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ECONOMICS OF RELIGION AND OIL EXPLOITATION IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION: A DIALECTICAL RESPONSE

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Abstract: The Niger Delta region's huge oil deposits have produced significant wealth; nonetheless, the local populace continues to be entrenched in poverty, environmental deterioration, and social turmoil. This paper analyzes the convergence of economics of religion and economics of oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta region. The article conducts a critical analysis of the interplay between the economics of religion and oil exploration and exploitation, exposing the inconsistencies and tensions that characterize the region's developmental issues. It employs a dialectical method to examine the intricate dynamics involved. The findings underscore the necessity for a sophisticated comprehension of the interaction of social, environmental, and economic elements in the region, guiding policy and practice regarding sustainable development and social equity. The paper contends that religion may either undermine or bolster capitalist objectives, contingent upon its association with grassroots activism or elite involvement. It attacks the monetization of oil revenue, resulting in systemic marginalization and opposition from local communities. This research promotes a theologically grounded economic justice framework that incorporates environmental stewardship, equitable resource allocation, and the empowerment of vulnerable communities.

Keywords: Economics of Religion, Oil Exploration/Exploitation, Niger Delta, Dialectical Method, Sustainable Development, Nigeria.

Introduction

The Niger Delta region in Nigeria is a paradoxical area characterized by substantial oil deposits that have significantly contributed to the nation's economy for decades (Iwejingi, 2013). The region is a crucial economic area, responsible for the majority of Nigeria's oil output. Nonetheless, the region continues to confront poverty, environmental deterioration, and social upheaval. It is one of the most destitute and ecologically compromised regions in the country, due to corruption, resource mismanagement, and environmental deterioration (Kew & Phillips, 2007). Religion plays a predominant role in influencing the worldview, attitudes, and economic behaviour of individuals in the Niger Delta. Religious organizations and leaders enhance the local economy, deliver social services, and influence economic decision-making. The economics of oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta involves a complicated interplay of interests among international oil corporations, governmental entities, and local communities. The extraction of oil entails considerable environmental and social consequences, such as oil spills, pollution, and the displacement of communities. The discovery and exploration of oil have resulted in a legacy of destitution and deterioration, leaving the region entrenched in poverty, violence, and instability (Nriagu, Udofia, Ekong & Ebuk, 2016). Notwithstanding Nigeria's economic expansion and its status as Africa's foremost oil producer, the Niger Delta and its inhabitants have endured militarization, insincere peace efforts, relentless military assaults, and methodical genocide (Osuagwu & Olaifa, 2018). The indigenous people have resolved to secure their future by stringent economic self-sufficiency, emphasizing local governance over the resources and wealth of the Niger Delta.

This article seeks to examine the interface between the economics of religion and oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta, emphasizing the contradictions and tensions that characterize the region's developmental obstacles. It employs a dialectical methodology to elucidate the intricate dynamics and propose potential avenues for sustainable development. The research argues that the convergence of religion and oil exploration and exploitation affects the region's developmental results, and the inconsistencies between these domains exacerbate poverty, environmental degradation, and social turmoil. The anticipated findings aim to guide policy and practice, aiding in the formulation of sustainable solutions to the region's developmental issues. The research enriches the current discourse on the political economy of

development, sustainability in the environment, and the influence of religion on economic advancement.

The Niger Delta Region: An Overview

The Niger Delta region in Nigeria is a heavily populated area formerly referred to as the Oil Rivers due to its prominence as a significant palm oil producer (Oyindamola & Anegbode, 2018). The delta encompasses more than 70,000 km², constituting 7.5% of Nigeria's total area, and is inhabited by over 31 million individuals from over 40 ethnic groups. The region encountered considerable difficulties during the Nigerian Civil War from 1967 to 1970, culminating in the formation of South-eastern states and other states. Non-violent opposition emerged post-civil war, with Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni tribe as prominent individuals (Stremlau, 2016). The cohesive oil protests intensified in 1990 following the release of the Ogoni Bill of Rights, which condemned the absence of economic growth, environmental degradation, and the devastation of their land and waterways by foreign oil corporations (Yusuf, 2008). Recent armed conflicts arose when the Ijaw people expressed apprehensions on the relinquishment of resource management to oil firms in the 1998 Kaiama Declaration.

The Nigerian government deployed forces to Bayelsa and Delta states, resulting in the deaths of some demonstrators and the detention of others. The frequency and intensity of local Indigenous opposition to commercial petroleum refineries and pipelines in the region escalated. To placate the people of the Niger Delta region, Governmental and corporate initiatives well established to advance the Niger Delta region, including the Niger Delta Development Commission and the Development Initiative. Uz and Uz Transnational have implemented strategies for the development of impoverished communities in the Niger Delta, particularly in Rivers State. In 2008, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) proclaimed an "oil war" against pipelines, oil-production facilities, and the Nigerian soldiers tasked with their protection (Oyindamola, Goddy & Anegbode, 2019). The Niger Delta is experiencing administrative neglect, deteriorating social services and infrastructure, elevated unemployment, social hardship, extreme poverty, filth and degradation, and persistent war. Affected individuals by oil spills comprise several communities, frequently including indigenous populations, who depend on local resources for sustenance, water, livelihoods, and cultural traditions.

Nigeria's oil sector, the cornerstone of its economy, has produced two-thirds of its revenue. Nonetheless, the nation's oil affluence has adversely affected social communities, resulting in state violence and destitution in the Niger Delta region. The delta, a biogeographic region comprising over forty ethnic groups, hosts more than forty individuals involved in fishing, farming, craft making, wood carving, and monumental sculpting. The discovery of oil wealth generated elevated development expectations, accompanied by federal capital investments in health, environment, education, infrastructure, and employment. The cultural, social, and economic environment of the Niger Delta was severely impacted by oil spills, pipeline breaches, seismic activity, land shifts, and river erosion (Imobighe, 2015). This led to the substitution of indigenous cultures with an individualistic cultural ethos centred on wealth and power as indicators of social rank. Nigeria was under British colonial rule until it attained political independence in 1960. The Nigerian economy appeared to have a favourable outlook, evidenced by a GNP growth rate of 7% in 1961 (England, 2012). Oil exploration commenced in the late 1950s; however, the outlook soured 35 years later. A hydrocarbon economy persisted, characterized by a 1:27 GDP per capita disparity between the wealthiest and poorest nations, with food imports totalling N 440 billion from 1990 to 1998 (England, 2012). Notwithstanding Nigeria's huge oil reserves, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Survey designated it as the most corrupt nation globally in 1998.

An Overview of Oil Exploration and Exploitation in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta region in Nigeria has   abundance of crude oil and natural gas. The region hosts over 78 ethnic nations and has been affected by oil exploration since the 1950s. The oil industry has discharged hydrocarbons and detrimental effluents into the environment via activities such as drilling, gas flaring, and oil spills (Erhun, 2015). This has resulted in environmental, social, and economic adversity for the residents, encompassing the devastation of fishing zones, livelihoods, agricultural land, and crops, fluctuating income, displacement, traffic obstructions, and demonstrations. Although the oil business has provided certain social amenities such as water, education, and banking, their quality is subpar. Globalization, the formation of novel political economies, the reversion of numerous nations to civil rule, and the economic ascendance of countries such as Nigeria have exerted significant pressures on the authority,

influence, and capabilities of nation-states like Nigeria. This has led to a reduction in the power and influence of nation-states such as Nigeria.

The Niger Delta contains more than one-third of Africa's oil reserves and output. The delta, drained by the Niger River and its tributaries, spans approximately 75,000 square kilometers, or 9% of Nigeria's total surface area (Iwejingi, 2013). Nigeria attained independence in 1960 and became fully functional in 1961. Prior to the discovery of oil, the populace engaged in fishing, hunting, foraging for forest goods, trading, and agriculture. The discovery and exploration of oil catalyzed swift development, resulting in the transformation of cities such as Warri and Port Harcourt among others into contemporary urban centres. The British colonization significantly influenced marketing and investing during this era. The creation of the Nigeria Ports Authority facilitated the export and import of products, rendering the process efficient and cost-effective, as transportation occurred via maritime routes. The establishment of this port, together with enhancements in power supply and road infrastructure, facilitated the transfer of products and individuals. Communication networks were developed via telephone lines, postal systems, newspapers, and printing companies, creating employment opportunities and an educated workforce. Urbanization and urban expansion occurred via infrastructure and socio-economic advancement.

Nevertheless, the oil-producing regions were overlooked or omitted from the development process, leading to many socio-economic issues. Since 1970, oil has emerged as the cornerstone of Nigeria's economy, serving as the primary source of revenue (Iwejingi, 2013). Oil corporations have emerged as significant employers, resulting in extensive importation of expatriate labour and a heightened influx of foreign nationals. Oil contamination in the Niger Delta is distinctive, resulting in both human and ecological catastrophes. Refineries constructed for the processing of crude oil and subsequent sale to global markets result in social, infrastructural, and residential devastation. Oil spills cause harm to human health, agricultural land, aquatic ecosystems, water resources, and social environments. Numerous riverine oil-producing and fishing-dependent towns suffer from pollution, and agricultural fields have been compromised due to oil contamination.

The Niger Delta region has encountered several environmental challenges stemming from oil drilling since 1965. Oil spills from production wells, pneumatic flow lines, depots, flow stations, and terminals have significantly

impacted wetlands and freshwater ecosystems. The oil refining industry in Nigeria presents significant risks owing to geological, climatic, vegetative, and hydrological dynamics, in addition to varied land utilization (Kew & Phillips, 2007). Wetland Rivers are heavily contaminated by crude oil, rendering the aquifer unfit for aquaculture and agriculture. The aspiration to transform the region into a premier tourism destination is thwarted, and the community relations of governmental and oil businesses are severely hindered. The direct result on economic activity is a complete collapse, with marine life perishing within three days of oil contamination. The pollution of rivers may lead to the extensive annihilation of fish populations, including paddlefish, shrimp, fingerlings, crabs, mollusks, and other delicate organisms (Nriagu, Udofia, Ekong & Ebuk, 2016). For numerous individuals in the region, these aquatic resources constitute their sole means of life. In contrast to soot from pipelines in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, fish from contaminated regions do not reach Lagos, the nation's commercial centre.

Religion in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has a longstanding legacy of religion, originating from indigenous belief systems. Christian missionaries encountered a society with established religious ideas and practices prior to the arrival of Western faiths. The Nasara (Muslim) Faith was introduced to the region by business interactions with certain Muslims in northern Nigeria before to the Nigerian Civil War (Heerten & Moses, 2017). The Vatican II Council localized religious denominations in the region and Nigeria overall by standardizing local language liturgies. This resulted in the founding of Nigeria's inaugural Christian University, the University of Port Harcourt, alongside the founding of Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, and Evangelical churches and their affiliated private schools. Religious institutions have evolved into instruments of economic empowerment via Micro financial institutions, cooperatives, and ad-hoc committees for marginalized individuals in society (Meagher, 2009). These institutions have facilitated access to soft loans with minimal or no interest rates for the impoverished and disenfranchised. Cooperatives and microfinance banks have enhanced the living conditions of certain families, while churches, through orphanages, have financially and materially empowered the underprivileged. Ad-hoc committees for widows, orphans, and the elderly have also rendered aid to the impoverished in the Niger Delta region. Nevertheless, several families in

the Niger Delta region endure severe poverty attributable to oil contamination, inadequate sanitation, and the inability to get a daily meal. This distress parallels that of other depressed economies globally.

Islam, Christianity, and New Religious Movements (NRMs) have had a significant impact on the wide variety of religious practices and beliefs found in Nigeria's Niger Delta. The region's ethnic groups practice folk religion that involves ancestors, spirits, and mystical powers; they are polytheists and nature-loving. Shrine structures, totemic trees, creative expression, and intricate dances are frequently examples of how these beliefs are expressed. However, the rise of Islam and Christianity is causing a decline in the number of people who practice traditional religions. While the Catholic Church, Anglican Church, traditional evangelical churches, and the new Pentecostal churches are the most common Christian denominations in the Niger Delta, Islam is one of the prominent religions among the Ijaw and Urhobo-speaking communities. NRMs, which combine Christian, Islamic, and folk beliefs, have become well-liked substitutes for traditional religions in recent years. These NRMs have a syncretic attraction and are primarily found among the educated elite. Intense rivalry and conflict between followers of various religions, especially between indigenous and global religions, is mirrored by the Niger Delta's diversity of religious practices and beliefs. While other denominations, especially evangelical churches, are widely practiced by the educated elite, Christianity remains the predominant religion in areas used for heavy oil exploration and production.

For instance, the Ijaw religion is a theistic faith, purportedly guided by Domey Agbonagbe, the creator of both the planet and humanity. Ijah, a prophet and messenger, guides humanity on worship and the pursuit of an improved existence. He guides the Ijaws' history and future, playing a crucial role in the creation of items like as fish traps, bamboo skimmers, rivercraft, and musical instruments. Ijah declares the cessation of disputes, envy, and conflict; promising paradise for adherents of his doctrine, while condemning dissenters to perdition. Traditional procedures are conducted during life and posthumously to guarantee proper veneration. Divine compassion and generosity are seen in the provision of plants for human necessities, while malevolence pervades the land in the guise of "ogbiri." Nonetheless, this novelty is consumed by the passage of time, resulting in competition, conflicts of interest, disputes over intangible matters, and alarming occurrences. The Ijaw religion is a nature-based faith that venerates certain natural objects as sacred (Ibube), as they are seen to possess divine

qualities. Ritual artefacts are positioned on the head or placed adjacent to the shrine, where the deity is enthroned. The Word (the 'Big God') is a profound enigma accountable for creation, existing alongside God, and facilitating salvation. Certain Ijaws assert their literacy in comprehending the Quran. Religion stabilizes agricultural life despite hostility towards their deities, which is reflected in their character.

Economic Theorization of Religion and Oil

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria encompasses three economic theories that connect oil production with economic effects: institutional structure, informal economic structure, and social capital. The Nigerian constitution stipulates that the Federal Government own all resource rights, including oil, and engages in a Joint Venture Partnership with foreign oil giants (Ibietan, Abasilim &Olobio, 2018). This framework has resulted in elite cooperation, reciprocal rent-seeking, and corruption inside the oil sector, with estimates indicating that political elites have misappropriated over $600 billion since independence (Meagher, 2009). The indirect consequences of oil operations on the local economy encompass persistent poverty and wealth disparity at the community level. Unseen economic and political systems regulate how local populations obtain rights for oil extraction and allocate the resulting profits within the community (Meagher, 2009). These elite factions further govern the conduct of local populations by regulating access to superior education, employment opportunities, and financial resources. Social capital denotes the connections of trust or confidence, reciprocal obligations for informal economic collaboration among kindred, ethnic, and communal links, as well as the mechanisms for informal dispute settlement and economic assurance within a region. Diverse familial lineages, clannishness, tribal and geopolitical locations, gender, and religions influence informal social capital, while socioeconomic organizations serve as platforms for novel economic behaviours and relationships.

Neoclassical economics, emerging from 1900, underscores supply and demand as fundamental determinants in the production, price, and consumption of commodities and services (Kenton, 2024). Neoclassical economics, grounded in the theory of free markets, posits that economies advance towards optimal conditions and the equilibrium hypothesis (Cory, 2006). Nonetheless, it has faced criticism from contemporary economic methodologies, evidence-driven policymaking, rational organizational theories, and growth frameworks.

Development economics expanded upon Keynesian principles to build models for market intervention to foster development, whereas evidence-based policymaking sought to underscore the prescriptive shortcomings of the Washington Consensus (Cory, 2006). Institutions, encompassing rules, norms, and microeconomics, have been a prominent subject in literature, especially regarding land use conflicts (Meagher, 2009). The assertion is that effective regulations and institutions foster growth and progress, whereas ineffective ones obstruct it. The Neoclassical Theory of Urban Land Use (NTULU) has been significant, characterized by notable quotations and a thorough rationality that includes self-interested preferences, ambiguous equilibrium, agent-structure analyses, and temporal considerations (Kenton, 2024). The NTULU elucidates how the microeconomic actions of land users and suppliers generate aggregate patterns that are both predictable and probabilistic. For instance, the influence of institutions on economic performance has garnered attention after the collapse of the USSR.

The role of religion in Nigeria has been extensively discussed as a mechanism of economic governance, overseen by informal, market-driven community institutions. Since the late 1980s, informal religious congregations have expanded in major urban areas, especially among Yoruba and Igbo merchants, craftsmen, and industrialists. These communities possess their own internal enforcement mechanisms, administering punishments and rituals for transgressors. Amidst swift economic destabilization following the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986, informal religious communities have offered the institutional support network esteemed by many. The rise of organized group violence is mostly an issue of state ineptitude and informal political dynamics. Informal market participants are deeply engaged in the administration of group violence due to their routine economic activities. Shifts in economic governance paradigms signify conflicting grassroots methods for regulating informal trade. Religion serves as a catalyst for institutional innovation, fostering economic credibility and trust within informal economies characterized by fluctuating laws and regulations. Structure-induced conditions elucidate the formation of religious communities, but agency-induced mechanisms account for the subsequent dissolution of this enforcement model. Group violence is contended to be mostly intra-ethnic, influenced by elite rivalry across ethnic boundaries.

Nigerians experienced political scepticism and cynicism stemming from natural calamities and voter disenfranchisement, resulting in diminished trust in the electoral process and formal politics. The political elite faced growing ostracism, leading to the emergence of a new leadership comprised of those formerly assigned to subordinate positions. Prayer assemblies were swiftly organized, and communities were urged to "return to God." A millenarian cloud began to loom over Nigeria, deriving power from the nation's discontent with the political process and signalling heightened mistrust towards official politics. This coalition comprised vigilantes, martial entities, protectors, and defenders of foreigners, representing intermediary movements between orthodox Protestants and Roman Catholicism (Meagher, 2019; Andersen, Bentzen, Dalgaard & Sharp, 2017). The ecumenical environment witnessed recently converted Catholics and former Anglican clergymen together as equals. Two focal points of interest were the emergence of hidden groups outside conventional Churches and groupings contesting established ideals by creating or co-creating new natural laws.

Economics of Religion

The economics of religion is a discipline that employs economic approaches to examine the interplay between religion and economic behavior (Iyer, 2016; McCleary, 2011). It stemmed from Smith's (1776; cf. Ottuh & Akpotor, 2021) *The Wealth of Nations,* which emphasized the impact of market dynamics, motivations, and competition on religious institutions. In 1905, Weber (2012 [1905]) identified a link between religion and economic behaviour, attributing it to the Protestant Reformation (Andersen, Bentzen, Dalgaard & Sharp, 2017). Religious orthodoxy profoundly impacts moral conduct, with diverse interpretations of the Golden Rule common across major faiths. Religious tenets promote cooperation and trust among culturally defined communities; nonetheless, some contend that association with religious communities may result in bias or discrimination (Ottuh & Jemegbe, 2020). The believing aspect of religious practice emphasizes divine reputation, whereas the belonging aspect pertains to social relations within religious communities. Studies demonstrate that religion affects economic outcomes via thrift, work ethic, integrity, and trust (Ottuh & Akpotor, 2021). The development of human capital is additionally affected by the religious importance ascribed to reading. The connection between religion and economic outcomes may be perceived as intrinsic or correlated with religion.

Dialectical Method in the Economics of Religion

The interplay of positive and negative religiosities illustrates the intricate and complicated dynamics of socio-ethical economic transformation, wherein the social structure of class both appropriates and is appropriated by conflicting logics (Waterman, 2002). The former is progressive in addressing contradictions in the public domain while being restrictive in managing inclinations towards radical, performative dissent in the moral domain. This dialectical perspective is essential for examining issues of agency and the influence of religion in economic life, especially as traditional market theologies are adapted and complicated by emerging religious groups and shifts in belief systems. Although the impact of religious groups on economic life is increasingly acknowledged, their influence is frequently trivialized or exaggerated, portraying the relationship of interdependence as a simplistic correlation between beneficial religious resources and detrimental economic exploitation, or alternatively, the detrimental nature of religion (Ottuh, Idjakpo & Uviekovo, 2022). Since the emergence of neoliberal political economy in the 1990s, the prevailing belief has been that economic transformation will depend on the simultaneous development of contemporary moral frameworks about economic existence. Comprehending this dialectical relationship necessitates the modelling of the moral economies of the formal aggregate economy alongside the dis/contents of the informal economy as disparate and nonlinear.

The Niger Delta Region of Nigeria is recognized for its abundant oil resources; nevertheless, the exploitation of these resources has not resulted in local development and prosperity (Joab-Peterside, 2018). Consequently, there has been a surge of evangelistic campaigns and the emergence of numerous new religious movements in the region. Economic interpretations of religion have developed, accompanied by a historical overview of these interpretations and a discourse on their use in understanding the Niger Delta Region. Religion shapes individuals' life organization and directs their approaches to business, investment, and development (Ottuh, Ottuh & Aitufe, 2014). Religious organizations shape the characteristics of economic systems emerging in regions or nations and play a vital role in mobilizing financial resources. Certain religions advocate for saving, frugality, and enhancing wellbeing, whilst others condemn capital accumulation, extensive agriculture, and aristocracy. New religious movements are primarily or significantly shaped by social and economic transformations, and their impact on the character and manner of

economic participation in their respective locales is currently a burgeoning area of research regarding the role of religion in economic performance.

The Niger Delta Socioeconomic Challenges

The Niger Delta, inhabited by 32 million individuals, is distinguished for its varied flora and fauna, plentiful fish species, and multiple rivers that supply fresh water and support agricultural land. Nonetheless, the region is socio-economically deprived of these advantages, making it the most impoverished in Nigeria. The geological history of the delta's development and silt accretion from the Niger and its tributaries has resulted in neglect and hindered progress, access, and benefits related to contemporary human existence. The consequences of oil exploration and exploitation on the Niger Delta populations have resulted in environmental degradation, sickness, infertility, and conflict. The overall health condition of these individuals falls short of basic standard guidelines due to oil pollution affecting air, land, and water, with various socioeconomic issues. The extensive fish species and biodiversity are compromised and submerged in sediment as a result of oil spills, resulting in malnutrition, especially in children aged zero to five years (Osuagwu & Olaifa, 2018). The extensive cultivable terrain that has sustained humanity for millennia is now desolate and devoid of production as a result of oil exploration and exploitation. Immediate strategies are required to effectively address the social, health, environmental, security, and political issues stemming from oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta region.

Nigeria, notwithstanding its oil boom, is confronted by poverty and unemployment owing to the intricate management of the oil sector. Although crude oil constitutes more than 85% of Nigeria's exports, the nation is positioned 151st out of 174 on the global human development index (Khan, 2015). The Niger Delta's oil area, reliant on subsistence agriculture, hunting, and non-timber forest resources, experiences economic depreciation, lack of development, oppression, environmental degradation, and human rights abuses. The 1956 discovery of offshore oil transformed the sustainable development and environmental conservation potential of the Niger Delta (Dakolo, 2021). Nonetheless, oil drilling resulted in detrimental outcomes and extensive demonstrations, culminating in vandalism and the embrace of bush churches, spirituality, and esoteric belief systems. Corporations have expended billions to engage many stakeholders in averting violent conflicts and pipeline sabotage. Notwithstanding the presence of

oil installations, Nigeria's social and economic metrics are subpar, as the oil-producing towns in the Niger Delta endure pervasive poverty and unemployment. The nation's extensive oil finance system has faced criticism for its detrimental outcomes and the necessity for peace negotiations.

The Niger Delta region is recognized as the most contaminated ecosystem on the planet, with oil spills constituting a major long-term catastrophe. This contamination originates from multiple sources, including oil production spills, corrosion of pipelines, sabotage, accidents, and inadequate maintenance. The devastation impacts the ecology and the inhabitants of the Delta, compromising the delicate ecosystem, potable water supply, agricultural land, and overall terrain. Oil contamination results in both immediate and enduring soil issues, as well as persistent disruption of agricultural supplies (Otoabasi, 2011). Rivers and estuaries deplete their traditional supplies, resulting in socioeconomic upheaval for communities reliant on these waterways for millennia. The Ogoni nation, located within Nigeria's Niger Delta Basin, represents a significant crime against humanity. Ogoni's national territory constitutes a segment of the Niger Delta Basin, which is a source of persistent, detrimental socio-economic conditions. Oil corporations such as Shell Nigeria Exploration and Production, Exxon Mobil, and state-owned oil development entities are accountable for acts of shooting, poisoning, mutilation, arrest, incarceration, kidnapping, torture, and execution (Isumonah, 2015). The present expenses incurred by these firms' illicit activities must be borne by them, as this constitutes a reprehensible and indefensible conflict.

Devastations of Oil Exploration and Religious Mobilization in the Niger Delta Region

The oil exploration endeavours of multinational corporations in the Niger Delta have resulted in economic, social, political, and environmental repercussions, inciting protests and counter-protests from impacted communities. These communities have organized to articulate their dissatisfaction with oil firms and governmental entities concerning allocation of resources, revenue distribution, and environmental destruction. Traditional reactions to oil exploration encompass negotiations, dialogue, and peaceful protests, but controversial tactics involve unfair violent assaults, bombings, sabotage of oil infrastructure, hostage-taking, and armed patrols of oil facilities (Isumonah, 2015). The responses have led to the disintegration of oil firms'

visionary objectives in the Niger Delta states, resulting in oil spills and the neglect of spill sites, hence heightening the risk to local water bodies. Multinational oil corporations operating in Ogoni ceased non-sustaining damage payments, exacerbating discontent with Niger Delta Environmental Justice Campaigns at the community level, and later caused spills involving silt and equipment. The Niger Delta in Nigeria constitutes one of the most affluent oil and gas regions globally, contributing around 95% of Nigeria's foreign exchange revenues (Iwejingi, 2013). Nonetheless, oil exploitation has engendered severe environmental contamination issues persisting for decades, culminating in poverty, starvation, underdevelopment, and a pervasive deficiency of infrastructure. Oil wealth has been identified as a catalyst for corruption among government contractors and officials.

As the Nigerian State increasingly relies on oil revenue, it tends to infringe upon oil-producing local communities. This year, oil corporations and the Nigerian government have allocated substantial resources to asphalt and related products, while the Nigerian government has complemented upper side dose-rate detection with a novel southern strategy utilizing fully autonomous recorders and underground detection systems with an extensive range of detection capabilities. Spills have devastated ecosystems in streams and surface water bodies, resulting in heightened bug populations and catastrophic repercussions for agriculture, which was the cornerstone of the economy before to the emergence of oil. The Niger Delta region in Nigeria has been contending with the intricate challenges of oil exploitation and environmental deterioration.

The Ogoni Bill of Rights, submitted to the Nigerian government and populace in November 1990, articulates the issues of local populations over their circumstances in life, education, and work opportunities. The region experiences extensive discontent and assaults on oil facilities, since the Ijaw Youth Council has designated Ijawland a "no-go area" for oil company operations (Iwejingi, 2013; Imobighe, 2015). The management of oil extraction in the Niger Delta is shaped by the institutional framework that connects numerous global and local entities. This research examines the grassroots reaction to oil exploitation and environmental degradation, emphasizing the rise of quasi-legal religious movements within oil-producing areas. Concerns around the loss of religious authority or credibility have resulted in the development of desperate methods to alleviate animosity (Barro & McCleary, 2003). The emergence of churches

advocating the notion of "are we not all worshipping the same God" has further strengthened the initiatives of the government and oil corporations.

These movements contest the state's definitions of legitimacy, legality, and morality. They present a persuasive theology of a "deity preoccupied with land" that seems disconnected from the concerns, aspirations, and daily anxieties of the Niger Delta inhabitants and their religious institutions (Meagher, 2009). A dialectical relationship characterizes the impact of the West on the religious economy in Nigeria's Niger Delta region and vice versa. Religious engagement has not merely been enforced upon the religious market by Western agents; rather, it has mutually transformed the perspectives and methodologies of these Western agents in their interactions. Religion, in conjunction with ethnicity, family, and indigenous knowledge, has emerged as a more prominent force in the Nigerian religious economy, resulting from a synthesis of concepts and practices from pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras.

The increasing theological diversity and radicalism in the Niger Delta region has necessitated a reevaluation of operational strategies by other religious organizations, leading to the production of propaganda pamphlets aimed at undermining competitors. Researchers of Nigeria's religious economy must consequently reevaluate the processes, methods, and ramifications of religious engagement and rivalry within resource markets, as well as production and consumption behaviours in Nigeria's burgeoning mega-cities. Religious denominations in the Niger Delta region have assumed a pivotal role in engaging with globalization, necessitating an understanding of the religious economy within this broader framework. The modelling of the ontology and phenomena of religious sects in the Niger Delta region must account for how their knowledge production and distribution have been influenced by increasing interaction with globalization factors and their consequent effects.

The Prospects of Oil Exploitation and Religion in the Niger Delta

The Nigerian government is entangled in oil exploration, presenting a considerable challenge to the country. Militancy in the region has grown more prominent, garnering local support against foreign intervention. Hostage-taking operations and pipeline damage have begun in the region, specifically in some areas of Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, and Akwa Ibom states. The Nigerian military and other security agencies have been vigorously yet ineffectively pursuing the culprits of the unprecedented attacks on oil installations and mitigating the surge

of hostage-taking incidents (Dakolo, 2021). The government's reactions to the crisis in the Niger Delta appear to be an emotional struggle between power and force, lacking any authentic effort to genuinely address the region's grievances. Government's reactions to militancy in the region have included military operations, the obstruction of waterways, the suppression of militant organizations, the establishment of ad-hoc committees, the creation of new states from Niger Delta territories, and the declaration of amnesty for Niger Delta militants. In 2009, Nigeria's President Yar'Adua culminated his peace initiative for the Niger Delta region by declaring amnesty for all militants, including those from the MEND militia, alongside a military build up to neutralize remaining militant factions.

Global oil demand declined in 2009, as the financial crisis exposed factors that would hinder growth in oil consumption in 2009 and thereafter. The responsiveness of oil consumption to economic growth rates has declined during the past fifty years. The short-term outlook for global oil demand is uncertain, with the agency forecasting a more favourable recovery of up to 1.5 million barrels per day in 2010 (Afshar-Mohajer, Fox & Koehler, 2019). Nonetheless, certain fundamental concerns articulated in 2009 regarding the likelihood of enduring long-term decreases are anticipated to continue in the forthcoming years. The low-price environment constitutes a structural rather than cyclical disruption in the demand forecast, reflecting a collective mindset from the 1990s that indicates industrial oblivion to the new normal. Worldwide, oil consumption decreased significantly by 3.6 million barrels per day (b/d), or 4%, reaching a seven-year low of 84.8 million b/d (Philibert, Lyons, Philibert, Tierney, 2019). Non-OECD demand, focused on cost-effective growth, has had declining growth rates for several years, in sharp contrast to OECD countries, where demand has diminished.

Religion parallels the oil industry in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Religion can significantly contribute to transforming its perception from a source of violence to one of healing and reconciliation. Religious reconciliation can be facilitated through peaceful interreligious dialogue, inclusive planning with stakeholders, engagement of religious, traditional, and civil society representatives in discussions, back-channel negotiations, strengthening regulatory institutions, and the promotion of literature and films focused on religious reconciliation. These strategies can be customized to align with the phases of the crisis: prior to a crisis, crisis, and post-crisis periods. A notable

correlation exists between the extent of oil exploration activity and the degree of underdevelopment in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. The government is urged to collaborate with oil corporations in the Niger Delta to determine appropriate compensation for rural communities according to their specified needs. Oil companies in the Niger Delta must rigorously comply with operational safety protocols to avert oil spills, enhance their response time by promptly addressing oil pollution upon occurrence, formulate contingency plans for spill prevention and mitigation, and deter sabotage by prosecuting offenders to discourage further incidents.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the interplay between the economics of religion and economics of oil extraction in the Niger Delta, highlighting the inconsistencies and tensions that characterize the region's developmental obstacles. This research has indicated that the quest for economic profit through oil exploitation has resulted in environmental deterioration, societal turmoil, and human distress, undermining the tenets of sustainable development and social equity. The economics of religion has offered hope and resilience to the local populace, although it also highlights the necessity for a more nuanced comprehension of the interaction among economic, social, and environmental issues. Policymakers and practitioners should account for the intricate dynamics in the region, integrating perspectives from both the economics of religion and oil production into development measures. Future research directions encompass additional studies and multidisciplinary methodologies that integrate perspectives from sociology, economics, environmental studies, and religious studies hence, engaging with current dialogues regarding equitable development, social justice, and the influence of religion on economic development.

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AMNESTY ON OIL EXPLORATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGER DELTA REGION: RELEVANCE AND CHALLENGES TO THE NIGERIAN CHURCH

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Abstract: This paper examines the various upheavals engendered by the activities of the oil multinationals in the Niger Delta region. It attempts to proffer enduring solution to the seemingly endangering atmosphere of oil exploration and environmental degradation in the oil-rich Niger Delta region. The research aims to provide a successful resolution and a basis for attaining conflict prevention, good governance and sustainable management of natural resources. This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory case-study design. The research reveals that the oil-rich region is the third-largest wetland in the world. Secondly, it is primarily populated by Christians whose youth have become restive over their natural resources. The research concludes that oil in this region is a natural gift; as such, it should be a blessing and not a curse, hence a theological approach. The paper, therefore, recommends the physical presence of the federal government and multinational companies as a stimulating factor to recalibrate social order in the region, which is a function of social justice.

Keywords: Amnesty, oil exploration, sustainable development, the Niger Delta, relevance, challenges, Nigerian church

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Introduction

The Niger Delta, Nigeria's oil belt is the world's third largest wetlands covering a vast coastal plain of the country. This region occupies an important position in Nigeria's development process. Since oil was first struck more than forty years ago, the region has grown to become the source of more than 90%of Nigeria's foreign exchange receipts (Ubhenin, 2006). Despite the substantial economic progress and social advancement in other parts of the country, the Niger Delta is replete with problems, which manifest in poverty, low levels of human development, environmental degradation, among other social and infrastructural problems. Income and social inequalities and long-term unemployment are recurring decimals in the region. As a result, social exclusion results from those problems, threatening social cohesion and democracy.

Conventionally, oil was supposed to be a blessing when it was discovered in the Niger Delta in 1956 (*The Nation*, 2009 a). The story, unfortunately, has turned out the other way. Oil, the supposed blessing of yesteryears, has become a curse today, all because of the neglect of the areas where it was discovered. It is an eyesore to note that the oil-producing areas have been despoiled by the companies operating there. While the managers of those firms live in opulence, the indigenes of those areas scavenge for the scraps from their table. Besides not getting the good things of life from being the host communities of these super-rich firms, their lands and rivers have been polluted. Consequently, they can no longer till the soil or fish, which are their age-long means of livelihood.

The social scourges of poverty and joblessness are widespread, with attendant disaffection and social discontent, particularly among the youths who are faced with reduced job opportunities and have become restive in their bid for greater control of their natural resources. The dire consequences of this are that it has led to the formation of ethnic militia groups agitating for self-determination of their natural endowment. Interestingly, the various governments of the states of the Niger Delta region have joined the fray, actively campaigning for resource control and by implication, providing cover for the militia groups operating within their territories. In so doing, the country has witnessed economic crises and political instabilities. Therefore, managing the conflict situation in the region has become imperative to the government and the citizens of Nigeria.

This paper, therefore, examines the fundamental issues that have perennially turned the Niger Delta into a crisis-ridden region, with emphasis on the latter day Niger Delta struggle which had led to the then-presidential amnesty granted the militants, as a panacea for meaningful sustainable development. Again, on another note, it further x-rays the degree of relevance and challenges this might pose to the church and christens in Nigeria as a whole and the Niger Delta region in particular.

The Niger Delta

The area that makes up the Niger Delta has been variously defined. Politically, it is the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria, comprising six states: Cross River, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Edo and Delta. This zone constitutes the main centre of Nigeria's oil industry, with three distinct ecological zones, namely: the sandy coastal area, the freshwater and swamp area, and the dry land rainforest (Programme on Ethnic & Federal Studies [PEFS], 2004 a). However, since oil has become the determining factor, other oil-producing states like Ondo, Imo and Abia have been added. In the words of Onoweh (2003), "this latter-day classification is not so much of a geographical entity, but a political creation of the Nigerian state" (p. 25). The region, Onoweh adds, is rich in other natural resources like palm oil and kernel, herbal plants, fish, reptiles, monkeys, among others. Farming and fishing remain the major economic preoccupations of the people. Other handicrafts include hand-dug boats, salt making, and local gin distillation. It has been estimated that the Niger Delta has a population of 20 million, with about 50 ethnic groups, and over 3,500 communities who speak not less than 2560 dialects (Omoweh, 2003).

In terms of resource endowment, the Niger Delta region is the richest in Nigeria, accounting for 70% of the country's hydrocarbon resources, especially crude oil and natural gas (PEFS, 2004 b). Other attractive endowments include extensive forests, rich wildlife, and impressive cash crop output, especially rubber and palm oil. A host of strategic industrial establishments are also concentrated in the Niger Delta region by its resources content and proximity to the sea. These include a multi-billion naira integrated iron and steel plant at Owvian-Aladja, Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Limited (NLNG), two oil refineries at Warri and Eleme near Port Harcourt, two petrochemical plants, major power stations, a

fertiliser plant and an assortment of oil installations(PEFS, 2004 b). However, the two oil refineries mentioned here had gone into comatose for years.

Critically thinking, any conceptualisation of the Niger Delta leaves one with the issues relating to injustices against communities in the area vis-à-vis serious grievances of critical concerns, manifesting in exclusion, deprivation, despoliation, and fundamental problems of human rights violation, oppression, intimidation and domination(Albert, 2003 a). Bogey et al (2016) lend credence to the above when they opine that the Delta communities have not profited from the oil wealth, or at least they have not profited to the extent they had expected and would have perceived as just (Ubhenin, 2006). Ubhenin further asserts:

> They felt neglected from a development point of view, and at the same time, they had to bear the environmentally and socially negative effects of oil production because government is largely absent in parts of the south of Nigeria and because oil companies do not have representatives on ground (Ubhenin, 2006 p. 16).

The indigenes have taken it upon themselves to agitate for their rights from the oil companies and the government of Nigeria. This may seem logical.

Current Realities in the Niger Delta Region

The social conditions in the Niger Delta are quite appalling. Based on the 1995 World Bank Report on the level and pattern of poverty in the Niger Delta:

> Despite its vast resources, the region remains poor. Group per capita is below the national average of US$280. Unemployment in Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State, is 30% and is believed to be equally high in the rural areas. The rural population commonly fish or practice subsistence agriculture, and supplement their diet and income with a wide variety of forest products. Educational levels are below the national average and particularly low for women. While 76% of Nigeria children attend primary school, this level drops to 30-40% in some parts of the Niger Delta. The present level in the Niger Delta is exacerbated by the high cost of living. In the urban areas of Rivers State, the cost of living index is the highest in Nigeria (Iyayi, 2006 p. 61).

Aside the poverty level of the people of the Niger Delta, a close look at the menace posed by oil companies to the environment reveals that petroleum operations has engendered massive environmental pollution in the oil-producing areas of the Niger Delta. Specifically, there are cases of pipeline leakages, well blowouts, and spillages that have had severe effects on land, water resources, the micro-climate, and the residents. In the words of Olukayode Taiwo and Tade Akin Aina, quoting C.V. Izeogu, opine that the burrow pits dug in connection with storing the test samples or for other purposes destroy the land and scenery (Olukayode & Akin-Aina, 1991). Those pits, according to them, hold stagnant water which becomes breeding grounds for mosquitoes and frogs whose croaking can be heard from nearby houses (Olukayode & Akin-Aina, 1991).

Moreover, valuable agricultural land and settlements are lost to the burrow pits, which unimaginably reflect the hazards and degradation that the oil-producing areas have to contend with. These include the blowout of a well in Obagi, such that the tremors were felt 20 kilometres away, and the area polluted was 131.75 square kilometres (Olukayode & Akin-Aina, 1991). Spillage in Rumuekpe spread crude oil over about 25.14 hectares (Olukayode & Akin-Aina, 1991). Another blowout occurred at Apoi, such that by the early eighties, about 1,862 square kilometres of land had been polluted, including 362 square kilometres of coastal beaches, 70 square kilometres of estuary, and 163 towns and villages(Olukayode & Akin-Aina, 1991). It is imperative to point out that the spilt oil around well blowouts is toxic to most species of flora and fauna. For instance, the spills in Obagi, Omoka, and Forema destroyed farmlands, polluted community water resources, and destroyed fish in nearby ponds, as well as crops. In some instances, the spilt crude penetrated the soil to a considerable depth, up to 0.65 metres in some locations, and this invariably affected plant growth and the roots (Olukayode & Akin-Aina, 1991).

Nutritionally, water, which is essential to man's survival, is another critical resource that is badly affected by the oil industry operations. Spillage pollutes the creeks, swamps, and rivers on which most inhabitant depend for their domestic water supply. Even the drinking water from a domestic well is also affected through oil pollution of sand in the substrata (Olukayode & Akin-Aina, 1991). Closely linked with this is a peculiar pattern of health hazards observed in these areas. Such illnesses, which result largely from environmental pollution

and degradation, include: diarrhoea, dermatitis, conjunctivitis, and gastroenteritis (Olukayode & Akin-Aina, 1991).

Devastatingly, the effect of gas flares on vegetation and the microclimate of the area are equally searing. Studies of the effect of gas flares on vegetation show that a typical flare in the Port Harcourt region clears the ground for a radius of 30-40 metres. The dire consequence is that the area fringing the 'no life' zone has few birds and insects. Similarly, higher vegetation at a distance of more than one kilometre from the flare is either suppressed, scorched, or damaged, even after the composition of the ground herbs has become normal, or nearly so (Olukayode & Akin-Aina, 1991). In some quarters, gas flares have also been linked with acid rain as burning of gas produces acid, which falls and washes into the soil of surrounding areas. Acids cause soil nutrients to leach, and crops barely do well. Arguably, this variant of pollution has been known to engender root rot in cassava tubers, maize, and other farm crops at the fringes of the urban areas, and this may probably be responsible for the dwarfing of oranges, mangoes and bananas in the affected settlements.

Suffice it to say that the burning of gas in the inhuman environment of the oil-producing areas radiates heat into the immediate atmosphere, thereby raising the daily temperature beyond normal. In the words of Olukayode and Tade, this idea is aptly captured: "This is an untoward situation which creates health problems such as burning eyes and breathing impairment for residents" (Olukayode & Akin-Aina, 1991 p. 7).

Judging from the foregoing, it is crystal clear that, the Niger Delta region which seems to be the hen laying the golden eggs for Nigeria as a whole is extremely marginalised in terms of developmental goals. Neither the state nor the oil companies are helping matters. For instance, on the part of oil companies, the issue of corporate social responsibility comes to the fore; which is talking about the role multinational corporations have played in exacerbating the problem in the host communities. These multinational corporations have been indicted for supporting security agents in committing human rights abuses against the local people. Oftentimes, the corporations have largely supported development projects that have caused more social divisions and problems in the Niger Delta. A good example would be the building of roads to their facilities, roads that are of no use to the communities. Again, development projects have often been

undertaken based on demands from a community, rather than upon an assessment of this community (Böge et al., 2006).

The problems plaguing the host communities of the Niger Delta may have been aggravated by the role of the Nigeria state, its politics, and its mode of surplus extraction, which makes it possible for the oil corporations to indulge in such complicity and conduct their businesses in a manner that is not too clear. As a matter of fact, during the military era, the Niger Delta experienced what could be described as the worst state of repression, as extra-judicial killings, torture and incarceration were widespread. As Albert Isaac succinctly puts it,

> In the Ogoni district, for example, it is estimated that between 1994 and the beginning of 1995, at least fifty Ogonis were summarily executed by security forces. Prominent among men was Kan Saro Wiwa of blessed memory. Surprisingly, too, the Obasanjo regime carried out massive military repression in towns of Choba and Odi in 1999 (Albert, 2003a).

As a catalyst to the problems of the Niger Delta, the initial incursion of the military approach embraced by the Obasanjo civilian government that was inaugurated in May 1999 only served to heighten anxiety and tension in the region. The devastation of the environment, which reached an unprecedented level during the period of military rule, has scarcely abated.

It is no gainsaying, that the level of development in the Niger Delta falls short of expectation in terms of its richness in natural resources endowment. No doubt, therefore, sustainable development is critical to the problem of the Niger Delta. Fundamentally, at the core of this is the security of the lives of the ordinary people of the region. By this, it means security of food, shelter, health, jobs and other social amenities to make life worth living. Besides state violence, undercutting livelihoods has also created anxiety, violence, conflicts, and insecurity in the region.

The Niger Delta, over the years, has witnessed significant levels of protest by the indigenous people of the communities. This is against the backdrop of resource exploitation activities by the multinational oil companies in their traditional homelands. On the other hand, the indigenous people have also, from time to time, carried out violent attacks against assets and personnel belonging to the multinationals. In all these, violent conflict between the state security forces and

indigenous groups, otherwise known as "*ethnic militia groups,*" has also been witnessed. As Imoukhuede rightly observed, the impact of these attacks on people, especially women, is high. He further stressed, that there are reported cases of women in Choba, Ogoni, and Odi who were gang raped by soldiers sent to restore peace in their communities (Imoukhuede, 2002).

The matter had become worse among the youths, who are the leaders of tomorrow. They have formed themselves into various kinds of militia groups, heavily armed with weapons of destruction, in their bid to demand and fight for greater control of their natural resources. Although the demand by the youths for accountability and responsible leadership is never out of place, the manner and the approach have been largely labelled as *restiveness.*

The Niger Delta episode should not be an exception from what is obtained elsewhere in the world. Acute conflict is a common problem between the state and indigenous people as a result of natural resource exploitation often carried out by multinational corporations, with encouragement and sanction by the state. However, on the other hand, if properly managed, the resolution would successfully pave the way for the attainment of good governance, conflict prevention, human rights, and sustainable management of natural resources endowment within a framework of social justice.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative, descriptive–analytical design that examined only publicly available documents already cited elsewhere in the manuscript, including official inquiries and policy texts, constitutional-reform monographs, peer-reviewed environmental and governance studies, socio-economic briefings, contemporaneous newspaper reportage, and ecclesial commentaries such as papal statements on environmental stewardship and scriptural texts framing ethical obligations. Each document was read in full, entered into a coding matrix, and assigned descriptive labels under four a priori categories—amnesty, environmental degradation, sustainable development, and ecclesial response.

