

## **A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY AND TRADITIONAL SYSTEMS OF IGBO CHILD UPBRINGING**

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### **Abstract**

Globalization has led to social and economic changes in societies and other aspects of life. These changes without denial, could affect the life priorities an individual. Thus, this wave of changes has affected the Igbo traditional system of child upbringing, leading to a new method or what can be referred to as 'modern system of child upbringing.' The contemporary Igbo seem to have a different approach to bringing up a child. This is by way of abandoning the traditional system of child upbringing and adopting the individualistic polity, thereby leaving the core values and essence of traditional system which see a child as belonging to the community i.e. "Nwa Ora/Oha." In contemporary society, immoralities, insubordination of children to their parents and elders are at its peak. We can also see that home values, the Igbo culture, customs, norms and language are on the verge of extinction. It is this lacuna that has motivated this research. The study employs the analytic method to critically analyze the two systems of child upbringing namely; the contemporary system and the traditional system with a view of showing that the departure from the traditional system is an unfortunate one. Findings reveal that parent's lackadaisical attitudes towards the up bring of their children and children's exposure to mass media at a very tender age, have resulted to children's misconduct, ill behaviour and lack of home values. The researchers in this research aim to answer the question who is to be blamed for the lackadaisical formation of youths today? The church? The school? The Western influence? The child or the parents? Thus, this research advocates for a reorientation of the youths, on moral or ethical standards which they will follow to discern their youthful age. More so, to educate parents to give a holistic psychological development to their kids as well as not to be too lenient in correcting their child's misconducts.

**Keywords:** Igbo, Traditional, Media

### **Introduction**

Childbirth in Igbo traditional system has its peculiarities. For instance, the celebration of a child's birth does not only concern the immediate family but, rather extends to the community at large. In Africa, human existence is communalistic and thus, an event like child upbringing is a community responsibility. In other words, the celebration of childbirth is community-based and it depicts that it is not only the immediate family of the child who thinks good of him/her, but the whole community. Mainly, the Igbo people hold strongly the

philosophy of "Nwa Ora" or "Nwa Mmadunile", which implies that a child belongs to the community. This implies that the sole responsibility of training up a child is not only the parents of the child, the maids, and school teacher rather, it is also a collective affair which includes the community; it is a shared responsibility, in that; there is joy and happiness shared in the community.

However, man is the custodian of culture and man is a social and dynamic being, and as a social and dynamic being, he is not perfect. If culture is a construct of man thus, it is non-static and imperfect. However, this has made cross-pollination of culture inevitable. Hence, this study deems it apt to x-ray the Igbo tradition with regards to child upbringing, in juxtaposition with the Igbo contemporary tradition to show the unfortunate departure - the bad effect of the Igbo contemporary system, and to strike a balance between them. The work is structured into various sections beginning with the theoretical framework down to the examination of what child upbringing is all about in Igbo tradition. Furthermore, a philosophical analysis on child upbringing in both traditional Igbo system and contemporary Igbo system would be examined.

Firstly, there is a need to examine the Igbo contemporary system of bringing up a child. Peil (1977) in Anyacho (2005) believes that "all societies experience a certain amount of change in their social structure and culture over time". It is through this view that we can say, the Igbo society just like every other society experienced a paradigm from traditional ways to contemporal ways. The traditional Igbo culture was affected by colonialism which introduced civilization and urbanization. Nnadi (1991) in expanding the effects of civilization, posits that;

This strange ways of life created a new image, especially among the modern generation with respect to morals. A new era began which made inroads into the customary ways of life and completely changed the notion of everything traditional. The youths in particular started feeling emancipated from the traditional customs especially those in township where they have alienated themselves from their homes and live free from parental control.

From Nnadi's findings, child upbringing in the Igbo traditional system was affected by civilization thus, leading to the contemporary system of child upbringing. The researchers notes that there are so many unanswered questions surrounding the Igbo contemporary system of bringing up a child. Some of these problems bother on the grounds of the socio-

cultural mix which boils down to two questions. At first, one may ask, does this system give room for communal living and interaction, among children in the same family and even in the community or society at large? Does it foster brotherhood in society since it is an individualistic system? A practical example would be situated in today's Igbo extended family settings whereby cousins don't get the opportunities to know themselves. In a family of four, you find out that the majority are all living in different cities. This family in its extended form comprises of father, mother, children, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, and in a larger case, the 'umunna'. The central question is, does the Igbo contemporary system of bringing up a child foster brotherhood?

