TRADITIONAL IGBO CHILDREN'S RECREATIONAL GAMES AS TOOL FOR IGBO LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract
The issue of the current state of Igbo language has been very topical at several conferences and always dominated discussions by Igbo scholars, identifying apathy towards the use of Igbo language as the bane of the language and its apparent endangerment. Blames have often been apportioned to parents for their neglect of the use of Igbo language at homes, and sometimes government's failure to encourage local languages by prioritizing English language over the indigenous languages in education. More often than not, such conferences had been concluded with recommendations, emphasizing the need for parents to make Igbo the medium of communication in the family without proposing strategic approaches to achieve positive result in inter-generational transmission of the language. This paper proposes the use of what children themselves love doing- children's recreational games, folktales and songs as tools that can enhance their Igbo language learning and proficiency. However, the paper submits that to make this learning strategy effective and realistic, the children's recreational arts have to be repackaged to meet the taste and sensibilities of the digital-age children. The study adopts unstructured interview to collect data on games and Focus Group discussion to get the participants' subjective views on the viability of using traditional Igbo children's games as tool for language learning and repackaging them for the interest of the present-day children. The paper concludes by recommending that traditional Igbo children's games be encouraged as language learning strategy.

Keywords: recreational game, Igbo language, language learning, endangerment

Introduction
Traditional Igbo society had different types of recreational activities and forms of relaxation that satisfied the leisure needs of both the young and old, and in the past people looked forward to spending or observing leisure time. A good number of these recreational resources are children's traditional sports and games, which featured prominently in moonlight and other pastime periods in the past. Unfortunately, today's Igbo society seems to be abandoning the repositories of some aspects of their leisure tradition, their folk arts - stories, riddles, songs, dance and music. Consequently, the social benefits, indigenous knowledge and skills acquired through them are no longer adequately appreciated.

The functions of folklore as pedagogic devices, particularly, but not exclusively, in preliterate traditional Igbo society, have received some attention by scholars, but this study argues that there are different forms of traditional recreational resources in Igbo land that have not yet received serious and deservings attention, especially children's recreational activities. The study contends that nowadays when there seems to be increasing interest to develop new approaches or methods that will enhance the learning of Igbo language, particularly by children, attention should also be paid to the relevance of traditional Igbo leisure culture, which has Igbo language as essential tool of expression and transmission.

Just as efforts are being made to methodically develop the children's skills in communication using cartoons and audio-visual devices, repackaging of various media of enculturation is equally essential for the children. A good deal of Igbo cultural and folkloric consciousness can be imparted into Igbo children if knowledge of indigenous art forms embedded in children's recreational activities is integrated into the formal school curriculum.

The study, therefore, proposes that different forms of traditional recreational activities in the leisure culture of the Igbo can be repackaged for more enticing performance and transmission using different strategies. The songs can be used as part of school children's entertainment, and more importantly as Igbo language development apparatus or mechanism. Introducing some of the recreational sung-plays and games as part of children's choreography, for instance, will obviously not only kindle their interest in those aspects of Igbo folklore, but also encourage, among others, the use of the Igbo language that is becoming endangered to the effect that some people fear it may get extinct if care is not taken. In this way, aspects of Igbo folklore and Igbo language itself can be preserved. However, it needs to be pointed out that cultural transmission through choreography and other forms of children's displays will be effective and more appealing if it meets and satisfies the taste of the present-day children.

Repackaged leisure cultural activities and traditional games or sports, which are hoped to stimulate the children's interest and motivate their competitive spirit, will not be an end in itself in satisfying the children's entertainment drive and enhancing their language acquisition skill but a means to an end, which are cultural transmission, language preservation, recreation and sports development that can be achieved through it. The advantages derivable from repackaged Igbo recreational activities are numerous.