Constant comparison was then applied to cluster codes into higher-order themes such as resource-control grievances, corporate social-responsibility deficits, and the church's role as moral arbiter, while verbatim extracts were preserved with page or column identifiers to maintain traceability. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation across document types; dependability was ensured by an

audit trail comprising coding sheets, analytic memos, and citation logs; confirmability was maintained by restricting interpretation to evidence explicitly contained in the sources; and transferability was supported by thick contextual description of the Niger-Delta setting. Because the analysis relied exclusively on secondary data, no human participants were involved, and formal ethics approval was unnecessary, yet interpretive restraint was exercised to respect the communities discussed. The sole reliance on documentary evidence limits access to first-hand narratives and real-time ecological measures, so the findings constitute an interpretive synthesis rather than empirical field evidence, a boundary acknowledged in the discussion and recommendations for future research.

Findings and Discussion

The struggle of oil-producing communities against the federal government has no doubt intensified, such that the deepening of the economic crisis has further radicalised the struggle. The Niger Delta communities are no doubt demanding the restructuring of the federation in a manner that would give more autonomy to the states, a sort of self-determination within the federation. They also demand a return to the allocative principle of derivation to provide compensation for oil pollution of their environment. This demand can never be out of place within the context of social justice.

Even before now, far back in 1957, before independence, the colonial government had recognised the peculiar problems of the Niger Delta. Consequent upon this, the British colonial government set up the Willinks Commission on September 26, 1957, to recommend the best strategies for developing the area. However, the report submitted by the Willinks committee on August 18, 1958, failed to meet the expectations of the minority ethnic groups as it noted that the dismantling of the tripartite federal structure through state creation would "create more problems than it sought to cure"[25]. However, the commission in its report recommended that the Niger Delta area should be accordingly, treated as special because of its special problems and peculiar developmental needs.

Premised on the recommendation of the commission and the acknowledgement of the neglect of the region, the federal government created the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) in 1962. For paucity of funding, the board did little or nothing to develop the Niger Delta, and it became moribund before the

outbreak of the civil war in 1967.The next attempt at developing the Niger Delta by the federal government was the establishment of the River Basin Development Authority (RBDA) in 1976. The activities of this board, like the NDDB, yielded no tangible results. In fact, some sectors have described it as a fraud on the part of the federal government (Willink Commission, 1958).

The year 1992 witnessed the creation of another board named the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC). It was during the administration of General Babangida (Rtd.) that the board was created. He also raised the statutory allocation of mineral-producing areas to 3%, and the fund generated will be administered by the board. However, OMPADEC also had problems with mismanagement, corruption, and inconsistent policy. What do we have now? At present, Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) has replaced OMPADEC. Even the establishment of the Ministry of Niger Delta has failed to reduce the tension in the region.

The deprivation and arrogant treatment by the federal government of the oil-producing communities has engendered the feeling of neglect among the people of the Niger Delta region that they are perpetually disinherited and expendable as a people. This feeling has fostered disillusionment and critical attitudes against the federal government. These attitudinal changes are often expressed in the sabotage of pipelines, vandalism, hostage-taking of innocent oil workers, and hijacking of oil companies' helicopters, which are often released after a huge ransom payment, has been made. These series of hostage-taking and near-war situations in the region is a pointer to the discontentment in the oil-rich communities.

Amnesty as a panacea for sustainable development in the Niger Delta

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines amnesty as an official act of forgiving people who have committed offences against the state and allowing them to go free (Hornby, 2010). However, there are always time frames for such a gesture. In the case of the militants of this aforementioned region, the amnesty granted them by the then Yar'Adua-led Federal Government of Nigeria expired on October 4, 2009 (*The Nation,* 2009 b). And so far, of all government interventions at solving the Niger Delta crisis, this has been more successful. *The Nation Newspaper* reported that more than fifteen thousand gunmen had surrendered their arms (*The Nation*, 2009 b). The implication of this is that it will

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halt or at best bring to the barest minimum the level of pipeline vandalisation, and in the process lead to an increase in oil output and the safety of the personnel.

Apart from the militants who are yielding to the amnesty granted to them, women in this region have also taken centre stage in the protest against the massive injustices being perpetrated by the state and the oil company against them. For instance, women and children from Ugborodo seized Chevron's tank farm and terminal in Escravos. In the past, women from Ijaw Oil Communities in Gbamurutu also invaded the NNPC/Chevron flow station. The Itsekiri women in Warri threatened to seal off all oil wells in the Niger Delta (*The Guardian*, 2002).

No doubt, sustainable development is critical to the problems of the Niger Delta, given the present condition of the region. A former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Honorable Dimeji Bankole spokeat a national conference on Niger Delta, hosted in Kaduna, where he acknowledged the historical exploitation of that region by the Nigerian nationhood and prescribed earnest amendment. He opined that:

> If we are to be honest with ourselves, we have not been fair to the Niger Delta region. The Niger Delta has been producing the funds with which we have been running this country for many years. The funds we use to build Abuja where I came from this morning, those lovely roads and bridges and offices came from funds from Niger Delta. I have not seen such bridges and roads in the Niger Delta. Until those roads and infrastructures come to Niger Delta, we will continue to put the request on the front burner of Nigeria politics (*The Nation*, 2009 b).

This situation might be a pointer to the fact that it was just a matter of time before agitation and militancy reared their heads. However, militancy, as we now know it, took time to manifest. In the time of Isaac Adako-Boro and the environmentalist, Ken Saro-Wiwa of blessed memory who fought the Niger Delta cause and paid with their lives, agitation in the Niger Delta was not as pronounced then compared with the crops of militants before the granting of amnesty, by the former president, Alahaji Shehu Musa Yar'Adua of blessed memory.

To a considerable level, the amnesty and post-amnesty programme of rehabilitation and reconciliation will go a long way to give our former militants a new orientation about life in the same spirit in which Nigeria has been rebranded. The onus lies on the government to make haste while the sun shines. It is a fact that the militants have been disarmed. And it is equally true that the government has granted them amnesty and is pursuing their rehabilitation. However, the former militants are unhappy as the government seems to be moving rather too slowly for their liking. However, in some quarters it has been argued that unless the government succeeds in rehabilitating the former militants, there could be a swift return to violence and further oil supply disruption (*The Nation*, 2009 b).

The Niger Delta Experience: The Role of the Church

No doubt the church cannot claim to be ignorant of the happenings in the Niger Delta region, which has become a national flashpoint, defined by various degrees of violence and other forms of aggressive behaviours. Critically speaking, there is general insecurity of lives in the Niger Delta of which the church is a great stakeholder. As a custodian and caretaker of God's creatures, "for the world and all that is in it belong to the Lord; the earth and all who live on it are his"(*Holy Bible*, Psalm 24:1, RSV). The Christians mostly populate the people of the Niger Delta, and as the people of God's family, the church has an obligation towards their spiritual growth. In the book of Genesis, after God had finished with all that He created, he made man to be in charge of all that he made. The Bible put it thus:"…replenish the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and fowl of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth"(Holy Bible, Genesis 1:28, RSV). Since the church is an integral part of the Niger Delta region, she is, therefore, bound to be affected either positively or negatively concerning the socio-political problem of the region.

The gains and the success of the Niger Delta are the gains of the church just as the problems of the Niger Delta are the problem of the church. As a result, the socio-economic reality of the Niger Delta should be of great concern to the church. In the words of Olanisebe Samson, "most of the Christian denominations, if not all, are experiencing the heat of the country's unhealthy socio-political and economic policies" (*The Catholic Herald,* 2010, p. 10). Within the context of the above assertion, the churches in the Niger Delta region cannot be exempted because there is no way that they will not be affected in the areas of

great concern: such as membership drive. As it is the ultimate goal of the church to make new converts daily, which will lead, in the long run, to an increase in payment of tithes and other stipulated financial obligations? For as long as the crisis lingers, it will affect the economic power of the church's members to meet the church's demands.

Another challenge the church may face is that it stands a big risk of losing her members to the stray bullets from the camps of the militants or the territories of the government agents. As we know, it is not a good omen for churches to be recording a decline in membership owing to death occurrence as it is currently happening in the Niger Delta before and after the granting of the amnesty. A war zone like the Niger Delta, devoid of peace, may not go without victims or casualties. If the bullet is not a respecter of a human person, it obviously cannot be a respecter of religion. This, therefore, implies that in an atmosphere of chaos, orchestrated by guerrilla warfare, no church can perform well. This is the direct opposite of the position of the church. The church should operate in a peaceful atmosphere, and this is only when it can perform her God's bestowed functions.

As a matter of fact, what is the church's attitude to the militants in practical terms? The greatest challenge confronting the church is the lack of concrete steps taken by it towards actualising the demands of the people, especially in the oil-rich region of the Niger Delta. Granted, the church, in most cases, preaches vibrantly against social injustices and lopsided policies of the government, but this is not enough. Since both the militants and non-militants alike are members of the church, likewise those in authorities, it behoves the church, therefore, to serve as a bridge builder by bringing together the warring parties. The militants, as members of the church, should be made to know what the scriptures say regarding being submissive to constituted authorities as one of the precepts of Christianity. On the other hand, the church should remind the authorities of their duties to the people. In these circumstances, the church will be seen to be championing the causes of the masses, to be the voice of the voiceless and the conscience of the people. The church also has the challenge of defending the truth and what is right in the sight of God in defence of the masses against any form of oppression, to the degree to which it does not hesitate to challenge that oppression with churchly weapons.

The circumstance in the Niger Delta today is dark and gloomy because the people living there are living in a world of darkness and helplessness and as

such, they need light. Towards this, the churches in the Niger Delta and the world over are hereby called upon to be a sign of light and direction in a world of darkness and sin. For a corrupt, violent, materialistic, hedonistic, and consumerist society, it behoves the church to shine out the light of holiness, love, purity of heart, mercy, kindness, and peace. This way, the church becomes the salt of the earth and the world's light.

More relevant to the issue at hand was the message the late Pope Benedict XVI delivered to mark the 43rd World Day of Peace on January 1, 2010, with the theme: "*If You Want Peace, Protect Creation, Environment.*" The papal message underlines the fact that:

> Protecting the natural environment is a challenge all people must face together, recognising they have obligation to respect a gift God created for all"[36]. He stressed further that, "the environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility toward the poor, toward future generations and toward humanity as a whole" (*The Catholic Herald,* 2010, p. 13).

While the encyclical focused on development and therefore discussed the need to share natural resources equitably and not exploit those found in poor countries like the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, it also insisted that there is a connection between environmental protection and peace. According to the Pope,

> The stockpiling of natural resources, which in many cases are found in the poor countries themselves, gives rise to exploitation and frequent conflicts between and within nations. These conflicts are often fought on the soil of those same countries, with a heavy toll of death, destruction, and further decay (*The Catholic Herald,* 2010, p. 11).

In trying to analyse the Pope's message as the head of the church worldwide, a lot of lessons can be drawn in the light of the appalling predicament and the exploitative nature of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria with the characteristic nature of developing countries, whose constant mismanagement of the environment subsist because the people of Niger Delta region cannot assess the levels of degradation that oil extraction has inflicted on the environment.

In summary, the church seems to be the only institution that has been able to and should checkmate the wrong deals of those in government and the activities of government. In this way, religion will be seen as a potent instrument of nation-building.

Conclusion

From the analysis undertaken so far, it is crystal clear that there is a strong link between oil and the crisis of Niger Delta, hence the quicker the better for Nigerians that the recognition and acceptance of the rights of the oil-producing minorities of the Niger Delta is imperative for democratic stability of the Nigerian state. The question is, should oil be a blessing or a curse to Nigeria? At present, the situation is such that resources accruing from the endowments of the Niger Delta region are used to develop other regions to the disadvantage of those that own the resources.

The current state of affairs in the Niger Delta is happening because the people of these areas are minorities, at the same time suffering from the dictatorship of the majority groups under the military and democratic dispensations. The crisis in the Niger Delta region cannot be resolved either by repression or the use of force; rather, it requires an open dialogue between all parties and by broadening the democratic space, to allow for the expression of the rights of the oil minorities. It is within the context as defined by trust, social equity, and democracy that the oil can be instrumental to the process of nation-building in Nigeria.

Inevitably, future peace lies in a non-violent approach to conflict management such as the noble gesture of the amnesty granted to the militants of the Niger Delta region. As currently witnessed on the part of the militant's readiness to arm disarmament and genuineness of heart with strong commitment on the part of the Federal Government of Nigeria, State Intervention in solving the Niger Delta crisis should be done to the extent of identifying best practices in the developed part of the world, where oil extraction has helped to prosper the local populations. With this faith, the peculiar circumstances of the entire people of the Niger Delta can be considered for bringing about sustainable development in the region.

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SEMIOTICS OF HUMAN COMMODIFICATION AND REGIONAL EXPLOITATION IN CHUKWUMA ANYANWU'S *TRAFFICKERS*: A NIGER DELTA PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: This paper is a semiotic analysis of *Traffickers* (2021) by Chukwuma Anyanwu, dissecting the symbolic representation of human commodification and socio-economic exploitation within the context of the Niger Delta struggle. It argues that the performance of trafficking is not limited but reflects a wider system of structural neglect, environmental collapse, and economic betrayal built in the postcolonial Niger Delta. Anchored on Semiotic Theory, this study interrogates names, language, rituals, spaces, and bodily dramatization as ideological signifiers of abandonment, resistance, and moral crisis. The findings reveal that trafficking is mythologized through euphemisms like "connection" and "opportunity," while gendered bodies are commodified through visual and ritual codes. Cultural symbols; such as oaths, silence, and costumes; are weaponized to enforce control. However, the play also dramatizes resistance through symbolic ruptures like fainting, subversive speech, and betrayal. Traffickers eventually exposes how exploitation is ideologically sustained and how semiotic disruption becomes a form of

reclaiming agency in a region plagued by socio-economic despair.

Keywords: Semiotics, Human Commodification, Regional Exploitation, Traffickers, Niger Delta

Introduction

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria presents a striking paradox. Notwithstanding its large contribution to national wealth through oil production, it is plagued by poverty, massive youth unemployment, insecurity, and environmental decay. The region has become a theatre of both physical and symbolic violence, where the body, the land, and the future are consistently commodified in a neoliberal economy which privileges profit over people. In the light of this, *Traffickers* (2021) by Chukwuma Anyanwu is a fertile dramatic lens into this reality. Through the artistic blend of humour, satire, ritual, and stark realism, the play dramatises the desperation born of socio-economic abandonment and how it transforms human beings, particularly the fictional youth, into tradable commodities.

This study adopts semiotic approach to examine Anyanwu's *Traffickers* as a textual enactment which reflects the lived experiences of the Niger Delta. By drawing on foundational semiotic theories by Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes, along with contemporary scholarships from Hodge and Kress's theory of social semiotics, the paper investigates the sign systems deployed in the play; such as bodies, visas, ritual oaths, interviews, and everyday speech, and how they portray allegorical ideological meanings. These signs are not mere artistic devices; they represent the invisible structures which normalise human commodification in *Traffickers* where structural violence is the order of the day.

Barthes (1972) posits that signs always serve to naturalise ideologies, thereby turning socially constructed realities into seemingly normal facts. In Anyanwu's *Traffickers*, this process is clearly illustrated in scenes where job seekers are instructed to strip for so-called modelling interviews or take ritual oaths of secrecy to secure employment abroad. These gestures, dialogues, and silences serve not just as dramatic elements, but as signifiers of betrayal, manipulation, and systemic of failure. As a result, from these semiotic cues, Anyanwu's *Traffickers* critiques the forces which transform human beings into merchandise and migration into a trap.

The Niger Delta struggle has frequently been examined through the perspectives of environmental degradation, political economy, and resistance literature (Watts, 2004; Ifowodo, 2005; Ojaide, 2013). While these perspectives remain useful, this paper redirects attention to the symbolic structures that both reflect and emphasise these material conditions. It posits that Anyanwu's *Traffickers* constructs a battle over meaning, in which characters must pass through survive the coded systems of exploitation surrounding them. The symbols employed in the play draw from familiar realities in the Niger Delta: the allure of foreign jobs, the illusion of prosperity, the manipulation of communal trust, and the quiet complicity of state institutions. In a broader term, these signs collectively represent the dilemma facing countless Nigerian youths, caught between hopelessness at home and dangers abroad.

Significantly, the aim of this paper is threefold. First, it seeks to examine the commodification of the human person in *Traffickers* through performance, gesture, and dialogue. Also, it connects these representations to the broader socio-political context of the Niger Delta, particularly its culture of abandonment and economic betrayal. Lastly, it demonstrates how a semiotic reading of drama, an artistic work, exposes the hidden structures of power, exploitation, and survival that define a society in crisis.

However, the methodological approach adopted is a close reading of the dramatic text, with emphasis on sign systems embedded in language, character movement, spatial design, and symbolic props. The analysis is supported by interdisciplinary perspectives from postcolonial studies, performance theory, and critical development discourse, which collectively frame the Niger Delta's struggle as not only material but also symbolic. Scholars like Nixon (2011) describe the violence experienced in regions like the Niger Delta as a form of "slow violence", capturing the usual invisible and cumulative effects of state failure, environmental collapse, and systemic poverty. Anyanwu's *Traffickers* visualises this slow violence through carefully choreographed performances of exploitation, showing how even efforts to escape are often absorbed back into the same system.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a semiotic framework rooted in the theories of Charles Sanders Peirce, Umberto Eco, and the multimodal discourse approach of Kress

and van Leeuwen. These perspectives is the tools to interpret *Traffickers* as a symbolic system where names, gestures, silences, costumes, and rituals convey layered ideological meanings.

First, Peirce's model of the sign, which includes icons, indexes, and symbols, is useful for interpreting the non-verbal elements of the play. For instance, bodily posture, ritual gestures, and physical spaces function not just as theatrical devices but as signs that point to deeper systems of power and control.

On the hand, Eco emphasizes that ideology is embedded in the structures of language and communication. His view that even silence or common expressions can carry ideological weight supports this study's reading of silence, euphemism, and ritual as coded mechanisms of domination and resistance.

However, Kress and van Leeuwen's theory of multimodal discourse expands this framework by explaining how meaning is constructed through the interplay of various modes: spoken language, visual elements, spatial organization, and bodily movement. In the play, interviews, oaths, dress codes, and choreographed performances are read as multimodal texts that structure power and submission.

This study also uses the concept of **semiotic domains** to organize its analysis. A domain refers to a thematic field where signs operate systematically. In Traffickers, domains such as naming, bodily display, space, and gendered interaction serve as platforms for negotiating meaning and enforcing ideology.

Equally important is the concept of **rupture**. A rupture occurs when the expected order of signs is broken, exposing the ideological structure beneath. Gift's fainting, Joy's questioning, and Afro's betrayal are treated as semiotic ruptures that resist the trafficking narrative and destabilize the dominant code of control.

Through this theoretical lens, the study interprets *Traffickers* as more than a story about trafficking. It is a symbolic drama where exploitation is constructed through signs and challenged through the disruption of meaning.

Review of Related Literature

Over the past two decades, scholars of African literature have increasingly given attention to the intersection of economic violence, symbolic representation, and social crisis, particularly in relation to the Niger Delta and the commodification of human life. Much of the scholarship has focused on poetry, realist fiction, and

protest literature; while relatively little attention has been paid to symbolic interpretations of drama, especially through a semiotic perspective.

Niger Delta literature, as a component of Nigerian literature, has over the years carved out a distinct identity rooted in the peculiar socio-political and environmental challenges of the oil-rich but underdeveloped region. From the early oral traditions to contemporary fiction, poetry, and drama, the literature of the Niger Delta presents a powerful and often painful chronicle of the people's experiences, aspirations, and resistance. This body of writing is defined not just by its regional setting but by its thematic preoccupations with environmental degradation, political marginalization, identity crises, gender struggles, and the persistence of postcolonial legacies. Ojaide (2015) defines Niger Delta literature as works by both indigenes and outsiders that explore the experiences, culture, environment, and struggles of the region's people.

Rooted in the socio-political and ecological realities of the Niger Delta, this literature gained prominence after the 1995 execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, which spotlighted the region's environmental and human rights crises. Ojaide emphasizes its strong sense of place, noting that writers respond to environmental degradation caused by oil exploitation through themes of activism and resistance. He frames this body of work within bioregional and ecocritical perspectives, highlighting how authors such as Ifowodo, Okpewho, and Agary portray dispossession, ecological contamination, and the erosion of traditional life. On the other hand, as Davies (2023) asserts, these themes reflect the dynamic and evolving realities of the Niger Delta, positioning its literature as a vital voice in Nigerian and African literary discourse.

One of the most prominent thematic currents in Niger Delta literature is environmental degradation, a reality deeply tied to decades of oil exploration and the attendant ecological disasters. Writers such as Ken Saro-Wiwa and Tanure Ojaide have used literature as a form of environmental activism. Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English* (1985) does not only narrate the consequences of war on a naive soldier but also highlights the environmental costs of oil exploitation. Similarly, Ojaide's *The Activist* (1991) dramatizes the struggle of a young man against oil companies whose operations leave the land polluted and communities impoverished. The narrative commitment to environmental concerns has attracted critical attention. For example, Anyokwu (2015), through an ecocritical lens, argues that Ojaide's poetry captures the

destructive impact of oil multinationals and calls for environmental justice and ecological consciousness.

Closely tied to ecological concerns is the literary engagement with social injustice and human rights violations, particularly in the face of political corruption and state neglect. Niger Delta writers often confront the failures of successive Nigerian governments in addressing the plight of the region's people. Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary* (1995) is a deeply personal yet politically charged documentation of his incarceration, capturing the state's repression of dissenting voices and its complicity in multinational exploitation. Similarly, Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010) portrays the dangers faced by journalists and environmental activists as they navigate a terrain of militarization, kidnapping, and oil politics. These works collectively expose the human cost of Nigeria's petro-economy and serve as testimonies of resistance and survival.

Equally prominent in Niger Delta literature is the theme of identity and belonging, often explored through the lens of cultural conflict and displacement. The Niger Delta is an ethnically diverse region with communities such as the Ijaw, Ogoni, Urhobo, and Itsekiri, each possessing unique cultural heritages. Gabriel Okara, one of the pioneering voices from the region, draws from Ijaw oral traditions to reflect on these questions in works like *The Voice* (1964) and *The Fisherman's Invocation* (1978). Okara's use of indigenous symbolism and syntax reclaims a voice for Niger Delta identity within the larger Nigerian postcolonial context. Oyebade (2010) notes that Okara's poetic fusion of oral tradition and modern literary technique constructs a powerful meditation on cultural loss and spiritual reclamation. The identity question is further explored by Isidore Okpewho in *The Last Duty* (1976), where ethnic loyalty and national allegiance collide in the character's moral dilemma.

Emerging voices in Niger Delta literature have also introduced gender and sexuality as critical themes, challenging the traditional male-dominated narratives of resistance and suffering. Azuah's *Edible Bones* (2011) is a compelling portrayal of a queer woman navigating life in a society hostile to non-normative identities. Similarly, Yeibo's *Of Waters and the Wild* (2017) addresses the aspirations and marginalization of women, portraying their struggles within patriarchal and exploitative systems. Feminist critiques, as reflected in Ankumah's (2013) analysis of African women's narratives, emphasize how writers like Azuah and Unigwe use literature to challenge gender norms and

empower female subjectivities. These explorations align with global feminist discourses while remaining grounded in the local realities of the Niger Delta.

Another notable strand in the literature is the concern with postcolonial resistance and identity politics. The legacy of colonial rule, and the continued economic neocolonialism facilitated by multinational oil companies, is a recurring motif in works from the region. Saro-Wiwa's political writings, particularly *On a Darkling Plain* (1989), as well as his activism with the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), articulate a postcolonial critique of internal colonization by the Nigerian state. Okoye's (2013) study of Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* reveals how language itself becomes a tool of resistance, with the use of "rotten English" serving to subvert colonial linguistic dominance and assert a unique Niger Delta voice. Cultural studies scholars like Akindes (2002) further argue that writers employ spatial representation in literature to challenge dominant narratives and reclaim ownership of indigenous spaces.

The theme of youth restiveness and violence is also gaining prominence, reflecting the region's contemporary crisis of unemployment, militancy, and disillusionment. Many young people in the Niger Delta caught between poverty and the allure of resource control struggles, become symbols of a generation failed by leadership. This frustration is vividly captured in narratives like *Oil on Water*, where the chaos of kidnappings, oil theft, and military crackdowns forms a grim backdrop to the region's complex political economy.

Critics and scholars have increasingly deployed diverse theoretical frameworks to engage with Niger Delta literature. Postcolonial theory remains foundational, particularly in interrogating power dynamics and colonial legacies. Ecocriticism offers tools for analyzing environmental themes, while feminist theory illuminates the gendered dimensions of marginalization. Trauma theory, as used by Azodo (2012) in her reading of Njoku's *The Forest Dames,* brings attention to the psychological scars left by violence and displacement. Meanwhile, globalization theory, as employed by Oritsejafor (2010), explains the tension between local identities and global economic forces, especially in the poetry of Tanure Ojaide. These frameworks underscore the interdisciplinarity and relevance of Niger Delta literature within and beyond literary studies.

Another compelling literary intervention on the Niger Delta crisis is *The OilLamp* (2005) by Ogaga Ifowodo, a poetic collection which recollects the desolation

caused by oil exploitation and state neglect. Building upon Bhabha's idea of unhomeliness, scholars such as Max (2021) interpret the collection as projecting a postcolonial condition in which indigenous people are estranged from their environment as a result of neocolonial influences and environmental degradation. This unhomeliness, as defined by Bressler (2011), leads to the psychological and material displacement of people within their own homeland.

In *The Oil Lamp,* Ifowodo presents this sense of estrangement most vividly in Part 5, "Cesspit of the Niger Area," and Part 6, "The Agonist." In Part 5 (p. 60), he portrays the absence of basic healthcare services in rural Niger Delta communities, depicting how residents embarks on long and risky journeys to urban centers for medical attention. The inclusion of indigenous spiritual symbols like Mami Wata also depicts how survival is sought by cultural rituals in the absence of state infrastructure.

In Part 6 (pp. 66–68), Ifowodo memorialises Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight, highlighting their execution as a national trauma. These sections of the collection resonate strongly with themes of slow violence (Nixon, 2011), complicity, and symbolic erasure. Through poetic structure and repetition, Ifowodo constructs a semiotic field of guilt, betrayal, and buried history that continues to define the lived experiences of the Niger Delta people.

On the other hand, Caminero-Santangelo (2014) further situates Ifowodo's collection in line with the tradition of environmental justice literature, arguing that his poetry seeks to reshape public consciousness by depicting the Niger Delta not only as a zone of extraction but as a space of memory, resistance, and political urgency. Furthermore, Max (2021) adds that *The Oil Lamp* revitalises Ken Saro-Wiwa's literary legacy by providing a symbolic counter-narrative to the state-sponsored myths of progress.

Although *The Oil Lamp* is a work of poetry, the symbolic registers it engages, such as; ritual, abandonment, silence, and memory overlap significantly with the semiotic themes explored in Chukwuma Anyanwu's Traffickers. This paper builds upon Ifowodo's intervention by extending the symbolic reading of Niger Delta literature into the realm of contemporary Nigerian drama, thereby addressing a gap in the scholarship where the semiotics of human commodification in dramatic texts remain largely unexplored.

Outside of literary criticism, Montgomery (2017), an anthropologist at Wayne State University, presents a detailed account of modern trafficking across Africa, with a particular focus on Nigeria. He argues that over 800,000 Nigerians are currently trapped in systems of forced labour and sexual exploitation, many of whom were deceived into leaving the country with promises of better lives. Montgomery attributes the increasing crisis to the relationship of neoliberal policies, poverty, and global inequality. He explains that while traditional slavery was based on ownership, modern trafficking thrives on illegality and disposability. His observations align with symbolic interpretations found in literature where trafficked individuals are often portrayed not just as victims but as representations of powerlessness, silence, and commodified identities.

Equally, Lipede (2007) discusses the role of weak borders, ineffective legal systems, and patriarchal structures in enabling trafficking within and beyond Nigeria. He emphasizes that the issue cannot be reduced to poverty alone, as cultural myths and collective aspirations for success abroad often motivate communities to participate in the trade (pp. 18–20). This is corroborated by a report from the United States Department of State (2011), which acknowledges Nigeria's compliance with global anti-trafficking treaties but criticizes the failure of enforcement. A report by the News Agency of Nigeria (2007) reveals that entire communities in Edo State sometimes participate in or overlook trafficking, driven by the myth of wealth from overseas migration. These findings provide a necessary backdrop for literary studies that interpret the body, silence, and ritual oaths as metaphors for commodification and systemic abandonment.

To understand how literature encodes these realities, semiotics provides a valuable analytical framework. Originating from the foundational works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, semiotics is concerned with how signs convey meaning in context. Saussure's model explains the sign as composed of a signifier and a signified, while Peirce's triadic model includes the representamen, the object, and the interpretant (Saussure, 1968, p. 66; Peirce, 1958). Later theorists such as Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes expanded these models by examining how signs function in literature, media, and culture, often carrying ideological and political significance.

Aniemeka (2017) applies this framework to J. P. Clark's poem *Abiku*, interpreting the cyclical return of the spirit child as a symbol of Nigeria's political instability. He explains that the repetition in the poem mirrors the country's cycle of failed

leadership and military coups. Using Saussurean and Peircean approaches alongside Fashina's macro-code theory, he decodes cultural symbols such as bamboo fences, thatched huts, and seasonal imagery as representations of poverty, national fragility, and the longing for stability (pp. 3–6). Aniemeka also draws attention to the poem's use of incantatory repetition as a phonosemantic device that intensifies the symbolic tension (p. 7).

Chemis, Sang, and Kipkorir (2020) contribute to this discourse through their semiotic analysis of rituals among the Nandi people in Kenya. Using Peirce's categories of icon, index, and symbol, they examine how social events such as weddings and funerals incorporate signs that communicate unity, transition, and belonging. Ritual elements like butter, calabashes, and fire are shown to operate as culturally embedded signs with multiple layers of meaning (pp. 120–123). These observations align with how African literature uses physical objects and ritual acts to symbolize deeper ideological or communal messages.

A similar strategy is employed by Al-Qadi (2024) in his semiotic reading of the Swahili play Malimwengu Ulimwenguni. He interprets the plot of marital betrayal as a coded representation of the Uganda-Tanzania war. Through the use of names, biblical references, and proverbs, the play constructs a symbolic parallel between personal infidelity and political treachery (pp. 4–7). For instance, the character Amina, whose name usually denotes faithfulness, becomes an emblem of betrayal. The twin girls adopted and later exploited by their grandparents are interpreted as metaphors for vulnerable African states manipulated by stronger political actors.

Taken together, these studies show that African literature; particularly from the Niger Delta; functions as a dynamic semiotic field where trauma, exploitation, and resistance are not merely narrated but encoded in signs. The human body, oaths, silences, and spaces become symbolic vehicles through which literature critiques societal decay and imagines the possibility of renewal. In a play like *Traffickers*, the body is not simply a passive victim but a site of inscription, marked by cultural codes, historical scars, and ideological tension. Through semiotic analysis, such texts reveal how exploitation is mythologized and how resistance is staged through symbolic rupture. Niger Delta literature, in this context, emerges as a powerful medium; rooted in oral traditions and evolving through contemporary drama, fiction, and poetry: to confront environmental degradation, social injustice, identity crises, and gendered marginalization. It is

both archive and protest, mapping the pain of a region while offering narrative strategies for survival, healing, and transformation.

Domains of Exploitation: Naming, Language, and the Niger Delta Condition in Anyanwu's *Traffickers*

The semiotic structure of Anyanwu's *Traffickers* is built upon a dynamic interplay of verbal, visual, and performative signs that encode layers of social meaning. From character names to gestures, costume to spatial setting, the play constructs a symbolic language through which the ideology of commodification, deception, and resistance is dramatised. In alignment with the topic, this paper examines six primary semiotic domains: naming and identity, linguistic codes, bodily signs and costumes, spatial semiotics, ideological myths of migration and connection, and gendered sign systems.

First, names in *Traffickers* serve not merely as character labels but as ideological signifiers that reflect personality, purpose, or paradox. For instance, the name "Ultimate Madam" signifies not only a woman in charge but one who holds supreme authority within the trafficking syndicate. Her title, laden with capitalist and patriarchal overtones, positions her as both an object and agent of commodification. In her own words:

> Life is full of opportunities...My clients across the globe need able-bodied young men and women... (p. 14), she naturalizes exploitation by framing it as opportunity. In the context of the Niger Delta, such reframing resonates with a familiar rhetoric where suffering is masked by the promise of oil wealth, and inequality is dressed up as entrepreneurial hustle. The irony is profound: in a region whose resources sustain the national economy, its youth are still traded under the banner of opportunity.

Similarly, "Madam Legit", a partner in crime, carries a performative contradiction; her name asserts legitimacy while her actions betray illegality. These ironic names function as what Roland Barthes calls second-order signs, where the literal is subverted by the connotative (Barthes, 1972). They portray the Niger Delta's socio-political terrain, where corruption often masquerades as governance and illegality is legitimized through performance. On the other hand, the male character "Konnected" is another striking example of ideological naming. His name signifies access, gate-keeping, and systemic privilege. As he

chants his slogan: "Stay connected to the right one, stay connected to get what you want" (p. 14), his name becomes a brand that sells hope in a context where actual structures for employment are non-existent." In the Niger Delta, where oil companies have created exclusionary economic enclaves and local content laws often benefit the few, "connection" becomes a currency. Konnected's speech acts as a mythic narrative that legitimizes illegality through euphemism, aligning with Barthes' theory of mythologized speech. The very idea of connection; divorced from merit, mirrors how access to oil wealth is determined not by communal equity but by nepotism, political links, or deceit.

Even more symbolically loaded are names like "Belief," "Gift," and "Mr. Godknows," which contrast the moral integrity of the family with the deceptive seduction of traffickers. Godknows' warning: "We cannot because there is famine in the land accept the devil's invitation to dinner" invokes religious and ethical discourses to contest the allure of quick wealth (p. 4). Within the Niger Delta narrative, this famine is not metaphorical. It is a lived paradox; a region abundant in oil yet starved of infrastructure, healthcare, and opportunities. Godknows' invocation is thus not just moral counsel; it is a desperate plea for ethical resistance in a region conditioned by abandonment and betrayed by promises of development.

Progressively, language in *Traffickers* vacillates between English and Nigerian Pidgin, allowing for the coding of hierarchy, persuasion, and manipulation. Pidgin, often used by the traffickers, gives them accessibility and populist appeal. For example, the declaration by Ultimate Madam:"Person nor deydey one place make opportunity waka come meet am" (p. 1)is encoded in popular proverb structure, disguising manipulation as folk wisdom. This aligns with Barthes' theory that proverbs and familiar speech can be appropriated into myth to serve dominant ideologies. In the Niger Delta, where oral tradition remains a vital mode of expression, such linguistic manipulations resonate powerfully. They mimic the language of politicians and profiteers who co-opt local idioms to cloak systemic exploitation.

On the other hand, Standard English is employed more often in the moral household of the Godknows family and by undercover agents, signaling rationality, order, and law. This diglossic variation becomes a semiotic cue that marks ethical alignment, reinforcing Umberto Eco's position that "language is a signifying system saturated with ideological tension" (Eco, 1976, p. 36). In the

regional context, the contrast between Pidgin and formal English reflects the tension between survivalist logic and idealistic morality; two languages vying for control of a region's future.

Thus, through names and language, *Traffickers* dramatizes the ideological battleground of the Niger Delta, where exploitation is masked by myth, and hope is commodified through signs. The symbolic weight of these linguistic and nominal choices not only reveals personal manipulation but exposes a collective condition shaped by history, greed, and unfulfilled promises.

Body and Space as Ideological Texts

Bodily semiotics and costuming in *Traffickers* play a central role in dramatizing commodification. The strip tease scenes during the "interviews" reduce characters like Gift and Rose to body parts for inspection. Gift recalls:"It was a strip tease!...I was asked to strip naked to my pants all because of a job" (p. 16).In this moment, the body serves both as a commodity and a signifier of economic value, stripped of agency and transformed into a spectacle of desirability. This reflects Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) assertion that bodily appearance, like other visual signs, plays a vital role in meaning-making within multimodal texts. In the neoliberal economy of *Traffickers*, the body becomes a readable text; inspected, judged, and ultimately traded.

However, the play does not merely present the body as passive. Gift's act of fainting becomes a potent semiotic interruption. More than a dramatic collapse, her fall is a refusal to participate in the ideological ritual of objectification. This aligns with Eco's notion of the sign as event; a rupture in the expected symbolic sequence that disrupts the semiotic machinery of power (Eco, 1976). Her silence and withdrawal signify resistance in a system where speech is often scripted by dominance.

From a Niger Delta perspective, this moment takes on broader socio-political meaning. Gift's fainting enacts the collective fatigue of a region persistently exploited; first by colonial extractivism, then by postcolonial neglect, and now by neoliberal illusions. Her body becomes a site of protest against a structure that has historically mined not just oil, but lives, dreams, and futures. In this context, resistance is not just personal; it is regional and intergenerational.

Equally significant is the symbolic use of space throughout the play. The village square (p. 1), traditionally a site for communal bonding, is recontextualized as a recruitment zone; signalling the corruption of cultural spaces by economic desperation. This transformation mirrors how spaces in the Niger Delta once devoted to kinship and collective memory are now infiltrated by survivalist opportunism and economic predation.

In contrast, the shrine of Egede (p. 42) introduces a powerful spiritual binary. Once a locus of ancestral authority and moral clarity, it is now reduced to an apparatus of fear. Egede's cryptic pronouncement:"The house rat is frolicking with the bush rat" (p. 42), operates as a semiotic riddle, unsettling normative hierarchies and signalling moral collapse. From a Peircean lens, this functions as an indexical sign; not pointing to a character but indicating systemic betrayal and the blurring of once-clear moral boundaries.

Significant to say, within the Niger Delta context, the desecration of the shrine is especially tragic. It symbolizes how even sacred traditions have been commodified in the face of economic decay. The oil boom, instead of delivering prosperity, has polluted both land and values, leading to the erosion of indigenous institutions. Spirituality, like the body, becomes a tool of manipulation; a distortion of cultural heritage under the pressure of survival.

Moreso, the interview compound (p. 13) further emphasised these power dynamics. It serves as a liminal space where youth, seeking escape, are transitioned from innocence to exploitation. Here, architecture itself becomes a semiotic instrument of control. Characters are made to queue, inspected one after another, reduced to metrics of worth. As Barthes suggests, spatial arrangements can encode ideology, dictating who moves, who waits, who speaks, and who is silenced. The compound becomes a symbolic checkpoint; an artificial border where the journey of commodification is legitimized.

In all, *Traffickers* uses both body and space to construct a dynamic semiotic grammar of power, betrayal, and resistance. By grounding these symbols within the lived realities of the Niger Delta; ecological devastation, cultural dislocation, and economic desperation; the play reveals how deeply structural violence can inscribe itself on the most intimate surfaces: the body, the home, and the sacred.

Power, Gendered Rituals and Semiotic Resistance in the Niger Delta

One of the most ideologically loaded signs in the play is the concept of "connection." "Get connected," repeated frequently by Konnected and others, serve as a floating signifier, a term so empty it can absorb any promise. While it ostensibly refers to employment or access, its repeated use masks its actual reference to trafficking and slavery. As Rose laments: "To think one can get a job as easy as that… I'm still dreaming", the illusion begins to unravel (p. 25). This ideological repackaging of trafficking as opportunity is what Barthes describes as the falsely innocent speech of myth, a rhetorical maneuver that naturalizes the unnatural (Barthes, 1972). In this context, Eco's observation that ideology is often hidden in the very codes of signification becomes critical: "To speak ideologically is to use the system of signs without revealing their conventionality" (Eco, 1976, p. 138).

Suffice to say it, gender operates as a central semiotic axis in Traffickers, where the human body, especially the female body, is coded, consumed, and contested. The play dramatises gender not merely through dialogue or characterization, but through symbolic performances of labour, sexuality, and silence. Building on feminist semiotic perspective and critical discourse analysis, we shall examine how the female and male bodies are differently inscribed with meaning in the trafficking economy, and how these inscriptions reflect broader systems of patriarchal commodification and resistance.

In *Traffickers*, the female body is persistently marked as a site of consumption, often reduced to spectacle under the pretext of recruitment. During the interview scene, characters such as Gift, Rose, and Joy are subjected to performative objectification. Gift's recollection is strikingly illustrative: "It was a strip tease!... I was asked to strip naked to my pants all because of a job" (p. 16). Here, the female body becomes the visual text through which desirability, docility, and economic value are assessed. This form of inspection echoes what Mulvey (1975) termed the "male gaze," where women are positioned primarily as objects to be looked at, their value tied to visual pleasure.

Even more telling is the fact that such objectification is rationalized as a precondition for economic empowerment. Madam Legit declares unapologetically: "You girls should not be shy…you're going abroad to work in fashion houses" (p. 15).The metaphor of fashion, linked to beauty, exposure, and

commercial display, serves here as a euphemism, a mythic code that conceals sexual exploitation beneath a discourse of glamour and opportunity. According to Barthes (1972), such myths operate ideologically by naturalizing social contradictions. What is essentially coercive is reframed as liberatory.

Moreover, the semiotics of attire plays a central role. The girls are asked to "dress smart," "look sexy," and "smile with confidence" (p. 14), an aesthetic script that transforms them into commodities for foreign clients. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) emphasize that clothing and bodily postures are not neutral; they function as visual signs that communicate values and invite interpretations. In this context, the attire becomes a uniform of subjugation, a mask of choice concealing the absence of consent.

While the female body is sexualized, the male body is commodified in different but equally symbolic terms. Characters such as Afro, Koolie, and Blackie are described as "gigolos," "muscle-men," or "bodyguards", categories that emphasize physicality over personality. Madam Legit announces: "Some of the girls will work in salons; some of the boys will be bodyguards. If you are strong and handsome, there is a place for you" (p. 16). Here, masculinity is reduced to physical strength and aesthetic appeal, stressing a commodified masculinity that is transactional rather than autonomous.

Also, Konnected's instruction to the boys to "stand straight… puff your chest… act like stars" (p. 14) reflects how performative masculinity is also constructed as a spectacle. Unlike the female characters, however, the boys are offered roles with a veneer of dominance (e.g., bouncer, protector), though they remain equally disposable. This symbolic inversion creates a hierarchy of commodification that appears to favour men, but ultimately foreground systemic objectification for both genders.

Beyond physical signs, the play also uses speech and silence as gendered semiotic tools. Female characters such as Gift and Belief often alternate between vocal protest and strategic silence. Gift's public fainting, for instance, is a bodily refusal, a disruption of the "interview" ritual. Her collapse, though silent, is louder than any spoken dissent. As Eco (1976) notes, silence can be a form of semiotic resistance when it interrupts expected codes of behaviour. Gift's action is not a withdrawal but a counter-sign, an embodied rejection of objectification.

Similarly, Joy disrupts the myth of opportunity by voicing her trauma. She asks:"If this is modelling, why do I feel used?" (p. 25), thereby puncturing the euphemistic narrative sustained by the traffickers. Her rhetorical question is not just a cry for clarity but a semiotic subversion; it shifts the interpretant from trust to suspicion, forcing the audience to re-evaluate what had been naturalized.

Meanwhile, Godknows, the moral father figure, represents patriarchal speech rooted in protection and spiritual authority. His repeated admonitions: "Beware of fast roads; they lead to dark ends" (p. 3), invoke biblical and proverbial registers, coding his masculinity as wisdom and restraint. Yet his role is limited to warning, not intervention; signifying the limits of traditional authority in confronting contemporary social evils.

One of the most gendered aspects of the play is the ritual of oath-taking, which is particularly targeted at the girls. Madam Legit reminds them: Once you swear, there is no going back. The spirits will deal with betrayal (p. 18). The use of traditional religion here operates as a symbolic tool of control. As Barthes (1972) argues the use of sacred language and ritual in capitalist structures often functions to legitimize exploitation, converting socio-economic coercion into divine decree. The oath becomes a performative speech act in the Austinian sense where its utterance enacts a binding force. However, for the traffickers, it also operates as an ideological sign: it transforms free agents into bound subjects, not through physical chains, but through psychological fear. The fear is gendered, drawing on patriarchal expectations of female fidelity and spiritual vulnerability.

In *Traffickers*, power is not simply exerted through brute force; rather, it is symbolically encoded through rituals, language, surveillance, and silence. The traffickers construct an ideological world in which deception appears as opportunity, control is veiled as protection, and resistance must either be hidden or symbolically encoded.

Central to the traffickers' strategy is the fabrication of the myth of opportunity. As Barthes (1972) explains, myths are ideological constructions that naturalize historical contingencies. They convert culturally and economically situated narratives into taken-for-granted truths. In *Traffickers*, the traffickers perpetuate the myth that travelling abroad equals success. Ultimate Madam insists: "I'm offering them opportunity. That's the word. Opportunity!" (p. 2), repeating the term until it loses its literal meaning and gains a mythical aura. This myth is

further supported by performative acts, such as the use of branded language, rehearsed interviews, and symbolic rewards like "golden tickets" (p. 14). These tokens resemble what Eco (1976) calls "sign-functions", objects or utterances that imply a broader ideological value. The golden ticket, in this context, becomes a false symbol of economic escape, concealing the transactional horror that lies beneath.

Importantly, the strength of the traffickers lies in their ability to reframe coercion as consent. As Konnected boasts:"Na hustle we dey do. You get mouth, you fit chop life" (p. 10), this streetwise idiom masks systemic exploitation as smart survivalism. The play thus critiques not only traffickers but also the cultural logic that glamorizes fast wealth.

Progressively, surveillance is another major sign system in the play. The interview process is not simply a recruitment exercise but a disciplinary ritual. Characters are told to "stand straight," "smile," "turn around," and "pose" (p. 14), instructions that echo Foucault's (1977) notion of disciplinary power, in which the body is trained and watched into conformity. These acts also resonate with Peirce's idea of indexical signs, where gestures point toward a larger system of control.

