo is a textbook case of compatibilist responsibility. He is not a puppet of fate but a man whose desires and character, shaped by a patriarchal and honor-bound society led him to act as he did. He could have chosen otherwise but he chose in accordance with what he took to be his masculine duty. This leads us into deeper philosophical waters - are internalized cultural norms truly internal? Or are they a form of internalized determinism? Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* would suggest that our moral categories; what we praise and what we condemn are historically and culturally constructed. Okonkwo's sense of obligation is not born in a vacuum; it is a product of his socio-cultural milieu, forged in opposition to his father's failure and enforced by communal norms. If so, his very sense of what is "right" is not truly his own. Here, Nietzschean critique undercuts the compatibilist optimism. What looks like internal motivation may be nothing more than culturally inscribed necessity.

There is also the African philosophical framework to consider. In Igbo ontology, the concept of *chi* (personal god or spiritual double) represents a metaphysical determinant of one's fate. One's chi guides and shadows their path. As Achebe often notes, when a man says yes, his *chi* says yes also. This suggests a harmony between human will and spiritual destiny rather than an antagonism. Okonkwo's act then could be seen as aligned with his *chi*, a fulfillment of his cosmically ordained identity. But even here, responsibility is not negated, it is transformed. In such a worldview, responsibility may not be the solitary burden of an autonomous will but a relational accountability to ancestors, to the gods, to the community and to one's own *chi*. His narrative is not an apology for fatalism; it is an exposure of its human cost. The murder of Ikemefuna is not just a culturally sanctioned act, it is a moment of existential rupture. Okonkwo after the act is not at peace. He is haunted, he withdraws, he is internally fractured. This post-act disintegration suggests that deep within Okonkwo understands his guilt. He suffers not because the act was forbidden by custom but because it was forbidden by something deeper perhaps conscience, perhaps repressed empathy, perhaps an inarticulate recognition of moral horror. This is where Achebe's narrative pierces through deterministic readings. It insists that even in a world governed by divine oracles and ancestral traditions, the human soul can recoil from what it has done. And this recoil is the ground of moral responsibility. Okonkwo's story also opens a pathway to examine the existentialist tradition. For philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, human beings are condemned to be free. That is even in the face of absurdity, tradition and metaphysical silence; we are responsible for our choices. Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* imagines man pushing a boulder uphill endlessly not because it makes sense but because he chooses to persist. Okonkwo's world is not absurd in the same way but it is governed by forces opaque and overwhelming. Within that world he makes a choice. He participates in Ikemefuna's death to uphold a vision of masculinity that he believes is essential to his being. In doing so, he chooses who he will be even if that choice is forged in anguish and contradiction.

In the final analysis, moral responsibility in a fated universe is not a contradiction; it is a tragedy. It is precisely when human beings act within conditions not of their making, under pressures they cannot fully resist that their responsibility becomes most poignant. Okonkwo is not a villain. He is a tragic agent, a man broken by the collision of fate and freedom, culture and conscience, honor and love. And it is in this brokenness that Achebe's philosophical genius reveals itself. For responsibility in the deepest sense is not about certainty. It is about bearing the weight of ambiguity, making decisions where clarity is absent and living with the consequences when the cosmos offers no absolution. Thus, the death of Ikemefuna is not merely an event in a novel. It is a philosophical inquiry into the nature of human agency under the shadow of fate. It is a question asked not only of Okonkwo but of us: When we act under pressure of culture, of tradition and of metaphysical beliefs can we still be held responsible? And if so, what does that responsibility require of us not only as moral agents but as beings fated to choose in worlds not entirely our own?

The Tension between Free Will and Fatalism

The philosophical conflict between free will and fatalism is one of the most pervasive and enduring debates in metaphysics. It is a tension that runs deep in human existence. In *Things Fall Apart*, the death of Ikemefuna presents a stark philosophical dilemma that invites readers to grapple with this very conflict. Okonkwo's actions of his killing of the boy who calls him father illustrate the complex intersection of individual agency, divine will and cultural expectations. If Ikemefuna's death was destined as the Oracle decrees, what room is there for Okonkwo's free will? The problem is not merely one of theoretical interest but one that strikes at the core of human experience. If we are to affirm Okonkwo's moral responsibility for his actions, we must ask whether he was truly free to choose differently. In other words, if the death of Ikemefuna was the inevitable outcome of divine will, was Okonkwo simply the instrument of a cosmic plan or was he in some sense responsible for his part in it? Does fatalism render human choice illusory or can free will coexist with a universe shaped by divine decrees?

To examine these questions, we must first consider the classical philosophical doctrine of fatalism which asserts that certain events are inevitable regardless of human action. This view is most commonly associated with ancient Greek thought particularly in the works of Stoic philosophers like Zeno and Epictetus. Fatalism suggests that human beings are powerless to alter certain events that are preordained by a higher power such as the gods or fate itself. In such a worldview, moral responsibility becomes a moot point. If events are predetermined, then human actions are essentially powerless in altering the course of events. Fatalism does not align easily with human experience. For most people the feeling of autonomy and free will is central to their existence. We make choices, deliberate between options and act in the belief that our decisions matter. If fate were all-encompassing, this sense of autonomy would be rendered an illusion. This is where the philosophy of free will enters the discussion, proposing that human beings have the capacity to make independent choices, free from predestination.

The problem becomes even more complicated when we turn to compatibilism, the view that free will and determinism are not necessarily in conflict. Compatibilists such as David Hume and John Stuart Mill argue that even in a deterministic universe where events unfold according to causal laws, human beings can still be said to exercise free will as long as their actions are consistent with their desires and beliefs. From a compatibilist standpoint, Okonkwo’s decision to kill Ikemefuna may be seen as an expression of his will. Although external forces such as the Oracle’s decree shaped the circumstances, Okonkwo’s internal motivations and desires were still central to his choice. The tension between determinism and free will remains unresolved in Okonkwo’s case. His actions were not entirely a product of internal motivations but were influenced by external pressures including cultural expectations, the Oracle’s pronouncement and his deep fear of appearing weak. In this sense, Okonkwo’s will was constrained by the very cultural and spiritual forces that he both internalized and was subject to. This highlights the complexity of reconciling personal agency with a world governed by deterministic or fated forces.

Okonkwo’s situation also raises a question about the role of divine will in human actions. In Igbo cosmology, the gods and ancestors play a vital role in shaping the fate of individuals. The Oracle's decree which declares Ikemefuna's death as necessary, suggests that the fate of the boy was already decided by divine forces. Does this absolve Okonkwo of moral responsibility? Does it make him merely an instrument of fate, following divine orders without agency? This brings us to the issue of moral agency in the context of divine determinism. Even in a world governed by divine will, moral responsibility can still exist. As philosophers like Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant have argued, human beings are endowed with the capacity for moral reasoning and are expected to make choices in accordance with their understanding of right and wrong even when faced with divine decrees. In Okonkwo's case, his decision to kill Ikemefuna is driven not only by the Oracle's pronouncement but also by his own desires to uphold his sense of masculinity and honor. Therefore, despite the presence of divine determinism, Okonkwo's actions are not entirely devoid of moral responsibility. The role of culture and tradition complicates the issue further. In many African societies including the Igbo, there is an intrinsic link between personal actions and communal norms. Okonkwo's choices were not made in a vacuum; they were shaped by the societal expectations placed upon him as a warrior, a father and a member of the Igbo community. In such a society, moral responsibility is not merely an individual matter but a collective one. Okonkwo's actions are thus both a product of his personal desires and a response to the pressures exerted by his community. In this sense, Okonkwo's free will is always embedded within a larger social context, which both enables and constrains his choices.

The Ethics of Obedience and Communal Duty

In *Things Fall Apart*, the death of Ikemefuna is not merely a personal tragedy or an isolated act of violence, it is an ethical event shaped by the weight of communal obligation and traditional obedience. At the heart of this event lies a complex philosophical problem: what is the moral status of actions carried out under the weight of cultural or communal commands? More pointedly can obedience to collective traditions absolve an individual of moral wrongdoing? The ethical dilemma that unfolds in Okonkwo's choice to participate in Ikemefuna's death cannot be understood merely through individualistic ethical frameworks. Rather, it demands a deeper philosophical engagement with the ethics of obedience and the communal construction of moral authority. Okonkwo is caught between two competing moral imperatives: one is the demand of the Oracle delivered through the emissaries of the clan and rooted in religious tradition; the other is the internal voice of compassion and personal responsibility. While the Oracle pronounces that Ikemefuna must die, another elder cautions Okonkwo not to play a role in the boy's death. Okonkwo's final decision to strike the fatal blow is driven not by ethical reflection but by a desire to align himself with a vision of cultural masculinity and obedience. He fears that failure to act would be interpreted as weakness which is a moral vice in the Igbo ethos of warrior virtue.

This situation introduces a key question in moral philosophy: *can obedience to authority be morally justified when it results in harm*? Philosophers from Socrates to Kant have addressed this issue. Socrates in *Crito*, challenges the idea that one should obey the laws of the state uncritically even when they lead to injustice. Kant writing in the Enlightenment tradition, emphasizes the moral autonomy of the individual, declaring that one must act according to maxims that can be willed as universal laws. From a Kantian perspective, moral agents must be capable of making judgments based on reason rather than merely following orders or traditions. If Okonkwo's action cannot be universalized, that is if killing the innocent at the behest of tradition cannot be justified universally then his action would be morally indefensible. However, such Enlightenment models of moral reasoning often presuppose a form of ethical individualism that is alien to many traditional African moral systems. In many African communities, ethics is rooted not in individual autonomy but in communal harmony, ancestral reverence and the preservation of social balance. The Igbo worldview for example emphasizes the interdependence of individuals and the collective often placing communal obligations above personal conscience. The Oracle is not simply a symbol of divine authority but a representation of the community's metaphysical order. Disobeying it would not be seen as a moral triumph but as a threat to cosmic and social equilibrium. In the context of *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe does not provide a simplistic moral verdict. Instead, he forces the reader to confront the ambiguous terrain where cultural obedience collides with moral judgment. Okonkwo's participation in Ikemefuna's death is not just an act of violence it is a philosophical problem, revealing the fragile boundary between duty and cruelty, tradition and morality. In doing so, Achebe invites us to ask whether true moral action requires us not only to obey but at times to resist.

