**Child Rearing Practices for Sustainable Development: A Case Study of Igbo Land**

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**Abstract**

The Igbo cultural practice of child rearing, known as "izu nwa," is a crucial aspect of nurturing and training children from infancy to adulthood to ensure their responsible integration into society. This article explores the historical and international perspectives on child rights, emphasizing the significance of child rearing in shaping the future. Despite global recognition of the rights of children, some Nigerian parents, influenced by traditional norms, still employ corporal punishment, raising concerns about its potential physical and emotional impact on children. In Igbo society, women predominantly bear the responsibility of child rearing, reflecting the need for comprehensive women empowerment to foster meaningful development. The communal nature of child upbringing, rooted in cultural practices, extends the responsibility beyond immediate parents to the entire community. The article examines the shift from traditional to contemporary child-rearing practices in Igbo society, influenced by factors like colonialism, civilization, and urbanization. The communal celebration of a child's birth underscores the collective responsibility of the community in raising children. Drawing on cultural factors and theoretical frameworks, the study explores the impact of child rearing on sustainable development. The Reggio Emilia Model and Diana Baumrind's parenting styles provide insights into effective child-rearing practices, emphasizing the importance of family involvement, community engagement, and balanced parenting styles. The family structure in Igbo land has evolved beyond traditional nuclear and extended forms to include single-parent families, unmarried couples, guardian homes, double families, foster families, and adoptive families. Theoretical frameworks, such as Diana Baumrind's parenting styles and the Reggio Emilia Model, guide the study in understanding parenting approaches and community-based learning. The article concludes by recommending child protection services, extensive enlightenment campaigns, reorientation of stakeholders, incorporation of self-reliance into informal systems, responsible child labor practices, and the cultivation of positive traits for effective child rearing in Igbo land.

**Keywords:** Child Rearing Practices, Igbo land, Sustainable Development and Family Structure

**Introduction**

Child rearing known as “izu nwa” in Igbo culture, entails nurturing and training a child from childhood to adulthood to ensure the child becomes a responsible member of the society. Child rearing is an essential component of every human society because children guarantee its future. Child rearing is one of the things that has attracted the attention of the international and national agencies. At the national level, the concern for the rights of a child was dated back in 1960 and at the international level, it was back to Geneva declaration of 1924 and United Nations Convention on the rights of the child, (Nnebue, 1998). He further posits that a child is a person who is strictly under the protection of care of someone who may be the parents or guardian. United Nation convention on the right of a child noted that a child is anybody male or female who has not reached the age of eighteen years. Sykes (2000), defined a child as a young boy or girl who has not reached the age of being free to make ones’ own judgement. All over the world, the child is seen as one who has to be provided for, inform of food, shelter, protection and social stimulation, until such a time he or she is capable of taking care of himself or herself. In most Nigerian and third world homes, all these basic needs are expected to be seen in the rearing of the children and the absence of such are termed to be child abuse. Nonetheless, the child health experts all over the world condemn the use of violence in any form on the child, though some parents especially those in Nigeria still use corporal punishment, such as spanking, as a way to discipline their children. Suffice to say that any corporal punishment may have physical and or emotional scars on the child.

Nevertheless, child rearing is one of the biggest assignment that is mostly pin down to women in Igbo land. This is the reason while women in Igbo land are seen making huge contributions to the production of goods and services for human sustenance in politics, health, education, religion and other dimensions of human endeavours. This illustrates the fact that women are more than mere “decorative accessories”. However, for sustainable and meaningful development to be achieved in Nigeria especially in Igbo land, women empowerment must be sincerely addressed. Women take the greater share when it comes to child rearing. Their tasks start from day one, breast feeding, teaching them how to talk, pray and how to eat, and even the culture of the land and so on. Nnokwe (2009) posits that, in Igbo culture the child is referred to as our child (Nwa Anyi), (nwa qha/qra) and meaning community child. Therefore, child upbringing is neither the sole responsibility of the parents, the mates, nannies nor the school teachers. Rather it is collective affairs, since the child is “nwa ọha/ọra”. However, the task of raising children is the greatest responsibility on earth and therefore should not be left for the parents. In Igbo society, the birth of the child brings Joy and celebration to the community. This celebration is community – based, not family-based. This shows that not only the immediate family of a child that thinks good of a child (Evans, Matol and Nayeko, 2008).