The shrine of Egede, presided over by the spiritualist who conducts oaths, represents yet another layer of ideological power. The use of indigenous religion, seen in chants like: "He who eats and turns against the hand that feeds shall not see the moon" (p. 19), introduces fear and obedience. Barthes' theory of mythologized speech is evident here; cultural symbols such as ancestral curses and spiritual sanctions are co-opted into capitalist exploitation, rendering the victims doubly; both economically and spiritually.

Importantly, these rituals also serve as multimodal texts, combining spoken incantations, body movements, and objects (e.g., chalk, goat blood, kola nuts), which reinforce the binding nature of the oath. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) multimodal theory helps us read these elements as parts of a broader ideological sign system.

While the traffickers appear united, the play exposes internal fissures that undermine the myth of syndicate solidarity. Characters like Afro, Koolie, and Blackie are not merely enforcers but unstable subordinates. Afro complains bitterly: "I'm doing all the dirty work while the madams fly abroad. Where's the

fairness?" (p. 30).His dissatisfaction disrupts the appearance of cohesion, revealing that power is unevenly distributed even within exploitative networks.

This intra-group discontent becomes a subtle form of resistance, albeit one marked by betrayal rather than justice. Afro's eventual decision to leak information to the authorities: "Let the whole thing crash. Let the world know" (p. 44), serves as a semiotic rupture, a moment when the sign-system of control collapses under the weight of its own contradictions. In Eco's terms, this is the point where the system's internal logic can no longer sustain itself and the sign's ideological function is exposed.

The most potent form of resistance in Traffickers is not physical revolt, but subversive semiotic disruption. Characters like Belief, Gift, and Joy do not simply oppose trafficking with moral declarations but with coded defiance. Belief's name, as previously established, is itself a sign of hope and persistence. Her refusal to yield, and her appeal to her father's teachings:"I remember what Daddy always said: quick roads lead to quick graves" (p. 17), serve as ideological counter-signs that reject the traffickers' narrative.

Gift's sudden fainting is not merely a dramatic collapse; it is a coded rejection of commodification. Through Eco's (1976, p.48) semiotic lens, her body interrupts the ritual of objectification, transforming silence into resistance. Her act replaces expected speech and compliance with a performative disavowal of the myth that binds her; a semiotic rupture within the trafficking economy.

Gift's fainting episode and subsequent withdrawal from the interview is a powerful form of embodied resistance. Though she says little afterward, her silence reverberates through the play as a rupture in the trafficking machinery. In line with Eco's observation that "even silence can be a sign, when it replaces expected speech" (Eco, 1976, p. 48), Gift's collapse functions as a counter-sign to the commodification of her body. But more significantly, when situated within the Niger Delta context, her action becomes a symbolic protest against the regional structures of abandonment. The Niger Delta, long plagued by systemic underdevelopment, oil-induced poverty, and youth marginalisation, produces conditions where desperation is normalized. Gift's resistance, therefore, is not just personal; it is generational. It expresses a collective exhaustion in a region where silence has been ritualised by failed promises, ecological ruin, and political betrayal. Her body becomes a semiotic battlefield, enacting a refusal to

be traded, to be silenced, or to perform obedience for a system that offers nothing but illusion.

Moreover, the final collapse of the syndicate is marked not by revolution but by exposure. The authorities, tipped off by a disillusioned insider, descend upon the traffickers' compound. The scene is devoid of fanfare but charged with symbolic meaning, the end of the myth, the deconstruction of power through the very tools it sought to suppress. As Barthes might frame it, the myth has been denaturalized.

Findings and Discussion

The play *Traffickers* by Chukwuma Anyanwu reveals a detailed symbolic structure where language, space, gesture, and bodily performance are not just theatrical elements but ideological expressions. These sign systems converge to portray a society where economic hardship, gender vulnerability, and moral erosion intersect to fuel the trafficking enterprise. The Niger Delta context lends further resonance to this structure, thereby exposing how structural neglect and economic frustration are repackaged as migration dreams and survival narratives.

Worthy of note, the use of ironic names such as "Ultimate Madam" and "Konnected" serve as ideological signifier which emphasise how deception and commodification are normalise. Their speech, rituals, and recruitment strategies present trafficking not as coercion but as a legitimate pathway to success. This mirrors the lived realities in many Niger Delta communities, where persistent underdevelopment, unemployment, and oil-induced ecological degradation have made migration seem like the only viable future for many youths.

More so, language is also core to the performance of exploitation in the play. The traffickers code their manipulation in Pidgin English, which enables them to appear relatable and trustworthy. Phrases like "get connected" or "you go hammer" subtly mask the dangers of their schemes, while exploiting the popular language of street survival. However, voices of morality in the play, such as Godknows, speak in formal English, to signal authority and restraint. This linguistic shift helps differentiate between moral and exploitative ideologies; while depicting how power is often exercised through language choices.

Furthermore, the use of costumes and the deployment of body movements in the play also portray symbolic meanings. Female characters like Gift, Joy, and Rose are presented as physical texts, thus; stripped, appraised, and trained in postures that show availability. Their bodies become commodities long before they cross any border. The ritualistic interviews, the queues, the commands to smile or undress, work to dehumanize them while maintaining a façade of formality. The Niger Delta's gendered experience of economic collapse; where women are simultaneously burdened with survival and robbed of agency, is portrayed in the play.

Another significant symbolic role in the play is the space. Traditional and communal settings like the village square are recontextualised as recruitment grounds. On the other hand, the shrine, once a sacred space, becomes a site of coercion, where rituals and oaths are used not to preserve identity but to instil fear and ensure silence. This inversion of space aligns with what has happened in the Niger Delta, where sacred land and ancestral waters have been polluted by oil politics, and once-communal spaces now symbolises betrayal and displacement.

Perhaps the most critical finding is the ideological work done by the myth of "opportunity." The traffickers constantly invoke the idea of a better life abroad, giving "golden tickets" and painting fantasies of success. The myth is so persistent and culturally coded that even victims begin to internalise it. It takes moments of collapse like Gift's fainting or Joy's sudden outburst, to break this illusion. These acts of resistance, though small, are symbolically powerful. They represent the human refusal to be consumed, and they challenge the very myths on which trafficking depends.

However, what the play *Traffickers* successfully stages is not just the movement of bodies across borders; rather, the movement of meaning through society, how dreams are converted into dangers, how survival is sold as salvation, and how silence is ritualised as consent. Consequently, when read through the perspective of Niger Delta, Anyanwu's *Traffickers* becomes not only a critique of trafficking but a portrayal of a region where neglect has been normalised and escape, even dangerous escape, has become a form of hope.

Conclusion

Chukwuma Anyanwu*'s Traffickers* is not a play about distant or isolated events. It is a reflection of realities that daily unfold in the Niger Delta and beyond, where lives are weighed, priced, and trafficked under the illusion of opportunity. Through its multiple semiotic structures, the play draws attention to the systems that make such trafficking possible; not only individual greed or moral failure but an extended structure of systemic violence, gendered oppression, and economic deception. Significant to say, the names of characters, their gestures, the spaces they occupy, and the language they speak all carry symbolic meanings. These are not mere artistic choices but coded messages which depict how human lives are reduced to signs of worth in a decayed commodified world. The village square becomes a recruitment station. The shrine becomes a theatre of fear. Speech becomes a weapon of seduction and betrayal. The human body becomes both the product and the advertisement.

Within this symbolic world, the Niger Delta experience adds urgency. Communities already devastated by oil exploitation are now caught in a second cycle of exploitation; this time from the global economy of trafficking. The region's youth, desperate for escape, are trapped between local collapse and foreign illusion. Their hardship is not accidental but patterned a product of historical abandonment and ineptitude leadership. In other words, the traffickers in the play are not just villains; they are symptoms of a society that has failed to protect its most vulnerable. However, within this bleakness, the play also presents a language of resistance. The fainting of Gift, the silence of Belief, the moral voice of Mr. Godknows, and even Afro's internal dissent are all signs of rupture; a moment when the ideology begins to unveil. These performances may not lead to full emancipation, but they challenge the codes, disturb the order, and open the possibility of re-signifying the terms of survival.

To sum up, Anyanwu's *Traffickers* is more than an artistic work on human trafficking. It is a symbolic record of a society in which survival has become a costly burden, identity is reduced to market value, and hope is often scripted as betrayal. This paper contends that the play stands as a potent cultural document that which the unspoken crisis in the Niger Delta and powerfully dramatises the semiotic dimensions of human commodification in a world defined by economic desperation and moral decline.

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RIVER ÒLÙWÀ'S WATER-FRONT: A TOURIST ATTRACTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract: River Òlùwà flows through many human settlements in both Ondo State's southerly and riverine axis - consisting of Okitipupa, Ese-Odo, and Ilaje Local Government Areas (LGAs), constituting an integral part of the State's Southern Senatorial District. Its water-front in Okitipupa Town - the headquarters of Okitipupa LGA - has long been identified as a potential tourist-centre, in Ondo State, if properly developed because of its scenic landscape and serene surroundings. The Òlùwà River is just not a veritable source of livelihood for many along its banks and other local communities; but, also, a very viable asset/resource for sustainable development. The study, therefore, explores the possibility of the River's water-front, in Okitipupa Town, becoming a prominently sustainable tourist-centre for Ondo State. The study's methodological approach adopts an all-inclusive analysis of the River's cultural and environmental significance e.g., traditional/indigenous beliefs and practices associated with it and location - while, also, assessing the bio-diversity and ecological integrity of the area. Furthermore, the study duly examines the current situation of tourism within Ondo State as well as identifying challenges to and highlighting opportunities for sustainable development. Findings reveal that modernizing the waterfront will produce significant socio-economic benefits for the area and the entire state, including: eenterprise development, creation of new jobs, improvement of infrastructure, alternative sources of

income for local communities, increased internally generated revenue (IGR) for the state and significant contributions to the sustainable development of Ondo State's tourist industry. Based on these findings, it is strongly recommended that the waterfront be extensively modernized to become a viable tourist centre.

Keywords: Sustainable Development; River Òlùwà; Tourist-Centre, Tourism Industry.

Introduction

Rivers are one of the ubiquitous resources of the earth, found unevenly in almost every geographical location and constitute many wetlands (Omosulu, Akinrinmade & Sogbon, 2023). The river is fresh water that flows from high to low place and endures to the biggest river, lake or sea (Fachrudin & Lubis, 2016). Ariver is a source of fresh water that must be managed comprehensively and sustainably to ensure the well-being of the people (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 7 Tahun 2004 in Maryono, 2009).

Rivers are used for agricultural production, transportation, recreation, industrial process, fishing and domestic uses. Rivers also influence the typology and morphology of settlements. For instance, London, New York, Cairo, Lokoja and to mention a few are great cities whose growth and development are influenced by their uniqueness of locations along river courses (Omosulu, Akinrinmade & Sogbon, 2023). Rivers are foundations of life and livelihoods, and are keys to sustainable development (Guppy & Anderson, 2017). Rivers serve as the primary source of renewable freshwater for humans and hold in some of the highest levels of biodiversity on Earth.

Rivers represent a major tourism resource, providing spectacular settings, recreation facilities, a means of transport, a sense of heritage and adventure, and links with the environment and natural world. River tourism accounts for an important proportion of the world's tourism consumption, with activities such as Nile cruises and rafting holidays making it an economically important area of tourism (Prideaux, Timothy & Cooper, 2009).

Òlùwàriver runs through many human settlements in Okitipupa and Ilaje Local Government Area, Southern part of Ondo State. The river lies between 40.40°N –

60.00°E and 50.00°N – 60.20°E. This river is used for silicamining, artisanal fishing and domestic purposes. It has tributaries that empty into the coast with length of approximately 80 Km and run through 50 human settlements (Olaniyan, Ugwumba, & Ayoade, 2019). The unique location and breathtaking beauty of ÒlùwàRiver inform this research.

Statement of the Problem

Rivers are an important but surprisingly neglected aspect of the global tourism industry. Yet rivers form the basis for many of the ecosystems that underpin ecotourism and other recreational activities, in addition to providing water to sustain urban growth, farming, agriculture-related experiences such as viticulture and the transport of goods and people. Compared to the research and industry attention that ocean cruising has attracted recently (Dowling, 2006), rivers have apparently been of little interest to tourism academics, although the same cannot be said for leisure and recreation scholars, who have demonstrated considerable in fluvial systems as outdoor recreation resources in recent years (Herrick and McDonald, 1992; Adams, 1993; Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000; McKean et al., 2005).   ÒlùwàRiver serves multiple purposes; however, due to inactive economic activities, the river has become overrun with water hyacinths. This paper, therefore, examinesthe possibility of the Òlùwàriver's water-front in Okitipupatown, becoming a prominently sustainable tourist-centre for OndoState and also assessing the bio-diversity and ecological integrity of the area.

Water Tourism

Water tourism area is developed with complete facilities and services, both for leisure and trans-formative experiences. And there are some elements of the tourism plan, namely: the natural and socio-economic environment; attractiveness and tourist activities; accommodation; transportation; institutional elements; other infrastructure; facilities, utilities and other travel services; domestic and international tourism market as well as the use of tourism infrastructure by local residents (Inskeep, 1991 in Agnes, 2005). According Soemarwoto (2001 in I Made, 2002), tourism is an industry that sells the physical and social environment existing culture to domestic and foreign tourists. Tourism consists of three basic elements, namely:

a. Mechanical elements--the issue of living to the selected destination or destination.

b. Elements of statistics-the issue of living in the goal area.

c. Elements consequence--the results of the above two elements related to their effects on ecosystems and social.

According to Fandeli (2001 in I Made, 2002), tourism object is the embodiment of human creation, way of life, art and culture and history of the place and the nation or the state of nature that has been attractive to tourists. Water is the main focus of tourism in nature or open space. The setting is unplanned or natural. Water tourism is usually supported by facilities and tourist activities related to the water fun or entertainment while enjoying the scenery or activity tourist attractions water. By leveraging water tourism, the Ondo State government can invest in the required infrastructure.

Benefits of River and Water Tourism

Tourism gives water resources great potential, combining their protection with respectful use. From an environmental perspective, river tourism provides opportunities to develop and implement new sustainable model of water resource management. Major excitement activities that can be done through the river include water adventure tourism which comprises water-rafting, river-cruise, fishing, river exploration, boating, kayaking and leisure that could be interesting parts to attracts the tourist thus could potentially develop the selected area. Water sports and hikes are also a part of adventure along the riverside. This will help the area develop a high-quality residential environment, quality of health and leisure. The number of tourists also brings economic income growth, making the government pay more attention to the economic benefits and ignore environmental protection. The development of tourism in cities will increase job creation and job diversification and create jobs that are highly dependent on tourism (Earth5r, n.d.).

Negative Impacts of River Tourism

The water environment in the natural environment is relatively easier to be affected by human activities. Once the water environment is polluted, the aquatic organisms are the first to be involved. Then, the land environment near the water

environment watershed will affect the growth of surface organisms. If not prevented, the unsustainable development of tourist attractions will eventually lead to exhaustion of tourism resources and stagnation of tourism development. In this regard, the government must take proactive measures during planning phase (Earth5r, n.d.).

The Study Area

The study was conducted at Okitipupa Local Government Area (OLGA), Ondo State, Nigeria with a population of 234,138 and a land area of 803 km². They are Ikales-speaking people (Salami, 2023).The Òlùwà River is located in the coastal region of Ondo State, Nigeria, and flows through the Okitipupa area. Okitipupa is a central town in the Ondo South senatorial district, which includes other riverine areas like Ese-Odo and Irele. Òlùwàriver is one of the major rivers in this region, along with others like the Arun River, Ipeluriver, and Ipororiver (Olaniyan, Ugwumba, & Ayoade, 2019).
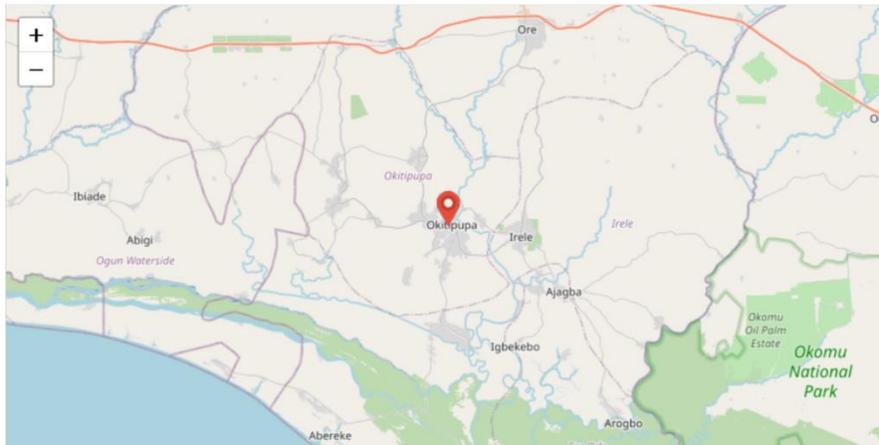
Map of Okitipupa showing other communities along the coastline

Source: https://nz.maptons.com/2901231

Data Collection Methods

Out of the administered questionnaire schedules, two hundred (200) copies were retrieved from purposively selected residents in Okitipupa community. Nine (9) complementary focus group-discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with residents to gain more insight in the subject matter. Data generated with questionnaire were presented in simple percentage and frequency distribution

tables. Data generated from the FGDs, which were conducted in local language, were recorded in both audiotapes and notebooks was subsequently transcribed and translated and presented in content analysis form. And snapshots of phonographs during the research were presented in plates.

Results and Discussion of Findings

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
	Gender		
	Male	94	47%
	Female	106	53%
2	**Occupation**		
	Trader	40	20%
	Civil Servants	80	40%
	Entrepreneur	30	15%
	Fishing	10	5%
	Students	22	11%
	Others	18	9%
3	**Number of Years in the Community**		
	1-5 years	25	12.5%
	6-10years	35	17.5%
	11-15years	40	20%
	16-20years	45	22.5%
	21 and above years	55	27.5%
4	**Educational Qualifications**		
	No Formal Education	-	-
	Primary School Qualifications	20	10%
	Secondary School Education/OND	70	35%
	HND/BSc Qualifications	80	40%
	MSc and above	30	15%
	Total	**200**	**100**

Socio-Economic Impacts of River Tourism

S/N	Socio-Economic Impacts of Tourism	SA	A	U	D	SD
5	The modernization of the water-front will make a significant contribution to the economic growth of the area, both directly and indirectly, by facilitating the supply of goods and services that cater to tourist activities. This will help alleviate poverty in Okitipupa and its surrounding communities	120(60%)	70(35%)	10(5%)	-	-
6	IF river Òlùwà river-front, becomes a well developed tourist centre it will produce social benefits to the area and the entire State like; enterprises' development,	130(65%)	65(32.5%)	5(2.5%)	-	-

	creation of new jobs, improvement of infrastructure etc. Many unemployed youths will have jobs.				
7	Tourism is considered as an element of community development; if this river-front tourist centre is well advertised, Okitipupa community will become a place of relaxation and tourist centre for both local and international tourists.	135(67.5%)	55(27.5%)	5(2.5%)	5(2.5%)	-
8	Tourism can positively contribute to the maintenance of natural environment by protecting, creating or maintaining the river. And when the river-front becomes developed and	85(42.5%)	60(30%)	30(15%)	10(5%)	15(7.5%)

	known, it will attract foreign investors.					
9	When the river-front is well cleaned it will even increase fishing activities and tourists can engage in fishing, boat cruising and it can increase the population of the area and enhance women's participation in economic activities.	100(50%)	50(25%)	20(10%)	15(7.5%)	15(7.5%)
S/N	Effects of Tourism					
10	Through this innovation, people in Okitipupa can mix with other people from diverse backgrounds with different lifestyles which through 'demonstration effect' may lead to the development of improved lifestyles and practices from the tourists'	80(40%)	60(30%)	20(10%)	20(10%)	20(10%)

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11	Improvement in lifestyle of the people, increase in population can lead to increase in crime rate and affect the indigenous culture and tradition of the people negatively	95(47.5%)	30(15%)	15(7.5%)	20(10%)	40(20%)

Social Characteristics

Item one from the table indicates that 94(47.0%) of the respondents are males and 106(53.0%) are females. Item two from the table revealed that 40(20%) were traders, the majority of the respondents 80(40%) were civil servants which indicates that the residents in the study area are mainly civil servants, 30(15%) were entrepreneurs, and only 10(5%) were into fishing which indicates that fishing business is going into extinction in the study area. While 22(11%) of the respondents were students, this may due to the establishment of a university in the area. And 18(9%) were in the category of others. Item three from the table reveals that, 25(12.5%) of the respondents have lived between 1-5 years in the communities, 35(17.5%) have lived up to 6-10years, 40(20%) have lived between 11-15years, 45(22.5%) have lived between 16-20years while the majority 55(27.5%) have live in the communities for 21 and above years. Item four from the table, further shows that none of the respondents have no formal education, 20(10%) have primary school qualifications, 70(35%), Secondary School Education/OND, 80(40%) Higher National Diploma and BSc. and 30(15%) of the respondents are with higher degrees.

Socio-Economic Impacts of River Tourism

Item five from the table reveals that majority 120(60%) strongly agreed that the modernization of the water-front will make a significant contribution to the economic growth of the area, both directly and indirectly, by facilitating the supply of goods and services that cater to tourist activities. This will help

alleviate poverty in Okitipupa and its surrounding communities. 70 (35%) of the respondents agreed to the idea, and 10(5%) were undecided.

Furthermore, during the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) on the socio-economic impactsof river tourism in Okitipupa area of Ondo State, Kuye claimed that:

> if this idea of river-front tourism becomes true and standardized, it will bring about tremendousdevelopment to the people and the communities around and this can also spark creativity among the unemployed youths and create more jobs. And if this is properly developed it can bring the Okitipupa community into limelight for foreign investors and it can further enhance women's economic participation and empowerment by increasing buying and selling (Kuye, oral interview, 2025).

Moreover, in an oral interview (2025), Ara, a retired head teacher, revealedthat during festive periods like Easter and New Year holiday, people around here do not have modern places for picnic but if these kinds of water-front tourist become standardized, people will turn in for more leisure activities like fishing, water-rafting, boating, river-cruise, river exploration, kayaking, water sports and other meaningful adventure along the riverside that can improve quality of life. This can also help develop the communities and support sustainable development capable of fixing unstable economies and, essentially, incorporating members with their communities for sustainable development. And if this is done in partnership with external change-agents, such as intervention agencies - e.g., private individuals, State and Local governments & advocacy groups for community development, especially, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). It can enhance sustainability and also help restrain the negative effects of river tourism such as pollution of the environment.

In another oral interview, Jale (2025), an entrepreneur opines during the FGDs that if the river-front of Òlùwà River is developed and modernizedwith the typical beautiful water-side and terrain, the development of tourism in the area can build people's skills towards community development, and it can be a vital source to economic survival for both the communities in Okitipupa and the entire state. According to Jale, the tourist attraction that will be birthed, can raise

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necessary funds for community development, create jobs, enhance community-pride, and promote indigenous culture.

Item six from the table reveals that majority 130(65%) of the respondents strongly agreed that if the Òlùwà river-frontbecomes a well-developed tourist centre, it will produce social benefits to the area and the entire state. It will foster development, creation of new jobs, improvement of infrastructure etc. Many unemployed youths will have jobs. 65(32.5%) of the respondents agreed to the idea, and 5(2.5%) of the respondents were undecided about the idea.

One of the interviewees, Alli (2025) a trader, during the FGDs, claimed that if the tourist centre is well-developed with the numerous economic prospects, it will help boost the standard of living of the people in the area, and, it will also enhance the quality of life of the people and their families.Similarly, Igbe (2025) a civil servant, during the FGDs argued that tourism development will also help in the spread of enlightenment and literacy of the people. And this will help us to strengthen our mental attitude by interacting with various people with different languages and cultures.

Item seven from the table shows that majority 135(67.5%) strongly agreed that tourism is considered as an element of community development. If this river-front tourist centre is well advertised,Okitipupa community will become a place of relaxation and tourist centre for both local and international tourists. 55(27.5%) of the respondents agreed to the claim 5(2.5%) of respondents were undecided and 5(2.5%) disagreed to the claim. Those who were undecided and disagreed to the claim are probably those with low formal education and possibly have little or no exposure.

Item eight from the table shows that majority 85(42.5%) strongly agreed that tourism can positively contribute to the maintenance of natural environment by protecting, creating or maintaining the river. They maintained that when the riverarea becomeswell-developed and known, it will attract foreign investors. 60(30%) of the respondents agreed to the idea, 30(15%) of the respondents were undecided, 10(5%) disagreed to the idea, while were 15(7.5%) strongly disagreed to the idea.

Furthermore, Oke (oral interview, 2025) during the FGDs claimed that a well modernizedtouristcenter cannot discontinue the serenity and equanimity of this

area; it will only beautify it, although, there could be increase in population and social crime, the government's has a role to play to remedy such situations. Item nine from the table shows that majority, 100(50%) of the respondents strongly agreed that when the river is well cleaned it will even increase fishing activities and tourists can engage in fishing, boat cruising and it can increase the population of the area, which will also enhance women's participation in economic activities. While 50(25%) of the respondents agreed to the claim, 20(10%) were undecided, 15(7.5%) disagreed and 15(7.5%) of the respondents strongly disagreed to the claim.

Ara (oral interview, 2025) suggested during the FGDs that for properly modernizedtouristcentre in this river-front, more hotels, motels, camping grounds, guest houses etc are needed, and the old neglected ones around the Oil Mill should be renovated to be in place to beautify the environment and enhance tourism development. If all these are in place that will constantly allow the government to maintain the water by occasionally cutting the water hyacinth. This will also improve our fishing activities andraise awareness among local residents about the importance of river and river-side tourism activities.

Effects ofRiver Tourism Development

Item ten from the table shows that majority, 80(40%) of the respondents strongly agreed to opinion that through this innovation, people in Okitipupa can mix with other people from diverse backgrounds with different lifestyles which through 'demonstration effect' may lead to the development of improved lifestyles and practices from the tourists. While 60(30%) of the respondents agreed to this opinion, 20(10%) were undecided, 20(10%) of the respondents disagreed to the opinion, and 20(10%) strongly disagreed to the opinion.

Item eleven from the table shows that, majority, 95(47.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed that improvement in community life of the people and increase in population can lead to increase in crime rate and affect the social, culture and tradition negatively. While 30(15%) of the respondents strongly agreed to this idea. 15(7.5%) of the respondents were undecided, 20(10%) disagreed with the idea and, 40(20%) strongly disagreed with the idea. They believe that increase in population cannot lead to increase in crime rate probably when there are enough security measures in place.Also, during the FGDs Aro (oral interview, 2025)

claimed that, increase in the influx people due to migration may lead to cultural diffusion and this may erode on the indigenous culture and tradition of the people and this may affect Okitipupa culture negatively, although this will still help preserve the river and decrease the wave of erosion and pollution affecting the river currently.

Plan of action for River Tourism in Okitipupa

During FGDs, the participants suggested the following: construction of visible attractions, personal communication, and advertising, internet marketing and promotional images as some of the plan of action to bring the river-front tourist centre into lime-light.

As suggested by one of the participants during the FGDs Mrs. Are, 27years old, female, actress that, promotional images of the river-side like clearing of the water hyacinth, construction of few cruise boats, trimming of the trees at sides of the river, construction of village huts and bush bars at the sides of the river, with all these in place, awareness can then be created on the internet and beyond.

River Òlùwà in the days of water transportation   Same River Òlùwà from Okitipupa to
from Okitipupa to Irele and during Ogigi festival   Irele has become overrun with water hyacinths,
                                                       rendering it devoid of any functional economic value

River Òlùwà water-side (current state with small sand mining boats at the riverbank big sand mining boats)

Relaxing mode of a tourist in Burgundy

Source: https://www.burgundy-tourism.com/discover-burgundy/along-the-canals-and-rivers/5-good-reasons-to-try-river-tourism/

The current state of the water-side front Okitipupa.

Waterside town and heritage sites at Burgundy in

Conclusion

Rivers represent a major tourism resource, providing spectacular settings, recreation facilities, a means of transport, a sense of heritage and adventure. They are also serve as inks with the environment and natural world. The tourism sector is playing an important role in the economic development of developing countries. River tourism accounts for an important proportion of the world's tourism consumption, with activities such as swimming, and sports activities, fishing, rafting, canoeing, river kayaking, etc. making it an economically

important area of tourism. The host'senvironment will also be transformed to different degrees in the process. A total of two hundred (200) completed questionnaire schedule were collected from the purposively selected residents in Okitipupa community, while nine (9) complementary focus group-discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with residents to gain more insight in the subject matter.

Findings reveal that modernizing the waterfront will produce significant socio-economic benefits for the area and the entire state, including: enterprise development, creation of new jobs, improvement of infrastructure, alternative sources of income for local communities, increased internally generated revenue (IGR) for the state and significant contributions to the sustainable development of Ondo State's tourist industry. Although, tourists will produce different levels of pollutants in the process of tourism. However, the paper suggests that using a self-management approach, with assistance from some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and/or other intervention agencies and private individuals, the local government authority in Okitipupa local government area should further take advantage of this naturally favored area by actively engaging in sustainable plans to create the required awareness for a achievable river-front tourist-centre.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT OF KIDNAPPING ON THE FAMILIES OF THE VICTIM'S IN AGUATA, ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract: Kidnapping has become a widespread and persistent security challenge in Nigeria, with significant socio-psychological implications, particularly in the South-East region. This study investigates the psychological experiences, emotional distress, and coping mechanisms of families of kidnapping victims in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. The study specifically, identified the major psychological and emotional challenges experienced by the families of kidnapped victims in Aguata LGA, assessed the prevalence of trauma-related conditions such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among these families, and evaluated the availability, accessibility, and adequacy of psychosocial and mental health support services for families of kidnapped victims in the study area. This study relied on the theories of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and the Trauma theory by Herman (1992) to explain the social phenomena under review. This study adopted a mixed-methods research design. The population of the study comprised family members of kidnapping victim's spouses, parents, siblings, and adult children (aged 18 and above) who had experienced abduction-related trauma between 2015 and

2024. A total sample of 400 respondents was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula. The multi-stage sampling technique was employed to elicit data, while affected households through collaboration with traditional leaders, vigilante groups, NGOs, and community-based organizations were purposively selected and snowball sampling was then used to reach additional participants by purposively selecting ten towns for the study. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS version 25 and the descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, standard deviations) were used to present the result. 30 participants were purposively selected from the survey pool for in-depth interviews. The findings reveal a pattern of chronic emotional disturbance exacerbated by cultural stigma, weak mental health infrastructure, and lack of institutional support. The study recommends amongst others, that the Federal and State lawmakers should advocate for policies that recognize and protect the rights of secondary victims of kidnapping, including provisions for psychosocial support in national security and disaster response frameworks.

Introduction

In recent years, Nigeria has witnessed a disturbing rise in kidnapping incidents, particularly in the South-East geopolitical zone, where the crime has evolved from politically motivated abductions to profit-driven attacks targeting individuals across various social classes (Onuoha, 2013; Omeni, 2015; Ejirefe & Egwuaba, 2023). Kidnapping, broadly defined as the unlawful and forceful detention of an individual against their will, now constitutes both a major security threat and an escalating public health concern (Edeko, 2011). While the experiences of direct victims have received increasing scholarly and policy attention, the psychological and mental health impacts on their families, the often-overlooked secondary victims-remain critically underexplored. In Aguata Local Government Area (LGA) of Anambra State, one of the regions severely affected by this trend, families of kidnap victims are frequently subjected to prolonged psychological distress. Emotions such as fear, helplessness, and anticipatory grief often give rise to serious mental health challenges, including

post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation (Ugwueze & Onuoha, 2019; Ilechukwu, 2020; Egwuaba et al., 2024). The uncertainty surrounding the fate of abducted loved ones, the trauma of ransom negotiations and social isolation intensify these psychological burdens (Egwuaba & Ebisi, 2021; Adebayo, 2013).

Despite the profound mental toll on these families, structured psychosocial support systems are largely absent, particularly in rural and semi-urban communities like Aguata. Compounding this gap are cultural norms that stigmatize mental illness and valorize emotional resilience, thereby discouraging individuals from seeking professional psychological help (Eze, 2021). The structural weaknesses in Nigeria's mental health care system, especially the limited integration of trauma-informed services within the primary healthcare framework further hinder early diagnosis, referral, and treatment of affected individuals (World Health Organization, 2018; Egwuaba & Olisa, 2020).While previous research has focused predominantly on the political, security, and economic dimensions of kidnapping in Nigeria (Adebayo, 2013; Omeni, 2015), empirical studies addressing its psychological impact on families of victims remain sparse. This represents a significant gap in both academic literature and policy intervention; particularly as the long-term mental health consequences for secondary victims remain severe and unaddressed (Van der Kolk, 2003; Paredes et al., 2020; Egwuaba & Egboh, 2025).

Statement of the Problem

Kidnapping has become an endemic security and public health crisis in Nigeria, with the South-East zone and Aguata LGA in particular, experiencing sustained increases in both frequency and severity. While direct victims often receive some attention, the families of kidnapped individuals endure prolonged psychological suffering, which includes PTSD, anxiety, depression, and in some cases, suicidal thoughts (Ilechukwu, 2020; Egwuaba, 2019; Van der Kolk, 2003). These psychological effects are exacerbated by extended periods of uncertainty, financial strain from ransom demands, and a lack of institutional and community-based mental health support (Paredes, González & Sánchez, 2020; Egwuaba & Nnatuanya, 2021). Despite the intensity and persistence of these mental health issues, secondary victims remain largely invisible in national policy, academic research, and public discourse. Structural deficiencies in the Nigerian healthcare system, especially in underserved areas like Aguata, and

deeply rooted cultural stigma further prevent affected families from accessing much-needed support (World Health Organization, 2018; Owoyemi et al., 2020; Eze, 2021).This study, therefore, seeks to fill a critical knowledge and policy gap by examining the psychological and mental health impact of kidnapping on the families of victims in Aguata LGA, with the aim of informing more inclusive mental health policy, trauma-informed care, and community-based interventions.

Objectives of the Study

This study sought to:

1. identify the major psychological and emotional challenges experienced by the families of kidnapped victims in Aguata LGA;
2. assess the prevalence of trauma-related conditions such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among these families;
3. evaluate the availability, accessibility, and adequacy of psychosocial; and mental health support services for families of kidnapped victims in the study area.

Literature Review

Kidnapping is broadly defined as the unlawful seizure and detention of a person against their will, often for ransom, political gain, or coercion (Edeko, 2011). In the Nigerian context, kidnapping has evolved from politically motivated abductions to economically driven crimes involving civilians, with devastating psychological and financial consequences for both the victims and their families (Onuoha, 2013).**Psychological impact** refers to the emotional and cognitive consequences of a traumatic event, including anxiety, depression, irritability, and emotional instability (Van der Kolk, 2003). Mental health**,** as defined by the World Health Organization (2018), is a state of well-being in which individuals realize their abilities, cope with normal life stresses, work productively, and contribute to their communities. When families experience the abduction of a loved one, the disruption to these functions often results in distress and, in severe cases, psychiatric disorders such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and acute stress reaction (Ilechukwu, 2020).**Secondary victims**, in this context, are the family members, friends, and close associates of

the primary victim (i.e., the abducted individual). These individuals may suffer emotional trauma even without direct physical exposure to the kidnapping event (Paredes et al., 2020). Given Nigeria's weak mental health infrastructure and cultural tendencies to suppress emotional distress (Eze, 2021; Egwuaba, 2018b), families often lack access to coping resources.

Major psychological and emotional challenges experienced by the families of kidnapped victims

Kidnapping often initiates a prolonged period of psychological suffering for the victim's family members. These families live in a state of constant uncertainty, fear, and grief, particularly during the captivity period. According to Ilechukwu (2020), families often experience a sense of helplessness, guilt, and emotional breakdown. In a study of 75 respondents in Enugu State, he found that nearly 70% reported significant emotional disturbances, including weeping spells, insomnia, and panic attacks. These symptoms are heightened by prolonged negotiations, media attention, and threats from abductors. Similarly, Ugwueze and Onuoha (2019) noted that mothers of kidnapped children frequently exhibited signs of psychological exhaustion, social withdrawal, and emotional numbness, especially in communities where stigma is attached to being associated with crime or misfortune. The emotional toll is compounded by the collapse of normal routines, financial hardship, and strained social relationships, which often follow in the wake of a family member's abduction. In a study in Latin America, Paredes et al. (2020) documented similar findings, describing the emotional landscape of affected families as "a silent battlefield" of rage, despair, and guilt. While the cultural contexts differ, the emotional responses to kidnapping are universally intense and destabilizing, underscoring the global relevance of this phenomenon.

The prevalence of trauma-related conditions such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD among these families

The psychological effects of kidnapping on families extend beyond temporary distress. Longitudinal studies have confirmed the persistence of psychiatric conditions among secondary victims. Ilechukwu (2020) identified that among relatives of abductees, 42% displayed PTSD symptoms such as intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, hypervigilance, and nightmares. An additional 35% were

diagnosed with moderate to severe depressive episodes characterized by hopelessness, suicidal ideation, and psychosomatic complaints. In the same vein, Van der Kolk (2003) provides a theoretical basis for these findings, noting that vicarious trauma particularly when it involves close family ties activates similar neurobiological responses as direct trauma. This includes overactivation of the amygdala and hippocampus, resulting in difficulty concentrating, memory loss, and heightened startle responses. The mental health consequences are further exacerbated by prolonged waiting periods, lack of closure, or the return of the victim in poor physical or psychological condition. In Nigerian settings, this is aggravated by the absence of early intervention programs or trauma-informed care, allowing these disorders to persist untreated (World Health Organization, 2018; Egwuaba & Sunday, 2023; Egwuaba, Egboh, & Nweke, 2024).

Socio-cultural factors influencing the mental health outcomes and coping strategies of affected families

The cultural framework within which families interpret and respond to kidnapping has a profound impact on their psychological wellbeing. In Igbo society, where stoicism, communal pride, and spiritual interpretations of misfortune are prevalent, psychological suffering is often internalized. Eze (2021) found that affected families, especially in Anambra State, tended to mask their distress for fear of appearing spiritually weak or socially pitied. As a result, individuals rarely seek formal counselling and instead rely on prayer, silence, or traditional rituals. Further, Onuoha (2013) explains that the cultural tendency to attribute kidnapping to ancestral curses, moral failures, or spiritual attack contributes to self-blame and social isolation. This stigmatization may result in secondary victimization, where affected families not only deal with trauma but also face gossip, alienation, or blame within their communities. Coping strategies, therefore, often skew toward spiritual resilience rather than psychological rehabilitation. Eze (2021) documented that families turned to fasting, church vigils, and visits to traditional healers as primary coping mechanisms. While these practices offer emotional consolation, they may delay proper psychological care and entrench harmful beliefs about mental illness.

The availability, accessibility, and adequacy of psychosocial and mental health support services for families of kidnapped victims

Despite the clear need for trauma support services, empirical data consistently show that mental health infrastructure in Nigeria remains grossly inadequate, especially in rural and semi-urban areas such as Aguata LGA. According to the WHO (2018), Nigeria has fewer than 300 registered psychiatrists, the majority of whom practice in urban centres. Community-level access to psychological care is almost nonexistent, leaving victims and their families to rely on informal and often untrained support networks. Also, Adebayo (2013) and Omeni (2015) noted that government responses to kidnapping have been largely security-focused, with little emphasis on post-crisis rehabilitation. There are no formal government-led trauma recovery programs in most LGAs in Nigeria, and civil society interventions remain sparse and underfunded. This systemic gap has allowed emotional and psychiatric conditions among families of kidnap victims to go unnoticed and untreated, fostering cycles of trauma that affect entire households. Furthermore, even when services exist, cultural resistance to mental health care rooted in stigma and ignorance remains a major barrier. Families may be unaware of their emotional condition or may perceive counselling as inappropriate or ineffective compared to spiritual remedies (Eze, 2021; Egwuaba, 2018a).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and the Trauma Theory by Herman (1992), which both offers a comprehensive lens to understand the multifaceted impacts of kidnapping on families by situating individual psychological experiences within broader socio-environmental contexts. The theory posits that human development and behaviour are influenced by interactions across multiple nested systems: the microsystem (immediate environment), mesosystem (connections between microsystems), exosystem (indirect environments), macrosystem (cultural and societal norms), and chronosystem (time-related changes and transitions). While the Trauma Theory (Herman, 1992) conceptualizes trauma as an overwhelming event that shatters an individual's or family's sense of safety, trust, and control. It emphasizes how traumatic events can cause long-lasting psychological disruption, manifesting as symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and depression. In the context of kidnapping, Trauma Theory elucidates how families are not only

indirectly traumatized but also experience vicarious trauma the secondary trauma resulting from exposure to the victim's suffering, media coverage, and the stress of prolonged uncertainty (Van der Kolk, 2003). Families' psychological distress is compounded when social support is limited or stigmatizing, preventing adequate emotional processing and recovery. Complementing Bronfenbrenner's model, Trauma Theory provides a focused psychological explanation for the mental health consequences following kidnapping.

Applying this theory to the families of kidnapping victims in Aguata, the microsystem includes the family members, directly experiencing trauma, whose mental health is affected by the abduction. The mesosystem covers interactions between family and social support networks such as religious institutions, community leaders, and healthcare providers. The exosystem involves local government policies and security agencies' efforts which, although not directly experienced daily by the family, influence their psychological wellbeing through available resources and protective mechanisms. The macrosystem reflects the sociocultural beliefs about mental illness, trauma, spirituality, and stigma within Igbo society and Nigerian culture at large, shaping how families perceive and cope with kidnapping trauma. Lastly, the chronosystem considers the timing and duration of kidnapping and its aftermath, including the prolonged uncertainty or closure that family members experience. This ecological perspective underscores the need to consider not only the individual psychological symptoms of anxiety, depression, or PTSD but also how family members' mental health is affected by, and interacts with, their immediate and broader social environments. For instance, cultural norms that stigmatize mental health issues (macrosystem) and the lack of accessible mental health services (exosystem) may hinder affected families from seeking formal psychological support (microsystem).

Integration and Application of both Theories to the Study

By integrating Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Trauma Theory, this study comprehensively explains the psychological and mental health impact of kidnapping on families in Aguata. The ecological theory situates individual trauma within layered social systems, highlighting sociocultural factors such as stigma, religious beliefs, and community dynamics that influence coping and help-seeking behaviour. Trauma Theory details the internal psychological processes and symptomatology experienced by family members.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design to investigate the psychological and mental health impacts of kidnapping on families of victims in Aguata Local Government Area (LGA), Anambra State, Nigeria. The target population included spouses, parents, siblings, and adult children (aged 18 and above) of individuals who had experienced kidnapping between 2015 and 2024. A total sample size of 400 respondents was calculated using Cochran's (1977) formula n= $\frac{Z^2(pq)}{e^2}$ at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. First, purposive sampling identified affected households through local stakeholders including traditional leaders, vigilante groups, and NGOs. Next, snowball sampling was used to recruit additional participants via referrals. While this approach was necessary due to the sensitive and stigmatized nature of the topic, it introduces potential selection bias, as referrals tend to involve individuals with similar experiences and networks. Consequently, the sample may not fully represent the broader population of affected families.

Furthermore, the study was limited to Aguata LGA, and although this provides an in-depth case study, findings should not be generalized to other regions of Nigeria without caution, as the sociocultural and security dynamics may vary. Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire incorporating items from standardized instruments such as the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist-Civilian Version (PCL-C) and Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II). The tools were translated into Igbo and back-translated into English to ensure semantic equivalence. However, these tools were not formally psychometrically validated in the Igbo language, which may limit the cultural precision and reliability of the measurements.

For the qualitative component, 30 participants were purposively selected from the survey pool, ensuring demographic diversity in kinship role, gender, and trauma exposure. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in English or Igbo, audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated for consistency in analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics summarized sociodemographic and psychological variables. Chi-square tests and logistic regression were applied to examine

associations and predict likelihoods of psychological distress outcomes. Odds ratios (ORs) and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were reported and interpreted to indicate practical significance. For instance, participants without access to mental health counselling were over twice as likely to report symptoms of PTSD (OR = 2.18; 95% CI: 1.34–3.54), suggesting a strong and actionable relationship. Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework, involving familiarization, initial coding, theme development, and interpretation. Coding was supported by NVivo software, and inter-coder reliability was strengthened by having a second researcher independently code 30% of the transcripts. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus, improving analytic validity and trustworthiness.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Anambra State Health Research Ethics Committee. All participants gave written informed consent after being briefed on the study's objectives, their right to withdraw, and data confidentiality. Personal identifiers were removed, and interviews were conducted in private settings. Recognizing the potential for emotional retraumatization, all interviews were conducted using trauma-informed protocols. Participants were debriefed after interviews and provided with referral information to free or low-cost mental health services run by a partnering NGO in Ekwulobia. All research assistants were trained in culturally sensitive, ethical, and psychologically safe data collection practices.

Result

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=400)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	168	42.0
	Female	232	58.0
Age (years)	18-29	80	20.0
	30-50	260	65.0
	51 &above	60	15.0
Marital Status	Single	60	15.0
	Married	288	72.0

Divorced/Widowed	52	13.0
Educational Level No Formal Education	40	10.0
Primary/Secondary	180	45.0
Tertiary	180	45.0
Total	**400**	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of respondents involved in the study assessing the psychological and mental health impacts of kidnapping on families of victims in Aguata Local Government Area, Anambra State, Nigeria. The demographic data provide critical context for understanding the social positioning, vulnerability, and coping capacities of participants. Out of the total 400 respondents, 232 (58.0%) were female and 168 (42.0%) were male. The predominance of female respondents reflects the gendered realities of caregiving roles in Nigerian families, where women are often at the forefront of emotional labour during crises. This gender distribution also has implications for the interpretation of mental health outcomes, as women are generally more susceptible to trauma-related disorders such as PTSD and anxiety in conflict-affected contexts.

