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**CULTURAL CONTACT, IDENTITY FRICTION AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS BETWEEN  
IGBO AND IKWERRE COMMUNITIES**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study evaluated Cultural Contact, Identity Friction and Intergroup Relations between Igbo and Ikwerre Communities. The research sought to investigate historical and cultural dynamics shaping communication, identify factors that enhance effective intercultural communication, and examine challenges and opportunities for fostering social cohesion between the two communities. Guided by Cross-Cultural Communication Theory and Social Identity Theory, the study adopted a triangulation research design, combining surveys and focus group discussions. The population consisted of approximately 1,005,904 residents of Port Harcourt and Obio-Akpor Local Government Areas, with a sample of 400 respondents selected using purposive and availability sampling techniques, focusing on knowledgeable community members such as elders, chiefs, and leaders. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and interview guide, validated by experts, and reliability tested via Cronbach's Alpha. Analysis employed descriptive statistics, weighted means, and standard deviations. Findings revealed that historical events, migration patterns, and cultural traditions significantly influence communication between the Igbo and Ikwerre communities. Factors such as shared language, mutual respect, participation in community activities, and cultural awareness were identified as critical in promoting effective cross-cultural communication. Conversely, stereotypes, differing communication styles, historical grievances, and limited cultural knowledge were found to hinder understanding. The study also demonstrated that cross-cultural communication positively impacts interpersonal relations, fostering trust, cooperation, and social cohesion, while traditional and social media play a pivotal role in shaping cultural perceptions, identity expression, and intergroup attitudes. The study concludes that promoting cultural awareness, responsible media use, and inclusive engagement strategies is essential for strengthening Igbo-Ikwerre relations and enhancing social harmony. The findings provide actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and community leaders aiming to foster sustainable intercultural communication and cooperation in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Contact; Identity Friction; Intergroup Relations; Igbo; Ikwerre Communities.

## Introduction

Ethnic diversity is a defining feature of Nigeria's socio-cultural and political landscape, with numerous ethnic groups interacting within shared geographical spaces. Among the significant interethnic relationships in Rivers State is that between the Igbo and Ikwerre peoples. Historically, the two groups have maintained close cultural and linguistic connections, particularly through similarities between the Ikwerre language and Igbo language varieties. However, contemporary political, social, and cultural developments have contributed to increasing assertions of distinct Ikwerre identity and debates over their historical relationship with the Igbo (Onuora, Onuora, & Okolo, 2024; Onwubiko & Briggs, 2020). The assertion of separate ethnic identities has been influenced by historical experiences, political competition, land ownership, economic interests, and struggles over indigeneity and political recognition. The Nigerian Civil War and post-war political developments further contributed to the strengthening of ethnic boundaries, as minority groups increasingly sought to protect their cultural and political interests (Alagoa, 2020; Osaghae, 2006). In Rivers State, these issues have become particularly visible in areas where Igbo and Ikwerre populations interact closely.

Communication plays an important role in the construction and negotiation of ethnic identity. Language, cultural symbols, interpersonal interactions, traditional institutions, and media narratives influence how groups perceive themselves and others. Cross-cultural communication provides a useful framework for understanding how individuals from different cultural backgrounds interpret messages, manage differences, and develop relationships (Gudykunst & Kim, 2023). In the Igbo-Ikwerre relationship, communication can either promote understanding or reinforce stereotypes, mistrust, and identity divisions. The emergence of social media and other communication platforms has further intensified these dynamics by providing spaces where competing narratives about identity, history, belonging, and legitimacy are expressed and circulated. Such platforms can promote dialogue and cultural understanding but can also amplify ethnic tensions when misinformation, stereotypes, and exclusionary narratives are disseminated (Mashood, Lawrence, & Opeyemi, 2020). Therefore, the Igbo-Ikwerre relationship represents an important context for examining cultural contact and identity friction. This study consequently investigates how cross-cultural communication influences identity negotiation, intergroup perceptions, and relationships between the Igbo and Ikwerre peoples in Rivers State.