Some of the philosophical issues that may arise when one subjects the Igbo contemporary system of child upbringing to critical examination include: Does this system inculcates in children the ethics of "the dos" and "the don'ts"? What is the condition of the ethics of the land in this contemporary time? Does this system contradict the traditional system? Is the departure from the traditional system a fortunate one or an unfortunate?

The researchers aim to expose the departure of child upbringing from the traditional way to a modern way and to show that this is an unfortunate departure since it portrays some dangers to the Igbo society in particular and humanity in general. Also, there is a need to dig down into the Igbo tradition to know the extent to which it has been affected by colonization and globalization.

The Igbo culture is in no doubt a mixed culture and this can be attributed to the emergence of the western cultures which have influenced the Igbo people in so many ways since their contact with colonial masters. The Igbo people lost the traditional heritage that created a strong bond among them, to the Western way of life. They see the whites as superior to them, virtually in everything they do, which can be expressed in their language and communication, dressing pattern, food, including the way they train their children. There is a need to teach and provide the future generation with some facts about communalism, as against individualism. The research is framed to increase the knowledge of the reader(s) to percolate that there is no perfect culture, and to imbibe the pride of living out one's culture instead of trying to copy completely a foreign culture and to adopt them as standards for raising their children. It is also important for the Igbos to cherish their cultural heritage which binds them together in the spirit of communalism.

### **Child Upbringing and Rites in Igbo Traditional Society**

Child training in Igbo traditional society is a major responsibility. Home values are very vital in a child's life and personality building. Thus, the Igbos give more attention to the way children are nurtured. Home values are a reflection of the societal, cultural values and norms, which the developing child has to abide by. Thus, the personality development and efficient learning of these home values take precedence. In Igbo traditional society, a child is generally believed to be owned by the community. This is encapsulated in the Igbo philosophy of 'nwa bu nwa ora' and this can be translated as 'a child belonging to all'. Thus, the caring and training of a child is everybody's responsibility and this can be seen when a woman corrects another person's child when he or she displays bad behavior. The assertion that the parent of any child does not have sole responsibility in bringing up their children can be seen in the rites of detachment, which is performed at the childhood development of every Igbo child. During the rites performance, the mother and the child is detached from each other through the cutting of the umbilical cord that connects them. This is for Kanu (2015), "...an integration into the community as a child of all members of the community." The kind of training given to any child ensures his or her moral, physical, social, and emotional development. The children learn the essence of ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, initiation functions, funerals, through their active participation. Hence, the Igbos carry out what P.C. Ikegbusi (1989), would call; "education by participation".

In Igbo traditional society, the birth of a child brings joy to the immediate family, relatives, and the entire community at large. Just as marriage, is valued in Igbo society, so is child training. The childhood development of every newborn child is full of activities. Nnokwe (2021) states that "the rite of childhood introduces the child to the community. It is believed that the child will grow out of childhood and enter into adulthood, physically, mentally and religiously." It is evident that the observation of these rites and ceremonies are very paramount in Igbo land and so every Igbo child has to perform those rites. These rites include;

**1. Omugwu Seclusion:** *Omugwu* seclusion is often a period where the mother of a new child and her child is given special care and this, is usually done in a secluded place. This seclusion usually starts at the birth of every child. After the baby has been thoroughly bathed, he/she is taken to the hut with the mother, the *Omugwu* seclusion, start thereof. It lasts for 28days, but some areas in Igbo land limited theirs to 20days. In a situation where the newborn baby is a

girl, the *Omugwu* seclusion is always sacred and also strict rules are observed during this period. For instance, the mother is restricted to her hut and she is not allowed to come into any gathering of any form and same applies to the new born child. The child is not also allowed to come to obi or even come out in compound gate.

**2. The Rites of *Imenyu Oku*:** The rite of *imenyu oku* signifies the ceremony of putting off the ever-burning fire beneath the bed of the child. It is usually done after three market days in Igbo land. The act of putting off the fire is usually done by the mother-in-law or ritually by children. The rites of *imenyu oku* mark the beginning of moral instruction of the child as such, the child learns how to obey rules and fit into communal etiquette.