The majority of respondents, 260 (65.0%), fell within the 30–50 years age bracket, followed by 80 (20.0%) aged 18–29, and 60 (15.0%) aged 51 years and above. This distribution suggests that most participants were adults in their prime working and caregiving years, who are likely to bear the socio-economic and emotional consequences of kidnapping events. The relatively smaller proportion of older adults may also influence symptom reporting, as older individuals may underreport psychological distress due to cultural norms surrounding emotional expression. In terms of marital status, a significant majority of respondents were married (72.0%), while 15.0% were single, and 13.0% were divorced or widowed. The predominance of married individuals indicates that many participants had immediate familial responsibilities, making the psychological and financial burdens of kidnapping particularly acute. Those who are divorced or widowed may experience additional emotional strain due to weakened support networks.

Educational attainment was relatively evenly split between those with primary/secondary education (45.0%) and those with tertiary education (45.0%), while 10.0% of respondents had no formal education. This spread indicates a moderately educated population, with potential implications for awareness of mental health issues and access to coping resources. Respondents with higher education may be more likely to recognize psychological symptoms and seek professional help, though stigma and limited-service availability remain barriers across all educational levels. The demographic composition of the study population suggests a predominantly female, middle-aged, and moderately educated cohort with strong familial responsibilities. These characteristics are critical in understanding the differential exposure and response to trauma, as well as the barriers to mental health service utilization. They also highlight the importance of designing gender-sensitive, age-appropriate, and literacy-aware interventions to support affected families in regions like Aguata.

Table 2: Prevalence of Psychological Distress among Respondents (N=400)

Psychological Symptoms (%)	Category	Frequency	Percentage
PTSD Symptoms (PCL-C Score)	Below Threshold	132	33.0
	Above Threshold	268	
67.0			
	(Probable PTSD)		
Depression Symptoms (BDI-II)	Minimal/Mild		184
46.0			
	Moderate/Severe		216
54.0			
Anxiety Symptoms	Absent/Low		160
40.0			
	Moderate/High		240
60.0			
Total		400	100.0

Source: Field Survey,2025

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Table 2 presents the overall prevalence of three categories of psychological distress post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety among family members of kidnapping victims in Aguata Local Government Area, Anambra State. The data, drawn from a sample of 400 respondents, provide insight into the magnitude of trauma-related mental health symptoms within this vulnerable population. Based on the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist – Civilian Version (PCL-C), 67.0% (n = 268) of respondents scored above the diagnostic threshold, indicating probable PTSD. Only 33.0% (n = 132) scored below the threshold. This high prevalence suggests that more than two-thirds of participants are likely suffering from clinically significant PTSD symptoms, reflecting the severe psychological impact of kidnapping-related trauma and uncertainty. These findings are consistent with global literature linking indirect exposure to violent events, such as having a loved one abducted to persistent and debilitating stress responses.

Depressive symptoms, as measured by the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II), also revealed a substantial burden. While 46.0% (n = 184) of respondents exhibited minimal to mild depression, a slightly larger proportion54.0% (n = 216), reported moderate to severe symptoms, indicating a need for targeted mental health screening and intervention. The data suggest that depressive symptoms are widespread and, in many cases, clinically significant among affected families. These emotional states may be exacerbated by prolonged uncertainty, financial strain due to ransom demands, and a lack of institutional support. Anxiety, another key indicator of psychological distress, was also prevalent. 60.0% (n = 240) of respondents reported moderate to high levels of anxiety, while 40.0% (n = 160) reported absent or low levels. Anxiety was often reported in connection with fear of repeated abduction, ongoing community insecurity, and concern for the safety of other family members. The elevated anxiety levels among the majority of respondents further affirm the acute and chronic psychological toll associated with living under threat or trauma in high-risk environments such as Aguata.

Collectively, the findings in Table 2 underscore the alarming levels of psychological distress among families of kidnapping victims. The prevalence of probable PTSD (67%), moderate to severe depression (54%), and moderate to high anxiety (60%) points to a mental health crisis that is largely unaddressed at the community level. These symptoms not only affect individual well-being but

also disrupt family functioning, social cohesion, and economic productivity. Given the scale of the problem; there is a pressing need for integrated mental health services within the primary healthcare system in Aguata and similar conflict-prone regions. This includes trauma-informed care, community-based counselling, and culturally sensitive interventions to reduce stigma and increase help-seeking behaviour. Public health stakeholders and policymakers must prioritize mental health as a core component of post-kidnapping family recovery strategies. Corroborating this finding, a female IDI participant expressed that:"Every day feels like a nightmare; I can't sleep and keep seeing his face in my mind''(Female respondent, 2025).

Other participants revealed that:

"Even now, I dream about them tying his hands and beating him. I wake up crying and sweating"(Female, 38, /wife of victim/IDI/6/4/2025).

"After it happened, I stopped feeling anything. I was just existing, not living" (Male, 44, /brother of victim/IDI/8/4/2025).

"I used to run a small shop. But now I don't even bother to open it. Nothing excites me anymore" (Female, 41/ mother/IDI/8/4/2025).

"Anytime I hear a siren or a strange voice, my heart starts beating fast. I always feel something bad is coming" (Female, 52, / aunt/IDI/7/4/2025).

"Even though he is back, I still fear someone else will be taken. The fear never left me" (Male, 58, /father/IDI/5/4/2025).

I didn't know this was trauma. I thought I was just weak or losing faith" (Female, 36/sister/IDI/ 6/4/2025).

Table 3: Influence of Social Support on Psychological Distress

Level of Social Support	PTSD Present(f)	PTSD Absent(f)	Depression Present(f)	Depression Absent(f)	Anxiety Present(f)	Anxiety Absent(f)
Low	140	30	150	20	160	10
Moderate	90	60	50	100	60	90
High	38	42	16	64	20	

60

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 presents the relationship between varying levels of social support categorized as low, moderate, and high and the presence or absence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety symptoms among family members of kidnapping victims in Aguata Local Government Area, Anambra State. The data highlight a strong inverse association between the level of perceived social support and the prevalence of psychological distress across all three mental health indicators. PTSD symptoms were most prevalent among respondents with low social support, where 140 individuals reported PTSD compared to just 30 without it. In contrast, among those with moderate support, 90 respondents experienced PTSD while 60 did not. For the high support group, only 38 respondents reported PTSD, while a greater number (42) did not. This progressive decline in PTSD prevalence with increasing social support suggests a protective effect of social support against trauma-induced stress reactions. The findings strongly indicate that higher levels of emotional and interpersonal support can mitigate the development or severity of PTSD symptoms in trauma-affected populations.

A similar pattern emerges with depression. Among respondents with low support, 150 reported depressive symptoms, whereas only 20 did not. Conversely, in the moderate support group, depression was reported by 50 individuals, while 100 reported no symptoms. Among those with high support, depression was present in only 16 cases, while 64 individuals showed no signs of depression. This inverse correlation underscores the critical role of moderate to high levels of social support in buffering individuals against the onset or escalation of depressive symptoms following traumatic experiences such as kidnapping. The pattern is most pronounced in the case of anxiety. Among respondents with low support, a striking 160 individuals reported anxiety, compared to only 10 who did not. In the moderate support category, anxiety was present in 60 cases, while 90 respondents reported no symptoms. The high support group recorded the lowest anxiety prevalence, with 20 individuals experiencing anxiety and 60 reporting no such symptoms. This gradient illustrates that strong social support networks significantly reduce susceptibility to anxiety, even in high-stress environments.

Overall, the data from Table 3 provide compelling evidence that social support serves as a powerful buffer against psychological distress in the context of trauma. The consistent decline in PTSD, depression, and anxiety with increasing levels of support affirms existing theoretical and empirical work on the social-ecological model of mental health, which emphasizes the role of interpersonal networks in resilience and recovery. These findings underscore the need for community-based mental health interventions that incorporate peer support groups, family therapy, and culturally responsive counselling services. In low-resource settings such as Aguata, mobilizing faith-based organizations, traditional leaders, and social clubs to offer structured emotional support may significantly reduce the mental health burden on families of kidnap victims. Supporting the above findings, an IDI participant reported that:"Without my community, I don't know how I would have managed the anxiety and sadness" (Male respondent/IDI/6/4/2025).

Another participant revealed that:"After the incident, we went to the clinic, but they only treated wounds. Nobody asked about our minds" (Fenale respondents/IDI/8/4/2025). An IDI respondent said that while seeking psychological help was viewed with suspicion or shame such that his families feared being labelled as: "mad" or weak if they discussed their mental struggles, people around here do not believe in depression. They think it's spiritual or a sign of weakness" (Male/ respondents/IDI/5/4/2025). While another IDI participant reported that:"Our church helped with prayers. But I still felt empty, like nobody understood what I was going through" (Victim's Sister/IDI/9/4/2025).

Other IDI participants reported as follows:

"My church members visited me almost daily and even helped with the ransom. I felt I wasn't alone, and that kept me going"(Female, 42, spouse/IDI/6/4/2025).

At first, they came to check on us. But when they heard we couldn't pay the ransom quickly, they avoided us. It was like we had a disease" (Male, 53, brother/IDI/8/4/2025).

"As a man, they expect you to be strong. Nobody asks how you're feeling; they only ask what you're doing about the situation" (Male, 47, father/IDI/7/4/2025).

Our pastor prayed for us and always checked on us. That helped me sleep better, even when I was still scared" (Female, 36, mother/IDI/7/4/2025).

"It wasn't many people, but one of my cousins never left my side. That helped more than a thousand empty sympathies"(Female, 50, aunt/IDI/ 2/4/2025).

Table 4: Effect of Duration of Uncertainty on Psychological Symptoms

Duration of Uncertainty (f)	PTSD Present (f)	PTSD Absent (f)	Depression Present (f)	Depression Absent (f)	Anxiety Present (f)	Anxiety Absent
≤ 6 months	90	70	100	60	110	50
> 6 months	178	62	116	104	130	110

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4 presents the distribution of psychological symptoms—specifically post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety—based on the duration of uncertainty experienced by respondents regarding the fate of their kidnapped relatives in Aguata Local Government Area, Anambra State. The variable "duration of uncertainty" was categorized into two groups: respondents who experienced uncertainty lasting six months or less (≤ 6 months) and those who endured uncertainty for more than six months (> 6 months). The findings reveal a clear pattern linking prolonged uncertainty with heightened psychological distress. Among respondents who experienced more than six months of uncertainty, 178 (74.2%) reported PTSD symptoms, while only 62 (25.8%) in this category reported an absence of such symptoms. In contrast, among those with six months or less of uncertainty, 90 (56.3%) presented PTSD symptoms, and 70 (43.7%) did not. This notable disparity suggests a strong association between prolonged emotional ambiguity and the development of PTSD symptoms. The finding aligns with trauma literature indicating that unresolved or extended stressors substantially increase vulnerability to post-traumatic stress.

Depression was also more prevalent among respondents in the >6 months category, with 116 (52.5%) reporting depressive symptoms, compared to 100 (62.5%) in the ≤ 6 months group. Although the margin is less pronounced than for PTSD, the number of individuals reporting the absence of depression was

higher in the prolonged group (104 vs. 60), indicating a more varied psychological response. While depression appears slightly elevated among those with extended uncertainty, it may also be influenced by other contextual factors such as availability of social support, financial strain, or previous trauma history. A similar trend is observed with anxiety. Among respondents with prolonged uncertainty, 130 (54.2%) experienced anxiety symptoms, while 110 (45.8%) did not. Comparatively, in the ≤ 6 months group, 110 (68.8%) reported anxiety, with only 50 (31.2%) reporting its absence. Although anxiety was prevalent in both groups, the difference is less stark, suggesting that anxiety may be a more immediate psychological reaction to kidnapping regardless of the duration of uncertainty, but still slightly intensified over time.

The data demonstrate a consistent relationship between the duration of uncertainty and the prevalence of PTSD, depression, and anxiety, with PTSD showing the most significant sensitivity to prolonged periods of ambiguity. These findings reinforce the argument that unresolved trauma, especially when sustained over time, imposes a severe mental health burden on family members of kidnap victims. Given the high prevalence of psychological distress, especially among those enduring uncertainty for more than six months, there is an urgent need for targeted psychosocial interventions, including grief counselling, trauma-focused therapy, and timely case updates, to mitigate long-term mental health consequences. These measures should be prioritized in high-risk communities such as Aguata, where institutional mental health support remains limited. Ascertaining the above finding, a female IDI participant opined that:"Not knowing if she is alive or dead is the worst pain; it's like living with a wound that never heals" (Female respondent/IDI/7/4/2025).

Other participants stressed that:

"Six months passed without a word. It was torture. I couldn't eat or sleep. My mind was breaking down slowly" (Female, 49, sister/IDI/4/4/2025).

"Every day I wondered should I start mourning or keep hoping? That confusion alone drove me mad" (Male, 61, father/IDI/5/4/2025).

It was painful, yes. But once we buried him, we could start healing. Not like others who are still waiting" (Female [mother], 55, mother/IDI/6/4/2025).

"We didn't know what to plan for funeral or celebration. We were stuck in one place, mentally and physically" (Male, 43, uncle/IDI/8/4/2025).

My in-laws said I gave up too soon. They blamed me for not doing more. But what could I do with nothing to go on?" (Female, 40, spouse/IDI/7/4/2025).

Table 5: Logistic Regression Predicting PTSD Symptoms

Predictor Variable (Coefficient)	B	S. E.χ²(Exp (B))	Wald	P-value	Odds Ratio (Exp (B))	95%CI for Odds Ratio
Gender (Female)	0.85	0.29	8.60	0.003	2.34	1.33-4.12
Age(>50 years)	0.46	0.27	2.89	0.089	1.59	0.92-2.75
Social Support (Low)	1.20	0.32	14.06	<0.001	3.32	1.79-6.35
Duration of Uncertainty (>6 months)	1.10	0.28	15.50	<0.001	3.00	1.72-5.22

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The logistic regression analysis presented in Table 5 examined the relationship between selected sociodemographic and contextual variables and the likelihood of reporting post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms among family members of kidnap victims in Aguata Local Government Area. Four predictor variables were included in the model: gender, age, level of social support, and duration of uncertainty regarding the fate of the kidnapped individual. The regressions models help identify the significant risk factors associated with psychological distress in this vulnerable population. The results indicate that gender was a statistically significant predictor of PTSD symptoms. Female respondents were 2.34 times more likely than their male counterparts to report PTSD symptoms (B = 0.85, p = 0.003, OR = 2.34, 95% CI: 1.33–4.12). This finding aligns with previous literature highlighting the heightened psychological vulnerability of women in trauma-related contexts, suggesting the need for gender-responsive mental health interventions.

Although age above 50 years was positively associated with PTSD symptoms (OR = 1.59), this relationship did not reach statistical significance (B = 0.46, p = 0.089, 95% CI: 0.92–2.75). This suggests that older respondents may have an increased susceptibility to trauma-related stress, but the evidence remains

inconclusive. Further studies with a larger age-diverse sample may help clarify this trend. Low social support emerged as a strong and significant predictor of PTSD symptoms. Respondents who reported low levels of perceived social support were 3.32 times more likely to experience PTSD symptoms than those with moderate or high support (B = 1.20, p < 0.001, OR = 3.32, 95% CI: 1.79–6.35). This underscores the buffering role of social networks in trauma recovery and highlights the urgent need for community-based psychosocial interventions.

Furthermore, the duration of uncertainty concerning the abducted relative's fate significantly influenced mental health outcomes. Respondents who endured prolonged uncertainty exceeding six months were found to be three times more likely to develop PTSD symptoms compared to those with shorter durations of uncertainty (B = 1.10, p < 0.001, OR = 3.00, 95% CI: 1.72–5.22). This finding illustrates the psychological strain imposed by unresolved trauma and the emotional burden of sustained ambiguity during abductions. Overall, the model highlights that female gender, low social support, and prolonged duration of uncertainty are significant predictors of PTSD symptoms. These findings emphasize the need for trauma-informed mental health services that are responsive to gender disparities, foster social resilience, and prioritize timely resolution and communication in cases of kidnapping. Such interventions are crucial for reducing long-term psychological harm among secondary victims in communities like Aguata that are disproportionately affected by insecurity.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the psychological and mental health consequences of kidnapping on the families of victims in Aguata Local Government Area (LGA) of Anambra State, Nigeria. The study revealed alarming levels of psychological distress among respondents. Quantitative analysis showed that 67% of participants met the threshold for probable PTSD using the PTSD Checklist–Civilian Version (PCL-C), 54% exhibited moderate to severe symptoms of depression (as measured by the Beck Depression Inventory-II), and 60% reported moderate to high anxiety levels. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that individuals closely connected to trauma victims particularly in violent crimes such as kidnapping are at high risk of developing secondary traumatic stress (North et al., 2012; Bisson et al., 2015; Van der Kolk, 2003).The qualitative data supported these findings. Participants frequently described symptoms such as persistent nightmares, intrusive thoughts,

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hypervigilance, helplessness, and social withdrawal. One participant recounted, "Every time the phone rings, my heart stops. I keep thinking it is bad news. Even now, years after, I still can't sleep well." These expressions of fear and uncertainty underscore the lingering psychological effects even after the resolution of kidnapping incidents. Such prolonged exposure to traumatic uncertainty has been identified as a critical determinant of psychological morbidity in conflict-affected settings (Weine et al., 2004).

A remarkable finding in this study is the gendered dimension of psychological responses. Female respondents, especially mothers and spouses of victims, were more likely to report severe psychological symptoms than their male counterparts. This aligns with prior studies which demonstrate that women, due to culturally ascribed caregiving roles and emotional sensitivity, are more vulnerable to trauma-related mental health conditions (Onuoha, 2013; Ilechukwu, 2020; Paredes et al., 2020).

Additionally, younger adults (18–35 years) exhibited heightened anxiety and stress symptoms compared to older age groups. This may be attributed to their active involvement in stressful activities such as ransom negotiations, liaising with security operatives, or handling social and digital media exposure about the incident. The generational gap in trauma coping mechanisms also played a role, as younger participants tended to lack the emotional resilience often built from previous life challenges (Egwuaba, 2018).Despite the high prevalence of mental health challenges among affected families, the study found that access to psychosocial support services was grossly inadequate. Only 12% of respondents reported receiving any form of psychological or trauma-informed intervention. Even among those, most support came from non-clinical sources such as religious leaders, community elders, or family members. This aligns with previous literature highlighting the weak mental health infrastructure in Nigeria, especially in rural and peri-urban areas (Gureje et al., 2015; Adebayo, 2013).The absence of trained mental health personnel at Primary Health Centres (PHCs), lack of referral mechanisms for trauma cases, and prevailing stigma around mental illness all contributed to low service utilization. As Van Ommeren et al. (2005) argue, the lack of culturally sensitive, community-based mental health services in low-resource settings hinders trauma recovery and leads to chronic mental health deterioration.

Conclusion

This study examined the psychological and mental health impact of kidnapping on the families of victims in Aguata Local Government Area, Anambra State, Nigeria. The findings reveal that families of kidnapped individuals in the area experience profound psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, trauma symptoms, and social withdrawal. Emotional instability, fear of recurrence, and the absence of institutional support were recurring themes. Furthermore, cultural stigma surrounding mental health discourages affected families from seeking professional help, while available mental health services in the area remain limited and underutilized. The implications of these findings are significant for local health authorities, civil society organizations, and community leaders in Aguata. It is evident that the community lacks adequate structures for trauma support and mental health care, especially for families dealing with the aftermath of kidnapping incidents.

Policy Recommendations

In response to these observed challenges, the following recommendations are proposed for immediate and localized implementation within Aguata LGA:

1. Local health authorities, in collaboration with the Anambra State Ministry of Health, should integrate trauma-focused mental health services into existing primary health facilities in Aguata. This would enable early identification, support, and referral of individuals suffering from kidnapping-related trauma. A pilot intervention can be launched in selected PHCs across the area to assess feasibility.

2. The Aguata Local Government Council should work with local churches, traditional institutions, and NGOs to set up trauma support centres. These centres can offer culturally sensitive counselling, group therapy sessions, and peer support tailored to families of kidnap victims.

3. There is a need for increased deployment of mental health personnel, such as psychiatric nurses and clinical psychologists to the area. Recruitment and short-term training on trauma-informed care can be organized in partnership with local NGOs or state health departments to bridge the immediate service gap.

4. Targeted community-based campaigns should be launched to educate residents on the importance of mental health and the availability of services. Utilizing local media, town union meetings, and religious gatherings will enhance community acceptance and help reduce stigma among affected families.

5. Local security committees, traditional rulers, and community leaders should be trained to identify signs of psychological distress among families of kidnap victims and refer them to appropriate local support services. This approach would promote early intervention and community resilience.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following targeted and evidence-informed recommendations are proposed:

1. The Anambra State Ministry of Health, in collaboration with local government health departments, should integrate trauma-focused mental health services into the existing Primary Health Care (PHC) infrastructure in Aguata. This should include the deployment of trained personnel, establishment of referral pathways, and creation of mobile outreach teams to reach rural and hard-to-reach communities. A pilot program within Aguata PHCs can serve as a model for potential scale-up across similar high-risk LGAs.

2. The Aguata Local Government Council should partner with NGOs, religious institutions, and community-based organizations to set up community trauma support hubs. These centres would provide culturally adapted interventions such as individual counselling, group therapy, and community healing circles. A public-private initiative could pilot one or two centres in high-incidence towns like Ekwulobia or Umuchu, evaluating effectiveness and community response.

3. To address the documented shortage of qualified mental health personnel, state-level partnerships with universities and health training institutions should prioritize the recruitment and community-based training of psychologists, psychiatric nurses, and social workers. A localized "Community Mental Health Corps" program could be piloted in Aguata,

focused on trauma-informed care and culturally competent service delivery.

4. Widespread stigma and misinformation around mental health were found to discourage help-seeking among affected families. The State Ministry of Information, in conjunction with local media outlets and religious leaders, should implement targeted awareness campaigns. These should be broadcast in English and Igbo, using radio, social media, and town hall meetings to normalize mental health discussions and promote service utilization. Impact should be measured through follow-up surveys.

5. There is a need for legislative advocacy to formally recognize families of kidnap victims as secondary victims entitled to psychosocial support. Anambra State lawmakers should consider sponsoring a state-level bill that mandates mental health and social support as part of post-kidnapping interventions. This would ensure sustained institutional attention and facilitate future policy modelling at the national level.

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SERVICE QUALITY AS A 'DRIVER' OF FIRM PERFORMANCE: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM THE TELECOMMUNICATION INDUSTRY IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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And

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Abstract: This study examines the effects of service quality on the performance of telecommunication firms in Enugu State. The study ascertains the extent to which responsiveness to customers' requests affects the market share and determines the extent to which the firm's empathy affects customer loyalty. This study adopted a survey research design. A sample size of 243 was determined. Descriptive statistics were used for demographic data, and simple linear regression was used for hypothesis testing. Findings show that responsiveness to customers' requests has a significant positive effect on market share and that a firm's empathy has a significant positive effect on customer loyalty. The study recommended that Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) operators should prioritize prompt and effective customer responses to boost their market share, and telecommunications firms should leverage the power of empathy to build stronger customer relationships, drive loyalty, and achieve sustainable success.

Keywords: Customer Loyalty, Quality Service, Firm Empathy, Performance, Service Reliability

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Introduction

In today's highly competitive business environment, service quality has become both a strategic necessity and a critical area of academic research. Organizations can no longer survive without building customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Research has consistently shown that service quality positively influences organizational performance, including improved profitability, market share, and customer retention (Majed, 2013; Sharareh & Fauziah, 2012). It also enhances corporate image and strengthens customer loyalty (Nimako, 2012). As consumers now demand higher standards in both products and services, quality has become one of the most important trends in consumer behavior.

In the service industries, quality is commonly evaluated based on how well the service meets customer expectations. This alignment is not only a measure of customer satisfaction but also a reflection of organizational performance. According to Aluco et al. (2013), performance feedback helps identify deficiencies and discrepancies between expected and actual outcomes. In the current global market, delivering quality service is no longer optional—it is a vital strategy for business success and survival. Fierce competition and deregulation in the service sector have compelled firms to adopt quality as a strategic tool for operational efficiency and market advantage. Quality assurance helps retain existing customers while attracting new ones (Biljana & Jusuf, 2011).

The telecommunications industry plays a central role in today's digital economy. As a major driver of communication and economic activity, its development is critical. In Enugu State, Nigeria, telecommunication began in the post-independence era with the establishment of Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL). While NITEL marked a significant milestone, its monopoly was plagued by poor service quality, negatively affecting customer perceptions (Oyatoye et al., 2013).

With the liberalization of the telecom sector in the early 2000s and the advent of GSM technology, firms like MTN, Airtel, Globacom, and 9mobile emerged, intensifying competition. This shift increased the focus on service quality as a competitive differentiator. Today, consumer expectations have evolved—people demand reliable connectivity, fast data speeds, accurate billing, and effective customer service. High service quality influences customer satisfaction, loyalty,

and the overall profitability of telecom firms (Zeithaml et al., 2018; Samuel & Olatokun, 2014).

Despite advancements, Enugu State's telecom sector still faces significant challenges. Poor infrastructure, erratic power supply, and security issues impact service delivery. Frequent network congestion, call drops, and inadequate customer support frustrate users (Ahmed et al., 2013; Kumar & Manshor, 2009). The regulatory body, Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), strives to enforce service standards, but gaps remain (Muhammad, 2012).

Surprisingly, the expected outcomes—customer satisfaction, retention, and loyalty—are not fully realized by major providers. Though firms aim to provide quality services for a sustained competitive edge, their responsiveness and reliability often fall short. Compounding the issue is the limited research focusing specifically on telecom service quality in Enugu State. Most existing studies emphasize other sectors, creating a gap in understanding the telecom context. This study seeks to address that gap by examining the effect of service quality on the performance of telecommunication firms in Enugu State, Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the effects of service quality on the performance of telecommunication firms in Enugu State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. ascertain the extent to which responsiveness to customers' requests affects the market share;
2. determine the extent to which the firm's empathy affects customer loyalty; and
3. evaluate the extent to which service reliability affects customer satisfaction.

Hypotheses of the Study

The study formulated the following hypotheses:

H1:   Responsiveness to customers' requests has a significant effect on market share;

H2:   Firm's empathy has a significant effect on customer loyalty; and

H3:   Service reliability has a significant effect on customer satisfaction.

Service Quality

Service quality is a multidimensional concept that reflects how well a service meets or exceeds customer expectations. It plays a pivotal role in shaping customer satisfaction, loyalty, repeat patronage, and positive referrals (Ibrahim et al., 2014). In today's highly competitive business environment, delivering high-quality service is essential for organizational success and long-term sustainability.

Several benefits stem from excellent service quality. It fosters customer satisfaction and loyalty, encouraging business and favorable word-of-mouth promotion. High service quality also helps reduce operational costs by minimizing customer complaints and attrition. Moreover, it boosts profitability through increased revenue and enhances a company's reputation, thereby attracting new customers and building brand equity. Ultimately, superior service quality offers a significant competitive advantage by differentiating a firm from its rivals (Parasuraman et al., 2005).

To improve service quality, organizations can adopt several strategies. These include investing in employee training to ensure staff possesses the skills necessary to deliver exceptional service and streamlining internal processes to enhance service efficiency. Empowering employees to resolve customer issues promptly without escalation also improves service outcomes. Additionally, gathering and acting on customer feedback allows businesses to identify gaps and implement targeted improvements. Embedding a culture of continuous improvement further supports ongoing excellence in service delivery (Grönroos, 2000).

Firm Performance

Evaluating firm performance in the service industry demands a multidimensional approach that incorporates both financial and non-financial indicators. While profitability and revenue growth remain relevant, non-financial performance proxies such as market share, customer loyalty, and customer

satisfaction offer deeper insight into a firm's long-term success and competitiveness (Grönroos, 2000; Zeithaml et al., 2018).

Market share reflects a firm's ability to compete effectively and attract a significant portion of customers within its industry. A growing market share often signals competitive strength, brand acceptance, and effective service delivery. Customer satisfaction serves as a vital measure of how well a service firm meets or exceeds customer expectations. It is typically assessed through surveys, feedback systems, and net promoter scores, and strongly correlates with repeat patronage and referrals (Parasuraman et al., 2005). Customer loyalty, on the other hand, indicates the firm's ability to retain customers over time. Loyalty is reflected in repeat business, lower churn rates, and higher customer lifetime value, all of which contribute to sustained revenue and reduced marketing costs (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990).

Several drivers influence these performance proxies. These include high service quality, operational efficiency, employee engagement, innovation, and effective customer relationship management (Heinonen & Strandvik, 2010). Service firms that continuously invest in these areas are more likely to deliver consistent value, increase customer satisfaction, foster loyalty, and expand their market share.

Responsiveness to Customers' Requests and Market Share

Amidst the rapid growth and rising customer expectations in the telecommunication industry, responsiveness to customer requests has become a vital driver of market success. In an increasingly competitive landscape, telecommunication firms that promptly address customer concerns tend to achieve higher levels of customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and ultimately, greater market share (Smith & Jones, 2022).

Firms adopting a customer-centric approach through swift response mechanisms often enhance customer experiences and foster lasting loyalty. Smith and Jones (2022) assert that prompt service leads to stronger customer relationships and encourages repeat patronage. Research by Chang et al. (2024) indicates that organizations excelling in customer service enjoy 2–5 times higher retention rates, boosting revenue and profitability. Similarly, the Temkin Group (2018)

found that customer experience leaders outperform competitors by 20% in revenue growth.

In today's digital era, responsiveness must extend beyond traditional phone and email interactions. Customers increasingly expect real-time, personalized support via social media, messaging apps, and self-service portals. Telecommunication firms that integrate these platforms and maintain consistent service delivery build stronger brand loyalty and reduce customer churn—a key factor in market retention, while Accenture (2020) highlights that reducing churn by just 5% can increase profits by up to 25%.Moreover, responsiveness enhances brand reputation and customer lifetime value. According to Deloitte (2018), firms with a strong reputation enjoy a 10% CLTV premium. Responsiveness is essential for sustaining competitiveness, enhancing satisfaction, and securing market dominance in the telecommunications industry.

Firm's empathy and Customer Loyalty

Empathy—the ability to understand and share the feelings of others—is a powerful driver of customer loyalty in the telecommunication industry. It goes beyond transactional interactions, shaping deeper emotional connections between customers and service providers (Smith, 2020). When telecommunication firms demonstrate genuine concern for customer needs, they foster trust and rapport, increasing the likelihood of customer retention (Jones et al., 2019).

Empathy is especially impactful in customer service scenarios. When customer service representatives approach complaints with understanding and compassion, negative experiences can be transformed into positive outcomes. This approach not only boosts customer satisfaction but also reinforces loyalty—even amid service failures (Brown & Miller, 2021; Chen et al., 2022).

Beyond individual interactions, empathy contributes to a positive brand perception. Firms that prioritize empathy across their communication strategies are often seen as more trustworthy and customer-focused, which influences customer preferences in competitive markets (Johnson, 2018). In today's digital environment, empathetic responses to online reviews and social media feedback

further amplify this effect, enhancing public perception and reinforcing loyalty (Taylor & Rogers, 2020).

However, maintaining consistent empathy across all touchpoints remains a challenge. Empathy must be embedded into organizational culture through training and leadership support (Harrison & Wilson, 2021). When practiced across all levels—from frontline staff to executives—empathy creates a lasting foundation for strong customer relationships.

Service Reliability and Customer Satisfaction

In today's fast-paced and connected business environment, service reliability is a vital driver of customer satisfaction, particularly in the telecommunication industry. Service reliability refers to the consistent and dependable delivery of a company's offerings (Smith & Johnson, 2019). In telecoms, where uninterrupted connectivity is crucial, customers expect seamless service. Any deviation, such as outages or dropped calls, often results in frustration and dissatisfaction (Brown & Wang, 2022).

Reliable service helps mitigate disruptions and enhances the customer experience. Studies show that organizations minimizing service interruptions report higher customer satisfaction (Clark & Turner, 2020). In industries where downtime can have a significant impact, consistent service delivery becomes essential in fostering customer loyalty and trust.

Trust, in turn, is heavily influenced by service reliability. Customers often equate dependable service with a trustworthy and capable provider (Gupta & Kapoor, 2018). This perception builds emotional reassurance, making users feel secure and valued, thereby strengthening satisfaction and long-term loyalty (Brown & Wang, 2022).Furthermore, customer feedback and online reviews frequently highlight service reliability as a major factor influencing satisfaction. Companies that actively engage with this feedback demonstrate a commitment to improvement and reliability, which boosts their brand reputation (Miller & Harris, 2019).

The link between service reliability and customer satisfaction is both practical and emotional. Firms that consistently deliver reliable service not only fulfill

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customer expectations but also cultivate trust and long-term loyalty. In the competitive telecommunication sector, investing in service reliability is essential for sustaining customer satisfaction and market success (Clark & Turner, 2020).

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design, which enabled the researcher to elicit responses directly from participants. This design was most appropriate for describing, examining, and interpreting the relationships among variables.Primary data were gathered through structured questionnaires. The population comprised 667 staff from four major GSM operators in Enugu State, Nigeria—MTN (221), Airtel (163), 9Mobile (136), and Globacom (147).Using Cochran's formula for finite populations, a sample size of 243 was determined. The calculation considered a 95% confidence level (Z = 1.96) and a 5% margin of error. Stratified sampling was employed to ensure fair representation from each firm. Bowley's proportional allocation formula was used to distribute the sample: MTN (80), Airtel (59), 9Mobile (50), and Globacom (54).Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into two sections.

Section A covered demographic details (e.g., age, gender, qualification, work experience), while Section B focused on research variables using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree).To ensure content and face validity, the instrument was reviewed by three academic experts and two industry professionals. Their feedback guided the refinement of the questionnaire, which was also pre-tested for clarity and relevance. A test-retest approach was used, involving 10 respondents. After two weeks, results were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.886—indicating a high level of internal consistency. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used for demographic data and research questions. Inferential statistics included Simple Linear Regression for Hypotheses 1–3.

Three linear regression models were employed for the study which includes:

MRKSH $= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ REPTCR} + \mu_1$………………………… 1
CUSLOY $= \beta_0 + \beta_2 \text{ FEMPTY} + \mu_1$………………………… 2
CUSTSAF $= \beta_0 + \beta_3 \text{ SERELIAB} + \mu_1$……………………… 3

Where;
$\beta_0 =$ the intercept autonomous parameter estimates

β1 to β4 are the slope of the coefficients of the independent variables to be determined

MRKSH   =   Market share

CUSLOY   =   Customer loyalty

CUSTSAF   =   Customer satisfaction

REPTCR   =   Responsiveness to customers' request

FEMPTY   =   Firm's empathy

Data Presentation and Analyses

Table 1.   Distribution and Return of Questionnaire

GSM Operators	No. Distributed	% Distributed	No. Returned	% Returned	No. Not Returned	%Not Returned
MTN	80	33	78	32	2	0.8
Airtel	59	24	58	24	1	0.4
9Mobile	50	21	48	20	2	0.8
Globacom	54	22	52	21	2	0.8
Total	243	100	236	97	7	3

Source: Field Survey, 2024

As shown in Table 1, a total number of two hundred and forty-three (243) copies of the questionnaire were administered by the researcher with 3 trained research assistants to the respondents of the selected GSM in Enugu State, Nigeria. Out of the 243 copies of a questionnaire sent out, 236 were returned, giving a response rate of 97%; 7 out of the 243 copies of a questionnaire administered were not returned, thus giving a non-response rate of 3%.

Table 2.   Demographic Characteristics

S/N	Characteristics / Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I	Gender		
	Male	126	53

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	Female	110	47
Ii	Age (in years)		
	21–30 years	45	19
	31–40 years	132	56
	41 years and above	59	25
Iii	Marital Status		
	Single	110	47
	Married	126	53
Iv	Educational Qualification		
	OND/HND	54	23
	B.Sc	148	63
	MBA/M.Sc	34	14

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 shows that there is a balanced gender representation in the sample, with 110 female respondents making up 47% and 126 male respondents making up 53%. The study's nearly equal distribution indicates that it includes viewpoints from both sexes, resulting in a dataset that is inclusive of all genders.

With 132 respondents, or 56% of the sample, falling into the 31–40 age range, this group comprises the majority of respondents. 59 respondents (25%) who are 41 years of age or older come next, while the least percentage of respondents (45, or 19%) is in the 21–30 age range. Given that the majority of respondents are in their active, mid-career period, the predominance of the 31–40 age groups may have an impact on their opinions and experiences in the telecom industry.110 respondents (47%) are single, while 126 respondents (53%) are married. The distribution indicates a fairly balanced split, indicating that the participants came from various social backgrounds.

Given that the majority of respondents in the sampled telecommunications companies have tertiary education, the largest percentage of respondents (148, or 63%) had a bachelor's degree (B.Sc.). Next, 54 respondents (23%) hold OND/HND credentials, and 34 respondents (14%) have postgraduate degrees (MBA/M.Sc.). The educational profile indicates that the workforce is well educated and has a solid basis in higher education, which could improve job performance and comprehension of organizational dynamics.

Table 3.   Model summary on responsiveness to customers' requests and market share

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square R	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.789a	.623	.621	.34551	2.2980

Table 4.   ANOVA on responsiveness to customers' requests and market share

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	55.128	1	55.125	461.801	0.000a
Residual	33.425	213	.119		
Total	88.553	214			

Table 5.   Coefficients on responsiveness to customers' requests and market share

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p	
(Constant)	0.401	0.044	–	9.151	0.000	
Responsiveness to customers' request	0.636	0.030	0.789	21.490	0.000	

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The model summary (Table 3) reveals a strong positive relationship between responsiveness to customers' requests and market share, as indicated by the correlation coefficient (R) of 0.789. The R Square value of 0.623 means that approximately 62.3% of the variance in market share can be explained by how responsive firms are to customer requests. The Adjusted R Square, which accounts for the number of predictors in the model, remains close at 0.621, suggesting the model, is a good fit. The standard error of the estimate is 0.34551, indicating a relatively small average distance between the observed values and the models predicted values.

The ANOVA results in Table 4 show that the regression model is statistically significant, with an F-value of 461.801 and a significance level (p-value) of 0.000. This suggests that the model, which includes responsiveness to customer requests as the independent variable, significantly predicts market share. The large F-value indicates that the variation explained by the model is substantially greater than the variation within the residual (error), validating the overall model's usefulness in explaining changes in market share.

From Table 5, the coefficients further confirm the importance of responsiveness to customer requests. The unstandardized coefficient (B) for this variable is 0.636, which implies that for every one-unit increase in responsiveness, market share is expected to increase by 0.636 units, holding all else constant. The standardized coefficient (Beta) is 0.789, demonstrating a strong effect size. The associated t-value of 21.490 and p-value of 0.000 indicate this relationship is statistically significant. These results affirm that responsiveness to customer needs is a critical predictor of market share performance among the firms studied.

Table 6.   Model summary on firm's empathy and customer loyalty

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square R	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.862[a]	.694	.692	.2312	1.7468

Table 7. ANOVA on firm's empathy and customer loyalty

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.

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1	Regression	109.315	1	68.415	69.176	0.000a
	Residual	48.202	213	.989		
	Total	157.517	214			

Table 8. Coefficients on firm's empathy and customer loyalty

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p	
(Constant)	0.869	0.132	–	6.583	0.001	
Firm's Empathy	0.774	0.069	0.862	11.217	0.001	

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The model summary (Table 6) shows a strong positive relationship between firm's empathy and customer loyalty, with a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.862. The R Square value of 0.694 implies that approximately 69.4% of the variance in customer loyalty can be explained by the firm's empathy. The Adjusted R Square value of 0.692 supports this finding by accounting for the number of predictors in the model. The standard error of the estimate (0.2312) suggests a moderate level of variability in the model's prediction errors, and the Durbin-Watson value of 1.7468 indicates no serious autocorrelation in the residuals, meaning the data is likely suitable for regression analysis.

The ANOVA result in Table 7 confirms that the regression model is statistically significant. The F-value is 69.176 with a significance level of 0.000, which is far below the 0.05 threshold. This means that the variation in customer loyalty explained by the model is not due to chance, and the predictor (firm's empathy) significantly contributes to the model. With only one predictor and a relatively large sample size (n = 214), the model shows strong explanatory power and reliability in capturing the relationship.

The coefficients table (Table 8) provides further insight into the strength and direction of the relationship. The unstandardized coefficient (B) for firm's empathy is 0.774, indicating that for every one-unit increase in perceived

empathy from the firm, customer loyalty increases by 0.774 units. The standardized beta value of 0.862 reinforces that firm's empathy is a very strong predictor of customer loyalty. The t-value of 11.217 and p-value of 0.001 confirm the statistical significance of the predictor. The constant (intercept) of 0.869 shows the expected level of customer loyalty when empathy is zero, although in practice, empathy is rarely absent entirely. Overall, the results affirm that firm's empathy is a key driver of customer loyalty.

Table 9.   Model summary on service reliability and customer satisfaction

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square R	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.885a	.783	.782	.31783	1.824

Table 10. ANOVA on service reliability and customer satisfaction

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	95.816	1	95.816	948.673	0.000a
Residual	26.567	213	.101		
Total	122.383	214			

Table 11.   Coefficients on service reliability and customer satisfaction

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig. (p)
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1					
(Constant)	0.560	0.122	–	4.596	
Service Reliability	0.854	0.028	0.885	30.500	

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The model summary in Table 9 provides insights into the relationship between service reliability and customer satisfaction. The R value of 0.885 indicates a very

strong positive correlation between the two variables. The R Square value of 0.783 shows that 78.3% of the variation in customer satisfaction can be explained by the reliability of the service provided. The Adjusted R Square of 0.782 confirms the model's robustness, adjusting for the number of predictors. Additionally, the standard error of the estimate is 0.31783, indicating relatively low variability in the prediction errors. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.824 suggests no serious autocorrelation in the residuals, implying the assumption of independent errors is satisfied.

Table 10 presents the results of the ANOVA test, which evaluates the overall significance of the regression model. The F-statistic is 948.673, with a significance level of $p = 0.000$, which is well below the conventional alpha level of 0.05. This means the model is statistically significant, and service reliability significantly explains the variation in customer satisfaction. In simpler terms, the regression model is a good fit for the data, and the relationship observed is not due to random chance.

Table 11 shows the regression coefficients that quantify the relationship between service reliability and customer satisfaction. The unstandardized coefficient for service reliability is 0.854, which means that for every one-unit increase in perceived service reliability, customer satisfaction increases by 0.854 units. The standardized beta coefficient is 0.885, indicating a very strong standardized effect. The t-value of 30.500 and the corresponding p-value of 0.000 confirm that this effect is highly statistically significant. In essence, service reliability plays a crucial and impactful role in driving customer satisfaction.

Discussion of Findings

First, it was found that 91% of the participants either strongly agreed or agreed that responsiveness to customers' requests to a large extent affects the market share of telecommunication firms; 6% disagreed while 3% were indifferent. The analysis of hypothesis 1, which used simple linear regression to see how responding to customer requests affects market share, showed that the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was accepted, meaning that being responsive to customers' requests has a significant positive effect on market share. The finding of the present study reenacts the previous research findings of Thibaut and Van den Poel (1998) that perceived service quality is a

key driver of customer loyalty and market share. The findings of the study also support the assertion by Bolton et al. (2004) that responsiveness to customers' requests enhances satisfaction, builds trust, and fosters loyalty among customers. This assertion was further strengthened by Anderson and Sullivan's (1993) finding that responsive interactions led to positive customer experiences, boosting overall satisfaction and influencing future purchase decisions.

The findings from the analysis of research question two indicated that 90% of the respondents agreed that a firm's empathy significantly affects customer loyalty, while 6% disagreed and 4% did not respond. We conducted the second hypothesis test using linear regression to ascertain the degree to which a firm's empathy influences customer loyalty. The research rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternate hypothesis. Hence, we conclude that the firm's empathy has a significant positive effect on customer loyalty. This finding aligns with the empirical results from Wang et al. (2019), which indicate that service empathy has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty. They also found that customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service empathy and customer loyalty. The findings of the study support the assertion by Aral et al. (2011) that empathetic service providers foster customer loyalty and reduce the likelihood of customers switching to competitors.

The analysis of research question three revealed that 94% of respondents agree that service reliability significantly affects customer satisfaction, while 4% disagree and 2% are ambivalent. Following the test of hypothesis 3 using simple linear regression to evaluate the effect of service reliability on customer satisfaction, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternate hypothesis was accepted. Hence, we conclude service reliability has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction. This finding reinforces the previous research conducted by Wang and Zhang (2017), which showed that service quality, has a positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Conclusion

The study examined the effect of service quality on the performance of telecommunication firms in Enugu State, Nigeria. Based on the findings, responsiveness to customers' requests had a positive and statistically significant effect on market share. This means GSM operators that respond promptly and

effectively to customer inquiries tend to enjoy greater market share. Furthermore, the study found that firms' empathy significantly influences customer loyalty. When GSM operators show genuine care and concern for customer needs, they foster deeper emotional connections, which lead to increased loyalty and long-term patronage. Additionally, service reliability was shown to have a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction. This indicates that minimizing network failures and ensuring consistent service delivery enhances user experience and trust in the service provider.