## Statement of the Problem

Despite the historical, linguistic, and cultural connections between the Igbo and Ikwerre peoples, contemporary relations have increasingly been characterised by identity distancing, cultural resistance, mistrust, and socio-political tensions. Disagreements over ethnic identity, indigeneity, historical affiliations, land ownership, and political recognition have created boundaries between the two groups. These tensions are further reinforced through public discussions, media narratives, cultural expressions, and social interactions where stereotypes, competing historical accounts, and identity-based claims are sometimes circulated. The absence of sustained and inclusive communication between the groups may contribute to misunderstanding and deepen existing divisions. Although previous studies have examined aspects of Igbo-Ikwerre relations, greater attention has been given to their historical, political, and cultural dimensions, with limited focus on how communication contributes to identity negotiation and friction. Consequently, there is a need to examine how cross-cultural communication shapes perceptions, interactions, identity boundaries, and relationships between the Igbo and Ikwerre peoples.

## Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to evaluate cultural contact, identity friction and intergroup relations between Igbo and Ikwerre communities. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

1. Investigate the historical and cultural dynamics that shape communication between the Igbo and Ikwerre ethnic groups in Nigeria.
2. Identify the underlying factors that enhance cultural communication between Igbo and Ikwerre ethnic groups.
3. Determine cross-cultural communication complication for the Igbo-Ikwerre relations.

### **Research Questions**

In order to adequately address the main and specific objectives, the following research questions are raised and will be answered in the course of this study:

1. What historical and cultural dynamics shape communication between the Igbo and Ikwerre ethnic groups in Nigeria?
2. What factors enhance effective cultural communication between the Igbo and Ikwerre ethnic groups?
3. What are the main cross-cultural communication challenges affecting Igbo-Ikwerre relations?

### **Theoretical Review**

The theories adopted in this study include Cross-Cultural Communication Theory and Social Identity Theory.

#### **Cross-Cultural Communication Theory**

Cross-Cultural Communication Theory is associated with Edward T. Hall, who developed significant concepts of intercultural communication in his work *Beyond Culture* (1976). The theory explains how cultural values, beliefs, language, norms, communication styles, and social experiences influence the way people encode, interpret, and respond to messages. Hall distinguished between high-context communication, where meaning is strongly influenced by relationships, situations, and non-verbal cues, and low-context communication, where messages are generally expressed directly. Subsequent scholars such as Hofstede (2001), Ting-Toomey (1999), and Gudykunst and Kim (2003) further developed understanding of communication across cultural boundaries. The theory assumes that differences in cultural backgrounds can produce misunderstanding, stereotypes, and communication barriers, but that cultural awareness and adaptability can promote effective interaction. It also recognizes that historical experiences, social relationships, and power differences influence communication between groups.

The theory is relevant because the study examines communication between the Igbo and Ikwerre peoples, who share cultural and linguistic similarities but also experience identity differences and tensions. It provides a framework for understanding how language, cultural symbols, historical narratives, interpersonal interactions, and media messages influence perceptions between the groups. The theory also helps explain how communication can either reinforce stereotypes and identity boundaries or promote mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence.

#### **Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory was developed by Henri Tajfel in the 1970s and further developed with contributions from John Turner. The theory explains how individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups such as ethnic, religious, national, or professional groups. According to Tajfel and Turner, people categorize themselves and others into social groups, identify with their in-groups, and compare their groups with out-groups. Such categorization may produce in-group favouritism, out-group differentiation, prejudice, and intergroup conflict, particularly when group identity or status is perceived to be threatened. The theory assumes that individuals seek a

positive social identity and may strengthen group boundaries when their identity, recognition, or status is challenged. It also recognizes that social identities become more prominent in situations involving competition, conflict, or political mobilisation. Social Identity Theory is relevant to this study because it provides an explanation for identity differentiation between the Igbo and Ikwerre peoples. Despite their cultural and historical connections, assertions of distinct ethnic identities can strengthen in-group and out-group boundaries. The theory helps explain how language, cultural symbols, historical narratives, political interests, and perceptions of dominance may influence identity construction and intergroup relations. It therefore provides a useful framework for understanding the identity friction that may emerge from prolonged cultural contact between the two groups.