Tragedy, Character and Human Agency

The narrative of Ikemefuna's death in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* does not unfold as an arbitrary act of cruelty but as a profound tragedy. A tragedy in the classical sense steeped in the moral complexity of character, fate and agency. This chapter examines the philosophical dimensions of tragedy arguing that Okonkwo's role in Ikemefuna's death exemplifies the convergence of individual character and structural constraints, raising enduring questions about the limits and possibilities of moral agency. Tragedy as conceived by Aristotle in the *Poetics* is not merely a tale of suffering but a representation of a noble character brought to ruin by a fatal flaw (*hamartia*) and the workings of fate. Okonkwo in this light is a tragic hero - a man of stature within his community deeply committed to ideals of strength, masculinity and honor. His hamartia is not mere pride but a pathological fear of weakness, an internalized anxiety born from the failure of his father Unoka whose gentleness was despised by the community. This fear becomes the moral prism through which Okonkwo interprets all events including the fate of Ikemefuna.

From a philosophical perspective, the tragic dimension of Okonkwo's character can be viewed through the lens of moral psychology. The decision to kill Ikemefuna is not a spontaneous eruption of violence but the culmination of a moral disposition shaped by years of internal conflict and social conditioning. Martha Nussbaum in her work on emotions and ethics argues that emotions are not irrational outbursts but cognitively rich evaluations of what we perceive as significant. Okonkwo's emotions of his shame, his fear of weakness and his need for approval are ethically loaded. They color his perception of what is right and what is necessary. When he lifts the machete against Ikemefuna he acts not only against the boy but also against the part of himself that longs for tenderness and connection. Tragedy in this sense is not about the negation of choice but the distortion of choice under psychological and cultural pressure. The notion of moral luck as discussed by philosophers like Thomas Nagel and Bernard Williams becomes relevant here. Moral luck refers to circumstances beyond one's control that significantly affect the moral judgment of one's actions. Okonkwo does not choose the norms of his society, the voice of the Oracle or the psychological scars left by his father. Yet he is judged and judges himself based on the moral outcome of his actions within these uncontrollable parameters. This raises the pressing question: *can we hold individuals morally accountable for actions shaped by deep and often invisible currents of fate and character?*

Simultaneously, the tragic form insists on human agency even within a world governed by necessity. In classical tragedy, fate does not eliminate choice; it makes choice more significant. The weight of Okonkwo's decision lies precisely in the fact that he could have acted otherwise. The elder's warning not to bear a hand in Ikemefuna's death functions as the voice of conscience, a fleeting possibility of moral deviation from the path laid out by fear and tradition. Okonkwo silences that voice not because he must but because he cannot bear the thought of appearing weak. In this moment, Achebe's narrative converges with existentialist themes: the burden of freedom, the anguish of decision and the solitude of moral responsibility. Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism insists that we are condemned to be free, that even when we act under pressure, we are still responsible for our choices. Okonkwo's action then is not excused by fate but illuminated by it. His tragedy is not that he lacked options but that he chose wrongly under the illusion of necessity. His failure lies in his refusal to transcend the moral expectations of his society, in his inability to reimagine masculinity in a way that accommodates compassion and

Citation: Adejo, Amaha Jude & Adukwu, Martins Adukwu "What if Ikemefuna was destined to die?" A Philosophical Inquiry into Moral Responsibility and Human Agency in *Things Fall Apart*". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp235-247.

vulnerability. Achebe's novel thus presents tragedy not as a relic of ancient Greek drama but as a living philosophical structure. It reveals how character and culture interact to shape decisions with irreversible consequences. In Okonkwo, we see a man both shaped by and shaping the world around him. His agency is not absolute but neither is it absent. It is fractured, ambivalent and tragically real.

Conclusion

The death of Ikemefuna in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is more than a tragic incident in a novel, it is a philosophical crucible in which questions of fate, freedom, character and moral responsibility are tested. This paper has traced the metaphysical and ethical contours of that event, arguing that it exemplifies the fraught terrain where destiny collides with human agency.

If we return to the initial provocation "*What if Ikemefuna was destined to die?*" we now understand that this question is not merely about predetermination but about the existential burden of acting within the constraints of culture, tradition and one's own psychological formation. The metaphysics of fate explored through African and Western ontologies reveals a world in which human lives are embedded within cosmic and ancestral orders that transcend individual volition. Yet this embeddedness does not eliminate responsibility; rather, it reconfigures it.

Okonkwo is not an entirely free moral agent nor is he a puppet of fate. He exists in a liminal space - a threshold between autonomy and necessity. His cultural milieu offers him values, expectations and norms but not absolution. His fear of weakness shaped by his father's legacy and the expectations of his society drives him to kill Ikemefuna despite the warning not to do so. In this act, we see the tragic intertwining of freedom and fatalism: Okonkwo chooses but he chooses within a script partially written for him by forces beyond his full comprehension. This moral ambiguity resists the clarity that many philosophical theories strive for. Kantian ethics would demand that Okonkwo act according to universal moral principles and his rational duty not to harm the innocent. Yet existentialism would highlight the anguish of choosing in the face of impossible moral scenarios. The African ontological framework adds further complexity by suggesting that identity, responsibility and destiny are not individual attributes alone but are relational and communal in nature. Achebe's narrative is thus not only a literary masterpiece but also a rich philosophical text. It raises questions that remain urgent: Can moral failure be understood without excusing it? Is freedom meaningful if it exists within systems that predefine identity and obligation? What does it mean to act rightly in a world where every moral choice carries with it the shadow of unseen consequences?

In essence, Ikemefuna's death challenges us to think deeply about what it means to be human in a world where our actions are shaped by the past, constrained by the present and judged in the light of ideals we can only partially realize. Achebe does not offer a resolution and neither does this paper. But in the effort to confront these questions, we engage in the very philosophical labor that defines the human condition: the quest to live responsibly in a world where destiny and freedom are never easily reconciled.

Works Cited

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann, 1958.

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Translated by Malcolm Heath, Penguin Classics, 1996.

Frankfurt, Harry. "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." The Journal of Philosophy, vol. 68, no. 1, 1971, pp. 5–20.

Gyekye, Kwame. *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*. Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996.

Nagel, Thomas. "Moral Luck." Mortal Questions, Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 24–38.

Nussbaum, Martha C. *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. Translated by Carol Macomber, Yale
University Press, 2007.

Tempels, Placide. *Bantu Philosophy.* Présence Africaine, 1959.

Williams, Bernard. "Moral Luck." Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973–1980, Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 20–39.

Wiredu, Kwasi. *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*. Indiana University Press, 1996.

Citation: Adejo, Amaha Jude & Adukwu, Martins Adukwu "What if Ikemefuna was destined to die?" A Philosophical Inquiry into Moral Responsibility and Human Agency in *Things Fall Apart*". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp235-247.

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)

Volume 1, Number 3

Review Article

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21213605

Open Access

An Eco-Critical Analysis of Environmental Degradation in Yerima's *Hard Ground*

Abstract

This study, "An Eco-Critical Analysis of Environmental Degradation in Yerima's *Hard Ground*" delved into the use of the theoretical construct of ecocriticism to understand how texts portray the relationship between people and the physical environment, and what those portrayals say about our ecological values. The study adopted qualitative research methodology, with content analysis as mode of data analysis. leaning on theoretical ideas of ecocriticism. Findings showed that, nature and literature have always shared a close relationship as evidenced in many creative works in almost all cultures of the world. The study concluded that climate change, conservation, deforestation and environmental degradation are rapidly impacting lives globally, and literature is a way to process and understand these issues.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Analysis, Environment, Degradation, Environmental Degradation.

Adukwu, Martins Adukwu
Department of Theatre Arts,
Prince Abubakar Audu
University, Anyigba.
Tel: +2348032323271
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-6569-5424

Adejo, Amaha Jude
Department of Philosophy,
Prince Abubakar Audu
University, Anyigba,
Adejoamahajude@gmail.com or
adejo.aj@ksu.edu.ng
Tel:
+2348162955933/+2347019407678
ORCID ID: 0009-0008-4756-490X

Corresponding Author's Email:
Adukwu.m@ksu.edu.ng

Date Received: 29th June, 2026

Date Accepted: 02th July, 2026

Introduction

Ecological issues are gaining attention in literary studies because they are reflecting real world concerns. Climate change, conservation, deforestation and environmental degradation are rapidly impacting lives globally, and literature is a way to process and understand these issues. Writers are exploring themes like nature, sustainability, and humanity's relationship with the environment, making literature a powerful tool for raising awareness and sparking conversation. In Nigeria, historical, political and sociological approaches to study of literature has received considerable attention. However, in recent years, writers are gradually becoming aware of the nexus between literature and nature, geography and spaces, thereby drawing insights from the mutual study of literature and nature.

Nature and literature have always shared a close relationship as is evidenced in many creative works in almost all cultures of the world. For instance, nature symbols like forest and yam fields in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (first published in 1958) reflects the protagonist's connection to his culture and land. Today the intimate relationship between the natural and social world is being analyzed and emphasized in many departments of knowledge and development. In literature generally, the relationship between the environment and literature is explored through ecocriticism, which examines how literature portrays human and nature relationships. Works like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) have highlighted environmental degradation, raising awareness about the importance of conservation. Similarly, Nigerian writers like Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Sozaboy* (1985), Niyi Osundare *City Without People* (2011), Helon Habila, *Oil on Water* (2010) and Tanure Ojaide, *Delta Blues and Home Songs* (1998) have explored nature themes in their works, reflecting the country's environmental concerns and the human experience within it. Some of these environmental concerns have received tremendous attention in recent times, with particular concern with the Niger Delta environmental degradation occasioned by oil spillage, militancy and bunkering activities.

The Niger Delta region's struggle with environmental degradation has been mirrored in works of many Nigerian writers, especially from the Niger Delta. For instance, Ogaga Ifowodo' *The Oil Lamp* (2005) raises awareness on the devastating effects of oil exploration. The analysis of the poem shows how oil spillage, bombings and gas flaring through the activities of both the government and the oil companies are capable of affecting the environment. Similarly, Ahmed Yerima's trilogy, *Hard Ground*, *Little Drops* and *Ipomu* is a dramatization of the Niger Delta crises especially in the militant insurgency in the Niger Delta region. The region had been plagued by years of violence, kidnapping, and oil pipeline vandalism, led by militant groups demanding greater control over the region's oil resources, environmental remediation, and better representation in the oil industry. Consistent with the above, some of the literary inspirations about the Niger Delta, registers the region as a site of historical interplay of the resources of water and oil, one that defines the people as been rich in resources but implicates the people and landscape of the region in the ever constant scuffle, struggle and attendant poverty defined by the experiences of these resources. To this end, this paper is conceived to highlight some of the environmental issues bedeviling the Niger Delta region through the dramatic lens of Yerima's *Hard Ground*.