Moreover, the study revealed a positive relationship between service assurance and corporate reputation. Consistent delivery of high-quality services strengthens brand credibility, attracts more customers, and enhances competitive positioning. Therefore, the study concludes that reliable networks, empathetic customer service, and prompt issue resolution not only improve customer satisfaction and loyalty but also drive overall organizational performance. Investing in service quality is essential for building a strong reputation, achieving market dominance, and ensuring sustainable growth in the dynamic telecommunications industry of Enugu State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and the conclusion of this study,the following recommendations appear very necessary: we made the following recommendations that:

1. **The telecommunication firms should leverage the power of empathy to build stronger customer relationships, drive loyalty, and achieve sustainable success.**

2. **GSM providers should solidify their position as trusted service providers and achieve sustainable growth in the competitive telecommunications industry by actively prioritizing service reliability and fostering a culture of customer centricity.**

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ASSESSMENT OF ISSUES AND PROBLEMS IN THE ADOPTION OF ELECTRONIC COMMERCE IN EDO STATE

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Abstract: Over the years, the problem of hosting an electronic commerce environment has suffered lots of setbacks; possible explanations for this include cyber security problems, lack of trust in technologies and internet services providers, and the lack of infrastructure. This study, therefore, conducts an in-depth Assessment of issues and problems in the Adoption of electronic commerce in Edo State. In the study, simple random sampling technique was used to select the target population. A total number of 1800 questionnaires were used in this research work and 1650 were received, and 90 of them were incomplete. The remaining 1560 valid and completed questionnaire were used for the quantitative analysis representing 86.7% response rate. Thus, both descriptive (frequency tables and charts) and inference statistical analysis (Chi-Square) were used for the analysis. Similarly, Minitab17Statistics software was used for inference statistical analysis (Chi-Square).The results of respondents showed that majority of challenges of e-commerce that discourage most people from fully adopting and using e-commerce are: High rate of poverty, high rate of illiteracy, acquisition of IT skilled personnel, and customer services. Other challenges identified are power outages, frequent power interruption, insecurity and technology costs. This study therefore concludes that, the Government of Edo State should provide the much-needed leadership and steady power supply

to enhance economic activities. More so, government and private organizations should invest in training, adequate publicity and established consumer protection, e-commerce legal framework that will attract and increase the confidence of e-commerce users.

Keywords: Internet, Software, E-merchandising, Automation, E-Commerce, Chi-Squae

Introduction

E-commerce is the use of the internet for marketing, identification, payment and delivery of goods and services. Electronic commerce is an emerging model of new selling and merchandising tools in which buyers are able to participate in all phases of purchase decision while stepping through those processes electronically rather than in a physical store or by phone (Ranganatha, 2024). The invention of internet, web technologies and other electronic devices, led to electronic commerce. Through the e-commerce technology, the internet has revolutionized the mode of business transactions by providing customers with the ability to bank, invest, purchase, distribute, communicate, explore and research from virtually anywhere, anytime there is internet access (Yin,2012).

The processes in electronic commerce include enabling the customer to access product information, select items for purchase and settle the items purchased financially. The paradigm shift in the mode of operation occasioned by the advent of the internet, global corporations now operate with much consistency and at reduced cost of transactions as if the entire world were a single entity. In Edo state, the internet business is revolutionizing the market space with Jumia and Konga being the best of e-commerce vendor (Mistra & Kothar, 2015). In the business-to-business world, buyers previously faced a number of obstacles to getting the best deal, suppliers were distant, research time was scarce, and intermediaries controlled most of the information. Presently, Web-based companies are becoming the new intermediaries and the conduit between producers and buyers (Jain*et al*, 2023).

Generally, e-economics can be broken down into two branches; E-merchandise and E-finance. E-merchandising is all the techniques and methods that enabling a

business to generate sales on their e- Commerce site, selling goods and services electronically and moving these items through distribution channels. For example, through internet shopping for groceries, hardware, gifts tickets, music, cloths and books can be move from one location to another through these channels. This process is in some ways similar to traditional merchandising aiming to improve the appeal of an in-store offer and develop sales (Gururaja, 2022).   E-finance is the provision of financial services and markets using electronic communication and computation such as Debit cards, smart cards, ATM cards, banking machines, telephone and internet banking, financial service and mortgages online.

The benefits of e-commerce include great customer loyalty, improved speed access, reduction in costs of operation, transformation of traditional market chain, acquisition of a niche market, business efficiency, increased automation processes, retained and expanded customer base, enhanced well-being and education of customers. However, the growth of e-commerce in Edo state is affected by accessibility, privacy and confidentiality, establishing cost, data security, network reliability, credit card threat, citizens' income and education, authenticity, cybercrime, poor technological infrastructures and fear of inadequate security in online environments (Ayo, el at, 2011). The overall purpose of operating business electronically otherwise known as electronic commerce is increase in profit of a business organization. To this end a wide range of customers can be reached, customer can participate easily that is anytime and anywhere, a more secure payment environment, via the internet (Poon. et, al., 1998). Edo State is one of Africa's most essential and influential E-Commerce markets. However, besides the comparably of high internet penetration and mobile usage in Edo State, only 26 % of the population buy a product online, which shows that there are still barriers and challenges when conducting E-Commerce in Edo State (Ajao el al., 2018). For example, a study by Sasu (2022) reveals that the preferred payment method on Jumia, the biggest E-Commerce platform in Nigeria, is still cash-on-delivery and Bank transfer, even though mobile phone usage and e-payment are well-developed.

Over the years the objectives of hosting an electronic commerce environment has suffered lots of setback. Possible explanations include, but are not limited to, cyber security problems, lack of trust in technologies and internet services providers, and the lack of infrastructure (Sasu, 2021). Further challenges revolve

around the lack of customer awareness and satisfaction (Choshin & Ghaffari, 2017), other problems are logistics and information technologies (Lawrence & Tar, 2010), and a lack of trained personnel (Ajao et al., 2018). Government policies, returned policies, lack of customer warranties or absurd requirements are among the problems that make online shopping difficult (Sasu, 2021), there by hindering the attainment of its purpose.

Hence, the purpose of this research is to conduct an indept- assessment of issues and problems of e-commerce adoption, particularly in Edo State and to proffer possible solutions to these problems that will see to the smooth operations of e-commerce in the State. This can also be a framework for other States to adopt and see to the full operations of e-commerce in the entire country and this can help to achieve a better cashless economy.

Literature Review

Till (1998) describe e- ecommerce as form of business, administrative transaction or information exchange that is executed using any information and communications technologies (ICT) enablers. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines e-commerce as a new way of conducting e- business. Also, they qualify it as business occurring over network which use non-proprietary protocols that are established through an open standard setting such as the internet.

 Khan and Uwemi (2018) presented a comprehensive definition of e-commerce while isolating it from e-business. The paper listed the different ecommerce models i.e. B2B, B2C, B2G and C2C. Rabiu*et, al.*(2019) gave a broad outlook of electronic commerce within organizational system and its impact on operations managements. It was defined with reference to e-trading and elaborating and how it has permeated every field of business. The paper identifies the revolutionary changes brought by the internet applications like e-mail and electronic data interchange. It also details the revolutionary changes brought by the internet technologies in manufacturing, marketing, purchasing, design, productions, selling, distributions, warehousing and human resources management.

Also, Choshin and Ghaffari (2017), elaborates the different applications of e-commerce and also highlight the challenges and future scope of e-commerce in

India. They also defined the degree to which they are operational in their country. Mishra and Kotkar (2015) trace the timeline and development of B2C e commerce in India. They concluded that due to limited internet accessibility, weak online payment systems and lack of awareness, the progress was very slow. Rungsrisawat N. and Somdech D. (2019) observe that though online travel and hotel booking still control the lion's share of e-commerce, this has comparatively fallen over the years due to the recent augmentation and consequent rise E-tailing services.

Abdul (2016) presents a comprehensive analysis of Problems and Prospects of e-Commerce" and how it can be performed in the digital ecosystem. The paper also enlists numerous points that can be of importance to e-commerce which is responsible for its implementation. It has also enabled the creation and exploitation of new business opportunities, at the same time increasing the way of customers in the development of new products and services. E-commerce has not only augmented the performance of internal business management, but has also enabled better customer relationships by promoting a business model that is essentially based on information sharing. Analysis of e-commerce conducted by Bhat, et, al. (2019) highlights ubiquity, low operating cost, improved customer interaction and time saving as the unique strengths of e-commerce, but at the same time underscore then necessity for e-commerce firms to adapt themselves to the changing environment and innovate constantly to come up with better offerings for customers.

Current Trends and Issues Surrounding E-Commerce in Edo State

Recent trends in e-commerce are seen by the improved measures taken to purchase a product by providing them with interesting videos relating to the product. Videos are very effective in conveying the usage, comparison and specification of a product to the users (Osas, & Adesoye, 2024). Smart phones are the most commonly used medium for accessing ecommerce website. High speed of internet in smart phones further simplifies access to e-commerce site. Amazon, eBay, Grofers and paytm are having mobile applications that enable the user to easily enter and access the website and order for product. Virtual Sales Force e-commerce companies trying to boost their sales by using popups and chat modules. Since Covid-19, the world has witnessed new and better means of doing business; hence the place of e-commerce cannot be overemphasized. The changes brought by Covid-19 has affected e-commerce positively and this

method of marketing is expected to be ubiquitous in coming days (VeenaShinde, 2024). Currently, more people prefer buying things online because they are not willing to step out and risk exposure to new variants. In 2021, retail e-commerce sales amounted to an estimated 4.9 trillion U.S. dollars worldwide. This figure according to Rui (2023), will grow by 50 percent over the next four years, reaching about 7.4 trillion dollars by the end of 2025.

Purchasing using mobile phones has become more common with the introduction of the smart phone and Quick Service. The ordering of the product, payment and delivery of the product will be completed in one week. Online shopping is a type of shopping that helps the customers to reduce the amount of time required for purchasing.

There are various issues affecting e-commerce in Edo State and among these issues are:
(i) Governmental Instability: As shown in previous reports, the government in Nigeria is unstable and faces challenges in corruption (World Bank, 2022). Our research reveals that one of the biggest fears from companies is that the government can shut them down.

(ii) Government Polices: Another issue is that the government is quick to adopt policies that may not benefit businesses and customers, while policies regarding E-Commerce in Nigeria are not consistent and transparent, which causes problems. This leads to companies feeling neglected by politics

(iii) Return policy: Another way to build trust is to introduce a return policy, which allows customers to have products sent back to the company, usually free of charge. A suitable return policy makes customers more willing to buy products and increases customer satisfaction, which is generally seen as a challenge. Once the customer's trust has been gained, it is important to confirm and retain it. Otherwise, it may well be that they switch to another company

(iv) Market research: It is essential to do targeted market research, considering every country's geographical, cultural, and economic markets. Market research is important because it builds the foundation for how much growth potential a company can have and how customer awareness can develop. Additionally, it must be mentioned that E-Commerce awareness also depends on the government and the relevant policies. For example, the Covid-19 period

substituted a lot of the education part, as people had to stay at home and were driven towards E-Commerce.

(v) Trust: Trust one of the most frequent problems associated with E-Commerce (Ajao et al., 2018; Lawrence & Tar, 2010; Rabiu et al., 2019). Our data analysis reveals that it is difficult to gain customers' trust, as there are significant security gaps when transacting online. While security loopholes cause much fraud on the internet, this is still most likely to occur in C2C transactions.

Methodology

This study conducts an in-depth Assessment of issues and problems in the Adoption of electronic commerce in Edo State.   The survey research methodology was used in this study. According to Yin (2012), the application of case study to a research can be in the form of single or multiple cases. Multiple cases are like multiple experiments employed to compare and extend a previously developed theory with empirical results of the case study (Halkias & Neubert (2020).

Population: The study covers six (6) different majorcities in Edo State senatorial district, Benin City, Ekpoma, Auchi, Uromi, Akoko Edo and Okada town in Nigeria. A simple random sampling technique was used to select the target population. A total size of 1800 was targeted for conducting this research. 1650 were received, and 90 of them were incomplete. The remaining 1560 valid and completed questionnaire were used for the quantitative analysis representing 86.7% response rate

Data Collection: The study employs a questionnaire as the major instrument used to gathered data from respondents. The use of structured questionnaires is cost effective and not time consuming. It also helps to guide the respondent on how to respond/answer the questions in questionnaires. Here, the closed-ended questionnaire using Likert-type scale options was employed. Possible responses to core questions are represented using a five-point Likert scale namely: strongly agree (SA); agree (AG); undecided (UD); disagree (DA) and strongly disagree (SD). Some researchers used closed questionnaires of the Likert scale type to obtain perceptions with considerable success (Chalmers and Johnson 2012). The questionnaire was designed by the researcher and divided into two sections. The first section (section A) was constructed to collect background information about

the demographic while the second section (section B) was designed to answer questions related to the study using the five Likert type scale.

Statistical Software used Data Analysis: This study conducts an in-depth review of issues and problems related to non-attainment of objectives of electronic commerce in Edo State for effective learning outcomes. Thus, both descriptive (frequency tables and charts) and inference statistical analysis (Chi-Square) were used. The software tool used for inference statistical analysis (Chi-Square) was Minitab17 Statistics software

Percentage Analysis

Table 4.1. Demographic distribution of respondents by Gender

Variables	Options	Numbers of Respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	940	60.3
	Female	620	39.7
	Total	1560	100

Table 4.2 Age distribution of the respondents

Age distribution of the respondents	Less than 15 years	40	2.6
	16-30	620	39.4
	31-40	430	27.6
	41-50	200	12.8
	51-60	150	9.6
	61 and above	60	3.8
	Total	1560	100

Table 4.3 Distribution of the respondents by Educational

Qualifications

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Education	Others	70	4.5
	High Degree	100	6.4
	University/ Polytechnic	650	41.7
	College of Education	380	24.4
	Secondary school	240	15.8
	Primary school	120	6.4
	Total	1560	100

Table 4.4 Distribution of the respondents by Computer and Internet skills

Computer and Internet skills	Yes	1400	89.7
	No	120	7.7
	Absent	40	2.6

Table 4.5 Distribution Respondents of the Problems/Challenges facing E- Commerce in Edo State

Respondents of the Problems/Challenges facing E- Commerce in Nigeria	High rate of illiteracy	1200	76.9
	Lack of e-commerce infrastructure	900	57.7
	Frequent power interruption and Power failures	1450	93.0
	Insecurity problem	1250	80.1
	High rate of poverty low	1000	64.1
	Web site issues and lack of trust	800	51.3
	Lack of privacy and confidentiality	856	54.9
	Unreliability of Internet service provider in rural areas	1330	85.3
	Lack of seriousness by banks and network issues	780	50.0
	Software compatibility	980	62.8
	Mode of payment is	1050	67.3

	difficult and unreliable		
	Reaching customers in rural areas	1305	83.7
	Employee resistance towards e-commerce	962	61.7
	Cost of technology is high	1400	89.7
	Making business known to users is problem	1280	82.0

Table 4.6 Distribution Respondents of the key Tangible Benefits associated with E- commerce in Edo Stat

Respondents of the key Tangible Benefits associated with E-commerce in Nigeria	Increase sales and convenience	1480	94.9
	Reduced operation costs	1200	76.9
	Increased automation of processes	1056	67.7
	Increased Business efficiency	1220	78.2
	Transformation of traditional market chain to modern chain	1350	86.5
	Enhanced customers skills on IT	900	57.7

Table 4.7 Distribution Respondents of the key Intangible Benefits associated with E- commerce in Edo State

Respondents of the key Intangible Benefits associated with E- commerce in Nigeria	Improved well-being and education of customers	1300	83.3
	Better knowledge management	590	37.8
	Customer are very loyalty by following the rules	850	54.5
	Reduced inventories taking	650	41.7

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	Shopping is very fast and convenient	1450	92.9

Table 4.8 Distribution Respondents on how you Rate your Overall E-commerce Shopping Experience

Respondents on how you Rate your Overall E- commerce Shopping Experience	Excellent	580	37.2
	Very Good	425	27.2
	Good	505	32.4
	Fair	50	3.2
	Total	1560	100

Table 4.9 Distribution Respondent on mode of payment for E- commerce

Respondent on mode of payment for E- commerce	Bank Transfer	460	29.5
	Card payment	680	43.6
	Cash undelivered	250	16.0
	Mono agent	100	6.4
	USSD	70	4.5
	Total	1560	100

Table 4.10 Distribution Respondents on the rate of using E-commerce is not affected by citizen's income

Respondents on the rate of using E-commerce is not affected by citizen's income	Strongly Agree	124	8.0
	Agree	180	11.5
	Undecided	156	10.0
	Disagree	750	48.0
	Strongly Disagree	350	22.4
	Total	1560	100

4.2 Chart Representing Classification of Respondents

Gender

Gender

39.7
60.3

- Male
- Female
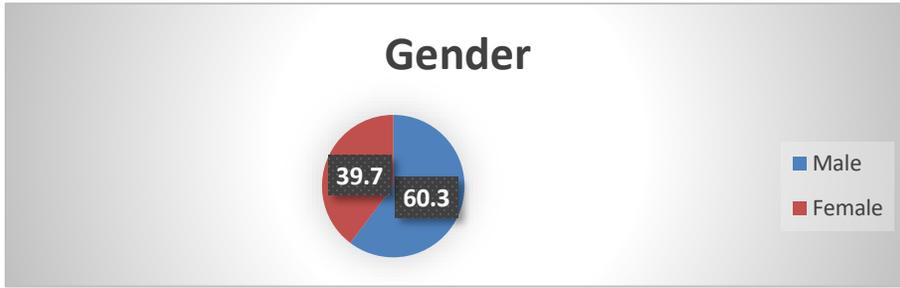
Figure 4.1 Chart representing Gender wise classification of respondents from table 4.1

Age distribution of the respondenets

| | Less than 15 years | 16-30 | 31-40 | 41-50 | 51-60 | 61 and above | Total |

40 2.6 | 620 39.4 | 430 27.6 | 200 12.8 | 150 9.6 | 60 3.8 | 1560 100

Series1   Series2
Age distribution of the respondents
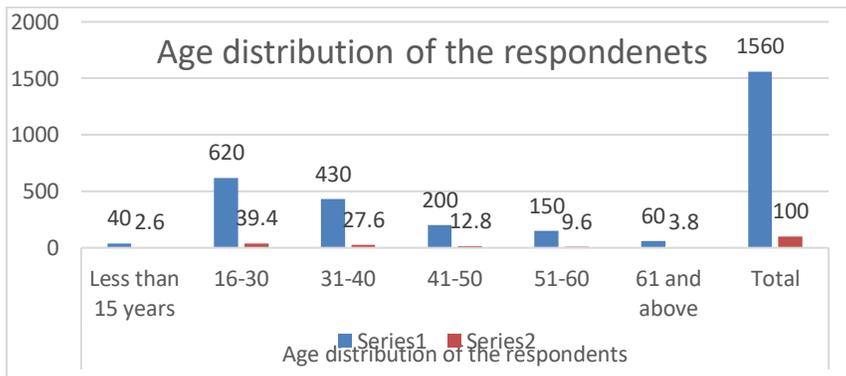
Figure 4.2 Chart representing Age wise classification of respondents from table 4.2

DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS BY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUD

Series1   Series2

1560

| Others | High Degree | University/ Polytechinc | College of Education | Secondary school | Primary school | Total |

70 4.5 | 100 6.4 | 650 41.7 | 380 24.4 | 240 15.8 | 120 6.4 | 100
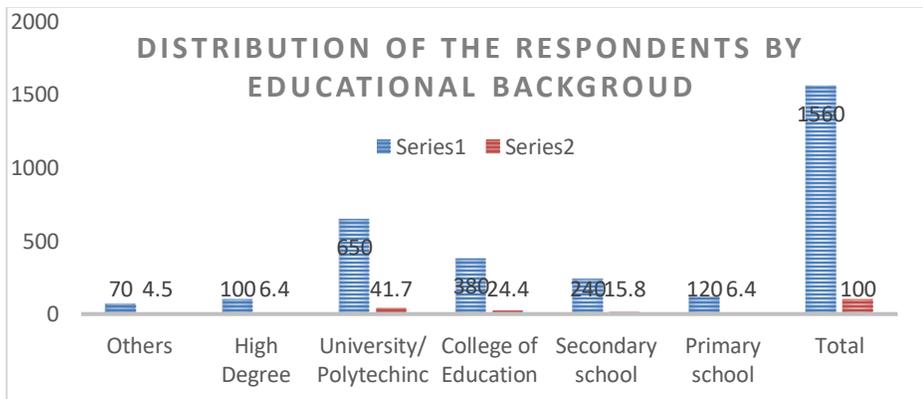
Figure 4.3 Chart representing Educational wise classification of respondents from table 4.3

Respondents of computer and Internet skill

1500	1400
	89.7
	120 7.7
	40 2.6

Yes   No   Absent

Computer and Internet skills

■ Series1 ■ Series2
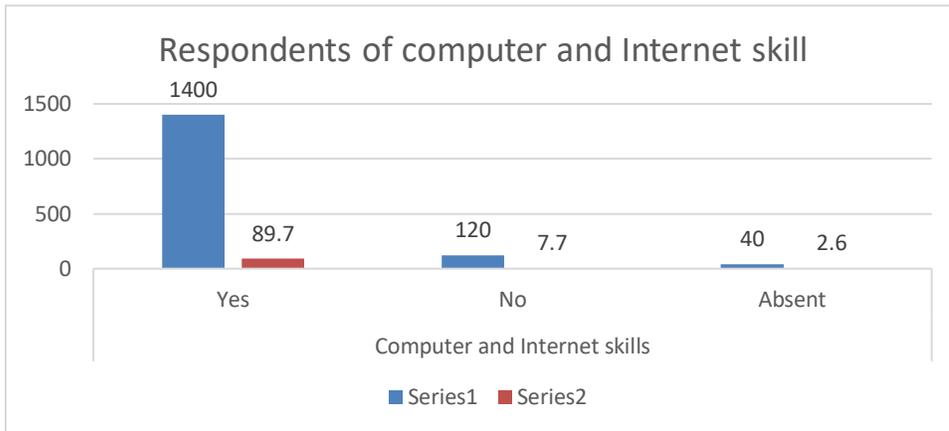
Figure 4.4 Chart representing Computer and Internet skills wise classification of respondents from table 4.4

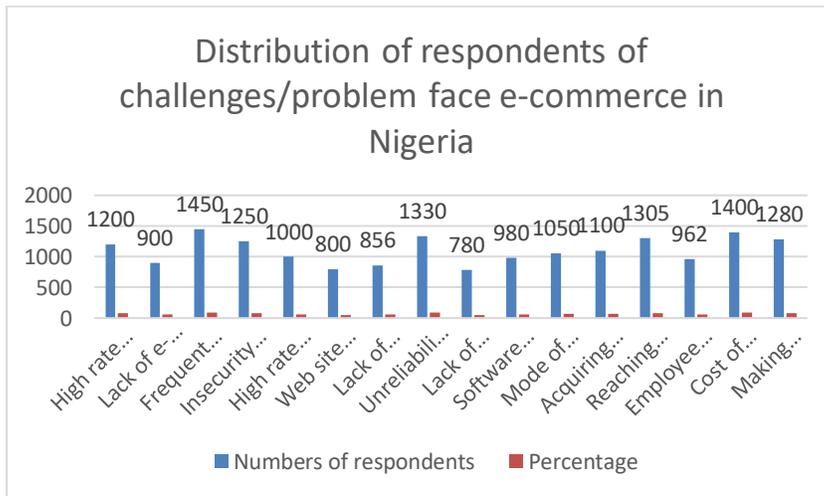**Distribution of respondents of challenges/problem face e-commerce in Nigeria**

1200 900 1450 1250 1000 800 856 1330 780 980 1050 1100 1305 962 1400 1280

High rate... Lack of e-... Frequent... Insecurity... High rate... Web site... Lack of... Unreliabili... Lack of... Software... Mode of... Acquiring... Reaching... Employee... Cost of... Making...

■ Numbers of respondents ■ Percentage

Figure 4.5 Problems/challenges facing e- commerce in Nigeria distribution of respondents from table 4.5
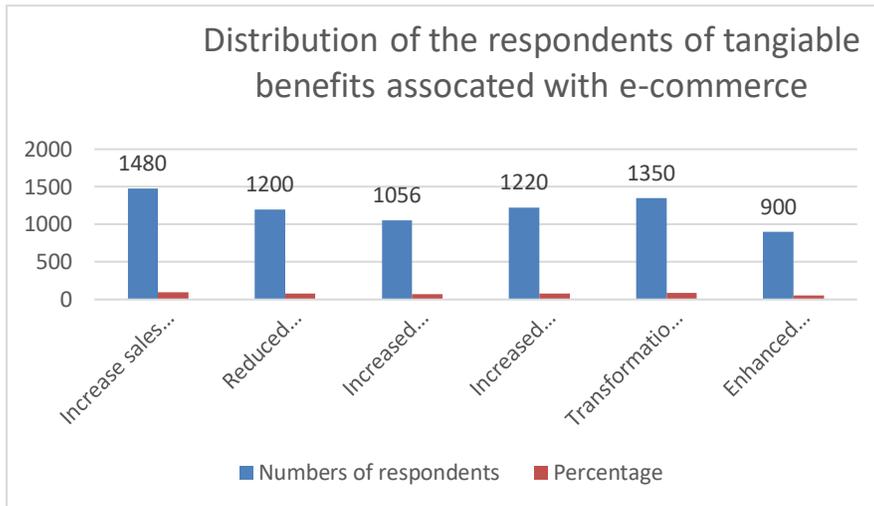
_____

Figure 4.6Chart representingtangiable benefits associated with e-commercewise classification of respondents from table 4.6
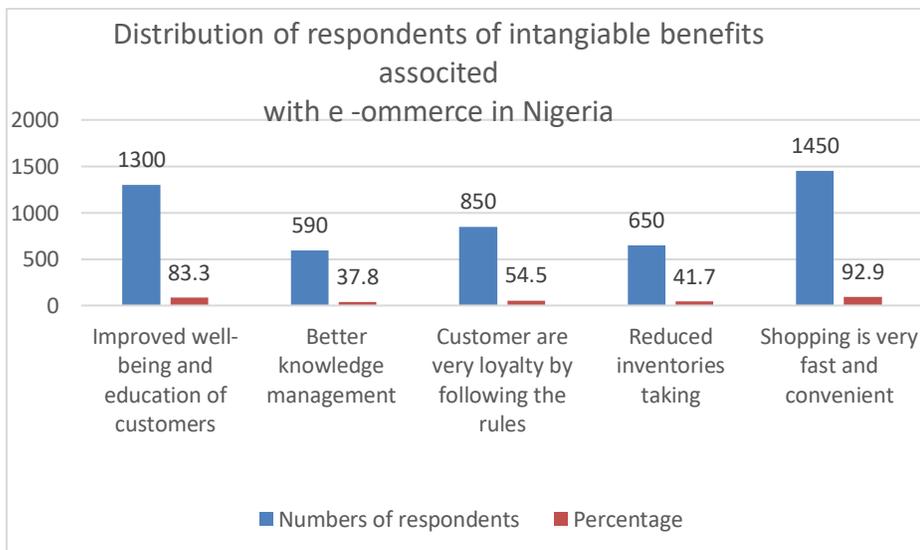

Figure 4.7. Chart representing of intangible benefits associated with e-commerce wiseclassification of respondents from table 4.7
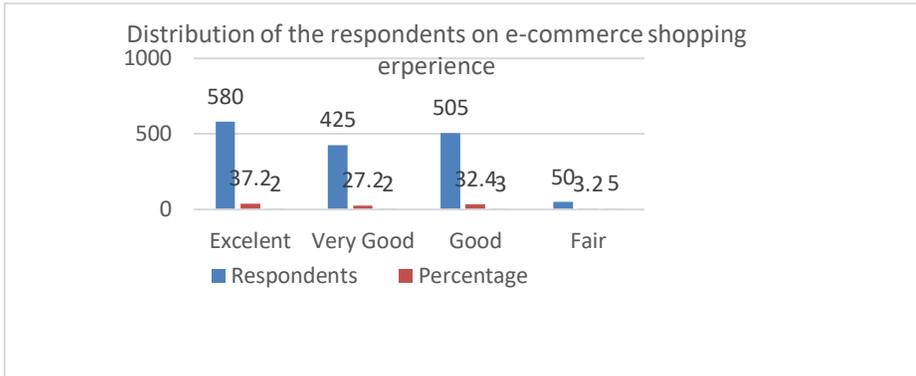
_____

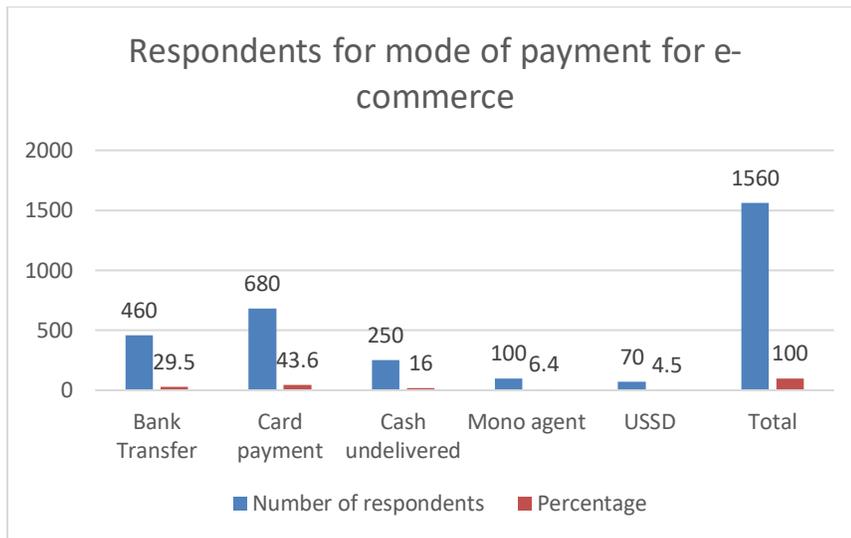Figure 4.8. Chart representing thee-commerce shopping classification of Respondent from table 4.8

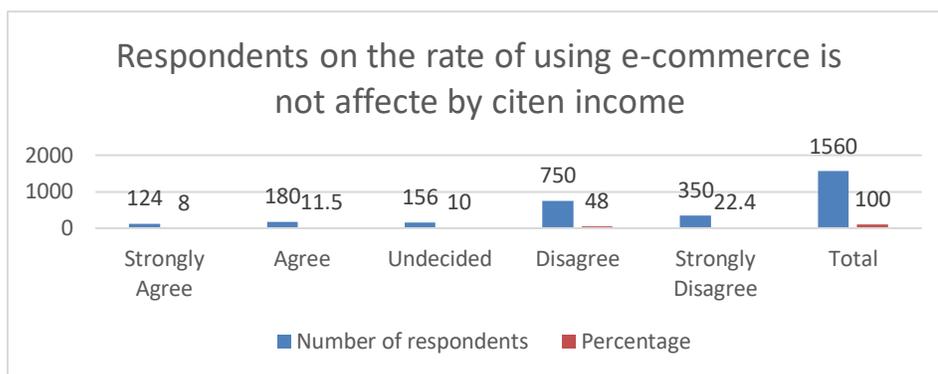Figure 4.9 Chart representing the mode of payment fore-commerce classification ofRespondent from table 4.9

Figure 4.10.   Chart representing the mode of payment fore-commerce classification ofrespondents from table 4.10

Results and Discussion

From table 4.1, it was observed that 940(60.3%) of the respondents are male while 620 (39.7%) are female. This result shown that there are more male who engaged on online activities e-commerce activities than female users in the sample studied.

In Table 4. 2, 40(2.6%) of the respondents are children less than 15 years of age, while the respondents in 620(39.4%) and 430(27.6%) are respectively are in the categories of age between 16-30 years and 31-40 years. This means that these categories are more involving online shopping activities and they spend all their time on internet activities. 200(12.8%) and 150(9.6%) represents the age between 41-50 years and 51-60 years   This shows that there are few people in this category who do not really have much interest on online shopping. 60(3.8%) of the respondents are adults above 61 years.

Table 4.3 shows the educational status of the respondents. The analysis show that secondary school and primary school which represent 240(15.8%) and 100(6.4%) respectively are not mostly engaged on online shopping activities. It can be deduced from the analysis that majority of respondents is University/ Polytechnic students with 650(41.7%) with the highest compared to college of Education with 380(24.4%). High degree 100(6.4%) and others (70(4.5%)) respondents rated as the least categories respectively. Ajao et al. (2018) already highlight the lack of trained personnel as a challenge for E-Commerce companies. The interviews support this. In addition, our research also underlines

that it is difficult to retain staff, which makes planning a complex process on the long term.

Table4.4 shown that 1400 (89.7%) of the respondents indicated they have computer and internet skills This aligned with the study of Okello-Obura and Magara, (2008) who said Computer literacy is very important for the maximum use of internet services and e-commerce activities while only 7.7% indicated that they do not have the computer and Internet skill. This means that the majority of the respondents have personal computer which make them have good internet skills. However, 40(2.6%) respondents did not return their questionnaire.

As shown in table 4.5, the major challenge/constraint encountered by respondents facing e-commerce in Nigeria are frequent power interruption and Power failures, high cost of technology and high cost of buying data for browsing and inadequate Internet access in most part of rural area in Nigeria as indicated by (93.0%), (89.7%) and (85..3%) of 1560 samples interview.

The other constraint is making business known to users which represent 82.0%. Schneider, (2016) findings also show that of insecurity problem (80.1%) and software compatibility (62.8%) of the server is another constraint facing customers shopping on Jumia, Flipkart and Amazon. Poor performance of the internet server is also a leading problem in this study which may be due to the bandwidth capacity and/or several users browsing at the same time. Another challenge/ constraint encountered were difficulties in acquiring IT skilled personnel is difficult as indicated by 70.5% of the respondents. This challenge was also reported by Waithaka (2013) in their studies on e- commerce. Another challenge hindering e- commerce in Edo State is mode of payment is difficult and unreliable which account for 67.3% of the respondents. 57.7% of the respondents also argue that e-commerce infrastructure is inadequate which made shopping online major difficult. The citizen lacked adequate Wi-Fi connection to have access to the internet. This finding was supported by Anasi (2006) in his study.

Research from previous literatures revealed that the technological infrastructure, as well as the internet infrastructure, are not fully developed in Nigeria (Lawrence and Tar, 2010; Rabiu et al., 2019; Schneider, 2016). Thus, companies have problems with their data management because they struggle to adopt IT capabilities. As already stated by Lawrence and Tar (2010), Nigeria has

difficulties in successfully implementing a logistic solution for E-Commerce companies due to the lack of proper infrastructure. Our findings show that poorly developed roads and the lack of appropriate addressing system complicate deliveries.

In table 4.6, 1480(94.9%) of the respondents engaged in online shopping activities because e-commerce is very convenience to buy goods and services, you can order for goods and services at the comfort of home and also increase the sale for the company. 1350((86.5%) of the respondents also support the fact that its reduced operational costs of buy and selling because it is more convenient to use without the need to travel from one place to another. 1350(86.5%) of respondents view e-commerce as alternative transformation of traditional marketing to modern chain of market whereby marketing is carried out through the use of Internet. Similarly, 1056(67.7%) and 900(57.7) of the respondents argue that e-commerce enhanced customers skills on IT and increased automation of processes. This means that majority of the e-commerce users were motivated because of increased Business efficiency as indicated by the respondents 1220(78.2%).

From the table 4.8, we observe that 37.2% of respondent rated excellent for online shopping experience. 27.2% of respondent rated very good for online shopping experience, 32.7% of respondent rated good for online shopping experience and 3.2% of respondent rated fair for online shopping experience.

From this table4.9, we observed that 680(43.6%) of respondent prefer card transfer mode of payment option on delivery for online shopping. ATM is the dominant payment instrument among respondents. 460(29.5%) of respondent prefer bank transfer for online shopping. This means customers prefer going to the bank to carry out their transaction because bank transaction is much safer and reliable. 250(16.4%) of respondent prefer cash undelivered for online shopping. Customers in Nigeria have a huge range of choices because there are many vendors on E-Commerce platforms and on the black-market. This causes companies to lower prices in order to outdo competitors, resulting in a price war. 100(6.4%) of respondent prefer mono agent banking for online shopping while 70(4.5%) respondents used USSD for shopping. From 4.10, it can be deduced that rate of using e– commerce is not affected by citizen income. This is shown as in

figure 10 as, Disagree 48.0%, strongly disagree 22.4%, and undecided 10.0%. The respondents with agree rate is 11.5% and that of strongly agree is 8.0%.

Testing the Research Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1:   Gender of respondent and computing skills

H0 (Null hypothesis) = There is no significant relationship between Gender of respondent and computing skill

H1 (Alternative Hypothesis) = There is significant relationship between Gender of respondent and Computer and Internet skills

Table 3: Contingency table for Gender and Computer and Internet skill Gender

Computer and Internet skill	Male	Female	Total
Yes	800	600	1400
No	105	15	120
Absent	35	5	40
Total	940	620	1560

Hypothesis 2:   Age of respondent and opinion about ss e- commerce shopping experience.

   H0 (Null hypothesis) = There is no significant relationship between Age of respondent and opinion about overall E- commerce shopping experience.

   H1 (Alternative Hypothesis) = There is significant relationship between Age of respondent and opinion about overall e-commerce shopping experience.

72.31   47.69

 3   35   5   40
24.10   15.90 All 940   620 156
 Cell Contents:
 Count Expected count

Pearson Chi-Square = 55.255, DF = 2, P-Value = 0.000

_____

Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square = 63.801, DF = 2, P-Value = 0.000

Since p-value < 0.05, reject Ho and conclude that is a significant relationship between

Gender and computer and internet skill at 5% level oh significance

Table 4: Contingency table for Age and Opinion e- commerce Shopping Experience

Age	Opinion e- commerce Shopping Experience				Total
	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	
Less them 15	28	17	12	3	60
16-30	250	153	200	17	620
31-30	150	147	123	10	430
41-50	70	66	76	8	220
51-60	60	30	53	7	150
61-Above	22	12	41	5	80
Total	580	425	505	50	1560