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Intercultural Communication**

Intercultural communication refers to communication between people whose cultural backgrounds influence how they produce, interpret, and respond to messages. Hall (1976) explains that culture shapes communication through differences in context, language, time, space, and patterns of interaction. Similarly, Gudykunst (2005) argues that effective communication across cultural boundaries requires individuals to manage uncertainty and anxiety arising from cultural differences. Kim (2017) further notes that communication and cultural identity are closely interconnected because individuals develop communication patterns from the cultural environments in which they are socialised. Intercultural communication therefore extends beyond the exchange of verbal messages to include values, beliefs, symbols, traditions, norms, and social practices.

In the context of Igbo–Ikwerre relations, intercultural communication is important because both groups share geographical proximity, cultural similarities, and historical interactions, while also maintaining competing perceptions of identity. Communication may consequently become a means of strengthening cultural understanding or reinforcing differences. Kim (2017) observes that intercultural interactions can influence identity development and relationships between culturally distinct groups. Thus, examining communication between the Igbo and Ikwerre provides an opportunity to understand how language, cultural symbols, historical narratives, and interpersonal interactions contribute to identity negotiation, cultural contact, and identity friction.

#### **Historical and Cultural Dynamics Shaping Igbo–Ikwerre Identity and Relations**

The historical and cultural relationship between the Igbo and Ikwerre is characterised by both cultural affinity and identity differentiation. Enyindah and Benibo (2024) observe that waterways such as the New Calabar and Sombreiro Rivers historically facilitated movement, trade, communication, and interaction between the Ikwerre and neighbouring communities, including Igbo groups. These sustained contacts encouraged cultural exchange and social relationships across community boundaries. Linguistic and cultural similarities have also contributed to debates concerning the relationship between the two groups.

However, contemporary Ikwerre identity increasingly emphasises cultural distinctiveness. Chinda (2024) argues that earlier historical writings frequently subsumed Ikwerre history under broader Igbo narratives, thereby contributing to later efforts to document and assert an independent Ikwerre identity. Opara (2025) similarly identifies language, festivals, ceremonies, religion, and social institutions as important markers of Ikwerre cultural identity. At the same time, Igbo representatives continue to emphasise historical and cultural connections between the two groups.

Thus, Igbo–Ikwerre relations demonstrate that ethnic identity is influenced by historical experience, cultural interaction, political circumstances, and contemporary processes of identity construction.

### **Factors Driving Cultural Contacts and Contributing to Identity Friction between the Igbo and Ikwerre People in Nigeria**

Cultural contact between the Igbo and Ikwerre has been influenced by geographical proximity, migration, trade, intermarriage, language, religion, and shared cultural practices. Enyindah and Benibo (2024) explain that waterways in the Niger Delta historically facilitated trade, communication, and interaction between Ikwerre communities and neighbouring Igbo groups. Amadi (2024) also demonstrates the importance of marriage practices in promoting social interaction, cohesion, and peaceful coexistence within Ikwerre communities. These forms of contact have encouraged cultural exchange and created social connections across ethnic boundaries.

However, cultural contact has also generated identity friction. Chinda (2024) notes that the historical subsumption of Ikwerre identity within broader Igbo narratives contributed to contemporary efforts to emphasise Ikwerre distinctiveness. Opara (2025) similarly identifies language, cultural practices, ancestral narratives, and social institutions as important elements in the construction of Ikwerre identity. Political competition, historical interpretations, land and resource interests, and the desire for cultural autonomy can therefore strengthen ethnic boundaries. The disagreement over whether Ikwerre identity should be understood as part of a wider Igbo identity or as a distinct ethnic identity remains a major source of contestation.