**3. Igba Afa Ceremony (Divination):** *Igba afa* ceremony is usually performed to know the ancestor whose incarnate the child is. Its processes are done through divination or intervention of the ancestors. The Igbos believe that children can be a reincarnation of spirit, yam, as well village festival spirit.

**4. Naming Ceremony:** The naming ceremony is a process of giving a newborn child in Igbo traditional society a name. In Igbo land, the child is not given a name immediately after birth, because they believe that sometimes, some newborns, may not come to stay or live. Due to this effect, they wait to know if the child has come to stay or not. The confirmation, comes after eight days to twenty days of birth, depending on the localities. Some parents may call their child names of the market days such as – Nweke (nwa-eke), Nwafor (nwa-afor). A naming ceremony is a vital ceremony in Igbo land. As Basden (1982) succinctly states that ‘naming the child is an important function...’ Furthermore, naming a child helps to show that the child is a human and it also gives him or her the ability to socialize in the community. Quarcoopome (1987) affirms that;

It makes him or her a member of society at large. Words and actions accompanying the ceremony are to ensure that moral values like honesty, truthfulness, Openness, industriousness, and hard work, are inculcated in the growing child and as well serves as reminders to those present to keep on the right path.

**5. Circumcision (*Ibe Ugwu*) and the Rites of *Ibe Agama* (Clitoridectomy):** Circumcision is done within eight days after the birth of every Igbo child. Though some areas or communities in Igbo land, do theirs at the puberty stages because they believe that circumcision ushers in the male child into adulthood and sex life. Mbiti (1969) rightly stated that “the physical pain

which the child is encouraged to endure is the beginning of training the child for difficulties and suffering of later life.” Meanwhile, the rite of *Ibe agama* is another form of circumcision done basically for the female child. It is the widening and smoothening of the mouth of the vagina. Though this rite is not observed throughout the Igbo land. The significance of clitoridectomy includes easy delivery, enhances hygiene, beautification, controls of excessive female urges, and promotion of fidelity in marriage.

**6. The Rites of *Iru Mgbede* (Fattening Seclusion):** The rite of *iru mgbede* is a vital part of puberty rites performed in Igbo culture. It prepares a young girl for marriage. It is a seclusion period that begins at the first menstruation of a girl child. Ezenweke (2021) supported this view by asserting that, “the basic principle of these rites is to formally welcome the child into adulthood or adult world, which in turn boost her morale to accept the adult role.

### **Child Training in Contemporary Igbo Society**

Child training and development in the present Igbo society has been influenced by foreign cultures and practices which are alien to Igbo culture and tradition. This is a result of colonization, advancement in technology, and negligence to Igbo language, mode of dressing, and culture. The present Igbo have shifted from the communalistic way of bringing up a child to adopting an individualistic system whereby everyone minds their business. Hence the sole responsibility of raising a child in this present era is no longer by the community but rather by the parents. The present Igbo adopt “the philosophy of minding one's business" as against "the philosophy of I live because you live". This can be seen in the attitudes of parents who threaten another parent who corrects their kids for a misdeed done by them. Onebunne and Ikwuagwu (2018) observes that,

It is because the Igbo personality of today has lost the core communal values which define his cultural dignity that the modern state in Igbo land is culturally, socially, politically, technologically, economically and nationally destabilized and morally anemic.

Children are also not breastfed very well due to women in this era are mostly businesswomen, civil servants who spend much time at work and less time at home. In affirmation, Nweze (1996) observes that,

With more women taking to professional careers and paid employment outside the home, the direct consequences are enormous in the value of child-rearing practices. In Nigeria, as in other parts of the world, situations have been created where mothers and fathers are becoming absentee parents as they are being forced by the demands of their jobs and professions to spend less time at home with their children.

The training of children is mostly done by the nannies, surrogate mothers, formal education, and mass media. Children are often left at the mercy of surrogate mothers from a critical tender age and are exposed to illicit and corrupt content through uncensored videos, music lyrics, and negative influence. Most modern children have been raised to see their cultures as barbaric, fetish, and archaic. To this effect, cultural values are on the grave decline, identities have been lost, and cultural heritage.