Chi-Square Test for Association: Worksheet rows, Worksheet columns
Rows: Worksheet rows   Columns: Worksheet columns

```
       C1     C2     C3     C4   All

1       28     17     12      3    60
      22.31  16.35  19.42   1.92
2      250    153    200     17   620
    230.51 168.91 200.71  19.87
3      150    147    123     10   430
    159.87 117.15 139.20  13.78
4       70     66     76      8   220
     81.79  59.94  71.22   7.05
5       60     30     53      7   150
     55.77  40.87  48.56   4.81
6       22     12     41      5    80
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  29.74 21.79 25.90 2.56

All   580   425   505   50 1560
Cell Contents: Count
Expected count
Pearson Chi-Square = 44.540, DF = 15, P-Value = 0.000
Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square = 43.875, DF = 15, P-Value = 0.000

* NOTE * 3 cells with expected counts less than 5
Since p-valve <0.05, reject Ho and conclude that there is a significant relationship between age and shopping experience at 5% level of significance

Recommendations

(a) The government of Edo State should provide the much needed leadership, support for e-commerce, and secured the internet from online fraudsters.
(b)In order for e-commerce industries in the country to thrift and raise the country's GDP, there should be steady power supply as this will enhance economic activities in the country.
(c) The government of Edo State and private organization should invest in training, adequate publicity and other enlightenment programs that are very vital to attitudinal changes of consumers to e-commerce transaction with emphasis on e-shopping, e-banking and e-business.
(d)Government should established consumer protection, e-commerce legal framework that will standardize e- commerce adoption in order to attract and increase the confidence of e-commerce users.

(e) Government and private organisations should systematically expand the necessary infrastructure by promoting the development of necessary technologies, expanding high speed information network and recruiting skilled IT personnel as this will promote the growth of e-commerce in the country

Conclusion

This paper studied the benefits, issues and challenges as they relate to e-commerce in Edo State. The survey research methodology was used in this study. It was revealed that some customers are concerned about perceived ease of use and insufficient information on the e-commerce site. The respondents correctly estimated the vast majority of challenges of e-commerce that discourage most people from fully adopting and using e-commerce, thereby hindering the

development of e-commerce in Edo State. High rate of poverty, high rate of illiteracy, acquisition of skilled IT personnel, and customer service have contributed to the poor adoption of e-commerce in the State. Other challenges identified in the adoption of e-commerce in Edo State are power outages and frequent power interruption, insecurity, technology costs. The major benefits of e-commerce in Edo State are increased sales, completive advantage, customer loyalty, increased automation of processes, extend application of new technology, better knowledge management, enhanced well-being and education of customers. This study is of the opinion that if the recommendations are adhered to, e-commerce in Edo State will continue to improve economic efficiency, competitiveness, social wellbeing and economic development. This will have positive impact to the development of Nigeria at large.

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COUNSELLING PRACTICE AS INITIATIVE FOR PEACE BUILDING, CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MANAGEMENT IN NIGER DELTA REGION

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Abstract: The study investigated counselling practice as initiative for peace building, conflict resolution and management in Niger Delta Region. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the investigation. The study's sample was comprised of 387 Niger Delta residents across the nine (9) states. The simple random sampling technique was used to arrive at the sample. The questionnaire titled "Counselling Practice as Initiative for Peace Building, Conflict Resolution and Management Questionnaire" was designed and used to collect data. A reliability coefficient of 0.63 was obtained for the items on the questionnaire. The researcher with the help of 10 research assistants personally visited the various sampled communities in the region to administer the instrument. The data were analysed using coefficient of determination of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation for research questions and hypotheses. The findings of the study show among others that there is a positive and significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta region. Based on the findings of this study it was recommended among others that Government, community leaders and stakeholders in the oil firm should prioritize aggressive counselling programmes to establish peace-building mechanisms in the region.

Keyword: Counselling Practice, Peace Building, Conflict Resolution, Conflict Management

Introduction

The discovery of fossil fuel in 1956 in Oloibiri present day Bayelsa State, and in recent time other neighbouring states has been bedevilled by the absence of development (basic amenities – water, electricity, good road and unemployment) amidst environmental contamination (oil spillage, gas flaring) which has led the Niger Delta region underdeveloped. The Niger Delta region is rich in oil and other natural resources which hold 90 percent of Nigeria economy. The struggle for control by Niger Deltan states (Ondo, Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Imo, Abia, Akwa Ibom and Cross River) had engendered crises between the Niger Deltans. Different ethnic groups Urhobos and Itsekiris; Urhobos and Ijaws, Ijaws and Itsekiris among the notable ones had clashed severally giving rise to ethnic militia groups and this led to the has historically been a flashpoint of tension between local communities, the government, and multinational oil companies. The resultant conflicts ranging from environmental protests to armed militancy have left deep psychological scars and fostered cycles of violence and distrust (Oniyama, 2024).

The region has long grappled with multifaceted conflicts stemming from environmental degradation, economic disparities, and political marginalization.

Conflict cases in region took a different dimension when the agitations for better living conditions and environmental sustainability in the Niger Delta heightened, abduction and demand for ransom spread out to the eastern region, cultism and political thuggery were carried out with ease cover. The conflicts in the Niger Delta date back to the early 1900s beginning with conflicts between foreign oil companies or corporations and a group of Niger Deltans that degenerated into militancy sabotage of oil prospects and eventually kidnappings which led to lose of lives and properties and prevalence of violence and insecurity. In an attempt to ensure that peace and security prevail in the area counselling practices have emerged as pivotal tools in fostering peace, resolving conflicts, and managing disputes within the region by government and other stakeholders. By equipping individuals and communities with skills in dialogue, empathy, and non-violent communication, counselling initiatives have contributed significantly to the region's stability.

Counselling practice is important since the community is an environment with an increasing number of problems and residents are faced with many challenges emanating from the youths which when control can impact positively on the oil rich area. Counselling is a personal relationship in which one person attempts to help another person toward understanding and solving his social problems (Oviogbodu, 2018). According to Adekoya (2016) counselling practice is a learning process in which individuals learn and understand themselves and their environment and make the right choice of behaviours that will help them develop, grow progress, ascend, mature, and step up in social activities. The inclusion of counselling as a service delivery system in Niger Delta communities acknowledges the fact that emotional health is an important aspect of both learning and personal development. Despite acknowledging the significance of community counselling, there are still gaps in their implementation and efficacy. For instance, Fleming and White (2024) established that even though communities have put in place counselling services, there are few professionals to offer those services. Additionally, this variation in program quality leads to variability in the outcomes of counselling interventions for residents, potentially diminishing their positive impact in the oil rich communities which underscores the necessity for a systematic review to enhance the effectiveness of counselling in communities.

Karcher (2020) ascertains the impact of counselling on community engagement which is noted for having counselling features boosted self-esteem. Okorodudu (2021) stated that following these principles of counselling respect for client autonomy, confidentiality, empathy, non-judgmental attitude, cultural sensitivity, professional boundaries, ethical and legal standards, self-awareness, trust, and a collaborative approach are fundamental to effective support outcome to community and the society. These counselling principles are founded on supporting and fostering personal development and cordial relationship among oil company and community members.

Ogagavwodia (2023) examines how education counseling influences the promotion of peace-building specifically in Ughelli North Local Government of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and its ability to reduce structural violence experienced in the region with the adoption of quantitative descriptive survey method. The study used questionnaire with a sample size of 1000 residence. The

results from the test of correlation between peace education counseling and national peace building showed a significant relationship between the two variables with a mean score of above 164 in support of a significant relationship as against less than 25 against. According to **Egbe (2013),** trauma-focused counseling interventions in conflict zones like the Niger Delta help individuals reintegrate emotionally and socially, reducing tendencies toward retaliatory violence.

Adekola (2016) highlights that integrating counseling into community dialogue initiatives in the Niger Delta significantly reduced youth restiveness and improved cooperation between conflicting parties. Amadi and Abdullah (2012) found that youths exposed to structured counseling programs showed greater inclination towards peace and entrepreneurship than their non-counselled counterparts. Ogunyemi (2009) argued that psychoeducational group counseling in oil-host communities improved intergroup relations and promoted a culture of peace and coexistence. According to Oviogbodu (2015)**,** post-amnesty programmes that included counselling components contributed to deradicalization and reintegration of ex-militants, reducing conflict levels in the region. Adekoya (2017) found that structured community counseling reduced the frequency of violent clashes in Delta State by facilitating dialogue. Iwuagwu (2014) noted that many counseling interventions in the Niger Delta were short-term and donor-driven, lacking sustainability and failing to address deep-rooted grievances.

Olanrewaju and Folarin (2013) argued that while counselling can help individuals cope, it does not significantly reduce conflict if root causes persist, limiting its overall impact on sustainable peace. **Eregha (2010)** highlighted that failure to involve broader community stakeholders in counselling-based peace initiatives led to minimal long-term impact on conflict dynamics. Despite the role of counseling in schools and communities in the surrounded area, the general attitude of youth towards conflict and violent has become a source of great concern to all the stakeholders in the oil sector and community. Could this attitude towards conflict and violent be attributed to the ineffectiveness of the fundamental principles that guide the therapeutic process that provide ethical, empathetic, and effective support to residents. This necessitated the researcher to carried out counselling practice as initiative for peace building, conflict resolution and management in Niger Delta region

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.
1. What is the impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region?
2. What is the impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region?
3. What is the impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.
1. There is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region
2. There is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region
3. There is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region

Methods

The correlational research design was used in this investigation. A correlational design is a design that is used to examine research the extent of the impact that exists between two or more variables. Because the researcher is interested in researching the relationship between the counselling practice as initiative on peace building, conflict resolution and conflict management a correlational research design is appropriate. The population of the study comprised all the states in Niger Delta. There are nine (9) states in the region with an estimated population of 20, 000000 residences according to google bureau statistics. The study's sample was comprised of 387 Niger Delta residents across the nine (9) states. The choice of the sample size was based on the recommendation of Krejcie and Morgan as cited by Ubiebi-Uyoyo (2022) that when a population is above 100,000 the sample size should be 387. The simple random sampling techniques were used to draw 43residents from each state that make up the Niger Delta. The instruments that was used for data collection is questionnaire. The questionnaire is titled "Counselling Practice as Initiative for

Peace Building, Conflict Resolution and Management Questionnaire". The questionnaire is divided into five sections: Section A contains demographic information about the respondents such as their gender, community and state.

Section B contains four scales: The Counselling Practice Rating Scale (CPRS), Peace Building Rating Scale (PBRS), Conflict Resolution Rating Scale (CRRS), and the Conflict Management Rating Scale (CMRS). Each scale consists of 10 items statements. Participants were asked to rate the items on a four-point scale ranging from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 indicating Disagree (D), 3 indicating Agree (A) and 4 indicating Strongly Agree (SA). The instrument's face and content validity validity was determined by experts from Guidance and Counselling Department. The instrument's reliability was done in Anambra State to evaluate whether the instruments exhibit internal consistency, the data was analysed using the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient which yielded a coefficient of 0.63 showing that the instrument is consistent and reliable. The researcher administered the questionnaire to the community residents directly with the help of 10 research assistants. The goal of the study was presented to the community heads who gave approval before the distribution questionnaire. To avoid loss, copies of the questionnaire were obtained immediately. The data were analysed using inferential statistics. To answer the research questions, coefficient of determination was used. At the 0.05 level of significant, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the null hypotheses to determine the significant relationship between the depend and independents variables.

Results

   In line with the data obtained from field work, the researcher presents and discusses the result of the respondents.

Research Question 1: What is the impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region?

Table 1:Coefficient of Determination of impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region

	N	R	r^2	r^2 %	Decision
Counselling Practice as Initiative Peace Building	387.077	.006		0.6	Positive Impact

Table 1 showed the r-value of 0.077 as the amount of impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region. The coefficient of determination (r^2) is .006 and the amount of contribution of counselling practice as initiative to peace building is 0.6. The result showed a positive impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region?

Table 2: Coefficient of Determination of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region

Variable	N	R	r^2	r^2 %	Decision
Counselling Practice as Initiative Conflict Resolution	387.97	.94	94		positive impact

Table 2 showed the r-value of 0.9 as the amount of impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region. The coefficient of determination (r^2) is 0.94 and the amount of contribution of counselling practice as initiative on Conflict Resolutionis 94. The result showed a very strong positive impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution.

Research Question 3: What is the impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region?

Table 3: Coefficient of Determination of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region

Variable	N	R	r^2	r^2 %	Decision
Counselling Practice as Initiative	387	.068	.005	0.5	Positive Impact
Conflict Management					

Table 3 showed the r-value of 0.068 as the amount of impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region. The coefficient of determination (r^2) is 0.005 and the amount of contribution of counselling practice as initiative to conflict management is 0.6. The result showed a positive impact of impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region

variable	N	R	r^2	r^2 %	p-value	Remark
Counselling Practice as Initiative	387					
		.077	.006	0.6	.047	Significant
Peace Building	387					

Alpha =0.05

Table 4 shows a Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis output of the significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region(r= 0.77, alpha level =0.05). Testing the null hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of .047 is less than the alpha level of 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis therefore rejected. This indicates that there is a significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region. The R-

square (r^2) value of .006 showed that 0.6% of variance in peace building was accounted for by counselling practice.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region

Table 5: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region

variable	N	R	r^2	r^2 %	p-value	Remark
Counselling Practice as Initiative	387					
		.97	.94	94	.976	Not
Conflict Resolution	387					Significant

Alpha =0.05

Table 5 reveals a Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis output of the significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region. The computed R-value of .97 and a p-value of .976 were shown, testing the null hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of .976 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis therefore accepted. This indicates that there is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region

Table 6: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region

variable	N	R	r^2	r^2 %	p-value	Remark
Counselling Practice as Initiative	387					
		.068	.005	.5	.076	Not
Conflict Management	387					Significant

_____

Alpha =0.05

Table 6 reveals a Pearson Product Moment Correlation output of significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region. The computed R-value of 0.068 and a p-value of .076 were shown, testing the null hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of .076is greater than the alpha level of 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis therefore accepted. This indicates that there is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region. The R-square (r^2) value of .005 showed that 0.5% of variance in conflict management was accounted for by counselling practice.

Discussion of Results

Impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger delta region

Data relating to first research question and it corresponding hypothesis indicated a positive and significant impact of counseling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta region. The reason for this finding is that counselling helps individuals and communities to foster interpersonal and intergroup communication and facilitate emotional healing. Through career and life-skills counselling, youths are empowered to pursue alternative livelihoods rather than militancy, decreased involvement of criminal or militant activities. This finding agreed with the finding of Amadi and Abdullah (2012) who found that youths exposed to structured counselling programs showed greater inclination towards peace and entrepreneurship than their non-counselled counterparts. The finding also agreed with Adekola (2016) who stated that integrating counselling into community dialogue initiatives in the Niger Delta significantly reduced youth restiveness and improved cooperation between conflicting parties.

Impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger delta region

Data relating to second research question and it corresponding hypothesis indicated a positive and no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta region. The reason for this finding is that counselling promotes empathy, tolerance, and understanding across ethnic and

community lines that strengthens social cohesion and rebuilds trust eroded by conflict. This finding agreed with the finding o **f**Egbe (2013) who stated that trauma-focused counselling interventions in conflict zones like the Niger Delta help individuals reintegrate emotionally and socially, reducing tendencies toward retaliatory violence.

Impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger delta region

Data relating to third research question and it corresponding hypothesis indicated a positive and no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta region. The reason for this finding is that counselling has been effective in reducing youth restiveness and violence through behavior modification and psychosocial support **but poor implementation and**

Lack of trained professionals, neglect of structural issues behind conflict, limited reach and community participation let to no impact.

This finding agreed with the finding of Eregha (2010) who highlighted that failure to involve broader community stakeholders in counselling-based peace initiatives led to minimal long-term impact on conflict dynamics. This finding also agreed with the finding of Adekoya (2017) found that structured community counselling reduced the frequency of violent clashes in Delta State by facilitating dialogue.

Conclusion

In line with the findings of this study, it is concluded that, counselling practice is an initiative for peace building, conflict resolution and conflict management in Niger Delta region. It can also be concluded a positive and significant impact of counselling practice in peace building, conflict resolution and conflict management existed in Niger Delta region.

Recommendations

1. Government, community leaders and stakeholders in the oil firm should prioritize aggressive counselling programmes to establish peace-building mechanisms in the region

2. Counselling centres with professional counsellors be established, employed and deployed to the Niger Delta communities and schools to manage conflicts among oil firms and youths.

3. Niger Delta youths that encourage education and development should be engaged so as to give the individuals in the region a sense of importance.

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THE PLACE OF AFRICA IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY: PROSPECTS AND OBSTACLES

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Abstract: This paper examines Africa's evolving engagement with the international community from the pre-Cold War era to the present day, exploring its quest for a meaningful foothold in global affairs through the lens of Dependency Theory, as posited by Frank (1966). Frank's theory highlights the structural dependency of peripheral economies on core capitalist systems, which perpetuates underdevelopment. The paper assesses Africa's capacity to leverage its collective influence to reshape international relations and institutions, and whether its growing political clout translates into tangible influence and policy outcomes. Africa's ascendance in international politics hinges on harnessing its numerical

strength and shared historical experiences to overcome economic and military disparities perpetuated by this dependency. The paper concludes that integrating its approach towards external actors and pushing for reforming the international system will be crucial in enhancing its global standing. Findings suggest that Africa's influence remains limited due to economic and military disparities. Its recommendations include strengthening regional integration, reforming international institutions, diversifying partnerships, and investing in capacity building to enhance Africa's global engagement and emergence as a significant player in shaping global governance and policy outcomes.

Keywords: International politics, Cold war, Post-cold war, Imperialism, African voice and development.

Introduction

Africa's influence in international politics remains limited, rendering its participation in international organizations marginal and ineffective in shaping global decisions. Despite recent strides in increasing Africa's quota and voice in global politics, effective representation remains elusive, leaving the continent without a significant presence in the international arena. The international community comprises numerous organizations, including financial institutions like the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), development organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), specialized agencies like the World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), trade organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO), and security and governance bodies like the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), whose decisions significantly impact African countries, prompting African leaders to advocate for equal representation and participation in decision-making processes that affect the continent's interests.

There are a number of international organizations where Africans have been able to register some effective representation, like the WTO and WHO. This has been as a result of the veto power they possess in lieu of the numbers that they have in these organizations. But, again, there is a general feeling that the entities in which

African countries have a voice have limited or no consequences on the agenda and policy direction in the international arena, Zondi (2011) holds the view that international arena has realized that the only way they can forge a distinct role in the international diplomatic game and have significant impact in multilateral processes is when they act as a regional block. These initial gains are being felt in the trade and climate change issues where Africa has exerted blocking power to ensure that their input on issues affecting them are taken into consideration.

Africa's influence in international politics remains limited, rendering its participation in international organizations marginal and ineffective in shaping global decisions. However, a knowledge gap exists in understanding the dynamics of Africa's engagement with these international organizations, with scholars like Adedeji (2012) highlighting the lack of research on Africa's negotiating capacity, while authors like Taylor (2015) focused on Africa's strategic engagement with global governance structures, which has led to this study's exploration of Africa's role in international politics and its quest for meaningful participation in global decision-making processes.

Africa and the International Community: A Brief History

Developing countries have historically been underrepresented in international institutions (Adebajo, 2016). This can be attributed to their late entry into global diplomacy after gaining independence, when most governance regimes were already established (Mkandawire, 2011). The African group attempted to coalesce around the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the G77 to advance their interests and project their perspectives (Abrahamsen, 2000). Within the UN system, the G77 group of countries pushed for collective concerns through reciprocal solidarity. The South-South grouping pressed for major reforms in global governance and a new international economic order (Taylor, 2003).

However, African representation varies across international organizations, with more presence in policy-making bodies like the WTO and ICJ compared to the UNSC (Brien, 2018). Clark (2019) argued that even in organizations where Africa has representation, the major powers significantly influence outcomes. For example, the UN General Assembly's one-country-one-vote system led big powers to shift focus to the UNSC, where they could exert more control. The veto

power in the UNSC often results in gridlocks, broken only by unilateral actions (Fisher, 2015).The multilateral system operates according to the whims of big powers, which prefer acting within and outside rules. For instance, the Bretton Woods institutions serve the global strategy of G7 countries led by the US (Babb, 2009). In the UNSC, only 21.4% of the African population has direct representation, despite most UNSC policies affecting African states directly.

The UN's leadership in generating ideas and formulating economic perspectives has been eroded by institutions like the IMF and World Bank, where weighted voting allows the US and its allies to shape global economic governance policies (Woods, 2006). The shift towards Bretton Woods' institutions has expanded their influence in economic management and policy processes. The big powers' reluctance to adhere to international rules is evident in the ICJ, where no permanent UNSC member has been subject to compulsory jurisdiction (ICJ Statute, 1945). Despite this, all permanent members have a jurist on the ICJ panel. In the Bretton Woods Institutions, developing countries are underrepresented on executive boards, making it difficult to ensure diverse interests are adequately represented (Best, 2014). African countries' participation in the WTO has been limited, but they must take a more active role to safeguard trade gains. Recent developments, such as the transformation of OAU into AU and the establishment of NEPAD and APRM, have led to increased cooperation between Africa and international institutions (Adebajo, 2016). The UN has provided financial and technical capacity to support these organizations. Africa's participation in international diplomacy has grown, but it faces challenges in negotiating and implementing deals to its advantage (Taylor, 2003). African countries have increased common positions and platforms in international diplomatic forums, enabling the African Group to play a more distinct role.

Right from the start, the African group and other alienated groups were obsessed with the reform of the world order already in place because that is the only way that their interests could find a place on the agenda of international politics. The main agenda of their proposals as argued by Barro and Lee (2005) has always been to:

- reform of the UN system in general, and the UNSC in particular, with a view to broadening representation at the highest levels of global decision making, and to disciplining

the use of the veto by the big powers in order to prevent the routine subversion of the will of the international community;

- recalibration of the voting rights and decision-making processes of the IMF and the World Bank, to ensure a greater voice for the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America

- generalized reform of the international trading system, to make it fairer, remunerative and development-oriented;

- create a global integrated programme for commodities (agricultural and mineral) that would assure more stable and fairer prices;

- create a new global currency, based on the special drawing rights, that could safeguard the development interests of all members of the international community;

- adopt rules that would govern the conduct and practices of Western transnational companies in the economic and political spheres, as well as in matters of technology transfer, patents, and copyrights amongst others

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Dependency Theory, as posited by Frank (1966). This theory highlights the structural dependency of peripheral economies on core capitalist systems, perpetuating underdevelopment. Its relevance to the study lies in understanding Africa's position in the global economy and the challenges it faces in asserting its influence in international politics. Another relevant theory is the Constructivist Theory by Alexander Wendt (1992). This theory emphasizes the role of ideas, identities, and social constructs in shaping international relations. It could provide insights into how Africa's identity and interests are constructed and perceived globally, influencing its interactions with other nations and international organizations.

The study focuses on Dependency Theory to investigate Africa's limited influence in international politics, exploring how structural dependencies hinder its ability to shape global agendas. By streamlining the investigation to this specific theoretical lens, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the systemic barriers Africa faces and potential strategies for overcoming them.

Africa's Global Perspective: Evolution from the Cold War to the Contemporary Era

Africa bore the brunt of Cold War bipolar politics, with both blocs vying for influence and rendering consensus in the UNSC on African matters nearly impossible due to competing spheres of influence. This dynamic relegated Africa to the periphery of international decision-making, particularly on issues that mattered most to them. Nevertheless, African states adeptly navigated this landscape by leveraging the rivalry between the superpowers to extract concessions, playing one against the other to advance their own interests. Fisher (2015) opined that the post-cold war global structure has produced opportunities for structured cooperation in international peace and security with economic development as one of the essential elements of stability. The African group has endeavoured to build a united approach in matters of world affairs and speak with one voice. However, this approach has dogged with a myriad of challenges especially where there is a strong national interest, such as security issues and conflict situations. In such scenarios, the African group has suffered the incapability of fronting a united position in either negotiations or voting. The immediate post-cold war period up to the 1990s was dominated with different approaches to solving African problems by international institutions.

The legacy of external decision-making for Africa is evident in policies like Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which were imposed on the continent with little or no input of Africans. These policies have had devastating effects, including the collapse of local industries, increased unemployment, deepened poverty, and heightened dependence on imports and international creditors. The lack of African voices in policy formulation led to counterproductive outcomes, exacerbating the very issues they aimed to address. In the 1990s, Africa began to assert its presence in international institutions. This shift was marked by the restructuring of international institutions and the emergence of multilateral approaches to security intervention under the UN and regional organizations. The cooperation between the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the UN led to comprehensive approaches to peace-making and peace-building. The transformation of the OAU into the African Union (AU) in 2000-2007 marked a new era for Africa. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) became a key platform for Africa's quest for greater influence in global affairs. This period saw increased cooperation between the

international community and the AU, including the development of the UN Ten-Year Capacity-Building Programme for the AU.

Africa intensified its efforts to speak with one voice, as seen in the 2005 "Common African Position" on UN reform, known as the Ezulwini Consensus (Barro & Lee 2003). The AU called for greater representation in the UN Security Council, including two permanent seats with veto power and five non-permanent seats. However, internal divisions and national self-interest have hindered Africa's ability to maintain a united stance. The Africa Group at the UN has shown some cohesion on issues like development, trade, and climate negotiations. African countries have also aligned themselves with the Group of 77 (G-77) and China to strengthen their negotiating position. In recent years, the African Group has engaged in efforts to formalize links with the UN, enhancing the symbiotic relationship between the two organizations. In the World Trade Organization (WTO), African states have become more active and embedded in the negotiating process. They have insisted on a development-focused discourse and vetoed agreements detrimental to their interests. The post-Cold War period has seen increased international intervention in Africa, with Africa's voice becoming more prominent in peace operations and capacity building. The question remains whether African countries have coalesced sufficiently as a group to effectively influence policy development at international deliberations, particularly at the UN.

In Search for Democracy, Development and Security: Home grown Solutions or International Interventions

The intensification of globalization according to Mkandawire (2019) and Bach (2020) has led to increased intervention by the global community in Africa's political, economic, military, and cultural affairs, with international organizations playing a significant policymaking role in states with ineffective domestic institutions. African states with limited influence in global policymaking are disproportionately affected by international policies. Nigerian scholars like Claude Ake, Sam Amadi, and Rotimi Suberu have contributed to the discussion on globalization, governance, and development in Africa. The lack of resources, unstable environments, and corrupt governments in some African countries has necessitated external intervention, often through international organizations. This complex dynamic has shaped Africa's development

trajectory, with ongoing debates about the role of global governance in shaping the continent's future

The big question has always been whether these interventions have provided the best solutions to African problems or whether Africa should have resorted to homemade solutions to tackle African problems. The rallying cry by various African actors in global politics has been "African solutions to African Problems". But the question begs: can Africa tackle these problems on its own? Do we have effective and efficient institutional structures, and the managerial resources and capacity to go it alone? Can we manage without the financial, logistical and technical capacity of the international environment? This and more are crucial questions begging for answers.

Several studies have been carried to answer the questions posed above. But the results have been mixed and remain controversial. In a study on the impact of IFI programmes in 76 African and Asian countries through 34 annual observations from 1974 to 2007, Limpach and Michaelowa attest to the mixed impact of the different types of IFIs implemented in Africa on the various dimensions of democracy. The authors observe that "in a narrow sense, democratization cannot be imposed from the outside. We do not find significant effects of any type of IFI program on vertical accountability as measured by the degree of political participation and competitive elections in a country". On a different note, they also observe that "in a wider sense, however, IMF and World Bank programs do have political implications for changes in the extent of executive constraints and in the level of civil liberties in developing countries". Their main results reveal that the IFIs' traditional lending programs have negative short-term impacts on horizontal accountability in recipient countries, while their development policy lending to low-income countries increases horizontal accountability over the long term. In addition, this study shows that the IFI's PRS initiative strengthens civil liberties by promoting broad-based participation of civil society and, in particular the poor in the domestic political decision-making process.

In two other studies by Barro and Lee (2005) on IMF financial stabilization programs, they observe that these interventions have had a marginally negative effect, directly on democracy and indirectly on economic growth, especially on democracy and economic growth contemporaneous and the lagged five-year

period. On the contrary other studies have illuminated the positive impact that international intervention has had in Africa. The study by Nelson and Wallace reveals that countries being under any kind of IMF program show significantly higher democratization levels, and concludes that the conditions attached to the loans disbursed by the IMF have a positive effect on the quality of democratic institutions in participating countries. These positive effects grow over time. For a one-year time lag, no apparent relationship between the participation in an IMF program and the level of democracy is detected. However, in the three-year and five-year lagged models, the coefficients for participating in an IMF program become stronger and statistically significant. Similarly, the path-breaking study by Abouharb and Cingranellion the IFIs' human rights impact looks at the length of time a country has been under a structural adjustment programme by either the World Bank or the IMF in the 1980 to 2003 period so as to determine how efficient and developmentally supportive these programmes were to African states. The authors find that longer exposure to structural conditionality is positively correlated with procedural democracy and development. At the same time, their findings, which suggest that long-term structural adjustment has a negative impact on a wide range of civil, worker and human rights, points to the paradox that structural adjustment "may have simultaneously advanced procedural democracy and a decline in substantive democracy".

Positive impacts of Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) processes are seen in three key areas, namely:
- that the PRS consultation process created new space for domestic policy dialogue and resulted in an unprecedented engagement of civil society organizations in poverty policy debates;
- that the PRS process contributed to a much stronger focus on poverty inside government; and
- that the PRS approach focused attention on donor coordination internationally and at the recipient country level (e.g., Booth, 2003; Molenaers & Renard, 2003; World Bank and IMF, 2005; Driscoll & Evans, 2005).

However, a lot of challenges for achieving national ownership and democratic control of the PRS process are still remaining. They are mainly seen in the areas of institutionalizing sustainable participation and taking the domestic political

context into account. Even though the ownership principle suggests participation of a variety of actors, in practice the PRS process was often characterized by "government ownership" rather than broader "country ownership". Moreover, governments often limited participation by depoliticizing the topics open for discussion and by politicizing the selection of participants. Another challenge that has not attracted enough attention so far is that many PRS processes have unfolded in semi-democratized states in which domestic politics tend to be patronage-based, with fragmented party systems, politicization of administration, as well as weak state regulatory and implementation capacities. Some case studies indicate that there is a risk that PRS will become identified with the political party in power and be discarded when there is a change of government.

In spite of the above state of affairs, in the past two decades according to World Bank (2013) has been an incessant push for African solution to African problems. The African Group has been calling for the need for homemade solutions to tackle the problems bedevilling Africa. In support of their call they have attempted to come up with a series of initiatives aimed at enabling the continent deal with its own problems based on an agenda, managed by Africans and designed principally to promote and foster an African agenda. One of the most significant of the initiatives that emerged was the Conference on Security Stability Development and Co-operation in Africa (CSSDCA). More importantly, the challenges of peace and security became almost intractable. The meeting concluded that Africa had to tackle the interrelated problems of security, stability, development and co-operation through its own means and to engage the rest of the world within a holistic and composite framework designed, owned and driven by Africans. The Africa Leadership Forum accepted the challenge to drive this process. In November 1990, it convened in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in collaboration with the Secretariats of the OAU and UNECA, a meeting of prominent African personalities drawn from government, business, academic, international and non-governmental organizations to brainstorm on concrete strategies to cope with the world's new realities. The meeting recognized the need to develop a framework for Africa along the lines of the CSCE. A Steering Committee, comprising about half of the conference participants, was set up to guide further activities in this direction. The

committee restructured the principles into four main goals: security, stability, development and co-operation.

The CSSDCA process as posited by Knadawire (2019) stresses the inter-linkage between peace, stability, development, integration and co- operation. It creates a synergy between the various activities of the African continent and seeks to consolidate the various critical issues relating to peace, security, stability, development and cooperation. The underlying thinking of the CSSDCA process was recognition of the fact that the problems of security and stability in many African countries had impaired their capacity to achieve the necessary level of intra and inter-African cooperation that is required to attain the integration of the continent, which is also critical to the continent's socio-economic development and transformation. Indeed, the premium on social and political stability was rising rapidly at a time when the changing international political framework had begun to marginalize the African continent and its concerns. There was also a growing awareness that the progress that the continent had recorded in the sphere of economic development left much to be desired and that poor economic performance underlined the rising wave of domestic conflicts. NEPAD, a new development programme, developed by African leaders, aims at tackling the continent's multi-faceted crisis, reflected in poor economic performance, bad governance, corruption and mismanagement, conflict and insecurity. More specifically NEPAD seeks to arrest and eradicate the deepening poverty on the continent; promote growth and sustainable development; halt and reverse the trend of the continent's marginalization; and restore peace, security and stability. These are to be achieved in partnership with the international community especially foreign donors. In addressing these issues, NEPAD identifies certain key areas whose tackling enhances the achievement of its overall aims. These include peace and security, economic and corporate governance, infrastructure, agriculture, and access to international markets.

The achievement of these objectives necessarily affects the continent's relations with the international community. In contrast to previous developmental paradigms, which required the bulk of the efforts from African states, NEPAD projects itself as a partnership between the continent and the international community to promote the development of the former (Lehman 2008). But, in seeking the partnership of the international community, NEPAD attempts to

accelerate the integration of the increasingly marginalized African continent into the global economy. And although the NEPAD project emphasizes mutual partnership, Africa is heavily dependent on financial aid from the North. Moreover, by relying on external funding, NEPAD is unlikely to change either the current configuration in Africa's international relations with the North or the contents of the former's foreign policies. While the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) more or less supplanted the CSSDCA and was given prominence over of it, the fact remains that security and stability remain the pillar upon which Africa can build its prosperity and relevance in the global market of development. The APRM is designed as a comprehensive mechanism based on the utilization of common diagnostic tools and measurement criteria for assessing performance and cross-referencing inputs for assessments from all stakeholders in African States and society.

Though it provides the basis for continuous engagement of the political leaders on issue of governance, its implementation for almost eight years has not reduced the assertion made in this paper that internal security remains the most daunting challenge confronting development in Africa. This is not to argue that Africa will not require outside assistance. Rather, it is to suggest that positive developments will depend, finally, on Africans developing "African solutions to African problems". Indeed, we believe that the only way that there can be positive outcomes in Africa is if African countries are no longer the junior partners on issues that most directly affect them. Murithi (2022) argued that there is the real possibility of the continent growing faster and becoming more democratic and more secure while addressing critical social issues, especially the empowerment of women. Indeed, to a certain extent, success will breed success, as investors are attracted to growing economies, which will in turn cause them to grow even faster, thus attracting even more investment, in an ever-increasing upward spiral. Political stability will reassure those who lose elections that they need not go back to the bush to win political power, and the enrichment of the rural areas will bind countries together after decades when the minorities in the urban areas benefited disproportionately.

Assisting the development of the AU capacities to channel its own path in addressing African problems is where the international community should focus their priorities on. They main goal should be to ensure a structured interface

between the AU and the international community. The lack of economic and material resources is one of the biggest challenges that all democracy, development and security initiatives contend with in Africa. At present, funding from external donors is a necessity in order to improve capacity. NEPAD, AU and other initiatives engaged in democracy, development and security initiatives are largely funded by external actors. All operations are also greatly influenced by international expertise, advisors and companies. What African actors need to guard against is that this external funding is not accompanied by too much influence in decision-making processes or leadership. Developments in Africa require increased international cooperation, which will need to be based on strong African leadership, internationally, regionally, nationally and at the various sub-state levels. The AU, NEPAD, the African regional organizations and its regional trade organizations will need to lead the way, with committed support from national leaders (Hoste, 2011).

Rethinking the African Agenda - Options for Reforms and the Challenges

Africa, a continent rich in cultural diversity and natural resources, has faced numerous challenges in its quest for democratic governance and sustainable development. The influence of international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank has shaped the economic policies of many African countries. While these institutions aim to promote economic stability and growth, their policies have often been criticized for undermining national sovereignty and exacerbating social inequalities. As Africa continues to navigate the complexities of globalization, the need for reform and sustainable development become increasingly pressing.

Africa's Option for Reform

The argument advanced by African countries for reform in the international governance system is primarily predicated on the need for greater justice and a more equitable representation in world affairs, with special emphasis on the institutions of global governance. Africa has the single biggest bloc of states in the General Assembly, yet does not have a permanent seat on the UNSC—complete with the power of veto. As outlined in the Ezulwini Consensus of 2005, the region has staked a claim for two permanent and five non-permanent seats. The continent has also added its voice to calls for the reform of the Bretton

Woods institutions, and the restructuring of the existing weighted voting system, both to increase the African share of influence and to broaden the decision-making base.

Africa has several options for reform. One crucial step is strengthening democratic institutions, such as parliaments and judiciaries, to promote accountability and transparency. By enhancing the capacity and independence of these institutions, African countries can build trust in government and improve service delivery. Additionally, promoting good governance through anti-corruption measures and public sector reform can help to reduce corruption and improve the business environment. Regional integration initiatives, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), can also promote economic growth and development by increasing trade and investment among African countries.

Investing in human capital is another key option for reform. By prioritizing education, healthcare, and social protection, African countries can build a more productive and resilient population. This can help to promote economic growth and reduce poverty and inequality. Furthermore, diversifying economies and promoting entrepreneurship and innovation can help to reduce dependence on primary commodities and promote sustainable development. By promoting a more diversified and competitive economy, African countries can create jobs and improve living standards for their citizens

In recent years, routine invitations have been extended to selected African leaders to attend G7 meetings, usually sessions devoted to discussing the continent's problems and offers of aid. These invitations may have been designed as a gesture of inclusivity and solidarity that speaks simultaneously to Africa and the civil society/social movement critics of that forum's role in global economic governance, but have hardly succeeded in redressing the fundamental imbalances in the rules and operations of the international financial system. That is why, alongside the basic political governance issues, African countries also have a strong interest in pursuing a reform of the international development architecture.

The forging of a new economic, social and political governance order that is the culmination of an accelerating global realignment process, is evidenced by the re-

emergence of China along with India, Russia, and Brazil. the increased significance in global economic affairs enjoyed by the East Asian countries, Turkey, South Africa, Argentina, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States to cite the most prominent new entrants; and the prospect of long-term decline that the old economic powers, many in the EU, face. It will be an order that will come complete with a radical redistribution of power, authority, and influence, and involve a rewriting/reinterpretation of rules pertaining to the global multilateral institutions. The old world order is gradually dying, while the new is struggling to be born (Kabia, 2011). Debates have already been held and theories are presently being spawned about how such a new order might eventually emerge: by war or by peaceful means; through revolution or evolution; by negotiation, compromise-making and consensus-building or through politico-military fiat; or through a complex combination of all these elements.

While interesting, the only relevance of these debates and theories to this paper is the extent to which they appear to be influencing the choices of major players regarding the need for change in the existing global governance order. The UN family of organizations is looking at the need to work and deliver as "One UN", rationalizing and streamlining agencies with overlapping mandates in order to improve effectiveness and impact and to cut down on costs (Neething, 2003). The ICC has been grafted onto the broader governance system through the assiduous pressure mounted by civil society coalitions whose voices in world affairs are also growing in significance. The IMF (2019) and World Bank (2013) weighted voting systems have also been occasionally tinkered with in order, initially, to accommodate countries such as Japan and, more recently, Saudi Arabia and China, and to replenish the funds put at the disposal of the institutions.

According to Frances, (2006) the workings of the existing international governance system are limited in scope and fragmented and piecemeal in nature. They have also been essentially reactive, rather than proactive. Unsurprisingly, the calls for more comprehensive, integrated reform remain as strong. It is to be expected that the weak and the marginalized in any political order would always have a strong interest in a radical reform programme, in the hope that the changes will offer them more say and benefits. By the same token, the strong and the main beneficiaries from an existing political regime would be most reluctant to embrace any change that could remove their privileges, whittle down their influence, and curb their power, even if they make gestures in favour of reform

out of enlightened self-interest. The different regions of the world, or at least countries located in different regions of the world, have sketched out their proposals for reform of particularly the UN, the Bretton Woods institutions, and the post-G7 framework. Their reasons, approaches and ambitions differ, which is why the formal work of reform promises to be a complicated process, to say the least. The member states of AU have begun harmonizing their individual negotiation positions on major international issues in order to turn their numbers into real political clout in international negotiations. While the African Group has existed in UN processes since the 1960s, in the last two decades it has gained prominence for pro-active approach in some cases and for advancing nuanced and distinct positions in key international negotiations. The idea of a discernable common African agenda is also gaining currency in all global multilateral forums. The strengthening of continental and regional integration has given further impetus to this notion of concerted diplomacy by Africa.

The Challenges of Rethinking Africa

Despite these options for reform, Africa faces several challenges that hinder its progress towards democratic governance and sustainable development. One major challenge is the weakness of institutions, including lack of transparency and corruption. These weaknesses undermine democratic governance and accountability, making it difficult to promote development and reduce poverty. The influence of international financial institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank, can also limit national sovereignty and undermine domestic policy-making. Many African countries are heavily dependent on primary commodities, making them vulnerable to fluctuations in global commodity prices.

Social inequalities, including poverty, inequality, and exclusion, are also significant challenges facing Africa. These inequalities can undermine social cohesion and stability, making it difficult to promote development and reduce poverty. Climate change poses another significant threat to Africa's development, with many countries facing challenges related to drought, desertification, and sea-level rise. By addressing these challenges and pursuing options for reform, Africa can work towards building more democratic, stable, and prosperous societies.

African states approach negotiations through formation of a harmonized position based on agreed principles for negotiations and common sets of demands and the building of alliances to further these. The challenge of a harmonized African position according Nelson & Wallace, (2005) includes how to leverage a regional approach in a global system that still sees states as the main actor in negotiations; and how to form a common regional position while still allowing flexibility for bargaining concessions. There is inadequate institutional mechanism to coordinate this interface especially at the political level because the Committee of African Ministers of Integration remains an ad-hoc body. The AU remains an intergovernmental organization whose decisions are still driven by interests of individual member states.

The failure of AU to transform into a supranational organization has undermined the ability of the Africa Group to present a concretized common position. While the intention has been to turn the institution into a supranational body underpinned by shared sovereignty, nation states are reluctant to cede any sovereignty to the organization in order to enable it to independently pursue the common interests of the continent. For this reason, individual state's interests tend to compromise the shared interests that common positions epitomize. This is why member states tend to choose one or more of them to champion or manage its common position instead of mandating the chairpersons of AU and AUC to represent their common interests. In the view of Eberlei (2011), the idea of a concerted negotiating position is weakened by lack of a framework for coordinating external relations by RECs and AU. As a result, both RECs and AU conduct international relations separately and often in competition with each other. There is very little evidence of alignment of RECs' international relations and Africa Common Positions. The draft protocol on relation between the AU and RECs is vague on this matter; only pointing out RECs should ensure that their international engagements are in harmony with harmonized policies and programmes between the two tiers of continental governance.

The compromise mechanisms tend to over-estimate the ability of the AU central organs to manage continental diplomacy when the power still lies with national capitals (Brien, (2018). By and large, there is no room for compromise during negotiations because it is often extremely difficult for AU to work out areas of compromise beforehand because that would require difficult internal

negotiations. There is need for institutionalization of AU-UN peace and security cooperation since the two organizations are complementary to each other's efforts and individually bring comparative advantages based on resources, experience and knowledge of realities on the ground. The 2000 AU Constitutive Act and the 2002 AU Peace and Security Council Protocol provide the legal framework for the AU cooperation with the international community and the UN in particular. Africa has resolved to determine its future destiny and is increasingly placing African problems on the international agenda. In the final instance, the AU-UN cooperation is situated within the framework that suggests unless democratization, institutionalization of good governance and economic stability takes root in the continent, peace will remain elusive and peace efforts a self-perpetuating industry.

On the wider international agenda of the UN, the Bretton Woods institutions, the EU, the G8, the US and other bilateral parties, the adoption of an integrated approach to African problems, including political, developmental and economic dimensions must become a first priority. African leaders will need to promote this actively; international attention for Africa is still too often only the result of determined action by groups and individuals outside Africa (Clark, 2013). While Africa is increasingly capable of preventing, managing and resolving conflicts, additional resources and enhanced political commitment are urgently required. Across the continent, five themes are emerging as increasingly central: increased peace, security and stability through conflict prevention, management and resolution; good governance and good policy; investing in people, by improving health and education and combating HIV/AIDS; pro-poor growth through support for the private sector in Africa; and sustainable development, focusing on the management of natural resources, environment and water.

The governance reform process underway in the IMF will (slightly) redistribute voting power between developed and developing nations. Wood, (2016) observed that the lack of adequate representation of Africa has been specifically acknowledged by building protection for African votes into the framework for reform, and by designing other mechanisms for African states to have power (an extra representative on the Board and more frequent meetings with management). Governance reform at the World Bank usually mimics that of the IMF. As has been pointed out in previous publications, the proposed reforms