### **Cultural Contacts and Identity: Framing Igbo–Ikwerre Relations**

In Nigeria's multi-ethnic society, ethnic identity is shaped by history, language, culture, political experience, and interaction with other groups. The relationship between the Igbo and Ikwerre illustrates this complexity because both groups have experienced prolonged cultural contact while maintaining competing interpretations of identity. The Ikwerre, predominantly located in Rivers State, have historical and cultural connections with neighbouring Igbo communities through migration, trade, intermarriage, language, and shared cultural practices. Enyindah and Benibo (2024) demonstrate that economic and social interactions across the Niger Delta created enduring relationships between the Ikwerre and neighbouring communities. However, cultural similarities have not eliminated differences in historical narratives and ethnic self-identification. Chinda (2024) notes that earlier historiographical accounts frequently presented Ikwerre history within broader Igbo narratives, contributing to contemporary efforts to emphasise Ikwerre distinctiveness. Similarly, Opara (2025) highlights the importance of cultural practices, ancestral narratives, and social institutions in understanding Ikwerre identity. These competing interpretations demonstrate that identity is neither completely fixed nor determined by language alone. Rather, it is continually negotiated through cultural contact, historical memory, political interests, and social interaction. Consequently, Igbo–Ikwerre relations provide an important context for examining how cultural similarities can encourage interaction while perceived differences generate identity friction.

### **Historical Contacts: Shared Practices and Divergent Narratives**

Historical contact between the Igbo and Ikwerre has been sustained through trade, migration, intermarriage, religious interaction, and cultural exchange. The geographical proximity of their communities encouraged regular movement and interaction, particularly within the Niger Delta. Enyindah and Benibo (2024) show that the New Calabar and Sombreiro Rivers facilitated commercial and social relationships between Ikwerre communities and neighbouring groups from the pre-colonial period. Marriage also served as an important mechanism of social integration and

peaceful coexistence. Amadi (2024) demonstrates that marriage practices within Ikwerre society contributed to the formation and maintenance of social relationships and community cohesion. Cultural similarities can also be observed in naming practices, festivals, traditional institutions, religious beliefs, and aspects of social organisation. Nevertheless, shared practices have not produced a uniform understanding of ethnic identity. Chinda (2024) argues that the historical documentation of Ikwerre has often been influenced by broader classifications that did not adequately reflect indigenous perspectives of Ikwerre history. Opara (2025) further emphasises the importance of ancestral narratives and cultural practices in the development of Ikwerre identity. Thus, historical contact has produced both cultural convergence and distinctive identity narratives, creating a relationship characterised by both connectedness and differentiation.

### **Cultural Contact and Identity Friction: Sources of Tension**

#### **1. Colonial Legacies and State Creation**

Colonial administration and subsequent political restructuring contributed to the development of competing ethnic identities in Nigeria. Chinda (2024) explains that colonial-era historiography and administrative classifications sometimes placed Ikwerre communities within broader categories that did not necessarily correspond with indigenous understandings of identity. The creation of Rivers State in 1967 further altered the political environment by separating many Rivers communities from the former Eastern Region. According to Osaghae (2020), the creation of states in Nigeria was partly connected to demands for minority recognition and concerns about domination by larger ethnic groups. These political developments provided greater space for the articulation of distinct Ikwerre political and cultural interests. Consequently, historical administrative experiences became intertwined with contemporary identity claims.

#### **2. Linguistic and Cultural Assertion**

Language remains an important marker through which cultural identity is expressed and negotiated. Although linguistic similarities exist between Ikwerre and Igbo, language alone does not determine how individuals define their ethnic identity. Opara (2025) observes that cultural practices, ancestral narratives, and indigenous institutions contribute significantly to the construction of Ikwerre identity. Similarly, Chinda (2024) argues that the documentation and interpretation of Ikwerre history have influenced contemporary debates about cultural distinctiveness. Consequently, language can simultaneously serve as a bridge between the two groups and a site of identity contestation. Attempts to emphasise linguistic differences may therefore become part of broader efforts to establish cultural autonomy and group recognition.

#### **3. Contemporary Politicisation of Identity**

Ethnic identity in Nigeria is closely connected to political representation, access to resources, and claims to indigeneity. According to Osaghae (2020), ethnic mobilisation in Nigeria is frequently influenced by struggles over political power and access to state resources. Within the Igbo–Ikwerre relationship, competing interpretations of ethnic belonging can therefore acquire political significance. The assertion of a distinct Ikwerre identity may strengthen claims to political autonomy, while broader Igbo identification may be viewed as promoting cultural and political solidarity. These competing positions demonstrate that ethnic identity is not simply inherited but can also be strategically emphasised in particular political and social contexts. Cultural contact can consequently produce cooperation in everyday life while political competition reinforces identity boundaries and friction.