Children at their early stage are sent to school, they are no longer given a good upbringing through folktales, traditions, customs, and values, Rather they are left at the mercy of school teachers who may not be able to teach them home values that are supposed to be internalized.

Akijobi (2001) opines that

Presently, the Igbo seem to abandon their once-revered folktales, forsaking the once popular and prominent medium for which cultures, values, morals, and ethics were communicated and inculcated into the young. Folktales are now being regarded as stories that lack sense and are devoid of truth.

Due to advancements in technology, a lot of cultural values have been eroded by western culture and this has an untold impact on the way children are been raised. For instance, we could see that people now say we shouldn't spank children when they misbehave. Modern parenting is more lenient and the parents of this contemporary time prefer the use of psychological approaches such as giving advice and giving space for the children to think on their own, without giving close monitoring to them. However, modernity and its consequences of digitization, have opened up a new paradigm for children. A paradigm whereby children are raised to ask fundamental questions about their identity, paternity, existence, and other realities that pertain to their lives.

## **A Philosophical Analysis of Child-Upbringing in Traditional and Contemporary Igbo Societies**

Having looked at these two systems of raising a child, a critical analysis of the two systems has to be done to see how the contemporary Igbos have departed from the traditional system, with regards to child upbringing.

### **Parents Responsibilities Towards their Children**

In Igbo traditional society, a major responsibility is giving to child training, because they frown at every bad deed by any child and their high regard for good behavior. Given the above, major responsibility that concerns child training at the tender age is being assigned to mothers in traditional Igbo society. Mothers in traditional Igbo society bring out their time to nurture and train up their children in the culture of the society, thereby inculcating in them the cultural values, morals, and the need to disdain evil or wrong doings. This is why when a child acts wrongly, the first question which will be thrown at the child is, whose child are you? This is to know if you are behaving like your parents or not and if the child was raised properly. In addition, the question exposes if the parent(s) as being responsible or irresponsible parents(s).

The traditional Igbo parents stay with the newborn child for a longer period and have the baby well breastfed and make him or her feels the motherly care. Breast feeding and weaning a baby wasn't a thing of condition or probability in Igbo land from speaking subjectively. Mother's care was a duty and a full time job. There were no nannies, no maids, no crèche or day care. The mother and father at this stage were his mentors and tutors. The women were so respectful and under their husbands, which passes a moral lesson to their children about family respect and individual roles. Up till now, some people and some societies hold with great dignity the value of respect and moral obligations.

Also, children in traditional Igbo society, cherish their parents, because they were showered with parental love and care. The killing of one's mother or father was hardly recorded. The parent brings out their time to sit and discuss with their children, through that, the children learn a lot from their parents.

Contrary to the Igbo traditional society, the parents have sole responsibility in child upbringing in the present era. In most cases, they employed the use of nannies, maids, or

surrogate mothers to help in nurturing children in contemporary society. The contemporary Igbo holds strongly on the "philosophy of mind your own business"- here everyone takes care of their children and gives lackadaisical attitudes towards other children whose parents may not be available or absent. This could be seen in the attitude of the contemporary parents, who threaten other parents for correcting their child for his or her misdeed or wrongdoings.

However, parents often leave their children in the hands of surrogate mothers, nannies, or maids and go about their day-to-day activities. Sometimes they spend less time at home, on the other hand, spend virtually all their time at their offices or business place. They are not always at home to check on the excesses of their children. Despite they have nannies who direct their actions, the nannies may not give them the necessary mother's or father's care they needed from their parents and as well as nurture him or her in the manner which their mothers would. In such scenarios, we could see that children are deprived of the parental care, guidance, and love, which they deserve.

More so, we could see children these days hating on their parents and some go to the extent of beating their parents or even murdering them. This is because, they lack love in their hearts, due to they were not always with their parents, so the love for parents is not in them. Sometimes, they love their nannies more than their parents. However, such children also speak ill of their parents in any gathering of children. Also, in children gatherings (playgrounds) it happens that most children speak good of their parents, thus, prompting other children who lack parental care to feel bad about the way he or she was brought up and this will affect his or her mental state or psychology.