Methodology

The researchers used content analysis to systematically analyze and interpret the meaning of the text with a keen bias for unbundling some of the environmental degradation issues highlighted in the text. The plays lay bare the misuse of nature and the effects of humans' degradation of the environment, particularly in the creeks of the Niger Delta region. The paper, drew its points of view generally from both primary and secondary sources of data, which included, the text, *Hard Ground*, journal publications, textbooks and Internet sources. The descriptive approach is adopted in our discussion and in presenting our findings.

Citation: Adukwu, Martins Adukwu & Adejo, Amaha Jude "*An Eco-Critical Analysis of Environmental Degradation in Yerima's Hard Ground*". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp248-259.

The Concept of Environmental Degradation

Environmental degradation is the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water and soil; the destruction of ecosystems; habitat destruction; extinction of wildlife and pollution. It is defined by Johnson *et al.*, as "any change or disturbance to the environment perceived to be deleterious or undesirable" (582). The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction defines environmental degradation as "the reduction of the capacity of the environment to meet social and ecological objectives, and needs" (*Wikipedia*). Environmental degradation is of many types. When natural habitats are destroyed or natural resources are depleted, the environment is degraded. Efforts to counteract this problem include environmental protection and environmental resources management. Miller and Spoolman conceptualized Environmental Degradation as: "depletion or destruction of a potentially renewable resource such as soil, grassland, forest, or wildlife that is used faster than it is naturally replenished. If such use continues, the resource becomes non-renewable or non-existent" (5)

The above confirms that, environmental degradation is the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources which includes all the biotic and abiotic element that form our surrounding that is air, water, soil, plant, animals, and all other living and non-living element of the planet of earth. Pradip Kumar Maurya et al confirms that, "the major factor of environmental degradation is human (modern urbanization, industrialization, overpopulation growth, deforestation, etc.) and natural (flood, typhoons, droughts, rising temperatures, fires, etc.) cause" (1). To Neelam Kumari, "environmental degradation refers to the deterioration of the natural environment due to human activities such as pollution, deforestation, over-exploitation of resources, and climate change. This phenomenon poses significant challenges to biodiversity, ecological balance, and human well-being" **(**78**).**

Extrapolating from the above, it can be inferred that environmental degradation occurs when there is an unchecked, uncontrolled and unsustainable extraction of natural resources. The rapid inclination for industrialization, population and economic development and unrestrained growth in urbanization adds to a litany of things that raises concern for environmental degradation. Barun Kumar Thakur, Himanshu Sekhar Rout & Tamali Chakraborty surmises that, "environmental degradation can be local, regional and global. Local as well as global environmental problems hurt poor people most. Local environmental concerns like water pollution and contamination, air pollution, waste disposal, deforestation and soil degradation have a direct impact on human-being (104).

Theoretical Framework

Scholars like, Cheryll Glotfelty, Jonathan Levin, John Loretta, Harold

Fromm, Peter Barry and Jonathan Bate have theorized about eco-criticism, and one of the underlying thread of argument in most of their submission is the admissible fact that, ecocriticism as a theoretical approach is different from the traditional approach to literature because, the critic explores the local or global, the material or physical, or the historical or natural history in the context of a work. In an attempt towards etymology, John Loretta in Fenn explains that:

> "Eco", from the Greek root *oikos*, means "house" … Just as "economy" is the management or law of the house (*nomos* = law), "ecology" is the study of the house. Ecocriticism, then, is the criticism of the "house," i.e., the environment, as represented in literature. But the definition of "house," or *oikos*, is not simple. Questions remain: What is the environment? What is nature? Why did the term "environment," which derives from the verb "to environ or surround," change to mean that which is nonhuman? Are not humans natural and a prominent environment in themselves? Where and in what does one live? Ecocriticism is by nature interdisciplinary, invoking knowledge of environmental studies, the natural sciences, and cultural and social studies, all of which play a part in answering the questions it poses (115)

William Howarth quoted in Glotfelty & Fromm confirms the above when he says, "the *oikos* is nature, 'our widest home,' and the *kritos* is an arbiter of taste" (69). For him, "criticism judges the quality and integrity of works and promotes their dissemination" (71). Thus the working definition of literary ecocriticism within the framework of this work is the analysis of literature's expression of humanity's place on Earth, our *oikos* or home. This wholly includes the cultural aspect through literature and the biological aspect through the Earth as our ecosystem.

The above definition of ecocriticism is apt for this study because it is concerned with raising the necessary questions about space, existence, care and the role of man in nature and ecological issues. In line with that, the central thrust of this theoretical framework deals with ecological problems like pollution, species extinction and other ecological exploitation addressed in the play. Beyond that, it is associated with the desire to investigate and remedy the current environmental problems. As Mukhtah summarizes, ecocriticism deals with "literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyze the environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental problems". (315) This paper, through ecocritical lens takes an exploration of hostile human activities on natural resources and their dreadful effects on the people living in the Niger Delta, Nigeria, as portrayed in the selected dramatic text, *Hard Ground*.

Synopsis of Yerima's *Hard Ground*

Hard Ground, the first play in Yerima's trilogy is set in Baba's sitting room, with most of the actions revolving around Nimi, Mama, Baba, Inyingifa and Father Kingsley. At the beginning of the play, Baba and Mama are asking Nimi questions regarding the role he played that led to the massacre of twenty militants in the creeks. Incidentally, while six of the boys involved in the case have been executed, Nimi's uncle, Father Kingsley has paid some ransom to the Capone and rescued him out of the camp to Lagos. This escape does not douse the death threats around him, because different nefarious activities in the camp are still linked to him. With his family bent on dissuading him from returning to the creeks fearing for his life, his uncle Inyingifa, involved in the gun trading business is particularly distressed and unhappy with the escalating violence in the creeks, which is adversely affecting his business operations due to the heightened security presence in the creeks.

Nimi is however hell bent on returning to the camp to clear his name and prove his innocence to the Don. In the meantime, he absolves himself of the charges of guilt, insisting that the presence of a mole in the camp is responsible for the series of information leakages about their operations. He explains that the twenty militants were massacred by the soldiers upon their arrival to commence a well-planned pipe-line vandalisation. The plan for the operation has been kept close among the insurgents, so the presence of the soldiers in the oil pipeline installations indicates that a spy, or what they call vulture in the Niger Delta militant underworld, has given them away. Now, Nimi is convinced that a vulture is in their midst, and names Father Kingsley, his uncle and a fake Catholic Priest to whom he went for confession before the operation. His suspicion of Father Kingsley is based on the grounds of his girlfriend Pikibo's information when she visited him in the police detention that the priest visited the camp two days before the raid, and left after their arrest.

With the failed attempts to please the Don and his escape from the creek, Don placed a death sentence on Nimi because everyone fingered him as the spy that leaked the information that led to the crackdown. Things quickly took an intense dramatic turn after Nimi learns of the death of his wife Pikibo and his unborn child in the hands of Don. Enraged by this act, Nimi vows to avenge their death by killing Don. When he finally got the chance, he pounced on the Don and slit his throat. Ironically, the Don, the most feared Don whom Mama calls unprintable name is Baba, Nimi's Father.

Eco-Critical Analysis of Environmental Degradation in Yerima's *Hard Ground*

From the play's exposition, the playwright subtly brings to fore the ecological situation of the Niger Delta creeks albeit through the lamentation of Nimi when he learned that he had been rescued from the creeks and brought to Lagos. Nimi's lamentation is saturated with poignant metaphors that beams light on man's inhumanity to man in the creeks and a ruthless description of violence that is both deep and worrisome. But beyond that, there is a legacy and a signature of degradation buried within Nimi's lamentation that invites the readers to understand the environment.

> **Nimi**: I did not ask anyone to rescue me. Now, I shall be labeled a vulture. And any child with knife can butcher me,

> tear me apart, or even hang me by the neck till life drips out of my body like river water, and I shall be left to die a slow and painful death. Ha, Ibinabo! They should have let me die with my friends for the sake of the land. Hmm, I smell now like a bad rotten fish. I smell… I smell the stench of coward in the swampy forest of green leaves and black oily soil. I smell they shall smoke me out like they do all vultures. They will be chased like a trapped rabbit. They shall fling me to the wolf boys who will spit on me first, like hungry crocodiles, their watery fangs shall await the bitterness of my flesh, oh god! Why did they rescue me? I should have been allowed to be shot and die for the glory of the land like my six brothers… the true warriors of the land (*Hard Ground*,11).

To begin with, of all the imageries the writer could deploy to drive home his point, he chose, "vulture", "bad rotten fish", "swampy forest", and "black oily soil". The researchers believe that, the choice of these images laced within Nimi's lamentation foregrounds the writer's aim of establishing not just the violent aspect of the Niger Delta militancy but also, the ecological conditions that may have arose from the violence.

Ecocritically, these images could represent many things, but within the context of this research, it mirrors the destructive impact of human activities (pollution, industrialization hazards) on natural ecosystem, emphasizing the darker aspects of human interaction with nature. The vulture, as a scavenger of death underscores the prevalence of death and decay. Instances of the prevalence of violence and blood bath is shown in the text, what is scare in the text is the question of proper burial. In the heat of the gun fights, inter-militant clashes, tension and constant raids of the creeks by government's JTF, are the bodies properly disposed? For instance, on page 15 of the text, Nimi, while holding a conversation with Mama attempts to answer this question of proper disposition of dead bodies that, "…one thing we know is that if we die fighting, or accepting the way we find ourselves, it is six feet down the hard ground that we go. Lika", but Mama hurriedly corrects him, saying, "Lika? That is soft marshy ground". What follows is Nimi's attempt at justifying the reason why they have to dig through the marshy ground:

> **Nimi**: Yes. The muddy land of periwinkles and mud-skippers that glide every day searching for food such as our flesh when we are buried. So we dig deep, when we bury, and we walk tall when we are alive. In our foolishness, we like to think it is hard ground. To us, at least God made it that way, marshy but firm, and we stand on it (*Hard Ground* 15)

Nimi's response to Mama confirms the researchers' suspicion regarding the militant's inability at properly burying their fallen warriors. The first two lines suggests that, periwinkles, crabs and mud-skippers scavenge on their dead bodies. Because on page 30, where Mama pleads with Nimi not to return to the creeks, she adds, "…you are all I have, son, your body is too young and supple for the crabs to have for dinner. Promise me you won't go back, son." This is further corroborated by Tingolongo on page 49 where he berates Nimi:

> **Tingolongo**: That is all I take from here these days. young souls, old souls,

> maimed souls, littles boys and girls, whose destinies are still hanging forcefully dragged to me. Some headless, some faceless, some eaten up by fishes and periwinkles. Oh man, you are wicked! The gods are angry (*Hard Ground* 49).