### **Empirical Review**

Onuora, Onuora and Okolo (2024) conducted a study on *Cultural Identity Politics in Nigeria and Marginalization of the Igbo Tribe: Case for Biafranism*. The study specifically looked into why Federal

Republic of Nigeria insisted in cultural and ethnic politics rather than true federalism. It employs New Historism by Walleys and Warren (1954:40) as a frame work for analysis. It analyses the verifiable literary history and other opinions which are completely neutral facts. Summary and Suggestions were done based on Nigerian political structure in Nigeria and the IPOB objective for self-determination because of the marginalization of Igbo people.

Tuki (2024) carried out a study entitled: *Ethnic Discrimination and National vs. Ethnic Identification in Nigeria*. A regression analysis reveals that the experience of discrimination prompts Nigerians to prioritise their ethnic identity over their national identity. The regressions also show that the negative effect of discrimination on an exclusive feeling of national identification is larger than its positive effect on an exclusive feeling of ethnic identification. These findings are robust to different operationalisations of discrimination and to the use of individuallevel survey data covering 36 African countries. Among the Nigerian population, Igbo ethnicity increased the likelihood of individuals prioritising their ethnic identity over their national identity, while Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani ethnicities had the opposite effect.

Lalekan, Adedapo and Sunkanmi (2023) carried out a study on *Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Nigeria: A Panacea for National Development or Decapitation*. This qualitative research is anchored on interviews with scholars across purposely selected academic institutions to elicit perspectives to determine if something can be done to tame the tide of many untoward incidences that have plagued Nigeria due to its diverse ethnicity and cultural pluralities. The outcome of the study is indicative that the outcomes of these dual phenomena can be rechannelled to produce desirable significance by deliberately institutionalizing some pillars that can become the backbone of society. These pillars or institutions will harness the upsides of ethnicity and culture by creating alignment capable of producing synergetic outcomes for the betterment of society. Neglecting such pillars will only mean we continue on the ignominious paths.

## Methodology

The study adopted a triangulation research design, combining surveys and focus group discussions. The population consisted of approximately 1,005,904 residents of Port Harcourt and Obio-Akpor Local Government Areas, with a sample of 400 respondents selected using purposive and availability sampling techniques, focusing on knowledgeable community members such as elders, chiefs, and leaders. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and interview guide, validated by experts, and reliability tested via Cronbach's Alpha. Analysis employed descriptive statistics, weighted means, and standard deviations. Findings revealed that historical events, migration patterns, and cultural traditions significantly influence communication between the Igbo and Ikwerre communities.

**Table 1: Historical and Cultural Dynamics Shaping Igbo–Ikwerre Communication**

| S/N | Respondent's View                                                    | SA         | A          | D          | SD       | Total        | Mean Score | Decision |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|--------------|------------|----------|
| 1   | Historical interactions influence communication patterns.            | 130<br>520 | 140<br>420 | 70<br>140  | 40<br>40 | 380<br>1,120 | 2.95       | Agreed   |
| 2   | Cultural festivals and traditions shape interpersonal communication. | 120<br>480 | 140<br>420 | 80<br>160  | 40<br>40 | 380<br>1,100 | 2.89       | Agreed   |
| 3   | Language similarities and differences affect understanding.          | 140<br>560 | 120<br>360 | 80<br>160  | 40<br>40 | 380<br>1,120 | 2.95       | Agreed   |
| 4   | Historical conflicts influence trust in communication.               | 110<br>440 | 130<br>390 | 100<br>200 | 40<br>40 | 380<br>1,070 | 2.82       | Agreed   |

Respondents agreed that historical interactions, traditions, and language differences significantly shape communication between the Igbo and Ikwerre communities.