### **Community Parenting**

In Igbo traditional society, multiple parenting was prominent, and the people involve includes; the immediate family, the extended families, the neighbors, the Umunna, and the community. So, these groups contribute to the nurturing of children depending on the circumstances. Thus, in a situation whereby the parents of any child travels and as well in any case whereby the parents lack money or are poor, the extended families like uncles and aunties, who are wealthy will help in training the children. In such cases, children are sent to their paternal uncles or aunties or maternal uncles or auntie to stay with them until their parents return. Also in a situation whereby the parents are not wealthy, the uncles will ask the

parents of the child to send their child to help them to bring up the child. Most times they do it with love and bring up such children as their own. This has resulted in a sense of brotherhood among Igbo families and it has fostered belongingness for such child.

More so, the elders in the community contributed majorly to child upbringing, because they cannot watch children misbehave. However, even when an elderly is not related to the child and sees the child misbehaves; the elderly is expected to correct the child. This can be seen in the Igbo proverb, elders cannot watch a child misbehave (*nne ewu anaghi ano n'ulo, ewu amuo n'ogbili*). Also, the African proverb states that; the grey hairs of the elders are a sign of wisdom. Thus, it follows that elders are being revered in Igbo traditional society. Furthermore, elders help to instill positive values in children whenever any child errs.

In the contemporary system, multiple parenting or co-parenting is not observed. Extreme existential living is very prominent, in this contemporary society, where everyone minds her own business. This can be seen in the nonchalance attitude of parents or elders in the community towards other people's wards when they see them in a wrong way.

In most cases, parents cannot even trust their children in the hands of their relations, not to talk of a stranger. It is true that in today's world, a lot of vices are being done to children by relatives. For instance, a female child might be raped or sexually abused when left with a male relative. The world today is not safe and trust is a difficult gift to lend out. However, it can be maintained that these relatives are the way they are because they are not properly raised.

The central question should be, can these multiple practices (co-parenting) still be practiced now? Can children from such family, listen to their elders when they are corrected for their misdeed? Can this system foster brotherhood among children in such families? Can such children have in them good behaviors? These are the fundamental questions that have crippled the traditional system of child upbringing that allows multiple parenting, a system that ensures positive values and good attributes of the child. Thus, the research exposes that there is need for the Igbo parenting and child upbringing to find a meeting point between the traditional system and contemporary system. Co-parenting is possible and encourage because parents in this era of dispensation will not always be around to watch over their children.

### **Folktale**

The traditional Igbos employed the use of folktales as a form of education. The Igbo folk tales have in them the cultural values, norms, languages, and customs which is handed over from one generation to another. Folktales are being told from their infancy and through folktales, children are taught the norms and values of the Igbo people, since the Igbo values and norms were also embedded in Igbo folktales.

Folktales were among the means of moulding of every Igbo child's character and it were relevant in educating the children on various aspects of Igbo history, values, norms, beliefs, language and as well, it teaches good morals which would help them to become better and responsible adults. Igbo folktales enhance communal living among the Igbo children in traditional society because during moonlight night when folk tales are told, children from different families are gathered and, this helps to stimulate the relationship or brotherhood among the children.

Folktales in contemporary times are on the verge of extinction. They are no longer told to children in this present era. In most cases, children are taught that Igbo traditions are barbaric, void of liberalism and thus, Igbo folktales which have in them traces of Igbo tradition, culture, norms, and custom are not told to children since the present Igbos believe and holds high on the traditions of the westerners. This has resulted in children having zero knowledge of the culture of their people. Also, the Igbo language is almost vanishing, we could see children speaking English with little knowledge of how to communicate in Igbo language.

### **Apprenticeship (Igba Boyi) and Existential Living**

In Igbo traditional society, at the teenage stage of every male child, he is sent to learn a skill(s) or to serve and learn any business he has a passion for from a businessman. They also learn various skills like blacksmithing, knitting baskets, and growing cash crops. The man could be his relation or one of their community members. An agreement concerning the duration of the apprenticeship (igba-boyi) in most cases may be stated after which it is expected that the master/trainer/businessman settles him (pays him off) either with money or goods. This has made Igbo children industrious and hardworking. Apprenticeship also served as a system where huge wealth is generated. Professor Ndubuisi Ekweke (2021), defines the Igbo apprentice system as

... a business philosophy of shared prosperity where participants cooperatively participate to attain organic economic equilibrium where accumulated market leverageable factors are constantly weighted and calibrated out, via dilution and surrendering of market share, enabling social resilience and formation of livable clusters, engineered by major participants funding their competitors, with success measured on quantifiable support to stakeholders, and not by absolute market dominance.