therefore will do little to raise Africa's total voting power, and therefore voice at either institution. As Tieku (2011) argues, the advent of the AU saw regional leadership of negotiations in Burundi improves markedly on the protracted process led by the OAU. Nevertheless, the complexities and nuances of such negotiations demand skilled mediators able to draw on substantial expert and institutional back up if the failures of that process are to be overcome. John Kabia also highlighted limited funding provided by member states, the level of corruption and the weak economic conditions as factors which undermine the efficacy of regional organizations like ECOWAS. Even in Africa's most developed state, South Africa, concerns arise about its ability to draw on enough expertise to effectively manage and lead the climate change negotiations as chair and host of the Durban 2011 round. This has its own influence on the development of Africa and its environs.

Best (2022) notes that Africa needs to fund its own training of technical capacity, which is happening through AERC, MEFMI, and some other regional and sub-regional organizations. It needs to campaign on voting issues in a more united way, for example agreeing on a rotating seat in the Security Council rather than continuing to fight over which one or two countries should have a seat. Larger African countries could give smaller low income countries more say. The inability of African countries to forge a much more coherent identity and consistently maintain a united stance on a wide range of issues means that African countries are at a disadvantage when it comes to promoting the continent's interests. The way forward for Africa in the international community involves a multifaceted approach that leverages its growing economic and demographic potential while addressing internal challenges. To strengthen its global partnerships, Africa must diversify its trade relationships beyond traditional partners and engage in mutually beneficial collaborations in technology, infrastructure, and innovation. Amplifying African voices on key global issues such as climate change, reform of international financial institutions, and promotion of peace and security is crucial. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and other regional integration initiatives can boost intra-African trade and enhance global competitiveness. However, Africa must also address internal challenges including corruption, governance issues, infrastructure deficits, and conflict. By harnessing international support through development assistance, capacity-building programs, and investment in

infrastructure and human capital, Africa can drive sustainable development and improve the lives of its citizens. Ultimately, a strong, unified, and proactive Africa can enhance its position in the international community and shape a more equitable global order.

Conclusions

As Africa navigates the complexities of global governance, several pressing issues come to the fore. The continent's historical marginalization and ongoing struggles for representation raise fundamental questions about its place in the international order. Can Africa leverage its growing demographic and economic weight to assert its interests more effectively? How can African nations balance their individual needs with the imperative of continental cohesion and collective action? What role should regional and international institutions play in supporting Africa's development and amplifying its voice? As we reflect on these questions, it becomes clear that Africa's path to greater global influence will depend on addressing these challenges and harnessing its unique strengths and opportunities.

The study's findings underscore the essential elements for a region or continent to wield significant global influence:
- Firstly, possessing a critical mass of numbers is crucial, as it provides a foundation for collective action.
- Secondly, acting cohesively as a regional or continental grouping enables unified decision-making and strengthens negotiating power.
- Thirdly, having substantial economic and military muscle is vital for shaping the global agenda and ensuring strategic autonomy and,
- Fourthly, a common identity that defines shared interests at the global level facilitates collective action and promotes a unified voice.

However, the analysis reveals that Africa falls short in several of these key areas. Despite having a substantial critical mass of numbers, Africa lacks cohesiveness and economic and military muscle to effectively shape the global agenda. The continent's vulnerability to external manipulation by Western and Eastern powers, rising powers, and global multinationals further erodes its bargaining power. Bilateral agreements often undermine Africa's collective interests, highlighting the need for a more integrated approach. To achieve greater global relevance, Africa must adopt a twin strategy focused on reforming the

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international system and integrating its approach to shape the global agenda, thereby enhancing its negotiating power and promoting a more unified voice on the world stage

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends as follows:

i. Africa should prioritize regional integration initiatives, cooperation, increase bargaining power, and promote a unified voice in global affairs

ii. Africa should such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), to enhance economic

iii. invest in capacity building initiatives, such as training programs, institutional development, and infrastructure diversify its partnerships beyond traditional Western powers to engage with rising powers, such as China, India, and Brazil, to leverage new opportunities, technologies, and investments.

iv. Africa should development, to enhance its negotiating capacity, policy-making capabilities, and global competitiveness.

v. Africa should prioritize continental cohesion by fostering a shared vision, promoting pan-Africanism, and enhancing regional and national institutions to support collective action and decision-making.

vi. Africa should advocate for reforms to international institutions, such as the United Nations Security Council, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, to ensure greater representation, participation, and influence for African countries in global decision-making processes.

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CRUDE OIL REVENUE AND THE POLITICS OF ALLOCATION IN NIGERIA (1956-2012): IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NIGER-DELTA

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Abstract: Oil has been the backbone of the Nigerian economy for decades. The Nigerian oil industry continues to generate foreign exchange earnings for the nation's economy, serving as a vital source of revenue for the Nigerian state. The study examines Nigerian crude oil revenue since the start of oil activities in the Niger Delta region. It critically analyses the politics surrounding the distribution of oil revenue to the states of the Federation, with particular emphasis on the Niger Delta states. While several studies explore general aspects of the oil industry, particularly regarding over-exploitation and environmental impacts, this research differs in its focus on the flow of oil revenue and the politics involved in its redistribution to both the broader Nigerian states and the Niger Delta region. It employs a qualitative research approach, utilising interviews, archival materials, and secondary sources such as books, book chapters, and journals, alongside analytical methods to interpret the data. The study finds that the

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initiation of oil activities profoundly altered Nigeria's history, notably transforming its economy from being primarily reliant on agriculture. A key finding highlights the politics of redistributing oil-derived revenue, which can foster feelings of neglect among oil-producing communities and threaten the peace and stability of the Niger Delta. The study concludes that the ongoing politics of revenue allocation, which often ignores the needs of oil-bearing communities, is a major factor behind persistent attacks and sabotage of oil facilities in the Niger Delta.

Keywords: NNOC, NNPC, Oil-bearing Communities, Royalties, Revenue Allocation

Introduction

Revenue accruing from oil exploration and exploitation has been a mainstay of many economies worldwide, particularly in countries that have vast oil reserves. In the case of several countries that experienced an oil boom in the 1970s, such as Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela, oil revenue contributed significantly to their economic growth and development. Governments in these countries have heavily relied on oil revenue to fund their budgets, improve infrastructure, and provide social services to their citizens. Despite the fluctuation in oil prices over the years, oil revenue remains a crucial part of government earnings in many oil-producing nations (Eduvwie & Ntukogu, 2021).

Nigeria's quest for oil exploration dates back to 1908 when the Nigerian Bitumen Company, a German firm, began exploring petroleum in the old Western Region. Despite their efforts, the company did not achieve any significant breakthrough and was forced to shut down during the First World War. In 1937, the Anglo-Dutch Consortium, Shell D'Arcy, resumed oil exploration activities. However, their attempts also proved futile, and exploratory activities were halted again during World War II. After the war, the search for oil continued, and in 1956, the breakthrough finally arrived. In the Otuakeme region of Oloibiri District, Ogbia Local Government Area, oil was discovered, marking the beginning of commercial oil production in Nigeria (Eduvwie*et al.,* 2025). Two years later, the company began exporting oil, fuelling the country's economic growth and development.

After successful exploratory activities and the construction of oil facilities in the Niger Delta region, the Nigerian government recognised the oil industry as a potential revenue source. To ensure the industry's smooth operation, the British colonial government enacted laws that granted Shell Petroleum Company exclusive rights over the exploration, production, and transportation of oil in Nigeria. The Mineral Ordinance Act of 1914, which was later amended in 1925 and 1946, gave Shell D'Arcy the exclusive right to explore minerals (Eduvwie & Ntukogu, 2021). This Act authorised the Federal Government to issue exploration, prospecting, and mining licenses, establishing the terms and conditions for preliminary exploration, drilling, and oil exploitation. Consequently, the Nigerian government has the sole authority to collect royalties, taxes, and a share of oil revenue in the Nigerian oil and gas industry.

The majority of literature in the oil industry has predominantly concentrated on the impacts, as well as the exploitative and explorative dimensions of oil, particularly concerning multinational and national oil companies, governments, and other stakeholders within the sector. There is a notable scarcity of studies that investigate the accumulation of revenue and its redistribution to the Niger Delta in particular and to Nigerian states more broadly. This research stands out as one of the few that documents the collection of oil revenue and its distribution across the Niger Delta States, with a wider focus on Nigerian states as a whole. It aims to evaluate the methods employed in oil revenue collection and to analyse the processes involved in revenue distribution.

Sources of Crude Oil Revenue in Nigeria

Throughout its history as a colony and an independent nation, Nigeria has employed various methods to generate revenue from its oil reserves. During colonial times, oil rents and taxes were collected by government departments such as the Geological Survey of Nigeria. In the post-colonial era, the Department of Hydrocarbons and the Department of Petroleum were established in 1963 and 1970, respectively, to manage revenue generated from oil sales or exports. Moreover, the Nigerian National Oil Company (NNOC) and Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) emerged as key players in the petroleum industry after their establishment in 1971 and 1977.

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Royalties and taxation in the oil industry, 1956-1971

Between 1956 and 1971, a levy was imposed on all oil produced at the wellhead in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This levy, known as royalty, was payable to the Regional Government and was then paid to the Mid-Western state. The levy was originally set at 12.5% of the oil produced. However, in practice, a monetary payment was made instead. The monetary payment was calculated based on the field-storage-tank value of the crude, which was determined by the world market price for crude oil during that period, after deducting the expenses involved in moving the oil from the oilfield to the refinery.

Throughout history, land and subsoil resources have been the preserve of communities and states. These communities and states have the right to tax or demand contributions in kind, rescind granted property rights, and police or regulate. In countries rich in oil and minerals that are under colonial rule, these rights may be overridden to favour transnational companies (Mommer, 2002). However, even in such cases, these companies are expected to pay royalties or taxes to the colonial government or collaborating chiefs (Rutledge, 2005).

After Nigeria gained independence, the government showed little interest in the oil industry, except for collecting rent, royalties, and taxes. This was because the focus was on regional economies, which were mainly agro-based. This arrangement was instituted during colonial administration. Most of the transnational companies operating in Nigeria had 100% equity in their operations (Geological Survey of Nigeria, 1958), and the government's entitlement was mainly on two benefits (NNPC, 1990): a 12.5% royalty and a 45% company profits tax (Shell BP, 1956).

Nigeria's involvement in the nation's oil industry, 1971-1979

In 1971, the Nigerian National Oil Corporation (NNOC) was established with the primary objective of marketing Nigerian crude oil (NNPC, 1990). However, the Nigerian government didn't become directly involved in oil marketing until two years later. This marked the beginning of the government's acquisition of participation interest in oil companies and the direct sale of equity crude.

The Nigerian National Oil Company's (NNOC) responsibilities were limited to calculating prices for the state's participating oil, assessing market prices, negotiating contracts, and monitoring operational costs (Terrisa, 1980). The

Nigerian government's involvement in the oil industry started on April 1, 1973, with a 35% equity stake. This equity increased to 55% with companies like Shell, Elf, and Agip due to pressure from the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Tedheke, 1984). OPEC had challenged multinational companies that had operated unchecked by the Nigerian State for years.

The settlement with American majors fell short by 5% of OPEC's 60% equity minimum and became effective on April 1, 1974. The same was true for Shell-BP, Safrap, and Agip-Philips. However, Mobil, Gulf, and Texaco failed to sign the agreement in March. These events marked a significant shift in Nigeria's oil industry, with the government taking a more active role in oil marketing and production.

Table 1: Nigerian Participatory Interests in the Oil Industry, 1973-1977

S/N	Company	Participation %	Date Acquired	No. of OML/OPL	Production (Barrel/Day)
1.	Shell-BP/SPDC	35	01/04/1973	58	1,240,000
		55	01/04/1974	58	1,380,000
		60	01/07/1979	58	1,360,000
		80	01/07/1979	58	1,360,000
		60	1989	58	n.a
2.	Elf	35	01/04/1971	4	40,000
		55	01/04/1974	4	85,000
		60	01/04/1979	4	78,000
3.	Agip/Phillips	33/half	01/04/1971	4	30,000
		55	01/04/1974	4	125,000
		60	01/04/1979	4	230,000
4.	Gulf	35	01/04/1973	10	368,000
		55	01/04/1974	16	390,000
		60	01/07/1979	16	380.000
5.	Mobil	35	01/04/1973	4	210,000
		55	01/04/1974	4	245,000
		60	01/04/1979	4	380,000
6.	Texaco	55	01/05/1975	6	10,282
		60	01/07/1979	6	56,000
7.	Pan Ocean	55	01/05/1975	1	10,000
		60	01/07/1979	1	10,000

Source: NNPC Joint Venture Department, 2020

The table presented above depicts the Nigerian government's involvement in the oil and gas industry from 1971 to 1979, which remained unaltered until 1986 when the government implemented the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Before the SAPs, companies like Shell, AGIP/Phillips, Gulf, Mobil, Texaco, and Pan Ocean had complete control over the concessions awarded to them. However, with the Nigerian government acquiring participating interests, the relative holdings of these companies were reduced. At a particular point in time, the Nigerian government holds a minimum of 60% participatory interests in each of these companies. The Joint Venture Department of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) is responsible for effective monitoring of oil company operations and safeguarding the government's interests in Joint Venture (JV) operations (NNPC, 1988).

Initially, the government sold most of its participating oil to foreign oil operating companies through a buy-back arrangement. This arrangement involved the government selling 50% of its equity crude oil to other companies at a concessional price, which helped cushion the effect of its participation and enabled the firms to meet previous long-term commitments. The government also sold another 25% of its oil to the companies as option oil, while the remaining 25% was sold to third-party customers without any stake or concession in the country (NNPC, 1990).

NNPC and joint venture partnership in the nation's oil industry, 1977-1990

In 1977, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation was formed by merging the Nigerian National Oil Corporation (NNOC) and the Federal Ministry of Petroleum Resources (NNPC, 1991). The NNOC primarily handled operational tasks, while the ministry was responsible for regulatory duties. The goal was to optimise the government's available human and infrastructural resources to create a more efficient oil agency. To ensure effective operation and regulation, the Corporation was divided into multiple divisions.

Over time, the NNPC has worked to become an international oil company and has partnered with multinational oil companies through joint ventures to market its products (John, 1991). However, acquiring technology for its operations has required heavy reliance on foreign expertise, limiting the Corporation's control over the Nigerian oil industry since most of the mining and transportation

technologies are procured from abroad. To access Nigeria's crude oil, prospective customers must demonstrate a commitment of capital resources, equipment, and manpower to the Nigerian oil industry (Etiebet, 1993). Consequently, the Nigerian government, through the NNPC, established three channels in 1988 to dispose of its oil. These are:

a.   Joint Venture Oil producing companies: These companies would be obliged to put off their share of crude oil produced under the existing fiscal terms. For instance, the market collapsed in 1986 and again witnessed a shift back to the oil-producing companies, averaging about 61% of all sales, while third-party and government-to-government dropped to 28% to 12%, respectively.

b.   Direct Sales to Refineries and their Associated Market Outlets: NNPC is in charge of crude oil sales within refineries in Nigeria and other industries to service the industrial needs of the country. Such companies must make their application to the NNPC for the purchase of crude oil.

c.   Direct Sales to Indigenous and Multinational Oil Companies: To qualify for the purchase of crude oil, such a company must have acquired an Oil Prospecting License (OPL) and must have completed the minimum seismic data acquisition and exploratory drilling programme (NNPC, 1990).

Table 2: Petroleum Sector's Contribution to the Nigerian Economy from 1958-1990

S/N	Fiscal Year	Fed. Govt. Revenue (-N-060)	Revenue from Petroleum (-N-000)	Shell of Petroleum in Total Revenue (%)
1.	1958/1959	154,632	122	0.08
2.	1959/1960	177,648	1,776	1.00
3.	1960/1961	223,700	2,452	1.10
4.	1961/1962	228,962	17,070	7.46
5.	1962/63	231,638	16,938	7.31
6.	1963/64	249,152	29,175	4.04

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7.	1964/65	299,132	44,976	5.38
8.	1965/66	321,870	41,884	9.06
9.	1966/67	339,196	29,175	18.26
10.	1967/68	300,176	44,976	13.95
11.	1968/69	299,986	41,884	13.95
12.	1969/70	435,908	29,582	17.31
13.	1970/71	756,605	75,444	25.99
14.	1971/72	1,410,611	196,390	52.46
15.	1972/73	1,389,911	740,185	41.45
16.	1973/74	2,171,370	576,151	71.36
17.	1974/75	5,177,370	1,549,383	80.81
18.	1975/76	5,861,600	4,183,816	78.70
19.	1976/77	7,070,400	5,965,500	77.70
20.	1977/78	8,358,900	5,965,500	71.40
21.	1978/79	7,252,400	4,809,200	66.30
22.	1979/80	12,273,400	10,100,400	82.30
23.	1980/81	15,813,100	4,936,900	31.20
24.	1981/82	10,143,900	8,847,800	67.50
25.	1982/83	10,811,400	7,253,00	67.00
26.	1983/84	11,738,500	8,209,700	69.93
27.	1984/85	15,041,800	10,915,100	72.56
28.	1985/86	12,302,000	8,107,300	65.90
29.	1986/87	25,000,800	19,027,000	75.80
30.	1987/88	27,310,800	20,933,800	76.65
31.	1988/89	50,272,100	41,334,400	82.22
32.	1990	47,657,000	46,244,000	97.24

Source: Compiled from National Planning Office: The Nigerian Economist Various Issues, 2020

In Table 2, there is a comprehensive overview of how petroleum resources have impacted the Nigerian economy throughout history, starting with Nigeria's first petroleum export in 1958. Prior to the oil boom and burst, Nigeria relied heavily on agricultural exports like cocoa, rubber, palm nuts, kernel, and palm oil, which were predominantly produced in the Western Niger Delta region. Groundnuts and other agricultural commodities were mainly produced in the

Northern region, while coal was abundant in the Eastern region. These formed the foundation of the Nigerian economy, with oil being a relatively insignificant commodity. However, the collapse of the regional economy and the Nigerian Civil War shifted the nation's focus to the petroleum industry, as oil became the primary commodity used to finance the war. This shift was made apparent by General Yakubu Gowon's claim that Nigeria's problem was not a lack of money, but rather a scarcity of it. As a result, the oil economy overtook the Nigerian political and economic landscape, leading to the collapse of other economic sectors as the nation became increasingly reliant on oil revenues. In fact, oil revenues accounted for 97.24% of the nation's revenue in 1990.

Revenue generated from crude oil lifting in terminals, 1998

In Nigeria, oil petroleum terminals serve as specialized ports that receive large petroleum tankers for exporting crude oil products to other countries. Delta State boasts four fully operational oil terminals - Escravos Oil Port Terminal, Forcados Terminal, Port of Pennington, and Ukpokiti Marine Terminal - all of which are situated offshore along the coastline. These ports are integral to the Nigerian economy, contributing significantly to the revenue generated by the Nigerian Ports Authority. Additionally, multinational oil companies, NNPC, and oil servicing companies operate functional private jetties in Delta State. These private jetties, including NNPC, Shell, Westminster Dredging, NBTC, Chevron, Texaco Overseas, DBN, McDermott, Elf, Nigerian Dredging and Marine, and Julius Berger (NPA, 1998), are vital to the oil industry as they facilitate the transportation of crude oil products and other related materials.

Table 3: NPA Revenue Generated and Expenditure from Oil Port Terminal, 1998

Month	Revenue (N)	Expenditure (N)	Balance (N)
January	62,418,631.72	23,344,457.13	39,074,174.59
February	82,792,852.78	33,777,985.31	49,014,867.46
March	101,237,700.20	40,682,504.42	60,555,195.78
April	55,271,555.00	24,305,756.48	30,965,798.52
May	84,761,321.39	51,971,118.34	32,790,203.04
June	80,236,607.01	24,169,656.43	56,066,950.58
July	50,767,291.53	72,140,555.42	-21,373,263.89
August	80,820,758.13	78,730,782.66	2,089,975.47
September	112,549,042.10	104,381,364.85	8,167,677.30

October	131,192,909.48	30,597,722.64	100,595,186.7
November	128,599,068.80	26,156,716.83	102,443,351.9
December	300,013,189.32	67,298,548.60	232,714,640.7
Total	1,270,750,927.46	444,960,141.91	693,104,757.7

Source: Compiled by Authors, 2020

Above is a table detailing the significant monetary contribution of various oil port terminals to the Nigerian economy through the Nigerian Port Authority. The oil port terminals located in the Niger Delta alone contribute N1, 270 million to the revenue of the Nigerian Port Authority. The total expenditure of the port amounts to approximately N444 million, which results in an operating surplus of N693 million.

It's crucial to highlight that the Delta Port Authority was found to be excessively lavish in its spending, which has jeopardized the revenue-generating potential of oil terminals in the federation account. Additionally, it's worth noting that the funds generated from port activities, specifically oil petroleum terminals and jetties are not included in the 13% Derivation Fund designated for States. Instead, these funds are distributed across the Federal Government, 36 States, and 774 Local Government Areas of the federation.

The Flow of Oil Revenue into Federation Account

In the Nigerian oil and gas industry, crude oil and gas are classified into two categories for lifting and export: Equity Export and Domestic Utilisation. The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) markets and lifts these categories, with the proceeds being remitted into the Federation Account. According to the NNPC Monthly Report, Equity Export receipts are paid directly into the Federation Account after Joint Venture (JV) Cash Calls are adjusted. Domestic Crude Oil is allocated for refining and is mainly assigned to the NNPC's three refineries in Warri, Port Harcourt, and Kaduna to meet domestic product supply. However, there is currently no evidence of these refineries functioning. NNPC pays the Federation Account for Equity Export and Domestic Supply after adjustments for crude oil and product losses, as well as pipeline repairs and management costs incurred during the period.
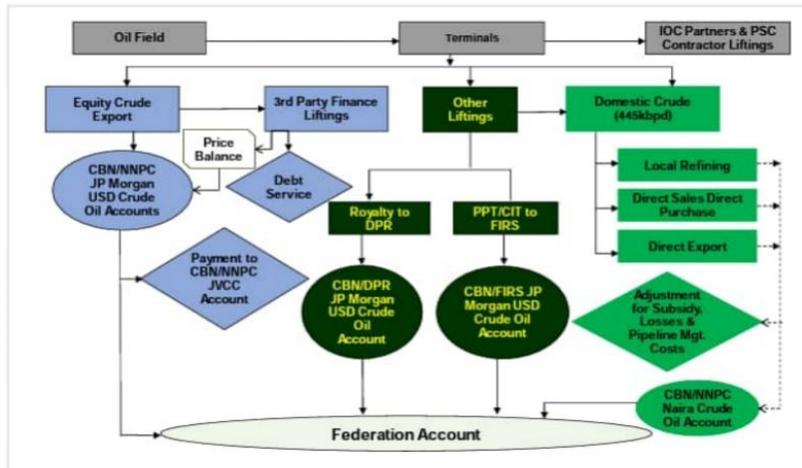
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Figure 1: Flow of Oil Revenue into Federation Account

Source: NNPC Monthly Report 2019

The diagram provided illustrates how revenue generated by Nigeria's oil industry is channelled into the Federation Account. Apart from lifting crude oil and gas for its own use, NNPC can also do so on behalf of the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) and Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS). The funds generated from these activities are then remitted into the Federation Account. Third-party finance lifting, on the other hand, refers to crude oil and gas lifted from fields that have been financed using an alternative loan facility. Before remitting the balance into the Federation Account, the debt liabilities of this type of lifting must be serviced.

It is crucial to keep in mind that the servicing of debt liabilities for alternate funding in the form of loans and Nigeria's equity of 55% are necessary. However, NNPC has not been able to fulfil its share of the liabilities under the JV arrangement. As a result, the partners have had to borrow from foreign banks to maintain oil production. It is believed that Nigerian banks cannot borrow money from investors in the oil industry. Furthermore, since the cost of running oil exploration and production is determined by multinational oil companies and with the inflation of the running cost, Nigeria has been relegated to a junior partner role in the JV partnership (Ezekiel, 2020)
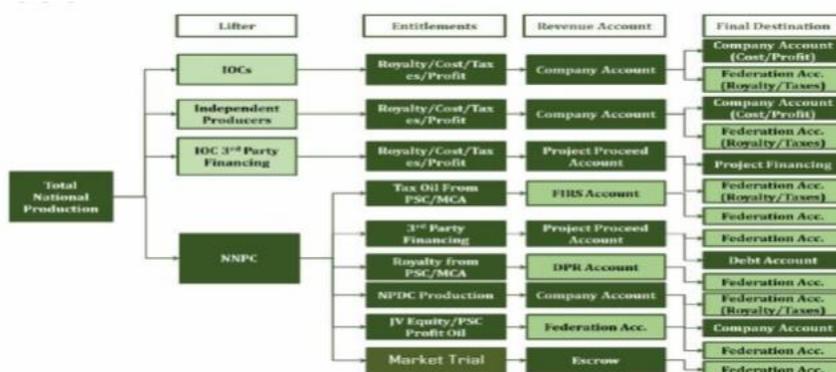
Figure 2: Summary of Oil and Gas Sales and Inflow into Federation Account

Source: NNPC Monthly Report 2019

The figure displayed above provides a comprehensive overview of the sales figures for both oil and gas, in addition to the detailed analysis of the proceeds that have been deposited into the Federation Account. As explained in the preceding paragraphs, these proceeds are a direct result of the sales of oil and gas. This visual representation helps to make it easier to understand the overall sales and payment figures with each other.

Politics in the Oil Revenue-Sharing Formula, 1958-1998

The Niger Delta region, like other mineral-producing areas, is greatly affected by oil and gas exploration and exploitation activities. Although the government and companies make efforts to mitigate the suffering of the people, the impact of these activities is immeasurable. The SPDC Annual Report of 2005 highlights the numerous challenges faced by the Niger Delta region, including providing basic services, education, employment, and law and order to millions of people in an area that is almost as large as England. It is not new knowledge that the people of the region have been protesting since before the country's independence and even before the discovery of oil, citing neglect due to the area's unique terrain. This was made apparent by the Willinks Commission, which was established in 1958, The Commission, however, posits that:

> We were impressed by the arguments indicating the need of those who lived in the creeks and swamps of the Niger Delta are very different from those of the interior. We agree that it is not easy for a Government or a Legislature operating from far inland to concern itself, or even fully understand the problems of the territory where

communications are so difficult, buildings so expensive, and education so scanty (Willink Report, 1958 p.2).

The problems of the Niger Delta were succinctly addressed by the Saudana of Sokoto, Ahmadu Bello, Premier of the Northern Region after the area became an oil-producing area when he argued:

> Those who may feel that the problems of the oil-producing areas are not minded that Nigeria is an entity within one environment; decay in one part will ultimately affect the rest of the nation. The fate of oil-producing communities should be a concern for all (The Technical Committee, 2008, page).

Back in 1963, the Nigerian constitution was amended to include a formula for distributing revenue generated from exporting minerals, particularly oil. Under this arrangement, the Federal Government was responsible for paying each region 50% of the royalty or mining rent for any mineral exported from that region. Meanwhile, 30% of the royalties and rents were pooled and shared among the Northern, Western, and Eastern Regions. It's worth noting that the Midwestern Region was established in 1964, comprising Edo and Delta States.

Sadly, the Gowon administration abolished the revenue-sharing formula and section of the Constitution related to the States' finances on July 1, 1969. The decline of the regional economy and the Nigerian Civil War's impact on the nation's economy made this decision inevitable. Notably, Chief Obafemi Awolowo served as a Federal Commissioner for Finance from 1967 to 1971 and is considered an elder statesman, noted:

> As a national wealth and gift of nature, no community should lay any claim to crude oil. Nor should the host areas where it is explored and produced merit any special treatment in the form of fund allocation, irrespective of the attendant ecological crises that it gave rise to (Omoweh, 2008, page).

During the period of Yakubu Gowon's administration, crude oil revenues were directed exclusively to the Federal Government. It was believed that this would help the government fund its efforts to win the war at that time (The Technical Committee, 2008). Subsequently, the governments of Murtala Muhammed and Olusegun Obasanjo also followed suit. This meant that all revenues generated

from crude oil were deposited into a central account and not remitted to the states or communities where the resources were sourced.

In 1981, the government of Shehu Shagari changed the allocation formula and created a fund administered by the Federal Government. The fund was designed to develop the mineral-producing areas of the country and was initially funded with 1.5% of oil income. However, in recent years, the allocation has been paid directly to the oil-producing communities as compensation for environmental disturbances and in recognition of their special contributions (NNPC, 1991).

To ensure that the funds allocated to the oil-producing communities were effectively managed, President Ibrahim Babangida established the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) Committee. The committee was chaired by General Paul Omu and had the mandate to review existing regulations for the disbursement of the fund and recommend more effective methods (NNPC, 1991). The AFRC also formed a presidential committee to implement General Omu's recommendations. As a result, State Task Forces were created, comprising Bendel State, Rivers State, and others, to ensure the full implementation of development projects in the oil-producing areas. Furthermore, the report recommended an increase in the allocation from the Federation Account to the oil-producing communities and the establishment of an intervention agency, the defunct Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC), to manage these funds for the development of the host communities.

In 1991, the Nigerian government reviewed the statutory allocation of funds to oil-producing areas from 1.5% to 3% and the ecological fund from 1% to 2%. The decision was made in response to the agitations of the people who were experiencing the negative effects of oil production on their communities. The government's action showed a willingness to acknowledge the plight of the oil-producing communities and an awareness of the impact that the industry was having on the people living in the area.

Despite this, agitations continued in many parts of the Niger Delta region. Ken Saro-Wiwa, an environmentalist, and Claude Ake, a political economist, were among the leaders who mobilized the people of the Niger Delta against what they saw as environmental poverty. Their efforts, among others, highlighted the need for the government to address the concerns of the people in the region.

In 1994, the people of Erhoike, an oil-producing community in the Kokori clan of Ethiope East Local Government Area, protested against the Shell Petroleum Development Company's (SPDC) operation and treatment of the community (Delta State Government, 2003). This protest happened in the same year that Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight chiefs were executed by the military junta of General Sani Abacha.

Group Captain Kefas, who was a military administrator of Delta State at the time, acknowledged that the whole nation suffered from the crisis caused by these agitations (Response by the Military Administrator, 1994). He argued that the crisis was due mainly to the elites' incitement of the people against the government. However, Colonel Bassey Asuquo claimed that the crisis was a result of the lack of basic facilities such as roads, water, electricity, living accommodation, and transport, which were needed to improve the people's lives in Delta State (Welcome Address, 1995).

The government recognised the need to address these challenges and proposed an increase in revenue allocation to oil-producing communities in the state as a means of settling them. This was seen as a positive step towards addressing the concerns of the people and improving their lives.

Oil Revenue Sharing Formula 2000-2012

The Nigerian Federal Government implemented the 13% Derivation Fund to share oil revenues with joint venture partners, and in the year 2000, it signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with various oil companies operating in the nation's oil industry. The MoU provided precise terms for sharing oil revenues between the government and the joint venture partners.

The MoU allowed oil companies to receive a fixed margin within an oil price range of $15 to $19 a barrel, with the remaining amount shared among private stakeholders. For instance, if the oil price is $19 per barrel, the government takes in taxes, royalties, and equity shares worth $13.78 per barrel, while the remaining $1.22 is left to be shared among the private stakeholders. The government's share increases with an increase in oil prices, and at $50 per barrel, it comes to $44.13 (Ugolor, 2005).

Furthermore, the Federal Government allocates 13% of its revenues from extractive industries, such as oil and gas, to the states where such production

occurs. Additionally, it returns a considerable proportion of the revenue it receives to State Governments (31.1%) and Local Government Areas (15.21%). According to a Government Statistical review, the total amount allocated in 2004 by the Federal Government to the 36 States was $6.2 billion, with a significant proportion coming from the 13% Derivation Fund from the Federation Account. This fund was primarily distributed among the four states (Delta, Akwa-Ibom, Rivers, and Bayelsa) where the SPDC's operations are based.

Other oil companies, both multinational and national, also contribute to the Federation Account through taxes, royalties, and other levies. The 13% Derivation Fund is later shared among the oil-producing States of the Niger Delta.

Global Influence on Nigeria's Oil Revenue

Fluctuations in global oil prices have significantly impacted revenue distribution to Nigerian states, primarily because the country relies heavily on oil exports for government earnings. Nigeria's Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) distributes revenue from oil sales, taxes, and other sources to federal, state, and local governments. When oil prices are high, such as during the 2011-2014 boom when prices averaged above $100 per barrel, state allocations increase, enabling higher budgets for infrastructure, salaries, and development projects (Central Bank of Nigeria [CBN], 2015). However, during price crashes, like the 2016 dip below $30 per barrel or the 2020 COVID-19 slump, FAAC disbursements shrink drastically, leading to unpaid salaries, stalled projects, and increased borrowing by states (BudgIT, 2020). This volatility exposes Nigeria's over-dependence on oil and the failure to diversify revenue sources, leaving states vulnerable to external shocks.

The impact of oil price swings is further exacerbated by Nigeria's derivation principle, where oil-producing states receive an additional 13% of mineral revenue. While this boosts earnings for states like Delta, Akwa Ibom, and Rivers during high-price periods, their economies also suffer disproportionately during downturns (Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group, 2018). Non-oil states, meanwhile, face even sharper shortfalls since they rely almost entirely on federal allocations. For instance, during the 2016 crisis, many states could not pay workers for months, triggering protests and strikes (Premium Times, 2016). The instability underscores the need for fiscal reforms, including a sovereign wealth

fund (like Norway's) to cushion price shocks and stronger internally generated revenue (IGR) mechanisms to reduce dependence on oil (World Bank, 2021).

Necessary Measures for Oil-Bearing Communities in the Niger Delta Area

To address the neglect felt by oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta, immediate and long-term measures must focus on environmental justice, economic inclusion, and governance reforms. First, a rigorous enforcement of pollution clean-up, expanding the Ogoni cleanup to other regions, and holding oil companies accountable for spills and gas flaring through heavy fines and remediation funds is critical. Simultaneously, economic empowerment programmes should prioritise local hiring in oil operations, skills training in renewable energy and agribusiness, and direct revenue-sharing schemes managed transparently by community trusts. Infrastructure development, including clean water, healthcare, and roads, must be fast-tracked, while security reforms should integrate ex-militants through job placements and community policing to curb oil theft and unrest.

Additionally, political inclusion is essential to ensure communities have a voice in resource management. This includes revising the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) to grant host communities greater control over development funds and advocating for true fiscal federalism to increase revenue allocation. International partnerships with bodies like the UN can provide oversight and funding for sustainable projects, while diversification into eco-tourism and tech hubs can reduce oil dependency. Without these steps, combining accountability, investment, and participatory governance, the cycle of neglect and conflict will persist, further marginalising the Niger Delta's people despite their resource wealth.

Conclusion

There are three primary perspectives from which the distribution of petroleum revenue in the Nigerian political economy can be viewed. The sharing of petroleum revenue with oil multinational companies, who provide financial and technological investments for the effective production of oil and gas, is the most discussed perspective in this context. The Federal Government obtains oil revenue through taxation and royalties from both multinational and national companies. Additionally, oil tankers that dock at most of the port terminals pay duties to the Nigerian Port Authority (NPA). The profits accruing from the

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production of oil in its Joint Investment Partnership and Production Sharing contract are not included in the Federation Account as part of the oil revenue. The money received from oil is deposited into the Federation Account, and it is shared with various states of the Federation. The oil-producing states receive a percentage of the revenue, which increases over time. The politics surrounding the allocation of oil revenue to the Niger Delta states without directly involving oil-bearing communities is responsible for militancy and youth restiveness in the area, as the communities often feel unsatisfied with the allocation process.

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INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH WRITING ERRORS AMONG ISOKO USERS OF ENGLISH

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Abstract: This study analyses the grammatical errors encountered by second language users of English. The aim of the study is to find out the causes and the grammar components which have not been grasped by the Isoko users of English. Data were collected from the written composition of 100 (one hundred) SS 3 Isoko speaking students administered by the researchers. Corder's (1981) Error Analysis was adopted for the analysis of data. The analyses of the students' essays have shown that six types of errors were identified and are common with language transfer. The errors are in the areas of homophonic words, wrong use of preposition, wrong use of the article, wrong plural and possessive formation, and wrong use of contracted forms and separation of compound words. We recommended, among others those teachers of English should give dictation and essay writing exercises to their students.

Keywords: Indigenous, Isoko users, English Language, Error analysis, Corder, Grammar error and Second language.

Introduction

English Language came into Nigeria through colonization centuries ago and three main groups of people emerged from this contact of English with the indigenous languages of Nigeria. These groups are the British, the new Nigerian elite trained in Britain and the native indigenous population trained in Nigeria (Kikelomo, 2011). A local variant of English emerged from the mixing of these groups of people. This local variant of English was coloured by influence from local languages. The borrowing of indigenous words into English is a result of this contact and these borrowed words are called 'loan words'. Today, English is used in every facet of life in Nigeria. It still comes in contact with practically all indigenous Nigerian languages and when Nigerians speak English features of their various indigenous languages often reflect in their speech.

The advent of English language in Nigeria can be traced to the sixteenth century at the time seaports and transaction spots were built on the African shores. English merchants had arrived at coastal areas such as Calabar, Warri and Brass to compete with the Portuguese who had dominated the commercial scene of Africa before the arrival of the British (Onuigbo & Eyisi, 2009). From that time on, English had started to grow from strength to strength in the Nigeria socio-cultural milieu. But a discussion of the advent of English language in Nigeria will be incomplete if the factors that contribute to the survival and the advent of English language in Nigeria are not mentioned.

The first factor is the fact that the Portuguese, being the nearest Europeans to Africa, were the first to sail down the Nigerian coast in the 15th century in search of commerce. The need for communication resulted in the birth of combination of local languages with Portuguese. After they had stabilized in Beninin present day Nigeria, they gradually imposed the English language on the indigenous languages because that was the only means of communication with them (Odumuh, 1997).

Another factor is the early commercial contact. The first English people to come to present day Nigeria were traders who came after the Portuguese in quest of anything to boost their economy and this eventually led to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade which was in a triangular format. Africans, mostly people from the present day were extracted from their roots and sent to work on the plantation fields in the New World (America) from where the farm produce were shipped to Europe (Goucher, LeGuin, & Walton, 2004). Following the contact, English became the phenomenon on the African soil and to facilitate trade, it had

to be learnt. In other words, the contact between the Europeans and the Nigerians warranted communication. The missionaries' impact is another factor. With the abolition of slave trade, many of the Africans who had been slaves were repatriated to Sierra Leone. During their stay in America plantation fields, they had learned English and had got in contact with Christianity (Bamgbose, 1971).

The returnees, therefore, served as assistants to the missionaries in their evangelical activities. A prominent Nigerian ex-slave was Bishop Ajayi Crowder, who, having become a Christian himself, helped the missionaries in evangelizing the Africans with the concomitant entrenchment of English. He also served as a teacher and an interpreter of the English language as a way of advancing the work of God. To be a Christian then, one needed a little knowledge of English which was important since it was the language of the Bible. English language spread with the spread of Christianity. The freed slaves from Sierra Leone served mainly as interpreters and teachers.

The impact of colonialism is another factor. During the colonial rule, the British wanted Nigerians to be able to speak English language. They became unsatisfied with the missionaries' use of indigenous languages which the missionaries later found out to be more effective in evangelizing people (Ogbu, 1991). Therefore, the 1840 policy of educating the indigenes in their indigenous languages was reversed in 1882. In 1842, a set of schools were founded by the colonial masters. This was because they were not satisfied with the missionaries' method of communication and the missionaries' aim which was to spread the gospel. With the 1882 educational ordinance, the then government made grants to schools on one condition that the grants would be given to schools whose students speak good English. This as well abetted the growth of the language being English in Nigeria till date (Ogu, 1992). From the 1920s till date, series of developments had taken place in Nigeria which had informed the indigenization of the language, the climax of which is summarized in Bamgbose (1971) cited by Adedimeji (2002) who avers that:

>…of all the heritage left behind in Nigeria by the British at the end of colonial administration, probably, none is more important than the English language. It is now the language of government, business and commerce, education, the mass media, literature and much internal as well as external communication (p.11).

The two general functions of English language perform in Nigeria are: The intra-national and international function. At the intra-national level, it is the language of education as well as a school subject, from the primary to the University level of education, media, science and technology. It is also an official language as well as a lingua franca to Nigerians. The roles of the English language are summarized by Olujide (1998), who notes that "The English language performs many significant functions in Nigeria" (99). Acording to him, "These functions are diverse in nature and vary very widely from group to group, individual to individual and social context to social context" (Olujide, 1998:99). Furthermore, Bamgbose (1991) as cited in Adedimeji (2002) says "English today serves as the official language of Nigeria, the language used for running the affairs of the government, fostering nationalism which is concerned with political integration and efficiency" (Adedimeji, 2002 p.12). This study therefore, is an error analysis of written English language of Isoko users of English.

Existing position

Mother Tongue (MT) is the verbal code that a set of persons well-thought-out to be residents of a region which is attained in the first ages, that ultimately turn out to be their normal apparatus of thinking and message (Awoniyi, cited in Oluwole, 2008). MT is usually seen as the First Language (L1) that somebody learns. The individual is seen in this sense as an innate user of the L1, though someone could as well be a natural user of extra linguistic code if the entire linguistic codes were got devoid of official schooling, such as via ethnic involvement. Frequently, one studies the essentials of the L1 from the family-member (*Wikipedia,* 2015).

It is largely recognised that, in the learning and tutoring processes, the MT of anyone is of great prominence (Oluwole, 2008). The mother tongue is the child's first communication tool in the environs and is the normal foundation that spoken abilities could be made on. It was the acknowledgment of the significance plus the contribution of MT to learning that caused the Ministry of Education at the Federal level in conjunction with further informative statutory organizations decide that the mother tongue should be used as medium of educating pupils. As is found in the National Policy on Education, the NPE (2012) warrants that the communiqué means of timely infantile institutes is

chiefly the MT or "language of the immediate community" (LIC) and ortho-graphy and schoolbooks of indigenous languages shall be made to augment Mother Tongue and LIC. Paradoxically, in majority of pre primary colleges in Nigeria the means of teaching is predominantly the L2. So long MT teaching is a cause, Emenanjo (2001) notes:

> The value attached to native language as regards to protection, preservation, promotion of Nigerian culture, as well as its role in promoting interethnic unity that enhances human dignity and subsequently helps promote national unity and integration in the country. This policy supported by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and justified in the National Policy on Education. The use of English language for a child to the neglect of his mother tongue has a negative influence on the child's cultural background which the policy is meant to protect (p.17).

One's indigenous language, then, is a portion of one's beliefs. It carries or conveys beliefs plus itself is subject to ethnically habituated approaches and cultures (Awoniyi, 1975).

An earlier view, Carroll (1964) contends that the situations of acquiring an L2 are like circumstances of acquiring a MT. At times there are intrusions and occasional response from the linguistic structure which will interfere into language in the other speech. Carroll also points that to effectively study L_2, the second language learner often has to prevent the first language structures from the second language acquiring process, if the constructions are distinctly different.

To buttress Carroll's point, Beardsmore (1982) proposes that several of the challenges a second language (L2) student has with the "phonology, vocabulary and grammar of an L2are due to the interference of habits from first language (L1) " (p.23). Beardsmore concluded by saying that the proper basics of L1 are utilized as contained by the situation of L2, resulting in errors in second language, as the constructions of the lingoes, first and second language are dissimilar. Being aware of the socio-linguistic situation in the country, Eka (2000) also avers that some features of the Nigerian English are as a result of the influence of the mother tongue, adding that "it is commonly known that a

person's first language often exercises a tremendous influence on the learning and use of another … second, foreign and alternate language" (p.40).

This section of the review has been able to examine some of the related causes of interference in L2 among second language users, which typically lead to errors of usage, especially syntactic errors. However, it is authoritative to gaze at if MT has a say on the English practice amongst the Isoko users of English. It is significant to pull attraction to the existence of the difficulties on the base of whatever might be bring out and commend whatever might be prepared to lessen them if they cannot be completely eliminated.

Theoretical framework

This study adopted S. P. Corder's (1981) Error Analysis. The Error Analysis approach is a branch of applied linguistics. It was engendered as a result of the challenges and criticism Contrastive Analysis faced in the early 1970s. Contrastive Analysis contends that the possible errors the learners would make in using a target language can be predicted so as to take steps to prevent or reduce the errors. But with the development of foreign language teaching, since contrastive analysis only focuses on language learning situation, but neglects language learners, there is a great limitation to the accuracy of the prediction of errors. In order to analyze systematically learners' errors, a new theory, "error analysis theory" comes into being. Error analysis on the other hand puts its focus on learners themselves, which strengthens the weak points of contrastive analysis theory and enriches the study of applied linguistics at the same time.
Corder (1967) put forward three important points about the analysis of learners' errors:
(1) For teachers, if they analyze systematically learners' errors, they will come to know the learners' real situation on the approach of target language;
(2) The analysis will provide researchers with the evidence of how learners acquire a language and will help researchers understand their learning strategy; and
(3) The analysis is quite necessary for learners as making errors is a means for learners to acquire a language and a testing for learners to check their command of the language learned. The first step for error analysis is to collect materials, the second step is to identify the errors, and then the third step is to classify them.

Classification of Errors

The theory of Error Analysis first distinguishes an error from a lapse or a mistake. It is believed that an error appears when a learner is ignorant of a certain language rule and makes errors in usage, but a lapse or mistake appears when a learner is so careless that he/she does not use the language rules he/she has mastered. Then causes for errors are divided into three parts roughly: (1) inter-lingual errors: The learners bring the habits of the mother tongue into the target language, which leads to negative language transfer; (2) intra-lingual errors: This kind of errors are caused by the learners' wrong understanding of the rules of the target language or by incomplete learning; and (3) other errors: errors in improper teaching or learning materials; in cultural habits of target language; in pronunciation and diction; in usage, expressions, and style. This shows that language acquisition is a creative process of constantly making errors. Students make progress in language by making errors and correcting them.

Isoko: The land and the people

Isoko is a South Western Edoid language of the Niger-Congo family; it is spoken in the Delta State. The Edoid languages make up a subdivision of the West Benue-Congo subdivision of Niger-Congo, and are spoken in the southern part of Nigeria (Britannica, 2023). They are categorized into four coordinate members, viz., Delta Edoid (DE), North Central Edoid (NCE), North Western Edoid (NWE), and South Western Edoid (SWE) (Elugbe 1973, 1989). The SWE comprised five languages: Erowa, Isoko, Okpe, Urhobo, and Uvwie. Isoko is one of the biggest among the group, and is generally spoken as a L1 or L2 language among the SWE zone (Aziza, 2008).

Further on, the Isoko nation is known as the "Home of heritage and hospitality". The Isoko region has been in existence from the defunct Bendel state, comprising what is now Edo and Delta states. The Isoko tribe is the third major nation in Delta state and one of the largest producers of crude oil and gas which 30% of revenue is contributed to the Nigerian economy yearly. Isoko is blessed with two Local Government Areas: Isoko North and South with headquarters in Ozoro and Oleh respectively. The language spoken is the Isoko language. It is linguistically parallel to the language used by the neighbouring Urhobo nation.

The written English of many second language users in Nigeria has been known to exhibit a number of weaknesses in language use, particularly as these learners/users are yet to have adequate mastery of English as an L2 in the environment. A major importance is the way they handle the grammar of English such as where and when to use past or present tense, inappropriate use of the articles, prepositions, homophonic words,wrong plural and possessive formation, contractions and separation of compound words etc. The yearly reports of examination bodies also point to this position. For example, in 2007, West African Examination Council (WAEC) quoted in Gunn (2017) reports:

> …some of the areas of failure in English language among the candidates are lack of the proper use of punctuations, unfamiliarity of the proper use of upper case and lower case, unawareness of the variance among the present and the past tenses and incompetence to identify different parts of speech and how they function in sentences (worldpress.com, 2012).

Research Method

The subjects for the research were selected from five secondary schools in Isoko South Local Government Area of Delta State. The population comprised Senior Secondary Three (SS3) students who were preparing for WAEC (as at the time the data were collected), the last stage of secondary school education in Nigeria. The simple sampling technique was used to avoid a biased selection. Five secondary schools were selected through this technique, by writing out the names of the nineteen (19) schools separately on different pieces of paper, after which they were folded into balls and shuffled together in a hat. And a neutral person was called to pick five schools out of it. The choice of the SS3 students was based on the rationale that the SS3 is the level at which students are expected to have covered a greater part of the English language syllabus, and are therefore deemed capable of performing well in competitive externally conducted examinations. Also at this stage some of them have been registered to take part in the West Africa School Certificate Examination or similar examinations

Further, the students who partook in the research were 100 SS3 students of the five selected government owned colleges in Isoko South Local Government Area of Delta state. Again, simple indiscriminate specimen method

was also used to pick out twenty (20) students each from the five (5) schools making a total of one hundred (100) students. The students were given three essay topics; from which they were to choose one to write on. The questions were written on the chalkboard and answer scripts given out. The participants were to compose the essay within 45 minutes. The data generated were subsequently analysed and discussed.

Data presentation and analysis

Homophonic words

Homophones are words which sound alike. Homophonous errors are errors rising from the misunderstanding of lexical that have the same sound or articulation but a dissimilar semantic and spelling. Every homophonous error is made mostly by pronunciation. Most subjects have presented some words in the way they pronounce them while others have displayed them in a hurry thus missing a letter or two in the word. This is phonological conditioning, words spelt as they are pronounced, therefore, missing the correct spellings. Data here are tagged D1 – D9.

Samples from the schools are:

		Acceptable Pattern
1	*…You <u>no</u> in our education…	know
2	*… if there were <u>sit</u> would…	seat
3	*… money more than <u>dose</u> who go to…	those
4	*… am <u>year</u> to oppose motion…	here
5	*… they love <u>were</u> they can…	where
6	*… provide <u>test book</u> and desk	textbook
7	*…after getting there, the <u>hole</u> school	whole
8	*…Joseph on his path never <u>taught</u> of	thought
9	*…that villagers <u>where</u> very	were

In D1 above, the confusion occurs between "no" and "know". Each time the students encounter the /k/sound they tend to replace it with a sound after the /k/ sound as displayed in D1. The students used 'no' instead of 'know', new instead of knew etc.

In number D2, the confusion is found between 'sit' /sit/ and 'seat' /si:t/. The two words have different meanings "sit" is a dynamic verb while "seat" is a noun. However, "sit" as it was consistently used by the students, cannot be combined with the (be) verb "were" *…if there were sit, instead of, …if there were seats.

In D5, D7 and 9, the ill-formed sentences were as a result of the student's inability to recognize where and when to insert the bi-labial approximant sound, /w/ and the glottal sound /h/. These errors may not be unconnected with the fact that the approximant sound /w/ and glottal /h/ are sometimes silent in a word. For instance, where the students are supposed to use "where" they omitted the /h/ sound and used "were". So also, instead of 'whole' they omitted the /w/ sound and wrote "whole" as "hole"

Wrong use of preposition

Prepositions are very delicate words which attract different verbs to themselves. Eka (2004) observes that prepositions are grammatical elements which typically go between noun or noun phrase (p.168). A preposition typically designates the time-based, altitudinal or coherent association of its item to the other part of the sentence. Most of students in this study showed a poor knowledge of the proper use of preposition. And this category of errors account for 4.91%. This error may have occurred because the Isoko language does not have any definite way of showing preposition and this interferes with the students' scripts. For instance, the sentence,

Isoko: ákpisọrsé

Translation: they go church

English: They went to church

Isoko: mẹbéyanziuwo

Translation: I am coming house

English: I am coming to the house

 Some of the errors detected, were the omission of prepositions, arbitrary use of prepositions and duplication of prepositions. Here are some illustrations from the essays under study.

* They did not go^ church …   (to)

* …always staying <u>as</u> home………..   (at)

*education simple mean the process^facilitating learning   (of) (112)

*educated is a way of life which ever person must participate on……. (in)

*… all because <u>of</u> they didn't past through…

*…I am have to^ against the motion……. (to speak against)

*let us look at the life^ those whom…(of)

*make people to move <u>for</u> one place to any in life (from)

* …gambling, kidnapping and the rapping^ innocent people…(of)

*… the ministry of education should be up and doing ensure^ that … (to)

*While others go out to look^ what to eat…(for)

* he will not allow his children^ touch anything…(to)

* I will be very happy <u>of</u> my recommendation are being …(if)

*… to help others who are^ need…(in)

* however, I am still going ^thank you...(to)

*… in schools ^ease learning…….(to)

*luckily to my a small voice …......(for me)

Wrong use of the article

English language has two articles; the indefinite articles "a" or "an" and the definite article "the". In the data collected, the respondents wrongly used or omitted both the definite article and the indefinite article. Errors in the use of article account for 2.22% in all the scripts.

Sample from selected schools

*… and ^<u>riches</u> person… rather than "…a rich person".

* the young boys and girls find <u>a</u> joy in helping rather than "… find joy in.."

* He <u>sleep</u> in^day while…. rather than "…he sleeps in the day".

*…when you go to ^place where… rather than "…..go to a place".

The apparent lack of or misuse of the article in the respondent's texts could be attributed to the absence of such grammatical particle in the respondents' mother tongue. For instance, the Isoko language does not have a word/representation for an English article. For example, the Isoko sentence; mebekpooria (I am going to a place) mebekporianana (I am going to the place) 'Oriana' meaning place, 'Orianana' meaning the place, the article is only realized through the addition of an 'na'.