**Table 2: Factors Enhancing Effective Cultural Communication**

| S/N | Respondent's View                                                | SA         | A          | D         | SD       | Total        | Mean Score | Decision |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|----------|--------------|------------|----------|
| 1   | Shared language improves communication efficiency.               | 140<br>560 | 130<br>390 | 70<br>140 | 40<br>40 | 380<br>1,130 | 2.97       | Agreed   |
| 2   | Mutual respect enhances understanding between groups.            | 130<br>520 | 140<br>420 | 70<br>140 | 40<br>40 | 380<br>1,120 | 2.95       | Agreed   |
| 3   | Common values facilitate smooth interactions.                    | 120<br>480 | 140<br>420 | 90<br>180 | 30<br>30 | 380<br>1,110 | 2.92       | Agreed   |
| 4   | Participation in community activities strengthens communication. | 130<br>520 | 130<br>390 | 90<br>180 | 30<br>30 | 380<br>1,130 | 2.97       | Agreed   |

Shared language, mutual respect, common values, and community participation were seen as key factors promoting effective communication between the Igbo and Ikwerre.

**Table 3: Main Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges**

| S/N | Respondent's View                                      | SA         | A          | D          | SD    | Total        | Mean Score | Decision |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|-------|--------------|------------|----------|
| 1   | Stereotypes create misunderstandings.                  | 120<br>480 | 140<br>420 | 80<br>160  | 40 40 | 380<br>1,100 | 2.89       | Agreed   |
| 2   | Differences in communication style cause conflicts.    | 130<br>520 | 120<br>360 | 90<br>180  | 40 40 | 380<br>1,100 | 2.89       | Agreed   |
| 3   | Lack of cultural knowledge leads to misinterpretation. | 110<br>440 | 130<br>390 | 100<br>200 | 40 40 | 380<br>1,070 | 2.82       | Agreed   |
| 4   | Historical grievances affect current interactions.     | 120<br>480 | 130<br>390 | 90<br>180  | 40 40 | 380<br>1,090 | 2.87       | Agreed   |

Respondents agreed that stereotypes, differing communication styles, lack of cultural knowledge, and historical grievances are major challenges affecting Igbo–Ikwerre relations.

## Discussion of Findings

### Research Question One: What historical and cultural dynamics shape communication between the Igbo and Ikwerre ethnic groups in Nigeria?

The study found that historical events, migration patterns, and cultural traditions significantly influence communication between the Igbo and Ikwerre communities. Respondents highlighted that festivals, communal rituals, and oral histories serve as important mediums through which cultural knowledge and communication norms are transmitted across generations. This aligns with the findings of Onuora, Onuora, and Okolo (2024), who argued that historical marginalization and cultural identity politics have shaped intergroup interactions among Nigerian ethnicities, particularly the Igbo. Similarly, Lalekan, Adedapo, and Sunkanmi (2023) emphasized that understanding cultural diversity is crucial for fostering effective communication and preventing misinterpretation rooted in historical tensions. Nwosu (2023) further noted that generational differences influence how ethnic histories are communicated and interpreted, affecting intergroup dialogue in Rivers State. These findings are consistent with Cross-Cultural Communication Theory, which posits that communication patterns are shaped by cultural context, historical experiences, and shared symbols, all of which guide interpretation and meaning-making in interactions. Social

Identity Theory also provides insight, suggesting that individuals derive part of their self-concept from ethnic membership, influencing communication behaviors to maintain group norms and identity. Respondents' narratives demonstrated that awareness of historical legacies, shared cultural practices, and identity markers facilitate smoother interactions, whereas neglecting these elements could lead to misunderstanding. Furthermore, the study supports Ekwealor's (2023) observation that historical grievances and inter-ethnic interactions continue to influence perceptions, respect, and negotiation strategies between communities. In essence, historical and cultural dynamics not only provide context but also actively shape communication strategies, emphasizing that any effort to improve Igbo-Ikwerre relations must account for shared histories, cultural rituals, and identity concerns.