In Nigeria, coastal areas, like the Niger Delta, where such ecosystems are common usually faces threats from oil spills, pollution, and overharvesting of resources. Based on these facts, the muddy land and the creatures' behavior is a direct consequence of oil spill which can devastate mangrove ecosystems, affecting species like periwinkle and mud-skippers. This devastation in turn, leads to a decrease in natural food sources, pushing animals to seek alternative, sometimes unconventional food sources. The above clearly paints a picture of an environment under stress, where in the case of the Niger Delta, the activities of humans negatively affects both the humans and the wildlife.

The use of the imagery of vulture to symbolize the prevalence of death and decay took a more sinister turn when into the play, the graphic death of Pikibo and the role the vultures play is unraveled. Beyond the establishment of the role of the vulture in scavenging, there is a more ominous interpretation to the image of vulture which is ecocritically hinged on the devastating role of the activities of humans on the region's environment. While describing the death by hanging of Pikibo, the playwright through Inyigifaa employs the most troubling of dictions to paint the performance of the gruesome death, while taking away from her the privileges of humanity and reducing her to the inconsequence of bareness and inanity reserved for things. Inyingifaa recounts - First they hung it by the neck with a string of wire, and cut its skin slicing it out of the body, piece by piece, so that it could feel the pain of all lives it had sold out to die. (*Hard Ground*, 51). Elatedly, Nimi expressed his satisfaction with this act, which ultimately exonerate him from the many allegations leveled against him. However, Inyingifaa adds, "Ee… er… one more thing. The vulture was pregnant. Since the child of the vulture is also a vulture, they cut out the unborn child and beheaded it (*Hard Ground*, 52). This new revelation about the gender of the vulture pricks Nimi who is aware that, there were three women pregnant in the camp before his departure, his wife – Pikibo inclusive. The stark confirmation of his fears that his late wife is the vulture is punishing and unbearable. Consequently, he vowed to kill the Don any chance he gets.

In addition to the foregoing, the gruesome manner of Pikibo's death calls for a formal identification of what 'vulture' signifies within the broader framework of the play. In Yerima's *Hard Ground*, vulture is synonymous with anybody, organization, thing or activity that harms the land. Writing in the book, *Where Vultures Feast*, Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas argued that, Shell, Texaco and other Big Oil Corporations operating in the Niger Delta are the vultures that feast on the region's resources. The resources of the region – beginning with palm oil that was the subject of a devastating monopoly of the Royal Niger Company as early as

1900s to crude oil that was discovered in 1956 – have turned the region into a tragic prey for multi-national Anglo-American behemoths (in Ajumeze, 195-196). Tracing the origin of these companies scavenging activities, Okonta and Douglas further revealed that:

> It is generally assumed that the exploitation of the peoples of the Niger Delta and the devastation of their environment began when crude oil was discovered in the area by Royal Dutch Shell in 1956. The truth is that Europe's plunder of the Delta, and indeed the entire environment, dates much further back, to 1444, when the Portuguese adventurer and former tax collector, Lancarote de Freitas, sailed to the West African coast and stole 235 men and women whom he later sold as slaves. De Freitas's trip was to trigger the Atlantic slave trade, which, before it was displaced by the trade in palm oil in the 1840s, saw several million able-bodied young men and women taken from the Delta and its hinterland and shipped to the plantations of North America, South America, and the West Indies (6).

Ecocritically, the designation of an entity as a 'vulture' precipitates a shift, wherein said identity is recontextualised as an antagonist to the territorial interests, concomitantly aligning it with the objectives of multinational corporations. Because, as Nnimmo Bassey cited in Ajumeze writes; "Nothing is allowed to stand in Shell's way: not trees, not swamps, not beast, not man. The people of the Niger Delta have been forced to live with a highly polluted environment: the result of practices that would not be permitted in Europe or the United States" (xi).

In *Hard Ground*, Yerima employed the notion of the vulture to convey something metaphorical about the imperial relation that feeds on the God-given resources of the Delta. In the Niger Delta petro-culture, particularly among the insurgents, it has become a buzzword used to label a betrayer of the struggle. Thus, it measures the consequence of betrayal - perceived as an act of negation of militancy - with the destructions reserved for Anglo-American capitalism, and that is why, Nimi's reaction to the description of the gruesome death of the vulture was one of thanksgiving, unknown to him that, it was his wife. At a related level, it appears to assign the betrayer with the status of a collaborator with the oil corporation, making both predators that feed off insatiably on the resource-rich region. This perhaps explains why James Tsaaior states that, - Vultures are predatory birds of prey and are an apt metaphor for death (79). Taking the Niger Delta context into consideration, he notes that the presence of vultures - anywhere, everywhere necessarily suggests the presence of carrion or carcasses in which the one so designated - has lost legitimate claim to life and is in death throes (79). Ultimately leading to the constant pollution of the environment.

In addition, "bad rotten fish" and "black oily soil" are stark indicators of pollution, likely resulting from industrial activities or oil spills, which not only harm aquatic life but also render the soil infertile. According to Enajite Eseoghene Ojaruega, "it is through the operations of the multinational oil companies that the greatest and perhaps, irreparable amount of damage has been done to the ecosystem and the environment of the Niger Delta. Specifically, the pipes carrying crude oil from wells to flow stations, to terminals, and to refineries as well as those carrying refined oil to oil depots run through vast landscapes. Sometimes, they are shoddily laid out and burst as a result of pressure or they leak from age (19).

Apart from the activities of the multinational companies, *Hard Ground* also provides enough clues into the reprehensible activities of the militants which puts the environment in hazard. Reacting to the death of the over twenty boys killed under his command in the creeks, Nimi admits to been involved in breaking up of oil pipes. He reveals thus, "…I took over before Danger Arrow could send us a new Capon. I organized the braking up of some pipes… (*Hard Ground*, 15)". Inyingifaa on page 24, draws reader's attention to oil bunkering activities in the forest – "… my men were killed. Paraded on television that they were caught bunkering. But I never meddle in oil, only guns...". The activities of these multinational companies, oil bunkering and oil pipes vandalism poses significant threats to aquatic ecosystems, causing widespread harm to marine life and contaminating soil in coastal areas. Oil spills in these areas do not only spread out over a wide expanse of land, but also take out crops and aquacultures through contamination of the groundwater and soils. Also, the consumption of dissolved oxygen by bacteria feeding on the spilled hydrocarbons contributes to the death of fishes. In agricultural communities, often a year's supply of food can be destroyed by only a minor leak, debilitating the farmers and their families, who depend on the land for their livelihood.

The impact on fish populations is particularly concerning, with several factors contributing to mortality. Oil coats the gills of fish reducing oxygen uptake and leading to asphyxiation, while toxic components like polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) can cause internal damage and disrupt physiological processes. These toxins can also accumulate in fish tissues, potentially affecting humans who consume them. In the novel, *Yellow Yellow* (2006), Agary recounts the effects of oil spillage on aquatic ecology and land thus:

> And so it was that, in a single day, my mother lost her main source of sustenance. However, I think she had lost that land a long time ago because each season yielded less than the season before, not unlike the way she and others in the village had gradually lost, year after year, the creatures of the river to oil spills, acid rain, gas flares, and who knows what else… (4).

In the above, the "main source of sustenance" isn't just a plot point; rather, it's a symbol of the intricate web between humans and nature. The land once fertile, now yield less with each season – a stark metaphor for the exploitation and slow degradation of the environment. This decline mirrors the broader narrative of environmental destruction in many Nigerian communities, where oil extractions has ravaged ecosystems. This narrative speaks to ecocriticism's core concern: the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds. The loss of land

and fishes reflects the broader loss of biodiversity, livelihoods, and cultural/economic practices tied to the land and river. It's a powerful indictment of systems that exploit nature without considering the long-term costs.

Furthermore, the description of Olokun worship by Mama on page 59 of the play raises serious ecological concern because of the tendency it portends towards ecological harm and degradation. According to Paul-Kolade Tubi, "Olokun, (river goddess) is worshipped as a principal deity in some communities, while generally all communities revere stream and ponds as places, which are inhabited by spirits. Water is primed by the people as can be seen in their personal names like *Omidina* (water stopped me), *Omipidan* (water causes havoc), *Omisore* (water helps), *Oyatola* (*Oya* river is wealth), *Osungbemi* (Osun river is my strength), *Omiyale* (flooding), amongst others" (324) Olokun is worshiped among the Yoruba, Edo/Itsekiri people as deity of the sea, wealth and the deep – so worship is almost always done at beaches, rivers or the ocean, with water as the ritual medium. In her supplication to Olokun, Mama says:

> **Mama**: Those who will confront evil must wear the shoes to run. Olokun, your daughter comes before you. I need more powers, more strength. Your sugarcane, sweets, biscuits and drinks have been sent to you at the bank of the Lagos beach. May his senses scatter, like the dust from your shrine… (*Hard Ground*, 59).

Deducing from Mama above, devotees of Olokun propitiates the goddess with different gifts such as bowls, bottles or snacks. Fruits, palm oil, cowries, eggs, candles, sometimes animals etc. These gifts are often left at the riverbank or cast into the current. When food, plastics, candles, animals, sweets, sugarcane, biscuits and drinks are left in rivers or the sea, they can degrade water quality and litter water bodies. This practice could harm aquatic animals, cause environmental degradation and pollution. In fact, in Olokun worship, large ceremonies can require substantial amounts of animals or materials to be dumped into the water bodies. Ecocritically, harmful Olokun worship practices of leaving organic matter, plastics and animal remains in rivers and the ocean can pollute theses ecosystems.