Wrong plural and possessive formation

This category of error was clearly evident in the respondents' scripts. There are instances where the students did not insert the plural morpheme "-s". Also observed was the arbitrary use of the apostrophe and –s morpheme to form possessive.

Examples

*… be able to communicate with <u>other </u>outside…   rather than .. with others

*… most of the time <u>student's</u> will…   instead of …the time students will…

*… straight to <u>Okoro</u> house…   rather than Okoro's house

*…that is, <u>Okoro father compound</u>,   rather than… Okoro's father's compound

*he will <u>still</u> other <u>people</u> things…   rather than people's things.

With his <u>wives little saving</u>… rather than… with his wives' little savings.

*companys..   instead of companies

*…mathematics teacher's but no English teacher's and other's too may have…, rather than 'teachers' … and 'others'

*…to convinces… rather than…. to convince.

*…theirs lifes…   rather than…. their lives

*Panels of judges… instead of panel of judges

*…the basic equipments…   instead of… basic equipment

*…essential for today living… rather than today's living

Wrong use of contracted forms

The following usages are either uncalled for or are wrongly used. Contracted forms are not meant to be used in formal writing but the respondents used many of contracted forms of words in the essays.

Examples

* …they <u>don't </u>belong..

*<u>I'm</u> a student of St. Michael's…

*You <u>won't</u> how to

*<u>I've</u> been able

*Riches <u>can't </u>compare

*First <u>that's</u> all you….
*but<u>I'll</u> prove
*<u>wasn't</u> a rich
*meaning you <u>didn't</u>

This error of contraction may have occurred from daily conversation among their peers.

Separation of compound words

Faulty separation of words was also observed in the respondent's scripts. Some of them include:

* through out	rather than	'throughout'
*him self	rather than	'himself'
*any thing	for	'anything'
*some one	for	'someone'
*with out	for	'without'
Your self	for	'yourself'
No where	for	'nowhere'
Her self	for	'herself'
Our self	for	'ourselves'
*… to day	for	'today'
*… every day	for	'everyday'
*… can not	for	'cannot'
*… every one for 'everyone'		

Discussion of Findings

The least errors discovered in the respondents' scripts are; homophonous errors, wrong use of preposition and wrong use of articles. Most subjects have presented some words in the way they pronounce them while others have displayed them in a hurry thus missing a or two letters in the words. Homophone is a word that is pronounced the same as another but differs in meaning and in spelling. Homophonic words that are spelt the same are also both homographs and homonyms.

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Examples from the students' scripts are as follow;

Examples (D1 – D9) are errors on homophone

* Joseph on his path never taught of

* After getting there, the hole school…

* The villagers where very…

* You no in our education …

* If there were sit would …

* Make money more than dose who go to …

       The above error is caused by the irregularities in both languages orthography. The sentences should have read:

- Joseph on his part never thought of

- After getting there, the whole school…

- The villagers were very

- You know in our education…

- If there were <u>seat</u> would …

- Make money more than those who…

       The students on their part have to pay more attention to pronunciation and spelling. The error is a result of mistakes arising from the confusion of words having the same or similar pronunciation but a different meaning and spelling. These are problems of phonological differences some of these initial sounds are not found in the L1 of the students, therefore, they pronounced words the way it sounds in their L1, thereby interfering in the L1 situation.

       In addition, on the wrong use of prepositions, the Isoko language does not have markers or features for preposition. Observation of the scripts shows that the students either omitted prepositions or the prepositions were inappropriately used. In some cases they were used even when not needed. For instance:

*they did not go ( ) church   (to)

*always staying <u>as </u>home (at)

*…all because <u>of </u>they didn't pass through school (the 'of' is not needed)

*…however, I am still gfoing( ) thank   (to)

In Isoko language, if I were to say "they did not go to church"

Isoko: ákpiisi̩o̩sehè

Translation: they church no

This is what the respondents tried translating, hence, the omission of the preposition …(to)

In addition, error in the use of article is the least of all the errors in the scripts analyzed. This shows that the subjects have little knowledge of the use of article. For instance, in the language under study, one can say in Isoko thus:

Isoko: wetikpooria (a place)

Isoko: wetikpkeria (place)

Oria means a place while eria is places

This knowledge of article displayed by the students has helped some of their writings to be grammatical, however, some of the students over generalized rules guarding the use of articles. For instance:

*…the young boys and girls find <u>a</u> joy in helping, rather than ….the young boys and girls find joy in helping.

Other errors identified were the use of wrong plural formation, use of contraction and separation of compound words.

Conclusion

English language is faced with several problems; the problems of textbooks and other study aids, the problem of interference from the learners' mother –tongue (native language), the teaching method as well as attitudinal problems and problem from the internet world which accounted for error of wrong plural and possessive formation committed by the students. It is therefore imperative for English language teachers, students, governments at all levels as well as other stakeholders in the business of education to redirect all efforts towards solving these and other identified problems in order to improve the teaching learning process on the one hand, and proficiency in the language use by student on the other hand.

Recommendations

The teacher of a second language has a big task before her/him. Teachers' ability to teach the second language should be couched upon a perfect or near perfect understanding of the working system of the target language and the learner's mother-tongue, then he can tackle the learning problems that may arise. Textbooks are very good; they have sections that cover all essential areas of

language study. However, having the textbook is not enough, the important thing is the use made of them. Exercises from these textbooks should be reinforced by the teachers. Exercise is an essential ingredient of learning which frequent practice can offer. When assignments are marked errors should be pointed out and the learner (student) should be compelled to rework the piece noting the correction previously given by the teacher.

Seminars and workshops should be organized by State and Federal Ministries of Education to update the knowledge of the teachers who are already in the service. Teachers of English should give frequent dictation and essay writing exercises to their students. This will improve their performance in English. The study of literature should form an important and necessary component of English language studies in all secondary schools in Nigeria, because literature is an instance of language in use. Therefore, an exposure to a range of literary texts in English over a period and selected from different parts of the world will enhance the students understanding of the creative use of the English language. It will also enhance the student's functional vocabulary. Reading skills should be taught in the early secondary classes. Students should be encouraged to develop their reading habit. Finally, the print and the electronic media can also be of great help by featuring educational programs such as debates, essay competitions, dramatic sketches and radio language.

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APOTHEOSISATION OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE AND CRIMINALITY: ITS IMPLICATION FOR CHRISTIANITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: Religious violence and criminality are increasing on daily basis in Nigeria. The involvement of the young and elderly in criminal activities is worrisome as it keeps presenting an atmosphere of threat to national peace and harmony. The height of this is that the government tends to be in a helpless situation that she has been unable to curb the mayhem. Despite the various constitutional punishment meant for various crimes being committed, criminality and religious violence continue to thrive. Discovering this misnomer in the Nigerian society and the promptness of its spread in the country, it becomes expedient to examine the major factors that contribute to the spread of this form of violence which is religious apotheosisation. This paper, therefore, engages the evaluation approach to engage the discourse in light of its impact on the practice of Christianity in Nigeria. The work concludes that, apotheosisation has contributed to spreading the violence and as such recommends that, religious leaders are to perceive themselves first as agents of peace and tranquillity which will then lead to how they encourage their adherents to live peacefully with members of the society.

Keywords: Apotheosisation, Christianity, violence, criminality, peace, insecurity, Nigeria

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Introduction

Nigeria from north to south and west to east is plagued by religious violence and criminality (Amaechi-Ani, Onwuama, Okolo & Okafor, 2020). From Nigeria's independence until now the country's story is coloured by conflicts, violence, warfare, and turbulence. Generally, there have been claims by all major religions in Nigeria to have had messages of peace as centre of their belief system, yet extremist and some committed adherents who hide their sacrilegious misdemeanour behind religious faith to foster religious violence and criminality in the light of fighting just course and in the believe to have being carrying out God's mandate, with habitual act of backing violence and criminal act with scriptural assertions resulting to apotheosisation of violence and crimes calls for thorough assessment and necessary curbing, in order to clarify the position of scripture on the concept of Religious violence and criminality.

Consequently, Christianity cannot be left out in the process of thorough scrutiny in order to define their correct standing when it comes to apotheosizing religious violence and criminality, because of the intense contributions that religious movement have contributed in fostering religious crisis Nigeria (Rowley, 2014). Deification of violence and criminal act in Nigeria is very rampant among major faiths, thus, understanding scriptural stands on violence and criminality is necessary; this will give clear views on how religious violence and criminality are apotheosised rightly and wrongly. Therefore, analytical inquiry to know the visible factors that has triggered deification of religious violence and criminality in the country need to be carried out.

Also, Ralph (2007 opinionated that, identification of immediate and visible drivers of religious violence and criminality in Nigeria is necessary, in order to evaluates and made clarifications of religious violence that is reasonable and religious criminality that is deify wrongly in the country under the disguise of interpretations of scriptural injunctions. Therefore, making recommendations to the various religious communities in Nigeria as well as the Nigerian state on appropriate strategies for managing religious violence and criminality is proposed.

Conceptual Clarification on Religious Violence and Criminality

In order to coerce and intimidate societies in the pursuit of generally religious and political goals, religious violence mainly refers to the use of

religious authorisation measures to arrogate superiority complex against others who hold different beliefs, creating a threat that instills phobia.

Religious violence is a phenomenon in which violence is either directed against or directed at religion (Wellman & Tokuno 2004). This is advanced further by Rowley (2014) who detailed that, religious violence is specifically defined as violence that is inspired by religious scriptures, teachings, or precepts. Violence against religious organisations, individuals, and property is referred to as religious violence. Acts done by secular groups against religious groups are also included in the definition of religious violence, which does not only refer to acts carried out by religious groups.

The spread and distortion of theological assertions and scriptural injunctions is the primary cause of religious violence committed by individuals whose motivations and goals are heavily influenced by religion as opined by Cavanaugh (2009). Therefore, it may be due to extreme forms of delusion that can change reality and make a person or a group of people feel less secure and vulnerable while pursuing religious goals and objectives that are thought to lead to liberation and the fulfilment of a just path.

Criminality is the trait or behaviour of someone who does an illegal conduct it is an activity that is completely against the law (Croall, 1995). It can also be seen as an ethically repugnant participation that could endanger the peace and harmony of the community. In this case, the act is completely illegal. The main way that criminality manifests itself is through violence and extreme fury, which typically leads to property destruction and the oppression, victimisation, and humiliation of weaker members of society.

Actions that incite fear are considered religious crime. These ideas are consistent with the experiences of people who have fallen prey to this threat rather than the perpetrators, who mistakenly think that they are supported by a religious motive, rationale, structure, or worldview (Croall, 1995). As a result, while victims of attacks view religious activists as terrorists and criminals, the course they represent praises them for their religious enthusiasm and brevity and views them as freedom fighters and true believers.

According to this premise, it is particularly problematic to try to imply moral judgement when evaluating religious violence that is expressly just and what constitutes religious criminality because it is considered religious violence

if one identifies with the victim of the attack, but it is considered heroism if one identifies with the perpetrator. It is crucial to pay close attention to the outcomes of acts of religious violence because that is the state in which one will be if one is on the level of defending the actual terms in the context of religious violence. To be honest, the act may be considered criminal if it causes other individuals who are the target to suffer from victimisation and brutality.

Apotheosisation

Apotheosisation is derived from Greek word apotheosis, meaning "making into a god." (The prefix "*apo*" simply means "quite" or "completely," and "*theos*" is the Greek word for "god"). According to Conlan (2016), apostheosisation is an act of hero-worship, it also means elevation of something to divine status and placement of an act or something on a very high pedestal. Apotheosisation is an act of deification, it means to offer honour or respect to someone or something which is believed to have possess divine power and commands great authority and respect therefore it calls for applauding and setting on highest pace or position.

Therefore, on this light of the concentration of this work which major on apotheosisation of religious violence and criminality in Nigeria, a practice which has advanced in modern times and reveals the act of showing aggression in the sense of serving and being zealous for God, such as physical violence against persons with the intention of harming them in a warlike manner.

Religious Violence and Criminality in Nigeria

Going back to the memory line of religious violence and criminality in Nigeria showed evidence of the menace to have been an untamed issue till this present moment (Egwu, 2001). Most of the religious violence and criminal act that have been perpetrated in Nigeria is between the two major faiths (Christianity and Islam) due to the persistence of unhealthy relationship and hostility between Christians and Muslims orchestrated the magnitude of religious violence and criminal experience up to date.

The lukewarm attitude to proffer meaningful solution to religious problems has led to several errors, even at the level of international relation, there have being a lot of havoc so far, for instance in the second republic, amidst the programme of making religion to play vital role in politics of National Party of Nigeria (NPN) Pope John Paul II during his visit reminded Nigerians of the

need to respect the multicultural nature of the country. However, just ten months after, and six months interval of the foundation laying of Christ Anglican Church in Fagge, Kano, there was religious riots of October 1982 which reawakened the suspicion that Muslims were still after their programme of Islamization in Nigeria (Eniola, 2010).

There are also several cases of religious conflict saga in one of it is that of Bauchi Progmo (1990-1991) due to the complaint made by Christian girls on water wastage by their Muslims colleagues during ablution due to the scarceness of it, but eventually led to a regrettable conflicts outbreak among ten schools that cause numerous causalities. On a lighter note, the conflict would have been managed and resolve adequate explanation and supposing the authorities take swift measure in collaborating with the law enforcements to curb the menace (Eniola, 2010).

Kaduna Sharia Crisis 2000 is also one of the notable religious conflicts that sum-up due to resistance on the introduction and elevation of Sharia Law in some of the Northern states which include Kaduna led to massacre of people putting mutual co-existence between Muslim and Christian questionable and untrue. Likewise, in 2001 there was a conflict on this aforementioned note in Nassarawa and Bauchi among the Tivs who are majorly Christians and Afrelist and Azeris mainly Muslims which left masses of people homeless and many dead (Mustapha, 2004).

Miss World competition riot, November 2002, this incidence is one of the most obvious agitations in the face of religious crisis in Nigeria so far, the Muslim opposed the competition because of the exposure of woman's body which was immoral, especially when organisation collided with Ramadan which was frown at. Hence, its end result left at least 100 people dead and so many churches were burnt down (Mustapha, 2004). Therefore, this raises a lot of question not only in the country but international communities as well regarding the magnitude contributions on religious hostilities in Nigeria their profess readiness to promote peace, reconciliation and economic growth. Religious polarization is a real challenge in Nigeria, and it has likely increased. The government has been unable to destroy Boko Haram or end the local conflicts in the Middle Belt. Further, the economy remains in the doldrums, and the country now has the most people living in extreme poverty in the world.

Apotheosisation of Religious Violence and Criminality in Nigeria

Both Christianity and Islam have specific intellectual beliefs. Each has a number of literatures which contain historical materials with which the validity of the doctrines is connected to ancient Israel whose history dominate the Old Testament and it also serves as its modes of propagation. Therefore, wrong notion of apotheosisation of religious criminality in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. However, owing to lack of in-depth understanding, outright ignorance, misinterpretation or cheer mischief, scriptural texts have been given whimsical and capricious interpretations towards predetermined ends and this as most led to numerous criminal act that have been perpetrated as divine. Such actions have often sparked off emotional responses and violence among the adherents of the various religions in Nigeria (Nayak, 2008).

Religious fanatics have wrought violent and unreasoning religious enthusiasm; religious fanatics show excessive irrational zeal to defend their religions in Nigeria consequently become destructive agents of religious disharmony in the society (Sulaiman, 2014). The adherents of Christians and Muslims are at one stage or another influenced by fanaticism to result to violent confrontation.

Although there are some cases of religious violence expression on the premise of self defense and to instill justice, thus, it cannot be taken as criminal act however, it should be done rightly and reasonably. Therefore, apotheosisation of religious violence is right when it's totally base on correct scriptural assertion, but when it negates the position of fostering peace then it is wrong and this can be viewed to be region criminality which is not scriptural and it will be wrong to exonerate such act.

Implication of Apotheosisation of Religious Violence and Criminality for Nigerian Christianity

It has become so glaring that Nigeria's stability order has suffered greatly as a result of religious violence and criminality; the extent of the damage that religious violence has inflicted to the nation is incalculable. Christians have suffered greatly as a result of the frequent conflicts that result from acts of religious violence, including the destruction of churches and the loss of lives. Although religious violence has various repercussions, the most evident one is

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the death toll, which is thought to have been caused by Islamist extremists acting in the name of God or Allah (Dauda, 1993).

Religious violence tends to damage the nation's reputation abroad in addition to threatening the stability order. Due to the regular occurrence of religious uprisings, some nations have been forced to issue travel warnings cautioning their citizens against visiting Nigeria due to the potential for sudden and violent religious tensions. For example, the U.S. State Department cautioned its nationals about the risks of visiting Nigeria in December 2003, citing a purported revival of violence issues (Bashir, 2002).

Another implication to this menace is the way at which many adherents that intend not to contend in brutal attacks with the aim of fostering peace instead of war mostly become victims of terror because of their religious beliefs, the magnitude of religious violence and criminality is well spelled out in Nigeria, such as that of the ancient Israel that does things that have to do with violence in old testament that can be for various factors but putting religion at the pinnacle to have being the driving force, resulting to an act of giving credence to God (Brueggemann, 2009). Therefore, it makes it a twisted case to really justify the claim of fostering peace which the religion stands to exalt due to major agitation and retaliation that have that are triggered by religious differences.

Therefore, since it is very true in most cases, that Christian adherents are mostly victimized during religious violence (Avalos, 2005). Thus, carrying out some protecting measure and self defense that is lawfully justifiable is necessary; however, great care must be put in place so that the act did not tend towards religious criminality and religious violence that is totally against the correct interpretation of the bible.

Prospects for Peace Actualisation against Religious Violence in Nigeria

The Hebrew term 'shalom' has a much broader meaning than the English word 'peace', with which it is usually translated (Chester 1989). In the prophetic texts (Isa 2:2-4 and Mi 4:1-4) it denotes a time of cessation of warfare and the onset of universal harmony (Chester, 1989 p.471).

Having synthesized the understanding of the actual and crucial stand of Old Testament that what it tends to apotheosize is peace and totally refute it records of violent act, therefore, the concept of religious violence calls for stability order in Nigeria, it is necessary to make some recommendations which

the following antidotes which are expected to go a long way in combating the phenomenon.

The Constitution must be strengthened and respected. This includes the respect for the rule of law, respect for the fundamental human rights, independence of the judiciary and respect to all democratic norms and values. This is the running of Government affairs in a positive and progressive manner that will be beneficial to the Governed by following due process and the rule of law.

The issue of faith is the concern of every individual. Thus, man has the choice and freedom to follow whichever religion he or she thinks he can find solace and tranquillity in (Bashir, 2002). Also, every person should be free to invite others to consider his or her religion of choice without any harassment whatsoever. In doing this, the principles enumerated by different religions on how to invite people to the way of God should be employed reasonably and peacefully. Invitation of another person to one religion should not be done in an aggressive manner; the invitation should be done with wisdom and discretion.

Furthermore, religious leaders should preach the genuine teaching of their respective religion about peace to their followers. All religions could promote peaceful and harmonious co-existence among people if only their teeming followers are informed of the erroneous consideration of anyone outside their faith as an antagonist. The Biblical injunctions are germane for promoting love and religious peace in contemporary Nigeria.

Furthermore, at the levels of education in Nigeria, Students and their Lecturers should constantly reflect on the value of religious tolerance in a mixed community of religious believers. In all tertiary institutions; symposia, lectures and conferences should be frequently organized on this topic (Lederach, 1995). Experts on dialogue with different religions should be invited to present leading papers that will promote meaningful dialogue. Enlightenment campaigns should also be organized for the members of the public on religious peace.

The need for inter-religious dialogue in a religiously pluralistic state like Nigeria is equally expedient (Alanamu, 2005). The aim of dialogue should not be to obliterate the identity of a participating religious group. Rather its objective should be to discuss the various aspects of the problem that pose as threat to the peaceful co-existence between different religious groups. The promotion of inter-

religious dialogue in Nigeria, will therefore contribute a great deal in averting religious violence.

Lastly on this note, there is the need for the development of an early warning system for raising alarm on the imminent eruption of religious uprising. Such warning system will enable the law enforcement agents to intervene promptly in religious tension before it escalates into violent out- burst. The pluralism on religious matters and ethnicity call for sincerity when relating with people of different faiths, we must be truly tolerant of each other especially where the practice of religion proves divisive. Since all religions preach peace and love and since we are children of one God; all efforts must be geared towards unity. Any country that is divided by religious conflicts finds it hard to recover. Christian and Muslim preachers must carefully guard their utterances so as not to wound people's sensibilities.

Conclusion

Considering the concept of violence in the Bible and Nigeria, this research has shown that there are those who perpetrate violence for their selfish aim in the name of God and set of dogmas resulting apotheosisation of religious violence and criminality which is in most cases irrational. They argue that the act of violence is the only way to obtain peace (Ojie, 2004). Others see it in the reverse that violence has no good to offer to lives and property.

Wars and misunderstanding took place in the Bible just like in Nigeria where insecurity rocks virtually every community. Some major causes of this religious criminality have been from human side. To forestall further religious unruly violence and criminality in Nigeria cannot be solved by violence, because of their intractable and explosive nature (Olukorede, 2003). Therefore, religious violence can be resolved only through dialogue and negotiation. Political solutions alone is not sufficient, it is necessary to apply the Christian principle which goes a long way to seek healing reconciliation and peace

As upheld by Yahaya (2009), that the church must be seen to be involved in an active struggle against injustice, ethnocentrism and oppression. Where there is fairness and equity for all ethnic and religious groups in respect of employment, political appointments, school admissions and all normal amenities in any of our communities, there should be greater willingness to accept people

from other religious groups. Thus, promoting justice is the greatest avenue for reducing religious violence and criminality in Nigerian.

Recommendations

The discourse in this paper focuses on apotheosisation of religious violence and criminality in Nigeria, which has grown over the years to be a menace, validating criminality in Nigeria. This study recommends the following to salvage the situation:

i.   Religious leaders are to play frontier roles in being catalyst for peace and orderliness in the society by desisting from inciting words to their religious adherents

ii.   The government is to bring criminals to book regardless of their strong religious affiliation.

iii. Teachers, parents and various instructors in the country are to ensure that the value of life and sanctity is taught for people to value the life of others regardless of their affinity.

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INSURGENCY, CRIMINAL GANGS, AND THE THREAT TO OIL AND GAS PIPELINES IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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Abstract: The Niger Delta, Nigeria's foremost oil-producing region, has long been plagued by insurgency and the activities of criminal gangs, posing significant threats to oil and gas pipeline infrastructure. The research problem explored in this paper centres on the persistent insecurity surrounding these installations, resulting in environmental degradation, economic sabotage, and socio-political instability. This study aims to critically examine the key actors, motivations, operational methods, and consequences of these threats while assessing the effectiveness of governmental, corporate, and community-based responses. Using a qualitative methodology grounded in document analysis, security reports, field investigations, and scholarly literature, the research reveals that pipeline insecurity is fuelled by a convergence of factors: weak governance, socio-economic deprivation, youth unemployment, environmental injustice, arms proliferation, and importantly, the moral ambivalence within informal institutions such as religious organizations. In some cases, religious figures have inadvertently legitimized violence through spiritual justification or silence, while in others, faith-based institutions have acted as mediators and peace-builders in efforts to restore order. The findings indicate that despite heavy military deployment and the use of

surveillance technology, existing responses have not produced lasting security. The study concludes that a preventive, development-oriented approach is critical. It recommends a multi-pronged strategy involving community-based security, intelligence-driven policing, anti-corruption reform, inclusive socio-economic policies, and the active engagement of religious organizations in moral reorientation, peace-building, and youth mentorship as essential components of long-term stability in the region.

Keywords: Niger Delta, insurgency, oil pipelines, security, oil, gas, religion.

Introduction

The strategic importance of oil and gas pipelines in Nigeria cannot be overstated, as they serve as vital conduits for the transport of crude oil, gas, and refined petroleum products—key lifelines of the country's economy. The Niger Delta region, which hosts the majority of these infrastructures, is paradoxically both the wealthiest in natural resources and among the poorest in human development indicators. Over the decades, the region has evolved into a hotspot of insecurity marked by pipeline vandalism, oil theft, kidnappings, and violent attacks orchestrated by insurgent groups and criminal gangs. These persistent threats have not only endangered the operations of multinational oil companies but have also compromised national revenue, environmental sustainability, and regional stability. As Ikpe (2013) argues, the crisis in the Niger Delta is deeply rooted in governance failures, unfulfilled developmental promises, and the skewed distribution of oil revenues.

The emergence of complex, decentralized criminal networks and insurgent actors has escalated the sophistication and frequency of pipeline attacks, transforming what was once isolated vandalism into an organized, multi-billion-dollar criminal enterprise. These actors often operate with tacit support from elements within local communities, corrupt state officials, and even some private security contractors, creating a web of complicity that frustrates enforcement efforts. The environmental consequences of oil spills and pipeline sabotage further exacerbate the hardship of already impoverished communities, fuelling a cycle of

resentment and resistance. The crisis, therefore, is not merely a security issue but a deeply political and socio-economic one.

This paper investigates the evolving threats posed by insurgents and criminal networks to oil and gas pipelines, with a focus on the root causes, actors involved operational methods, and strategic responses. It seeks to offer a comprehensive framework for understanding these challenges and recommends sustainable security strategies grounded in inclusive development and policy reform. By critically appraising both formal and informal stakeholders including religious bodies, NGOs, local communities, private security outfits, and government institutions the study highlights the multi-dimensional nature of the conflict and the need for holistic, participatory solutions. Only by addressing the structural drivers of insecurity can the Nigerian state hope to achieve long-term peace and protect its vital oil infrastructure.

The Nexus between Oil, Insurgency, and Criminality

The relationship between oil, insurgency, and organized criminality in the Niger Delta is complex and historically entrenched. Since the discovery of oil in Oloibiri in 1956, the region has experienced paradoxical underdevelopment despite being the source of Nigeria's vast petroleum wealth. Oil extraction has produced substantial revenue for the federal government and multinational corporations, but it has simultaneously generated widespread poverty, ecological destruction, and political exclusion for local communities. This situation created fertile ground for resistance and rebellion. As Watts (2004) famously conceptualized, the Niger Delta represents a "petro-violence" zone where the politics of oil intersect with social grievances and violent contestation.

Militancy emerged as a response to these injustices, notably with groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in the early 2000s. These groups initially pursued political goals demanding resource control, environmental justice, and greater community inclusion in oil revenue management. However, as Omeje (2006) observes, many of these movements degenerated into criminal enterprises due to internal fragmentation, leadership struggles, and the allure of illegal oil bunkering profits. Akpan (2010) also highlights how rampant youth unemployment, lack of formal education, and disenchantment with both state and corporate actors have driven local youths to join armed gangs and insurgent cells.

Over time, the clear lines between ideological militancy and economic criminality have blurred. Today's pipeline threats are carried out by hybrid actors some with residual political rhetoric but primarily focused on profiteering. The operations of these actors are sustained by access to arms, connivance with corrupt officials, and the informal support of disenfranchised community members. Consequently, pipeline insecurity has become institutionalized, undermining both national security and local livelihoods. Addressing this nexus demands a nuanced understanding of the socio-political context and an integrated approach that transcends mere military suppression.

Actors Involved in Pipeline Threats

Militant Groups: Militant groups in the Niger Delta have historically framed their actions apolitically motivated resistance against marginalization, environmental injustice, and unequal distribution of oil revenues. Groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) have carried out coordinated attacks on oil infrastructure to demand resource control, community development, and increased federal allocations. These groups often position themselves as defenders of local communities against exploitative state and corporate interests. However, over time, the ideological purity of such groups has often eroded as some factions resort to criminal activities. As Osaghae et al. (2011) note, many of these groups engage in a mixture of activism and opportunism, blending political rhetoric with profit-driven actions.

Criminal Gangs: Unlike militant groups, criminal gangs in the Niger Delta operate primarily for economic gain. These groups engage in activities such as illegal oil bunkering, pipeline tapping, sea piracy, and kidnapping for ransom. They are highly organized and often function with military-grade weaponry and logistics. Aghedo and Osumah (2015) argue that the commercialization of violence in the region has empowered these gangs to act as informal entrepreneurs in the illicit oil economy. Their operations are further facilitated by porous borders, weak state institutions, and high youth unemployment. Unlike politically inclined militants, these gangs rarely make public declarations or demands but focus on maximizing profit through black market operations and collusion with insiders.

Local Colluders: Local colluders comprising villagers, youth groups, traditional authorities, and informal actors play a crucial role in facilitating attacks on pipelines. These actors often provide intelligence on security patrol schedules, help construct illegal connections to pipelines, or offer protection for bunkering activities in exchange for financial incentives. Many residents, disillusioned by government neglect and corporate exploitation, view oil theft as a legitimate form of compensation or resistance. This informal support structure makes it extremely difficult for state security forces to detect or deter pipeline vandalism. The socio-cultural acceptance of bunkering in some communities has normalized criminal activities and eroded the moral boundary between economic survival and illegal enterprise.

Corrupt Officials and Security Agents: A critical and often underreported group involved in pipeline insecurity are corrupt government officials and compromised security agents. These actors either turn a blind eye to illegal operations or actively participate by providing protection and facilitating oil theft. As Ikelegbe (2010) and Idemudia (2009) explain, systemic corruption within the security apparatus undermines the effectiveness of law enforcement and delegitimizes anti-bunkering campaigns. This collusion is particularly damaging as it conveys to local communities that criminal activities enjoy high-level backing, further weakening the rule of law. Moreover, some pipeline protection contracts are allegedly awarded to former militants who, while securing one area, may facilitate illegal operations elsewhere.

Methods of Attack and Impact

    i. **Direct Sabotage Using Explosives or Manual Perforation**: One of the most common methods of attack on oil and gas infrastructure is the deliberate sabotage of pipelines using explosives or crude tools. Perpetrators often detonate improvised explosive devices (IEDs) or manually bore holes into pipelines to disrupt the flow of crude oil and siphon off resources. These acts are carried out both to damage state and corporate property and to enable oil theft operations. Such sabotage is highly destructive and typically results in large-scale oil spills and fire outbreaks. These tactics serve not only economic purposes but also strategic ones, as they are often used to attract government attention or negotiate ransom or political concessions. Repairing the damage

consumes significant financial resources and causes production shutdowns that affect national oil output.

ii. **Illegal Refining Camps Connected to Tapped Pipelines**: Illegal refining, often referred to as "artisanal refining" or "kpo-fire," is widespread in the Niger Delta. These makeshift camps are often located in remote creeks and forests and are supplied directly through tapped pipelines. Crude oil is siphoned off through unauthorized connections and transported to these camps, where it is refined using rudimentary and environmentally hazardous techniques. These activities result in severe environmental pollution, including the release of toxic smoke, contamination of water bodies, and destruction of farmlands. Moreover, these camps are sometimes protected by armed gangs, making enforcement difficult. The proliferation of illegal refineries signifies a parallel economy in the region, fuelled by local demand for cheap fuel and systemic unemployment.

iii. **Hijacking of Oil Transport Vehicles:** In addition to stationary infrastructure, mobile oil transport such as tankers and supply boats is also a target. Criminals hijack oil-laden vessels or trucks, reroute them to black market destinations, and resell the stolen fuel domestically or internationally. These attacks often occur in poorly policed coastal waters or rural transit routes and are executed with military precision. Hijackings have economic implications for logistics companies, oil marketers, and the Nigerian economy at large. Insurance costs for transporting petroleum products have risen due to these risks, and delays in supply chains are common. The hijackings also contribute to the global perception of Nigeria as a high-risk zone for investment in the oil and gas sector.

iv. **Kidnapping of Oil Workers for Ransom**: Kidnapping oil workers especially expatriates and senior technical staff has become a lucrative business for both militants and criminal gangs. These kidnappings are used as bargaining chips to demand ransom from companies or to force political negotiations with the state. Victims are often taken from offshore platforms, company guesthouses, or road convoys and held in remote creeks until demands are met. Kidnapping not only threatens human lives but also deters skilled workers from operating in the region. It imposes significant security costs on oil companies, who must invest in private security and negotiate with criminal elements. The social fallout also

includes psychological trauma, loss of productivity, and community hostility when innocent people are harmed or killed.

Table 1. Security Incidents in Niger Delta (2015–2024)

year	Crude Oil Theft(Million Barrels)	Thwarted Criminal Attempts	Oil Worker Kidnappings	Oil Infrastructure Sabotage
2015	27.1	Limited public reports	Scattered; data not clear	Jan 2015 Trans Forcados pipeline vandalised. May Shell pipelines sabotaged in ogale and Kpoghor
2016	101.6	Military launched Operation Crocodile Smile to combat theft	Sept: 14 oil workers kidnapped; later released	Shell subsea pipeline bombed. Trunk line bombed in Bayelsa & Delta
2017	36.5	Navy intercepts illegal refineries and barges in Rivers and Bayelsa	Low reports; less publicized	Trans Forcados shut down in a month for sabotage repair
2018	53.3	Navy/Nigerian Army destroyed 200+ illegal	Offshore kidnapping threats rise	Trans Forcados pipeline leak and shutdown

		bunkering sites		
2019	42.3	Dozens of bunkering camps destroyed, over 100 suspects arrested	Sporadic crew kidnappings	Trans Forcados spill due to sabotage
2020	39.1	Several bunkering rings dismantled	Gulf of Guinea: 62 crew kidnapped (IMB)	Lagos Atlas Cove Mosimi pipeline explosion
2021	17.6	Falcon Eye surveillance system launched	Kidnappings reduced due to naval presence	No major sabotage reported
2022	36.7	Dozens of vessels seized; pipeline security contracts initiated	Crew kidnappings resumed in shallow waters	Over 100 death in illegal refinery blast in River
2023	7.7	Hundreds of sites, vessels, pits intercepted weekly	No public record of major incident	Week 17 pipeline vandalism sabotage in Delta

| 2024 | Data not available | Navy & Army seized >8.8M L stolen crude; 700K L recovered in Nov | Multiple crew members kidnapped off Bayelsa (unconfirmed) | No major sabotage |

Source: State and corporate responses

The Nigerian government and multinational oil companies have deployed a combination of military, political, and technological strategies to address the persistent insecurity affecting oil pipelines in the Niger Delta. One prominent state-led initiative is the deployment of the Joint Task Force (JTF), such as Operation Delta Safe, comprising personnel from the Nigerian Army, Navy, and other paramilitary forces. Their mandate is to protect critical infrastructure, deter militant activities, and enforce maritime security. However, the presence of armed forces has often resulted in human rights abuses and has occasionally heightened tensions with local communities.

The Amnesty Programme, launched in 2009, was a landmark political strategy aimed at disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating over 26,000 militants. Though it temporarily reduced violence, critics argue it lacked sustainability and failed to address systemic grievances (Ukeje & Adebanwi, 2008). Oil companies like Shell and Chevron have invested in surveillance technologies such as drones, CCTV, and GPS-tracked sensors to detect pipeline breaches and unauthorized activities (Asuni, 2009). Additionally, pipeline protection contracts have been awarded to private security firms, some run by ex-militants, in a bid to leverage their knowledge of local terrain and actors.

While these interventions have delivered short-term stability, they often function as stop-gap measures. Scholars like Zalik (2004) and Pegg & Zabbey (2013) argue that many strategies are top-down and fail to address root causes such as poverty, underdevelopment, and ecological damage. There's a growing perception that these efforts reinforce a militarized approach rather than promote genuine peace-building. Furthermore, entrusting ex-militants with pipeline protection has drawn criticism for legitimizing violence as a pathway to state patronage.

Challenges to Effective Security

Despite various interventions, several challenges continue to undermine efforts to secure oil and gas infrastructure in the Niger Delta. A major issue is the deep-seated lack of trust between local communities and both the government and oil companies. Years of perceived neglect, broken promises, and environmental degradation have created an atmosphere of resentment and suspicion. Consequently, local residents are often reluctant to cooperate with security agencies or report criminal activities, thereby creating fertile ground for insurgents and oil thieves to thrive.

Corruption is another formidable barrier: Human Rights Watch (2007) and other watchdogs have documented cases where security personnel and public officials are complicit in the very crimes they are meant to prevent. These actors may provide protection for oil thieves or divert recovered stolen crude into the black market. Such systemic corruption makes it nearly impossible to enforce laws consistently and undermines the morale of honest officers.

Intelligence gathering and rapid response mechanisms are also woefully inadequate: In many cases, by the time a threat is identified, the perpetrators have vanished. The difficult terrain, including swamps and mangroves, further complicates surveillance and quick deployment. The use of modern surveillance tools has yet to be fully integrated into a coherent security strategy.

Lastly, poor coordination among federal, state, and local authorities creates duplication, inefficiency, and bureaucratic delays. As Okonta (2008) observes, a fragmented governance system often results in overlapping mandates, finger-pointing, and lack of accountability.

These structural weaknesses have allowed criminal activities to persist and, in some cases, flourish, despite the substantial resources allocated to security in the region.

Recommendations

i. **Community-Based Security**: For any security framework in the Niger Delta to be sustainable, it must involve the direct participation of local communities. Community-based security mechanisms help build trust, local ownership, and real-time intelligence sharing. Empowering local youth groups, vigilante committees, and traditional leaders through

formal training, legal frameworks, and stipends can shift their role from passive observers or accomplices to active protectors of infrastructure. This approach also counters narratives that pipeline protection is solely the responsibility of the state. However, such community initiatives must be inclusive, transparent, and devoid of favouritism to avoid reproducing the same inequalities that fuel insecurity.

ii. **Strengthen Intelligence Networks**: An effective intelligence architecture that combines human intelligence (HUMINT) with technological tools is essential for pre-empting threats to oil infrastructure. Currently, much of the surveillance is reactive, responding after attacks have occurred. This must shift towards a proactive model, where data gathered from community informants, digital sensors, drones, and satellite imagery is synthesized in real time. Collaboration between oil companies, security agencies, and local networks will improve threat identification and response. Training programs on counter-terrorism and cyber-surveillance should be prioritized, alongside the development of a centralized database of threats, patterns, and actors. Strengthening intelligence not only improves response time but enhances deterrence.

iii. **Transparency and Accountability**: Corruption is arguably the greatest obstacle to effective pipeline protection. To address this, there must be institutional reforms that promote transparency and accountability within security agencies and oil firms. Independent oversight bodies, including civil society organizations, should be granted access to monitor security contracts, disbursement of funds, and operational reports. Oil companies must also adopt Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) models that are transparent and community-driven. Strict penalties should be enforced against officers or contractors found guilty of collusion or negligence. Whistleblower protection laws should be enacted to encourage insider reporting without fear of reprisal.

iv. **Socio-Economic Development**: Poverty, unemployment, and lack of infrastructure remain the underlying causes of insecurity in the Niger Delta. As long as young people remain idle and disenfranchised, they will be vulnerable to recruitment by militant or criminal groups. Governments at all levels must prioritize investments in education, healthcare, roads, and clean water. Skills acquisition programs tailored to the local economy—such as agriculture, aquaculture, and marine logistics—should

be scaled up. Microfinance opportunities, youth enterprise schemes, and cooperative societies can also provide alternative livelihoods. Socio-economic development not only improves quality of life but also reduces the allure of the illicit oil economy.

v. **Regulate and Professionalize Private Security Firms:** The federal government should develop and enforce a strict regulatory framework for private security operations in the oil sector. Licensing must be tied to human rights standards, accountability mechanisms, and community engagement protocols. A national registry of vetted firms should be maintained, and violators held accountable through an independent oversight body.

vi. **Legal Reforms**: The current legal framework for prosecuting oil theft and pipeline sabotage is either outdated or poorly enforced. There is an urgent need for comprehensive legal reforms that clarify jurisdiction, increase penalties, and improve trial speed. Special courts for oil-related crimes should be established to ensure swift justice. Moreover, the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) must be fully implemented; especially the provisions that promote host community participation. As Ojo (2012) notes, strengthening legal institutions will help restore public confidence in the rule of law and criminal behaviour. Effective legal reforms will also enhance Nigeria's international reputation and investor confidence.

A Critical Appraisal – The Role of Informal Sectors and Formal Sectors in Oil Pipeline Security

Religious Organizations: Religious organizations in the Niger Delta play a dual and complex role in the dynamics of oil-related conflict and peace-building. Their widespread presence and deep cultural influence allow them to shape public morality and community norms. On one hand, religious leaders often preach messages of peace, reconciliation, and moral discipline. Churches, mosques, and faith-based NGOs have launched initiatives aimed at youth sensitization, nonviolence education, and community healing especially in post-conflict areas. These organizations have also facilitated reintegration programs for ex-militants, promoting forgiveness, skill acquisition, and spiritual rehabilitation.

However, the sector is not without controversy. Some religious groups, either overtly or covertly, offer spiritual legitimacy to acts of violence, framing pipeline

sabotage and oil theft as forms of divine resistance against exploitation and marginalization. Reports indicate that a few churches have "blessed" youths before engaging in vandalism or militancy, interpreting their actions through a theological lens of justice and liberation (Oluwaniyi, 2010). This ideological support contributes to the normalization of illegal activities among some segments of the population.

Additionally, religious institutions are often constrained by internal factors such as doctrinal rivalries, lack of coordination, and limited financial resources. Externally, their credibility is sometimes undermined by accusations of political bias or selective activism. To strengthen their positive contributions, there is a need for interfaith collaboration, capacity-building in peace education, and formal partnerships with government and civil society. These steps can help religious organizations more effectively counter radical narratives and act as trusted mediators in the Niger Delta's complex socio-political landscape.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): NGOs in the Niger Delta serve as key actors in addressing the socio-environmental and political crises associated with oil exploitation. Their contributions span a wide spectrum from advocacy and policy lobbying to grassroots mobilization and service delivery. Prominent NGOs such as Environmental Rights Action, Niger Delta Human Rights Watch, and the Stakeholder Democracy Network have brought international attention to oil spills, gas flaring, and the human rights abuses committed by state and non-state actors. Their watchdog role holds governments and oil companies accountable and pressures institutions to implement reforms.

Moreover, many NGOs run peace-building programs, vocational training for ex-agitators and community engagement forums to reduce the appeal of militancy. Their flexible structures and relative autonomy often allow them to respond quickly to local needs and experiment with innovative approaches to conflict resolution and sustainable development. However, the NGO landscape in the region is not uniformly positive. Some organizations operate primarily as "briefcase NGOs"—existing on paper to secure donor funding with little to no grassroots presence or impact (Okonta & Douglas, 2001). Others have been accused of acting as proxies for political actors or even collaborating with militant networks under the guise of development work. This has led to credibility issues and reduced trust from communities.

To maximize their effectiveness, NGOs must adhere to principles of transparency, community ownership, and long-term engagement. Collaboration with government bodies, religious leaders, and traditional institutions can foster more sustainable and inclusive outcomes. Additionally, establishing independent monitoring mechanisms and ethical guidelines can weed out opportunistic organizations and strengthen the sector's overall integrity.

Local Communities: Local communities are at the heart of the Niger Delta oil conflict, occupying the paradoxical role of both victims and perpetrators. For decades, communities have endured environmental degradation, health crises, and socio-economic marginalization due to oil exploration and the failure of government and corporate actors to deliver on development promises. The degradation of traditional livelihoods such as farming and fishing has pushed many, especially youth, towards alternative survival strategies including oil theft and pipeline vandalism (Watts, 2004).

In many cases, sabotage is viewed not merely as criminal behaviour, but as a form of "resource justice" or economic rebellion. Community leaders, youth groups, and even women's associations have been implicated in varying degrees of complicity, ranging from passive tolerance to active participation in illicit oil activities. Corruption within local leadership such as accepting bribes or benefiting from oil theft further erodes the social fabric and perpetuates insecurity. Despite these challenges, communities also have immense potential to serve as custodians of national infrastructure. Initiatives involving local surveillance teams, vigilante networks, and traditional security structures have proven successful in deterring sabotage when backed by proper incentives and support (Ukeje, 2011). Community-based security models that reward information sharing and promote local ownership of development projects can create a strong deterrent to vandalism. For this to be sustainable there must be meaningful investment in local governance structures, transparent resource allocation, and participatory mechanisms that give communities a stake in oil wealth. Empowering youth through education, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement can shift the narrative from resistance to responsibility.

Private Security Organizations: Private security organizations (PSOs) have become integral players in the protection of oil infrastructure in the Niger Delta, especially given the inadequacies of state security forces. Oil companies, faced with persistent threats to pipelines and facilities, have increasingly outsourced

security to private firms that offer surveillance, intelligence gathering, and rapid response capabilities (Gilbert, 2010). These firms often possess superior logistics, advanced technology (such as drones and satellite imaging), and flexibility in deployment. However, the rise of PSOs is fraught with challenges. Many operate with minimal oversight and have been accused of human rights abuses, excessive force, and, in some cases, collusion with oil thieves or militant groups (Akinwale, 2010). The absence of strong regulatory frameworks has allowed rogue elements within the private security sector to exploit loopholes for personal gain, further undermining community trust and legal enforcement. Additionally, the presence of heavily armed private operatives often exacerbates tensions with local residents who see them as extensions of exploitative oil interests rather than partners in development. Without community engagement and clear accountability, PSOs risk entrenching cycles of violence rather than promoting stability. To address these issues, private security must be brought under a unified regulatory and ethical framework, aligned with national security objectives. Integration into multi-stakeholder security arrangements comprising government agencies, community groups, and civil society actors can enhance legitimacy and effectiveness. The emerging model of public-private-community partnerships offers a promising path forward, enabling shared responsibility and reducing hostility.

Oil Companies: Oil companies are both major stakeholders and prime targets in the Niger Delta conflict. Their infrastructure pipelines, flow stations, and terminals is often the focus of vandalism and theft. While they contribute significantly to national revenue, their presence has triggered environmental degradation, forced displacement, and socio-economic disruptions in host communities. Despite launching Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, many oil companies have failed to establish meaningful relationships with their host communities. CSR is often implemented without adequate consultation, leading to poorly designed projects that neither address core grievances nor promote trust. Their reliance on private security firms, coupled with weak grievance redress mechanisms, has worsened tensions.

Nonetheless, oil companies have the capacity to be powerful agents of peace-building and development. By adopting transparent stakeholder engagement strategies, funding long-term community development, and supporting environmental remediation, they can help transform the conflict landscape.

Inclusive employment policies, local procurement, and collaborative decision-making platforms are key to restoring community trust and ensuring the security of their operations.

National and State Governments: The role of national and state governments in addressing oil-related insecurity is foundational yet fraught with contradictions. As custodians of Nigeria's natural resources, governments bear the constitutional responsibility to safeguard oil infrastructure and ensure equitable distribution of benefits. Over the years, the federal government has launched several initiatives including the Joint Task Force (JTF), Operation Delta Safe, and the Amnesty Programme to curb militancy and pipeline sabotage. Some state governments have also engaged community development projects and security collaborations. Nonetheless, the overall performance remains mixed. High levels of corruption, politicization of security contracts, and weak judicial enforcement have undermined government credibility. There are credible reports of complicity by political elites and security personnel in oil theft syndicates (Ukiwo, 2011). The militarization of the region often results in human rights violations and further alienation of local populations (Obi, 2009). Yet, recent innovations, such as the engagement of indigenous surveillance firms like Tantita Security Services, have shown promise in intercepting illegal bunkering activities and restoring some level of order. These successes underscore the importance of contextual intelligence and community buy-in.

To achieve lasting peace and effective pipeline protection, governments must go beyond security-centric responses. This includes implementing structural reforms that address the root causes of conflict such as poverty, unemployment, and environmental injustice. Institutional transparency, fiscal accountability in oil revenue sharing, and participatory governance mechanisms are essential. By embedding local voices in policymaking and development planning, the government can rebuild trust and foster more resilient security architecture.

Conclusion

The persistent threat to oil and gas pipelines in the Niger Delta represents far more than a security dilemma it is a reflection of entrenched socio-political fractures, economic marginalization, and environmental neglect. The region, while rich in hydrocarbon resources, has long suffered from a paradox of abundance, where resource wealth fuels conflict rather than prosperity. Decades

of perceived and actual injustices, state failure, weak institutions, and corporate exploitation have produced a volatile environment where insurgency and criminality flourish. Military deployments and technological surveillance though important in the short term have not addressed the underlying grievances of the people, nor have they built the trust needed for collaborative security solutions.

Sustainable pipeline protection cannot be achieved through force alone. A transformative shift is required: from reactive measures to proactive, inclusive strategies. Community-based security models, when genuinely supported and transparently executed, offer one of the most promising solutions. Alongside this, addressing corruption within state and corporate structures, strengthening judicial frameworks, and reinvesting oil wealth into meaningful socio-economic development are crucial steps toward peace.

Furthermore, oil companies must redefine their engagement with host communities, moving from extractive relationships to partnerships that promote human development and environmental justice. The Petroleum Industry Act (PIA), if effectively implemented, offers a legislative framework that could support these changes. Ultimately, safeguarding Nigeria's critical energy infrastructure demands more than physical security it requires a commitment to equity, accountability, and participatory governance. Only through such a holistic and inclusive approach can lasting peace and stability be restored to the Niger Delta and the nation's oil wealth be truly secured.

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