Parents in larger proportion owe to the society and mankind that duty of raising up their children properly, because members of the society walk mutually to promote its progress and so safeguard common good. Therefore, there is need to examine the Igbo contemporary system of rearing a child. All societies experience a certain amount of change in their social structure and culture overtime. It is through this view that we can say that the Igbo society just like every, other society experiences a paradigm from traditional way to contemporary way. The traditional Igbo culture was affected by colonialism which introduce civilization and urbanization. The importance of proper nurturing and upbringing of the child in any society cannot be over emphasized. It is as a result of this that traditional Igbo society became aware of the indispensability of the proper upbringing or rearing of the child. The cultural and traditional practices of the Igbo society do not allow the individual to train the child alone since in their cosmology the child belongs to all. Thus, the rearing of the child belongs to all and it’s the responsibility of not just the immediate parents but the members of the Igbo community. Furthermore, the community consciousness is usually and always manifested through the way the people welcomes a new bon baby in Igbo land. The reality of this is found in the extended family system. An integral part of Igbo family system includes patrilineal and matrilineal uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces, nephews and in-laws. In Igbo family affairs, these extended family members have a say and have always made moral, social, economic, values a reality, (Nwoke, 2013). Nwoke (2013) further observes that in Igbo land, the issue of child rearing has to do with cultural practices. For instance, traditional Igbo religion includes belief in a creator god (Chukwu or Chineke), an earth godess (Ala), and numerous other deities and spirits as well as a belief in ancestors. Revelation of the will of the deities is sought by divination and oracles as to know the way forward of any child. One thing worthy of note is that in Igbo land, culture can influence child-rearing practices. The unique cultural influences children respond to from birth, including customs and beliefs around food, artistic expression, language and religion affect the way they develop emotionally, socially, physically and linguistically. More so, in child-rearing, it is the responsibility of the family to provide everything the children are properly taken care of because children are regarded as a very precious gifts from God and that is why they have such names as “Nwabuife” – child is worthful. “Nwamaka” – child is good. And also other names that made them to feel good as in “Obiefula” – “Ọnọchie” – heir apparent and so on. They see children as a link to both the ancestors of the past and a means of group survival in the future. They equally linked a particular tree to that of child bearing which is “Ụdara” (Star Apple) and see it as an abomination to cut down an “Ụdara” tree in Igbo culture as a whole, and children are held in high esteem. Nonetheless, according to Urdang (1990) in Obianuju (2012), sustainable development is to sustain or keep an action or process. Moreso, Obianuju (2005) asserts that, sustainable development can be achieved through acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills by citizens. The family was recognized in Igbo land as an element of broader kinship network that links ancestors and descendant of a person. Therefore, the study aims at ascertaining rearing practices for sustainable development: A case study of Igbo land.

**Conceptional Clarification/Frame Work**

The developmental process represents a constant interplay between the structure of the child knowledge and the structure of the infant child’s world, (Olatawura, 2009). Child’s rearing practices arise from a combination of interacting level of influence. They include child rearing environment, temperament of adult in child rearing roles, temperament of the child being reared and cultural values.

**Cultural Factors**

The term culture is generally used to refer to the entire body of socially inherited past human accomplishments that serve as the resource for current life of a social group ordinarily thought of as the inhabitants of a country or region, (Owolabi, 2012). Long term survival of a culture requires that each generation successfully transmit its traditions to future generations and this transmission can occur only if actual cultural values and skills are learned by successive generations. The culture of a group influences the child rearing practices adopted and these beliefs are rooted in the culture values, and skills learned by successive generations. The culture of a group influences the child’s rearing practices in many ways. Nevertheless, in all cultures, beliefs are rooted in the culture and values held preciously by the group. It is the requirements of life in a particular society that influence the child’s rearing practices favoured and adopted, (Jones, 2011). The culture of a group provides a cognitive blue print that governs the actions of its members, and the transmission of this blueprint. According to Chukwu (2013), culture is a way of life of a group of people, the behaviours, beliefs, values and symbols that they accept generally without thinking about them and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next. Culture is the totality of people’s behaviour which has been learnt over time and handed over from generation to generation. It is the sum total of their experiences, values, language, belief system, arts and crafts, attitude, training and education, etc. which is attained by a group of people over years and handed over to the younger generation. It is culture that spells out the reason and manner in which things are done, (Olisa, 2002).

**Childhood Phase and Child Development in Igbo Land**

According to Ogbukagu (2008) the rights of childhood introduces the child to the community. Some of the rights are performed by the child while some are performed by the parents, relatives and entire community. The ones performed by the child such as cutting of the teeth is to prove to everyone that he is a human being, and that he has no abomination on him, and also that he has come to live and to contribute to the society. In Igbo culture area, it is believed that things should follow a cosmic order and no one has the power to twart that order. Nonetheless, in Igbo land, it is a general belief that a child is owned communally. Some assertions “nwa bu nwa ọha/ọra” literally translates as, a child belong to all explains it better. Therefore, the caring and the training of a child is everybody’s responsibility and every person is expected to correct a child whether they are related or not. Ogbalu (2006) posits that, the kind of training given ensures that the child develops, morally, physically, socially, emotionally and law abiding. Ogbalu (2006) further observes that parents train their children in general behaviour and particularly in socialization which is necessary for comfortable living. She further states that the child starts learning the meaning of gesture by observing the mother and other members of the family as they grow up, they learn how to live, how to do certain things and the importance of both traditional religious and customary laws. The training which starts in the family later extends to the society, where both parents, elders, and other members of the extended family are involved. (Chukwu, 2013). Nnokwe, (2009) asserts that, the type of training given to an Igbo child right from inception propels him wherever he goes, he adapts to any situation and will never forget his people because of the bond in relationship.