Conclusion

The world of literature is replete with works dealing with the relationship between humans' affairs and their effects on nature, and the threat that the continuous misuse of our environment poses on humanity have caught the attention of writers. It is this sense of concern and its reflection in literature that have given rise to a new branch of literary theory, namely Ecocriticism. It is a truism that environmental degradation is a global phenomenon. Therefore, reaction and opinion on the topic is evidenced in the fields of the Sciences, the Arts and the Humanities.

Ecocritical reading of the text shows that, environmental degradation is not a single-issue crisis but a convergence of material extraction and cultural practices, both of which treat ecosystems as disposable backdrops for human ambitions. The industrial logic that profit over maintenance – exemplified by chronic leaks and corroded oil pipes in the Niger Delta have left the water covered in oil slicks and other toxic chemicals. The harmful practices of oil extraction, large scale killings, pipeline vandalism, and dumping of items into water bodies externalize harm: the oil industry displaces risk onto marginalized farming and fishing communities, reckless killings keep the air polluted, while certain religious performances displace waste onto rivers.

As our analysis has shown, Activities of characters in the text *Hard Ground* have moreover proved true the basic assumptions that degradation of the environment is a result of willful acts of human beings; and that consequences of the degradation such as poverty, breakdown of law and order, general insecurity and unabated devastation of the place is retributive.

Works Cited

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1958.

Agary, Kaine. *Yellow-Yellow*. Dtalkshop Publishers, 2010.

Ajumeze, Henry Obi. "The Biopolitics of Violence in The Drama of the Niger Delta" *Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in African Studies School of African & Gender Studies, Anthropology & Linguistics*. University of Cape Town, 2018.

Barun Kumar Thakur, Himanshu Sekhar Rout & Tamali Chakraborty. "Environmental Degradation, Sustainable Development and Human Well-Being: Evidence from India". *MANTHAN: Journal of Commerce and Management,* 101-120

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962.

Fenn, Valthana. "Roots of Ecocriticism: An Exploration of the History of Ecocriticism. A Literary Theory of the Post-Modern World". Jorunal of English and Literature (JOELL) 2, (2): 2015. 114-119.

Glotfelty, Cheryll and Harold Fromm. Ed. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Habila, Helon. *Oil On Water*. UK: Hamish Hamilton, 2010.

Ifowodo, O. *The Oil Lamp*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc, 2005.

Johnson, D. N., Lamb, P., Saul, M. & Winter-Nelson, A. E. "Meanings of Environmental Terms", *Journal of Environmental Quality* 26, 1997: 581–589.

Kumari, Neelam. "An Introduction to Environmental Degradation: Origins, Impacts, and Remedial Measures", *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)*. 12, (1): 2024. 78-83.

Miller, G.T & Spoolman, S.E. *Living in the Environment: Concepts, Connections and Solutions* (16th Ed). USA: Brooks/Cole Cengage Learning, 2009.

Mukhtah, R. "An Overview of Ecocriticism." *International Journal of English Language,* *Literature and International Studies* 4 (3): 2017. 315-322.

Ojaide, Tanure. *Delta Blues and Home Songs*. Ibadan: Kraft Books, 1998.

Ojaruega, Enajite Eseoghene. "The Global Conundrum: Anthropocene, Oil and Globalization in Niger Delta Literature". *Open Journal of Social Sciences,* 10. 2022. 15-28

Okonta, Ike and Oronto Douglas. *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights and Oil in The Niger Delta.* San Francisco: Sierra Book Club, 2001.

Osundare, Niyi. *City Without People*. Boston, MA: Black Widow Press, 2011.

Pradip Kumar Maurya, Sk Ajim Ali, Ateeque Ahmad, Qiaoqiao Zhou. Jonatas Da Silva Castro, Ezzat Khan & Hazrat Ali. "An Introduction to Environmental Degradation: Causes, Consequence and Mitigation", *Environmental Degradation: Causes and Remediation Strategies*, 2020.

Saro-Wiwa, Ken. *Sozaboy*. Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1985.

Tsaaior, James. "Poetics, Politics and The Paradox of Oil in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region." *African Renaissance*, 2, (6): 2005. 72-80.

Tubi, Paul-Kolade. "Afroecology of Traditional African Societies: An Anthropology of Ecotheology, Ecophilosophy and Ecospirituality of the Yoruba", in Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu (Ed) *African Eco-Philosophy: Cosmology, Consciousness and the Environment*. 311-337. USA: Treble clef Lane Silver Spring, Maryland, 2021.

Yerima, Ahmed. *Three Plays*. Ibadan: Kraft, 2011.

Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)
Volume 1, Number 3
Empirical Article https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21213481 Open Access

The Influence Of Corporate Social Responsibility On Brand Image In The Banking Industry In Uyo, Akwa Ibom State

Emem Akaninyene Sampson Ph.D.
Department of Marketing,
University of Uyo, Uyo
ORCID: 0009-0003-0625-9523

Akpan, Udeme Isaac
Department of Business Education
University of Uyo, Uyo
Email:
udemeiakpan@uniuyo.edu.ng

Corresponding Author's Email:
ememsampson30@gmail.com

Date Received: 29th June, 2026

Date Accepted: 02th July, 2026

Abstract

This study examined the influence of corporate social responsibility on brand image in the banking industry in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The study adopted a descriptive research design. With the population of one million, twenty-three thousand and five hundred (1,023,500) customers employed for this study. This was obtained from the five (5) selected second generation banks in Uyo metropolis. Using Taro Yamene's formula for sample size determination, a sample size of 400 was derived. Data for the study were collected using structured copies of questionnaire and 2 research hypotheses formulated for the study and were tested using simple regression model at a 5% level of significance. From the data analysis, findings revealed that the independent variables of ethical responsibility and philanthropic responsibility significantly affect brand image in the banking industry in Uyo Metropolis. Based on the findings, it was concluded that corporate social responsibility significantly affects brand image in the banking industry in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. Thus, it was recommended that banks should find a way to innovate their corporate social responsibility practices in order to foster a brand image that will lead to increased customer base and increased profitability. Also, banks should undertake more morally justified corporate social responsibility initiatives which will help them strengthen community welfare and their brand image.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Brand Image, Banking Industry, Ethical Responsibility, Philanthropic Responsibility.

Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has emerged as one of the most important strategic tools used by organizations to build and sustain a positive relationship with their stakeholders. In the contemporary business environment, organizations are no longer assessed solely on the basis of profitability and service delivery; they are also evaluated by the extent to which they contribute to the welfare of society (Poudyal and Yukongdi, 2020). This growing expectation has made CSR a critical aspect of corporate strategy, especially in highly competitive industries such as banking.

Corporate Social Responsibility refers to the deliberate efforts and ethical obligations of organizations to contribute to the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the communities in which they operate (Kwagga, Samuel and Medugu, 2023). It involves business practices and policies designed to promote societal development beyond the primary aim of profit-making. CSR activities may include educational sponsorships, healthcare support, environmental sanitation, youth empowerment programs, poverty alleviation schemes, infrastructure development, and other community-oriented projects. Through these initiatives, organizations demonstrate their commitment to sustainable development and social welfare.

The banking industry, as one of the major pillars of economic development, plays a significant role in national growth and community transformation. Banks serve as financial intermediaries that facilitate savings, investments, loans, and other financial services essential for economic activities. Due to their visibility and influence in society, banks are often expected to engage actively in CSR initiatives that improve the standard of living of the people and support community development (Poudyal and Yukongdi, 2020). In many cities, including Uyo, banks participate in various social responsibility programs such as scholarship awards, entrepreneurship training, and support for small businesses, community health outreach, and environmental sustainability campaigns.

Brand image, on the other hand, refers to the perception, beliefs, impressions, and feelings that customers and the general public hold about a particular organisation or brand, it is the overall mental picture that people form about a company based on their experiences, interactions, and information received from different sources. According to Lee (2011), a strong and positive brand image is essential for the success of any organisation because it enhances customer trust, loyalty, satisfaction, and patronage, in the banking sector, where trust and credibility are fundamental, brand image significantly influences customers' decisions regarding the choice of financial institutions (Kwagga, Samuel and Medugu, 2023).

In recent years, the role of CSR in shaping brand image has attracted considerable attention from researchers and practitioners. Lee (2011) opined that many organizations now view CSR not only as a moral obligation but also as a strategic marketing tool for enhancing corporate reputation and strengthening customer relationship this is because organisation which engage in meaningful social responsibility activities are more likely to be perceived as caring, trustworthy and socially responsible institutions by their customers. To this end, positive perception can improve the brand image of the bank and provide a competitive advantage in the market.

In Uyo, the capital city of Akwa Ibom Stare, the banking industry is characterized by intense competition among various commercial banks seeking to expand their customer base and maintain market relevance. As a result, banks increasingly adopt CSR initiatives as a means of improving their public image and differentiating themselves from competitors. However, despite the growing involvement of banks in CSR activities, it remains necessary to examine the extent to which these efforts actually influence the brand image of banks in the minds of customers and the general public. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on brand image in the banking industry in Uyo.

Statement of the Problem

The banking industry in Uyo operates in a competitive environment where customers have multiple options in choosing financial institutions, in such a setting, maintaining a positive brand image has become increasingly important for banks seeking to retain existing customers and attract new ones. Despite the increasing adoption of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives by banks, there is still uncertainty regarding the extent to which these activities influence the perception and image of the banks among customers and the general public. Some customers may view CSR programs as genuine efforts towards societal development, while others may perceive them merely as promotional strategies aimed at improving corporate reputation.

Furthermore, some banks invest significantly in community development and social welfare programs, yet may still experience issues relating to customer dissatisfaction, poor public perception, and reduced loyalty. This raises concerns as to whether CSR efforts truly translated into a stronger brand image within the banking sector. Therefore, the problem of this study was to determine the extent to which Corporate Social Responsibility influences brand image in the banking industry in Uyo.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the research was designed to,

- Examine the influence of Ethical Responsibility on Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo.
- Examine the influence of Philanthropic Responsibility on Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated from the objectives of the study;

i. Does Ethical Responsibility influence Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo?
ii. Does Philanthropic Responsibility influence Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo?