In contemporary society, apprenticeship is no longer observed in the strict sense. Some parents no longer have interest in sending out their children to go for *igba-boyi* (apprenticeship), rather they leave their children at home, where they may not even receive good home training. Some parents, cannot trust their children into the hands of strangers or even close relatives, due to extreme existential (individualistic) living obtainable in this present era. This has an effect on the children, family, and society at large, because the child may grow up being lazy, especially when such does not receive proper training from his parents. Thus, the child may end up engaging in any sort of bad acts like stealing and loitering around the village. Also through loitering around the village, he may join a bad gang, become a cultist and end up causing chaos in the society at large. This is obtainable in this present society; we see youths that want quick money which will not come through hard works and some end up doing money rituals or running mad to gain money.

Due to youths of this contemporary time are not ready to pass through any form of difficulties before becoming rich, many of them, have disposed of themselves to many immoral acts to be wealthy. To this effect, our society is in shambles and crimes like fraud, arm robbery, prostitution, continue to rise beyond recognition leaving us trapped in a siege.

Igbos are known for their communal living. In Igbo land, adages like; *Onye ahala nwanneya* (be your brother's keeper), *agbatobi nwanne bu onyenkeya* (your neighbor is also family), *gwurugwuru bu ugwu eze* (The King derives his honour from the multitude of supporters behind him) and *anyukoo mmamiri onu ogbaa ofufu* (Communal effort has a multiplier effect). These show the indispensable value of unity in the Igbo community which shuns individualism and subjective existence. Contrary to the traditional system, there is an extreme individualistic living in the contemporary society where everyone cares for only his or her family without thinking of what will benefit his neighbor. Thus this contradicts the communal living among Igbos in traditional society. According to Kelechukwu Iroma (2021), Igbo

apprenticeship system is an important factor because it fuels Nigeria's entrepreneurs. The Igbo apprenticeship system allows young people to learn a trade and start a business. This is why it is regarded as a Nigerian model of stakeholder capitalism.

## **Conclusion**

Having gone through the Igbo traditional and contemporary systems of child upbringing, it is pertinent to evaluate and critically analyze their contents and identify the ideal system. However, in the course of this research work, one may be tempted to conclude that child training in traditional Igbo society is far better than what is obtainable today in the contemporary era, due to immorality, children disobedience to their parents and the authorities; stealing, prostitution, etc. all on the rise in our present-day societies.

In as much as there was a minimal rate of immorality among youths and heinous crimes caused by children in the traditional system, the system alone is still not highly an ideal system of child upbringing. This is because there is a mix of culture already from the colonial masters. Yes, we cannot go back to the old traditional system; that does not mean that we should discard it totally and move with what is on trend – the contemporary system. More so, the contemporary era poses some threat to child training in Igbo society. It is like a cankerworm eating away the roots of the Igbo heritage. Thus, the researchers are not of the view that all children raised in this contemporary era are wayward or manner-less or are not perfect as children in the traditional Igbo society. Rather, this study is of the view that in most cases, there have been records of the bad disposition from children of this present time, and that is why one may be tempted to have a general view that most children of this contemporary society are guilty of immoral acts.

Therefore, no parents would like to have a child that is wayward or a nuisance in the family and society at large. Thus, in order to ameliorate these issues of child upbringing, the research advocates that Igbos should indulge in cultural harmonization, tolerance, and mediation between the two systems. It is through the process of cultural harmonization that the distinctive features, peculiarities, and original traits of each will be retained. This implies the traditional Igbo society should not be too dogmatic to incorporate some of the good sides of the contemporary system of raising children and drop the bad sides on one hand while the

contemporary system should not be too liberal. In conclusion, there should be a balance between child upbringing in traditional and contemporary Igbo societies.

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