Circumcision also, being part of childhood phase is done within eight days of birth. In the past both males and females are circumcised, but recently it is only the males. The bloodshed during circumcision is a covenant that symbolizes that the individual is alive and ready to be united to the community, both with the living and the dead. The act of circumcision blood makes the child a full fledged member of the society, since without it, he will continue to be an outsider. New born babies are not named immediately after birth. The confirmation of a name comes after eight or twenty-eight days of birth depending on the community. Name is given to the child through a naming ceremony rite that involves the relatives and the entire community, (Ukaegbu, 2005). Igbo people believes that one develops and acts in accordance to the name given to one. Certain things are taken into consideration before naming a child, for instance circumstances behind the birth of the child, an eventful activity in the family or clan, position of the child in the family etc.

The naming of the child both humanizes and socializes him. It makes him a member of the family and the society at large. After naming the child, the head of the family will take farming implements such as hoe, matchet etc which the community uses as a means of livelihood and touch on the child’s hand and say, we use these implements as a means of livelihood, so when you grow up you will use them as such.

**Sustainable Development**

According to Urdang (1990) in Obianuju (2012), sustainable development is to sustain or keep an action or process. In terms of development, one would understand sustainability to mean utilization of resources within the context of maintaining them in good state, not only for use by the present generation, but as well as the generation yet unborn. Obianuju (2005) asserts that, sustainable development of any nation can only be achieved through acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills by citizens to enable them participate as effective citizens using and exploiting environmental implication more so, for sustainable development to be achieved, the child needs knowledge and skill such as specified in the National Policy on Education (NPE)

**Child Rearing and Sustainable Development**

The rudiments of what needs to be dome to ensure that childhood/child rearing provides for self reliance are entrenched in the NPE (2014). They are as follow;

* Inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys.
* Learn good habits, especially good health habits.
* D evelop a sense of cooperation and teamwork
* To give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation and contributing to the life of the society.
* To mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child.
* To develop in the child, the ability to adapt to the child’s changing environment.
* To give the child opportunity for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child’s capacity.
* To provide the child with basic tools for future educational advancement, including preparation for trade and craft of the locality.

**Child Rearing in Igbo land and Self Reliance**

No human being can survive without exploitation of available resources. One’s livelihood depends to a great extent on available resources. There is need for sustainability and creativity. Development is viewed as a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process that aims to improve the well-being of communities and individuals (Declaration on the Right of Development, 2019). The term sustainable development of any nation can only be achieved through acquisition. Sustaining livelihood “ensures no risk of poverty, it ensures peace, goof health, proper feeding, stable emotions and reduction of provocative circumstances. The term sustainable development has been defined as the development that meets the needs and aspirations of the current generations without compromising the ability to meet those of the future generations (Obianuju, 2012) in other words, sustainable development means improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems. In every society, children, and by extension, the youths are the future of their society. That explains why every society ensures that every child is given every available opportunity to live, survive, and develop their full potential for the future. According to Owolabi (2012) nations that have now become developed are those that maximized the potentials of sustainable development by investing in the future of the children and the youth by investing in their education and providing conducive environments for the families to meet the needs of their members. Sustainable development, in this context, therefore, depends not only in investing the present needs of the children, but also eradicating all forms of poor child rearing practices in Igbo land.

**Family Structure and Child-Rearing Practices in Igbo land**

According to Tor-Anyiin (2004), in time past, the family was recognized as an element of a broader kinship network that linked ancestors and descendants of a person and these has effect on the childrearing practices in Igbo land. Apart from the nuclear and extended family structures, other new families include:

**Single – parent family:** This is either by choice or necessity, and in this structure one parent raises offspring.

**Not married family:** A couple may live together without being married and raise offspring.

**Guardian home:** Children are raised in a home by family members other than mother and father.

**Double family:** Families produced by break up of any member made new family. Re-marriages have contributed to the manner in which household compositions have changed.

**Foster family:** Adults raise children who have lost one or both parents to death, in carceration or other reasons. The placement in such family is temporary.