Citation: Sampson, Emem Akaninye.ne & Akpan, Udeme Isaac "The Influence Of Corporate Social Responsibility On Brand Image In The Banking Industry In Uyo, Akwa Ibom State". *Journal of People and Worldviews (JPW)*, 2026: pp260-278.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Framework

Independent Variables **Dependent Variable**

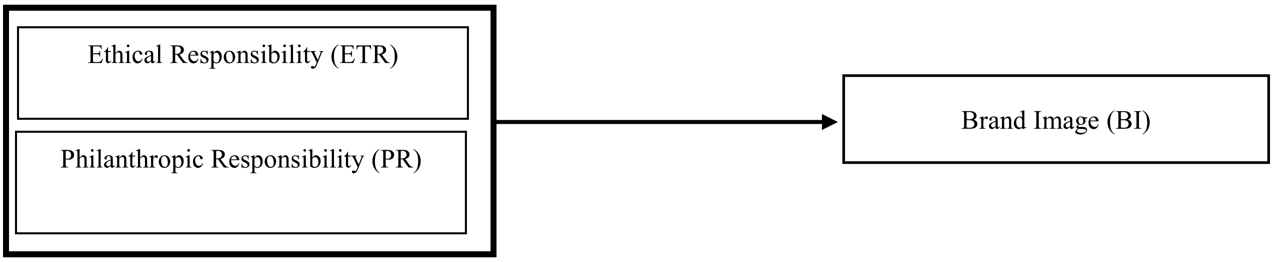


Figure2.1: A Conceptual Framework Showing the Link between Corporate Social Responsibility and Brand Image

Source: Researcher's Model, (2026)

An Overview of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept that is fast becoming an important subject of discussion in myriad business and academic corridors, as a tool for modern business management. CSR represents an ongoing self-regulation activities and effort initiated by businesses to encourage ethical behaviour aimed at promoting quality work-life balances and prosperity of local communities and society within which they operate (Kwagga, Samuel and Medugu, 2023).

CSR as a commercial strategy began in the United States in the 1960s and has progressively become popular worldwide. The European Commission defines CSR as an enterprise's responsibility for its impact on society (Kwagga, Samuel and Medugu, 2023). This definition identifies basic tenets of CSR, including attention to stakeholders, friendly disposition to social, economic, and environmental issues. It pertains to companies' voluntary behaviours and performances that go beyond the scope of basic business relationships. CSR is a self-regulating practice that ensures that the firm is sensitive to its stakeholders (Kwagga, Samuel and Medugu, 2023).

There is no agreed definition of CSR. For instance, CSR is defined by Lee (2011) as part of any organization's commitment to achieve its goals. Meanwhile, Lord and Richard (2010) defined CSR as the continuous commitment by businesses to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large. CSR is the conception that an enterprise is responsible or held responsible for its impact on all relevant stakeholders (European Union, 2006). CSR draws attention to the ethical value of other corporations, that is, other organizations may mention some high profile stages to be considered but will be adopted and addressed in its CSR for the achievement of business, such as ethics and sustainability.

Engagement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs by organizations is evident in various ways. CSR could be implemented in the form of sponsorships, cash donations, volunteering activities, creating a foundation that works for the betterment of society, and so on. Access to information, changing business strategies, cut-throat competition, and creating meaningful work for society, have made CSR an important strategic tool for many organizations. CSR is the antidote for companies to prosper in the world where every step is being watched. Today, in order to build and maintain a favorable reputation, CSR serves as an essential element for a competitive advantage of the firm (Poudyal and Yukongdi, 2020). For strengthening customer relationship, CSR is one of the innovative means for companies as it helps to increase customers' trust and loyalty and enhance brand image.

Drivers of CSR

Ethical Responsibility

Ethical responsibility outlines that even if the law does not require, companies are expected to do the right thing. There are countries where the law does not state anything on the ethical treatment of the workforce or solid wastes, and so on, however, knowing that it is the wrong thing to do, companies are expected to do it correctly. To become socially responsible, this CSR component has been made essential by the business ethics movement.

Ethical norms can be interpreted through individual conscience and the anticipations of external stakeholders. The watchword of the London Stock Exchange, "My word is my bond," embodies the basic ethical principles of honesty and sincerity, which, together with trust, are customarily linked to the financial sector (Decker & Sale, 2009). The codes of ethics that personify voluntary limitations also include the basic ideologies of honesty, fair conduct, respect, and transparency in the financial sector. The ethical values and expectations of stakeholders are most apparent in the stakeholder dialogue, which puts communicative ethics into practice. Assuming ethical duties indicates that organizations will uphold the behaviors, customs, and standards that, despite not being enshrined in law, are still expected. Businesses are expected to follow both the letter and the "spirit" of the law as part of their ethical obligations. Another part of the ethical expectation is that corporations will operate fairly and objectively even in situations where regulations do not specify how to proceed or provide guidance. Consequently, ethical obligations accept socially accepted or banned behaviors, standards, regulations, and procedures even if they are not spelled down in the law (Kwagga, Samuel and Medugu, 2023).

With regard to protecting the moral rights of stakeholders, it is expected that businesses will be accountable for and responsive to the full spectrum of norms, standards, values, principles, and expectations that reflect and honor what customers, employees, owners, and the community deem to be consistent (Sule and Salisu, 2023).

Philanthropic Responsibility

Societies expect the companies to contribute to various societal projects even if it does not align with the firm's direct goal. This is a way for firms to act as a responsible corporate citizen and engage oneself for the betterment of society other than the business partners and shareholders. It is important for managers and employees to participate in voluntary and charitable activities within their local communities, especially in projects that enhance a community's quality of life (Sule and Salisu, 2023). The distinguishing characteristic between philanthropic and ethical responsibilities is that philanthropic responsibilities are not expected in an ethical or moral sense. Philanthropy is located at the most voluntary and discretionary dimension of corporate responsibility and has not always been linked to profits or the ethical culture of the firm.

Corporate philanthropy includes all of a company's optional or voluntary endeavors. Although philanthropy or corporate giving may not be a literal responsibility, it is now often anticipated by firms and is part of the public's general expectations (Kwagga, Samuel and Medugu, 2023). These activities are undoubtedly elective or discretionary in terms of both their scope and nature. They are motivated by the company's desire to engage in social activities that are not prescribed by legislation, demanded of business ethically, or widely expected of business. However, some companies do make charitable contributions in part for ethical reasons. They wish to act in a morally upright manner for society. The general population is aware that firms "give back," and the main distinction between the four-part model's ethical and philanthropic categories is that business donating isn't always assumed to be morally or ethically right. Although society accepts such donations, it does not categorize businesses as "unethical" based on their giving habits or if they are contributing at the appropriate level.

Brand Image

A brand is a distinctive identity of a producer, seller or services and goods that can either be a symbol or a name, which helps the company to differentiate its offerings from its competitors. Likewise, the American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as a reflection and perception of a brand in the heart and minds of people. Brands are the combination of emotions and beliefs of people of what the brand should be (AMA, 2010). Consumers' knowledge and beliefs regarding the brand along with its non-product attribute leads to the brand image of a brand for each customer. Brand image is personal and symbolizes the consumers' attachment and association with the brand comprising of all the brand-related descriptive and evaluative data information (Kwagga, Samuel and Medugu, 2023). The message of the brand has a strong influence compared to that of its competitors when a consumer has a favorable brand image for the particular brand (Kwagga, Samuel and Medugu, 2023). Thus, when it comes to the important determinant of a buyer's behavior, brand image is definitely one of them.

Brand Image is one of the very renowned concepts in marketing. A brand image is the constellations of pictures and ideas in people's minds that sum up their knowledge of the brand and their main attitudes towards it. This definition shows that the brand image is the subjective concept rather than an objective concept formed in the consumer's mind. Associations related to the brand are grouped together to form an image in the consumer's mind (Sule and Salisu, 2023). Thus, consumers are more peculiar about brand associations and product attributes to determine value for money. It is product attributes that initiate the purchase and brand image comes at later stage, however, it does have significant role to play in consumer buying behavior. Like the name, image, logo and color of a product are easily acceptable and leave a mark on consumer's mind due to neutrality and unique aesthetics. However, if the associations like self-expressive benefits, personalities and emotional benefits are introduced it will further enhance the brand image of Telenor in terms of quality and value. All its marketing efforts are totally focused on improving product and corporate image or one can say brand image.

CSR and Brand Image

With the importance of corporate social responsibility rising, consumers' expectations on companies' commitment to CSR are growing. When a firm's strategy regarding positioning is CSR program based, it can be seen that the core values are filled by corporate social responsibility concept (Poudyal and Yukongdi, 2020). To ensure the brand from attacks, companies can integrate CSR into the marketing strategy (Poudyal and Yukongdi, 2020). The company which communicates the CSR to manage customer's expectations has an added bonus, as it becomes a strategic branding tool to influence and retain customers (Poudyal and Yukongdi, 2020). CSR programs shape a positive customer's attitude along with positive behavior. Thus, the utmost reason to be participating in CSR activities is to strengthen the brand image for companies. Today, rather than just being a contributing factor to the customer's social value, corporate social responsibility is becoming an essential aspect of every business which affects the brand image in a positive manner, thus, it is being considered of strategic importance (Poudyal and Yukongdi, 2020).

Additionally, CSR helps to engage the consumers in brand loyalty as it creates a positive influence on brand image. Furthermore, an increment of word of mouth and positive purchase intentions is an outcome of established brand image (Poudyal and Yukongdi, 2020). Most commercial banks have adopted a number of best practices when trying to create differentiation in brand recognition through corporate social responsibilities which include focusing on strengths, developing a strong marketing campaign, a unique logo and brand and a unique image in order to have a sustainable competitive advantage. There is a positive and significant association between a bank's CSR score and its financial size and quality. CSR, therefore, is not about free gifts and voluntary work **(**Manyange, 2013**)**. It is a strategy by organizations to deploy their resources in a way that helps the organizations build its brand image, brand position and company reputation through a mutually productive and sustainable business relationship with its community members. If well implemented, CSR is a win-win initiative for both the organization and the CSR beneficiaries.