**Research Question Two: What factors enhance effective cultural communication between the Igbo and Ikwerre ethnic groups?**

The findings indicate that shared language, mutual respect, participation in community activities, and cultural awareness are critical in enhancing effective communication between the Igbo and Ikwerre communities. Respondents noted that the use of common proverbs, idiomatic expressions, and inclusive dialogue fosters mutual understanding and reduces misinterpretations. This supports the observations of Nwadike (2021), who emphasized the importance of linguistic differentiation strategies among Ikwerre elites to navigate intergroup communication effectively. Similarly, Ekechi (2022) found that economic interactions in Port Harcourt markets facilitated cultural learning and informal communication channels, promoting understanding between diverse ethnic groups. Lalekan, Adedapo, and Sunkanmi (2023) also highlighted that shared cultural practices and collaborative engagements serve as mechanisms for improving intergroup communication in Nigeria's multicultural contexts. From a theoretical perspective, Cross-Cultural Communication Theory underscores that effective communication is not solely dependent on language proficiency but also on cultural competence, contextual awareness, and sensitivity to social norms, all of which respondents highlighted as enhancing factors. Social Identity Theory further explains that when individuals perceive communication as respectful and identity-affirming, it strengthens intergroup cohesion and trust, reducing barriers created by ethnic boundaries. Respondents consistently stated that active participation in festivals, communal events, and joint decision-making platforms allows members of both communities to interpret verbal and non-verbal cues accurately, fostering empathy and rapport. Additionally, Mashood, Lawrence, and Opeyemi (2020) emphasized that cultural diversity, when recognized and respected, can transform potential conflicts into opportunities for collaboration. Overall, the study shows that effective communication is enhanced not only by shared language but also through deliberate engagement in culturally meaningful activities, demonstrating that structural and interpersonal factors work together to improve Igbo-Ikwerre interactions.

**Research Question Three: What are the main cross-cultural communication challenges affecting Igbo-Ikwerre relations?**

The study revealed that communication between the Igbo and Ikwerre communities is often hindered by stereotypes, differing communication styles, historical grievances, and limited cultural knowledge. Respondents indicated that misunderstandings frequently arise due to misinterpretation of gestures, tone, and idiomatic expressions, as well as preconceived notions about each group's behaviors and intentions. This finding aligns with Tuki (2024), who noted that ethnic discrimination and the tension between national and ethnic identity often create barriers to effective intergroup communication in Nigeria. Similarly, Onuora, Onuora, and Okolo (2024) argued that historical marginalization and contested cultural narratives influence perceptions, sometimes fostering mistrust between communities. Nwadike (2021) also observed that linguistic differences

among Ikwerre elites can exacerbate misunderstandings when communicating with other ethnic groups. Respondents additionally highlighted that rapid urbanization and social media exposure have amplified these challenges, reflecting Nwankwo's (2023) findings on competing historical narratives among youth, which can distort perceptions of other ethnic groups. From a theoretical perspective, Cross-Cultural Communication Theory explains that such challenges often arise when interlocutors rely on differing cultural frames of reference, leading to misinterpretation and communication breakdowns. Social Identity Theory further elucidates that individuals are motivated to protect their group identity, sometimes resulting in defensive communication behaviors that hinder open dialogue. Ekwealor (2023) similarly suggested that unresolved historical disputes contribute to tension and cautious interaction, affecting both social and professional relationships. Overall, the study demonstrates that effective Igbo-Ikwerre communication requires not only awareness of linguistic and cultural nuances but also strategies to address historical grievances and reduce reliance on stereotypes. Interventions such as intercultural training, shared social activities, and platforms for dialogue are therefore essential to mitigate these communication challenges and strengthen intergroup trust.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the study concludes that communication between the Igbo and Ikwerre communities is profoundly shaped by historical events, cultural traditions, and shared practices, which provide both context and structure for interactions. Factors such as mutual respect, shared language, participation in communal activities, and cultural awareness were identified as critical in enhancing effective cross-cultural communication, while stereotypes, differing communication styles, historical grievances, and limited cultural knowledge were found to hinder understanding. Effective communication was shown to positively influence interpersonal relations, fostering trust, cooperation, and social cohesion across professional, educational, and social settings.

### Recommendations

1. Policymakers and community leaders should promote cultural awareness programs that educate both Igbo and Ikwerre communities about shared histories and traditions.
2. Intergroup engagement through festivals, communal projects, and collaborative activities should be encouraged to enhance effective communication and mutual understanding.
3. Efforts to reduce stereotypes and address historical grievances should be implemented to overcome cross-cultural communication challenges.

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