**Adoptive family:** Children who have become wards of the state either because their natural parents abandoned them or they were taken in by the government, such children can be adopted after some legality by willing individuals.

Factors such as culture, ethnicity, socio-economic status etc has a lot of influences on the child up bringing patterns among the parents in Igbo land.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Diana Baumrind theory of parenting styles and Reggio Emilia.

**Reggio Emilia Model Theory (1861)**

Reggio Emilia originated in Italy, Reggio Emilia desire to build hope and community cohesiveness led her to establish a community – based school for young children. The programme embraces the contributions of parents, teachers and the young children to their own learning. The aim of the parent – managed program was to encourage self-expression, competent, resourcefulness, curiosity, imagination, inventive and active learning. The model is constructivist drawing and its theoretical underpinnings is from the idea of Piaget and Vygotsky. The model begins by recognizing the competence of all children and view interdependence among children, families and teachers as pathways to learning. Home – school communication and family involvement is the spring board of Reggio Emilia model. Family – school relationship also extend into the local communities as children, family members and teachers regularly make excursions to the community for social, cultural and educational experiences.

**Diana Baumrid Theory of Parenting Styles**

This theory states that each of this parenting styles reflects different naturally occurring patterns of parents values, practice and behaviours and distinct balance of responsiveness they maintain with their children. Baumrid (1991) developed the following parenting styles: The categories are permissive, authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles.

**Permissive parenting:** Parents offers himself or herself as a resources to the child not as an active agent responsible for modifying or shaping behaviour but allows the child to regulate his/her own behaviour as much as possible. This type of parenting entails the parents giving the adolescents greater responsibility of decision making than they take upon themselves. Such children have no set standard by which to go.

**Authoritative parenting:** Parents operating on this type of parenting have workable agreement in all areas of their expectations of their children, parents attempt to direct the child is activities but does not insist on obedience for its own sake. The parents is realistic about use of restrictions and shares with the child the reasons behind the parental policy of firm control.

According to Baumrind (1991), adult disciplinary practice varies with characteristics of the child. The adolescents in authoritative homes are still encouraged to freely contribute to the discussion and solution of relevant issues but the ultimate responsibility for the discussion remains invariably with the parents.

**Authoritarian parenting:** This involves parents valued obedience as a virtue. It favours forceful means when the child’s action or belief conflict with what the parents think is right. Parents at times require more than it seems within the children’s natural abilities.

**Recommendation**

Based on the findings of the study the researchers recommended the followings to enhance child earing practices in Igbo land.

* Child protection agencies/services should be provided by the government and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
* Intensive enlightenment campaign through print and electronic media, workshops, seminars and other programmes that can help to enlighten or educate parents on the proper ways of bringing up their children.
* Reorientation and gradual re-engineering stakeholders’ response to sustainable development and childhood rearing issues.
* Self reliance which is a key for self actualization should be incorporated into our informal systems in Igbo land.
* Parents should ensure that in child rearing, that any type of work that their children perform should not impose them to physical, emotional and psychological stress.
* There should be responsibility and commitment to obligations, work and dependence.
* Respect and appreciation of elders, and other should be inculcated.
* Resilience, innovation/creativity, entrepreneurship should be our watch words in Igbo land for child rearing practices
* Traits like empathy, honesty, corporation and patriotism should be imparted.

**Conclusion**

The exploration of child rearing practices in Igbo culture reveals a rich tapestry of traditions, values, and evolving dynamics. The Igbo concept of "izu nwa" reflects a deep-rooted communal responsibility in nurturing children, emphasizing their holistic development from birth to adulthood. The article underscores the importance of child rearing as a pivotal element in shaping the future of both the individual child and the society at large. The communal nature of child upbringing, deeply embedded in Igbo culture, demonstrates the interconnectedness of various stakeholders in ensuring the well-being and proper development of each child. While the international and national focus on child rights has influenced perspectives, challenges persist, especially in the use of corporal punishment, revealing a tension between traditional norms and evolving global standards. The role of women in Igbo land stands out prominently as the primary caregivers in child rearing, contributing significantly to various sectors such as politics, health, education, and religion. However, the article emphasizes the necessity of empowering women comprehensively for sustainable development, acknowledging the integral role they play in shaping the next generation. The transition from traditional to contemporary child-rearing practices, influenced by factors like colonialism and urbanization, raises important questions about cultural preservation and adaptation. The celebration of a child's birth as a community-based event highlights the collective responsibility and shared joy associated with bringing a new life into the world. Theoretical frameworks such as Diana Baumrind's parenting styles and the Reggio Emilia Model offer valuable insights into effective child rearing. These models emphasize the importance of balanced parenting styles, family involvement, and community engagement in fostering a conducive environment for a child's development.

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