The Banking Sector in Uyo

Banks act as financial intermediaries in our society, they price and value financial assets, they monitor borrowers, they manage financial risks and they organize the payment system (Sule and Salisu, 2023). By performing these functions, banks have a huge impact on the society. They usually require firms and households to adopt certain behavior in order to increase the chances that these lenders will pay interest and amortizations. The banking industry in Uyo is well established with a myriad of commercial banks which are categorized as large, medium and small banks. Competition is very high between these banks and also the demand for banking services is also increasing with the gradual increase in economic growth. There is need to enhance value delivery for the clients to stay competitive in the industry. Banks tend to increase branches to beat competition but the new trend is to improve service delivery and harness technology to serve customers better hence increased revenue ((Sule and Salisu, 2023).

Brand image is the consumers' perception about the brand. As such, it will guide a future development of a possible bound between consumers and organizations that have its highest expression through consumer loyalty, and the willingness of the consumer in paying a premium price. Positive CSR behaviors can facilitate brand building. CSR help brands to increase the public awareness in society and also enhance its uniqueness as customers usually prefer to purchase the products produced by companies with high social responsibility. Cooperative banks, from inception in the 19th century, have been seen as innovative and revolutionary enterprises capable for resolving economic and social problems, even in the face of market failure. They have embedded as they were within local areas and communities as a result creating strong relationships amongst their members based on trust and reciprocity and significantly increasing banking access to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), farmers and low income households, fostering local economic and social development (Sule and Salisu, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984)

Stakeholder theory, which was propounded by Freeman (1984), is the mirror image of corporate social responsibility. Instead of starting with a business and looking out into the world to see what ethical obligations are there, stakeholder theory begins with the world. It lists and describes those individuals and groups who will be affected by (or affect) the company's actions. In a single sentence, stakeholder theory affirms that those whose lives are touched by a corporation hold a right and obligation to participate in directing it. The purpose of the firm, underneath this theory, is to maximize profit on a collective bottom line, with profit defined not as money but as human welfare (Manyange, 2013).

Company managers are primarily charged not with representing the interests of shareholders (the owners of the company) but with the more social task of coordinating the interests of stakeholders, balancing them in the case of conflict and maximizing the sum of benefits over the medium and long term. Corporate directors, in other words, spend part of the day just as directors always have: explaining to board members and shareholders how it is that the current plans will boost profits (Manyange, 2013). They spend other parts of the day, however, talking with other stakeholders about their interests: they ask for input from local environmentalists about how pollution could be limited, they seek advice from consumers about how product safety could be improved and so on. At every turn, stakeholders are treated (to some extent) like shareholders, as people whose interests need to be served and whose voices carry the real force Clarkson (1998).

The stakeholder theory is a fundamental concept within the field of CSR literature. It argues that businesses have a broader responsibility beyond solely serving the interests of their shareholders. However, their duty extends beyond a narrow focus and includes the responsibility of meeting the diverse requirements and expectations of various stakeholders (Bello *et al.,* 2021). The stakeholders involved in this context extend beyond the shareholders and encompass a diverse range of groups, such as employees, customers, local communities, suppliers, and the environment. This theory posits that firms have a fundamental ethical responsibility towards a range of stakeholders, and fulfilling this responsibility can have a substantial impact on their reputation and brand perception. The stakeholder theory places great importance on the ethical obligation of companies to actively interact with their diverse stakeholders, leading to significant implications.

When corporations proactively engage in CSR efforts to address the concerns and interests of stakeholders, it can significantly enhance their brand image. The positive impact stems from the perception that the company is not solely motivated by profit but also demonstrates a genuine concern for the overall well-being and welfare of the broader community. Accordingly, stakeholder theory posits that organizations have the ability to foster enduring trust and loyalty among a diverse range of stakeholders through the implementation of a more inclusive and ethically accountable strategy.

Empirical Framework

Sule and Salisu (2023) examined Corporate Social Responsibility and Its Effects on Brand Trust in Bank: Evidence from Nigeria. The purpose of this study is to determine how corporate social responsibility (CSR) affects consumer trust in the banking industry. The study's emphasis is on CSR's four primary facets: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. A model was used in this study to demonstrate the effects of several CSR elements on brand trust. A questionnaire was distributed to 400 bank clients, and 397 responses were received, valid and entered for descriptive and cause effects as the method of gathering primary data from respondents for analysis. The results showed that clients view CSR initiatives as a key component when engaging with banks. When banks engage in these activities, their brand trust is strengthened, and CSR activities and brand trust have statistically been linked in favorable and substantial ways. Customers of banks have different perceptions of the relevance of these activities. The findings would be enhanced by a larger sample size, the inclusion of more stakeholders, such as employees and managers, and the replication of the study in other nations. In order to improve their corporate reputation, banks are encouraged to take into account the study's variables in their operations and promote CSR. The topic of CSR has been covered in a lot of research, but only a small number of them focus on the banking industry and the Dala Kano, notably in Nigeria. For a better understanding of CSR initiatives and their implications on brand trust, this study recommends further research in the field.

Pham, Dinh and Tran (2025) in their study the Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Customer Loyalty: Evidence from the Commercial Banks in Viet Nam aimed at investigating the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on customer loyalty, while also evaluating the role of mediating variables in this association. Additionally, the study aims to explore the factors that affect customer loyalty, such as the demographic variables of gender, average income, and education level. Based on model testing on PLS software with the data collected from 300 customers using services at Vietnamese commercial banks, the results show that CSR positively affects customer loyalty and intermediate factors such as corporate reputation, trust, and customer satisfaction have a positive significant in the relationship between CSR and customer loyalty. Besides, education, average income, and gender do not significantly affect customer loyalty. Therefore, the study emphasizes the importance of investing in CSR, thereby building personalized CSR strategies to meet the desires of each customer segment. Commitment and implementation of practical actions by commercial banks are essential for sustainable development and create competitive advantages for these organizations in restoring trust and enhancing customer loyalty.

Dapi and Phiri (2015) conducted a study on the impact of corporate social responsibility on brand loyalty. The key objectives of the study for the article were to determine consumer attitudes towards specific CSR programs, determine the impact of CSR on brand image and brand loyalty and determine what kinds of CSR programs are considered to be adequate by consumers to qualify as socially responsible. A quantitative survey was done using customers of the South African mobile phone service provider Vodacom. A self-administered questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument. The main findings of the study were that although most consumers were not aware of what CSR as a concept is, they felt that companies are obligated to be socially responsible. Most importantly however, it was determined that the knowledge of a firm's CSR initiatives may lead to enhanced corporate image and brand loyalty. From the findings, this article recommends that corporations need to take a more proactive rather than a reactive approach to societal and environmental issues. It also recommends that companies need to be more transparent about their CSR initiatives to consumers which in turn leads to increased stakeholder engagement.

Kwagga, Samuel and Medugu (2023) examined the Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Image of MTN in Nigeria. The study viewed CSR from the lenses of economic CR activities, social CSR activities and environmental CSR activities. Survey research design was adopted to carry out the research in Kaduna metropolis. Purposive sampling technique was used to arrive at 278 business men and women and other subscribers to MTN network. Questionnaire was used to collect primary data. With the aid of ordinary least square regression analysis, the data were analyzed and the result shows that economic CSR activities, social CSR activities and environmental CSR activities impact brand image of MTN Nigeria. The study concludes that economic, social and environmental CSR activities play important roles in determining brand image of MTN; and recommends that management of MTN Nigeria should find a way to innovate their CSR responsibility practices. By engaging in CSR initiatives MTN Nigeria will foster a brand image that will lead to increased customer base and increased profitability. The study also recommends that MTN should undertake more morally justified CSR initiatives that will help to strengthen community welfare and their brand image.

Arslan and Zaman (2014) in their study the Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Image: A Study on Telecom Brands. The study examined the impact of corporate social responsibility on brand image determined by using the advance econometric techniques. Brand image consists of all associations in the mind of consumers of that brand. Brand image is considered the basic and significant important part of brand equity. The findings of study support the positive effect of corporate social responsibilities. The findings are also helpful for professionals and researchers.

Araújo, Pereira and Santos (2023) conducted a study on the Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Image and Brand Equity and Its Impact on Consumer Satisfaction. This paper aims to study the effect of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on brand image and brand equity and its impact on consumer satisfaction. The study follows a quantitative methodology, using the implementation of an online questionnaire distributed to people who bought, during the pandemic, a product that used a CSR action. Subsequently, data were analyzed through Smart PLS, following the Structural Equation Model. It was possible to conclude that the CSR initiatives positively affect consumer satisfaction through the mediating effect of brand image and brand equity. Further, brand image and brand equity improve when companies use CSR initiatives, and, despite what previous research has concluded, consumer satisfaction is not affected directly when CSR initiatives are used. This research has also showed that CSR's impact on brand image is higher for men, and CSR initiatives' impact on brand equity is also higher for regular purchase consumers.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed descriptive research design to examine the relationship between independent and dependent variables. The descriptive research design enables the researcher to collect data from all aspect of the variables through a structured questionnaire.

Area of the Study

This study was conducted in Uyo metropolis of Akwa Ibom State. Uyo is the state capital of Akwa Ibom state. Uyo became the capital of the state on September 23, 1987 following the creation of Akwa Ibom state from the former Cross River State. Uyo L.G.A is made up of four clans: Etoi, Oku, Offot and Ikono. It is bounded in the North by Etinan and Abak L.G.A's, in the south by Itu L.G.A and in the west by Ikot Ekpene and Obot Akara L.G.A's. The inhabitants are mostly traders and civil servants.

The population of Uyo, according to the 2006 Nigerian Census is 309,573 with a land area of 923,768 km² with geographical coordinates of 503′ 00″ latitude and 756′ 00′′ longitude. With many banks in Uyo metropolis, the city was deemed suitable in carrying out this study.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Since the population was known, the researcher adopted the Taro Yamene's formula to obtain the sample size. Thus, we have;

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n= sample size

N= population size= 1,023,500

e=error margin=5% or 0.05%

$$n = \frac{1,023,500}{1+1,023,500\,(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1,023,500}{1+1,023,500\,(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{1,023,500}{1+2,558.75}$$

$$n = \frac{1,023,500}{2,559.75}$$

n= 399.8= 400(approximation)

Therefore, the sample size used for the study was 400.

The researcher adopted the purposive sampling method by relying on her own judgment in choosing the customers who participated in the survey. In administering the questionnaire, respondents were selected with the help of the research assistants who were trained by the researcher on how to carry out the research process. The selected banks were assigned 25 copies of the questionnaire to be filled by their customers (16*25=400). In the absence of the customers, the questionnaire copies were dropped with the bank security of each bank under study who helped in administering it to the customers.

Sources of the Data

Data for this research were collected from primary source. The primary data were obtained with the use of questionnaire, designed to enable respondents express their independent opinions. The researcher also employed the use of secondary data where the bank's annual database was assessed.

Validity of Research Instrument

A pilot survey was conducted to test the validity of the questionnaire. The test covered all the items measured. The content validity of the instrument was determined by my supervisors who matched the variables of the instruments with the research questions in order to determine whether or not the instruments measured what they were supposed to measure. They successfully assessed the instrument and made suggestions. The suggestions were taken care of and changes made where necessary. This idea was to make sure that questionnaire covered what it is supposed to cover. This makes the questionnaires to be deemed valid to be employed to collect data in the main study.

Method of Data Collection

Data were collected using a questionnaire-based survey of individuals who were bank customers. Google forms were sent to respondents with the help of frontline officers of banks, managers and various organizations who were approached through personal contacts in order to receive email addresses along with the list of respondents. However, as banks and other organizations were reluctant to disclose the identity of the respondents, the list was not provided, instead, they circulated the Google form themselves. Furthermore, in order to avoid receiving incompletely filled forms, all the fields were made mandatory or 'required' in the Google form. A total of 320 respondents completed the survey. For the development of the questionnaire, the first section contained a simple question which helped to screen out the respondents. The question was regarding whether the prospective respondent had a bank account or not. The purpose of doing so was to determine if the respondent met the criterion to participate in the study. The second section included questions relating to the respondents' demographic characteristics while the third and fourth sections in the survey contained the questions that were related to the independent variables (i.e., two components of CSR) and the dependent variable (brand image). These variables were measured on the basis of a 5-point Likert response scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (coded 1) to "Strongly Agree" (coded 5).

Method of Data Analysis

The analysis of data for this study was done based on the data collected from the respondents using a self-structured questionnaire. Simple Linear Regression was used in testing the hypotheses at a 5% level of significance. The simple percentage was adopted in analysing the respondent's bio data.

Data Presentation, Analysis, Discussion of Findings

Data Presentation

In this subsection of the study, the key variables of the study were presented- Brand Image (BI), ethical responsibility (ETR) and philanthropic responsibility (PR). The computed data were based on the opinion of the respondent's collected using questionnaire. The dependent variable of the study Brand Image (BI) while the independent variable was corporate social responsibility measured using ethical responsibility (ETR) and philanthropic responsibility (PR

Data Analysis

The simple linear regression statistics showing the effect of Ethical Responsibility on Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo.

Table 1: Simple Linear Regression Output

Variable	Beta (β)	t-Stat.	P-Value	Remark	R	R^2	F-ratio
Constant	0.236	5.157	0.000	Insignificant	0.976	0.952	7957.589 prob.<0.05
ETR	0.986	89.205	0.000	Significant			

Source: Researcher's Computation, (2026).

*Dependent Variable=BI

From Table 1, R^2 showed that 95.2% variation in Brand Image (BI) was caused by the influence of Ethical Responsibility (ETR). From the computed value of F-statistics of 7,957.589 (prob.<0.05), it was discovered that R^2 was significant in explaining the influence of ETR on BI of Banking Industry in Uyo. ETR indicated a positive and significant influence on BI (t-stat.>1.966, p-value<0.05) of Banking Industry in Uyo. It implied that a percentage increase in ETR will result to 98.6% increase in BI.

The constant (β_o) of 23.6% showed the level of BI of this study as ETR was held constant and significant (t-stat.>1.966, p-value<0.05). The null hypothesis, which states that Ethical Responsibility has no significant influence on Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo was rejected and the alternative hypothesis, which states that Ethical Responsibility significantly influences Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo, was accepted on the rationale of t-statistics and p-value computed (t-stat.>1.966, p-value<0.05).

The simple linear regression statistics showing the effect of Philanthropic Responsibility on Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo.

Table 2: Simple Linear Regression Output

Variable	Beta (β)	t-Stat.	P-Value	Remark	R	R^2	F-ratio
Constant	0.038	1.235	0.217	Significant	0.990	0.980	19510.782 prob.>0.05
PR	1.018	139.681	0.000	Significant			

Source: Researcher's Computation, (2026) *Dependent Variable=BI

From Table 2, R^2 showed that 98.0% variation in Brand Image (BI) was caused by the influence of Philanthropic Responsibility (PR). From the computed value of F-statistics of 19,510.782 (prob.>0.05), it was discovered that R^2 was insignificant in explaining the influence of PR on BI of Banking Industry in Uyo. PR indicated a positive and significant influence on BI (t-stat.>1.966, p-value>0.05) of Banking Industry in Uyo. It implied that a percentage increase in PR will result to 101.8% increase in BI.

The constant (β_o) of 3.8% showed the level of BI of this study as PR was held constant and insignificant (t-stat.<1.966, p-value>0.05). The null hypothesis, which states that Philanthropic Responsibility has no significant influence on Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo was rejected and the alternative hypothesis, which states that Philanthropic Responsibility significantly influences Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo, was accepted on the rationale of t-statistics and p-value computed (t-stat.>1.966, p-value<0.05).

Discussion of Findings

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The Cooperate Social Responsibility strategies considered for this study were ethical responsibility and philanthropic responsibility to see how they affect Brand Image of Banking Industry in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. To achieve the study objectives, a simple linear regression model was used to test each of the independent variable. The major findings revealed were as follows:

- The result also revealed that Ethical Responsibility significantly influences Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo. This means that bank that treats their employees fairly and are honest in their communication with their customers can induce their brand image. These findings are consistent with that of Poudyal and Yukongdi (2020), Sule and Salisu (2023) and Kwagga, Samuel and Medugu (2023) but contradict the work Dapi and Phiri (2015) that see consumer's loyalty as factors affecting brand image.
- The result showed that Philanthropic Responsibility significantly influences Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo. This implies that supporting community development projects and engaging in social welfare activities can help increase bank's brand image. This is in line with Kananen (2024) but disagree with Khan, Benhamed, Soliman and Khalifa (2024).

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of the Findings

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The Cooperate Social Responsibility strategies considered for this study were ethical responsibility and philanthropic responsibility to see how they affect Brand Image of Banking Industry in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. To achieve the study objectives, a simple linear regression model was used to test each of the independent variable. Relevant data were collected with the use of questionnaire from the customers who owned a bank account with any of the selected banks in Uyo. From the analysis of data, the independent variables (ethical responsibility and philanthropic responsibility) had a positive and significant effect on the dependent variables (Brand Image). This suggests that for banks to increase their brand image, all the strategies of Corporate Social Responsibility must be employed to build more brand reputation and patronage.

Conclusion

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

i. Ethical Responsibility significantly affects Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.
ii. Philanthropic Responsibility significantly affects Brand Image in the Banking Industry in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations were made;

1. Based on the significant effect of ethical responsibility on brand image in the banking industry in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, banks should avoid unethical business practices to in order to enforce positive image of their brand.

2. Based on the significant effect of should undertake more morally justified CSR initiatives which will help them strengthen community welfare and their brand image.

References

Abirami, D. & Thothadri, S. (2017). A Study on the Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Service Organizations with Special Reference to Branding and Brand Value. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT), 5(4); 875-888.*

Adeyeye, B., Ibitayo, O., Adesina, E., Yartey, D. & Ben-Enukora, C. (2021). Exploring the CSR Influence on Brand Patronage in Nigeria. *Covenant Journal of Communication (CJOC), 8(2); 85-106.*

Araújo, J., Pereira, V. C. & Santos, J. (2023). The Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Image and Brand Equity and Its Impact on Consumer Satisfaction. *Administrative Sciences, 13(1); 1-16.*

Arslan, M. & Zaman, R. (2014). Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Image: A Study on Telecom Brands. *Developing Country Studies, 4(21); 84-90.*

Ayogyam, A., Amo, F., Kyire, L.A., & Mohammed, H. (2014). The Effect of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Building. *International Journal of Marketing Studies, 6(3); 126-134.*

Chaithra, V. & Jayashree G. V. (2024). The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Building and Consumer Satisfaction: A Review. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews, 5(2); 2755-2759*

Dapi, B. & Phiri, M.A. (2015). The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Loyalty. *Journal of Governance and Regulation, 4(4); 8-16*

Esmaeilpour, M. & Barjoei, S. (2016). The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility and Image on Brand Equity. *Global Business and Management Research: An International Journal, 8(3); 55-66.*

Hwang, J. (2024). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Brand Image. *International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 13(02); 1569–1578*

Kananen, A. (2024). The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on Brand Image and Consumer Loyalty. *Administrative Sciences, 11(8); 12.18.*

Khan, S.K., Benhamed, A., Soliman, M., & Khalifa, G.S. (2024). Understanding corporate social responsibility's influence on brand reputation, employer branding, and performance. *Tourism & Management Studies, 20(4); 73-84*.

Kwagga, J. F., Samuel, E. & Medugu, M.H. (2023) Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Image of MTN in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Management Sciences, 24(1); 144-153*

Manyange, B. N. (2013) Corporate Social Responsibility and Brand Image in Banking Industry; A Case of Kenya Commercial Bank Ltd. *Developing Country Studies, 4(21); 14-20.*

Negassa, G. J. (2023). The effect of corporate social responsibility on brand equity in the banking industry: the mediating role of brand credibility and brand image. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews, 5(2); 2755-2759.*

Pham, M.T., Dinh, T.T.T., & Tran, P.T. (2025). The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Customer Loyalty: Evidence from the Commercial Banks in Viet Nam. *Economic Insights – Trends and Challenges, 14(1); 85-109.*

Poudyal, A. & Yukongdi, V. (2020). The Influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Image: A Study of Nepalese Commercial Bank Customers. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research, 9(4); 176- 192.*

Rathnayake, M.R. (2022). The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Customer Loyalty of the Banking Services. *Global Scientific Journal, 10(8); 846-866.*

Saksham, V. & Supriya, A. (2025). The Role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Shaping Brand Image. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews, 6 (3); 8068-8069.*

Sule, S.A & Salisu, A. (2023). Corporate Social Responsibility and Its Effects on Brand Trust in Bank: Evidence from Nigeria. *International Journal of Economics and Business Issues, 02(02); 01-12*