Igbo Children as Victims of Use of Igbo Apathy
Naturally no child is born with any particular language; he/she acquires it. Ikwubuzo's (2012: 76-77) study on enculturation of the diasporic Igbo child made reference to John Locke's conception of the child's mind as *Tabula Rasa* (a clean passive receptacle of impression), describing the child as "an immature organism and must, therefore, be taught the skills and values of the adult culture." It is what you teach the child that he/she will imbibe because "human infants do not possess culture at birth (Zondervan, 1988). That puts the responsibility of teaching children their mother tongue on the parents. Undoubtedly, children are the main victims of the vexed issue of the Igbo apathy towards the use of their language, and should, therefore, be prominent in the discussion of the current state of Igbo language. The children are not to blame, albeit their unwillingness to speak their heritage language; they are simply trapped in their parents' nonchalance and impassivity in the use of Igbo in communicating with their children. Some Igbo scholars, in their various studies (Ohiri-Aniche, 2001, Nwadike, 2008; Madubuike, 2011; Njemanze, 2011; Ikwubuzo, 2012, among others) and conference forums, like this current one, have expressed concerns about the state of Igbo language especicially the decline its use, the endangerment it faces, among others. One of such concerns was expressed by Ohiri-Aniche (2001: 68) when she remarked that the "The greatest danger faced by local languages is that families no longer pass them on to their offspring and communities are using them less in their everyday communication." On children's recreational activities in particular, she noted that "It is all the more pitiable when one sees these children singing foreign songs and playing foreign games while the great wealth of local songs, games, folktales, etc. is completely ignored..." (pp. 67-68). Ikwubuzo's (2023) Inaugural Lecture at the University of Lagos drew attention to the fact that some of the foreign cartoon films children love to watch are American and Asian fairy and animal tales that even have parallels in Igbo traditional tales. The popular *Cinderella* story, for instance, has its parallel in Igbo folktale as "*Nwa Ogbenye Na Ibe Ya n'Egwu Edere*" ("An Orphan and her Mates at *Edere* Dance") (Iroaganachi, 1973, pp. 7-12), or "*Ụmụagbọghọ Jere Egwu n'Eke Oloma*" ("Maidens Who Attended a Dance at *Eke Oloma*") (Emenanjo, ed., 1977, pp.34-36). Nwadike (2008, p. 18) had asked, "Do we still sit under the moonlight to tell our children the folklore of our land? Have we not taken our oral tradition as irrelevant and obsolete aspects of our daily life?" Much has been said on the subject matter at various conferences yet less has been achieved. Sometimes, scholars end up recycling or quoting what they had said in earlier studies or conferences for want of something new to say. Nonetheless, something can still be done.

ExistingWorksonIgboRecreationalSongs
Extant collections and classifications of oral Igbo poetry (Egudu and Nwoga, 1971; Ogbalu, 1978; Ugonna, 1980; Emenanjo, 1989) included some examples of recreational or leisure time poems, among other types of oral poetry. Egudu and Nwoga (1971) have few examples of such poems grouped under "Relaxation

poems"; Ogbalu (1978) in his own collections classified them under "Mbem na Egwu maka Egwu Ọnwa" (Moonlight plays). While Ugonna (1980) assembled the poems majorly under the categories he tagged "Abụ Ifo" (Sung folktales), "Abụ Ụrọ̀ na Abụ Nwa" (Poems for Amusement and Lullaby), Abụ Ilu na Abụ Ọjuọṇụ" (Proverbs and Riddles); some other examples overlap into his two other classifications - "Abụ Ịhụnanya na Abụ Nkọcha" (Love and Satiric poems) and Abụ Egwuregwu" (Play poems). Emenanjo (1989) identified two general classes of Igbo riddles, namely, Agwụgwaajuaza 'simple, spoken riddle', and Agwụgwaekweaza 'sung chain-riddle'. These works mainly highlight the sociological values of the recreational songs.

Contemporary research in the field of Igbo oral art forms and games has also primarily focused on the values inherent in the art and the need to sustain and modernize them for future generation. Ikwubuzo (2008) stresses the role of oral literature such as riddles on youth development in the past. He is of the view that riddles are educative and socializing tools for shaping the morality of children and the youths and acquainting them with Igbo cultural values and worldview. Complementing the earlier study, Ikwubuzo (2012) in the paper titled "Enculturating the Igbo Child" focuses on the enculturation of diasporic Igbo child and different methods of achieving it such as role of the family and use of electronic resources designed in Igbo medium that are children friendly. Okafor (2017) stressed the importance of Igbo folk songs, such as birth, burial and lullabies as a means of cultural expression and addressing social issues. Nwaamara (2017) re-echoed the same sentiment, but laid emphasis on revival and preservation of Igbo folk songs to meet the needs of a changing world. Ogene and Nwokoye's (2015) work, documented some Igbo moonlight games in a text form to draw the attention of Igbo to a dying, yet very prominent leisure art that is worth preserving.

A common denominator in these studies is the idea of bringing to the fore and consciousness of the Igbo, the cultural heritage and the need to maintain them, especially through inter-generational transmission. However, none focused on traditional Igbo children's recreational arts as their main thrust or the potency of the songs and games as a viable tool for language learning. Even Ogene and Nwokoye's (2017) work that documented some Igbo moonlight games is deficient in the aspect of repackaging for optimal attraction to children and their use in enhancement of children's Igbo language proficiency. The studies by Okafor (2017) and Nwaamara (2017) were inclusive of all folk songs without focusing on a particular genre and without suggesting ideas on how to preserve them. This is the gap the present research hopes to fill. An attempt is made to present the symbiosis between traditional games and language proficiency, as well as the social, kinethic and physiological benefits of Igbo traditional games to children.

Methodology
Qualitative methodology was deemed ideal for this project.The following techniques were adopted for data collection: Narrative interviewers were used to collect data on tales and games from respondents in each sampled community. Participant Observations were also germane in collecting data, particularly practical sessions on sung-games. Focus Group discussion was used to elicit information and the subjective views of participants about the current state of Igbo recreational resources with respect to Igbo language use, and the study's strategies to repackage them for the interest of children in the present time and future.

Sampling Technique
Stratified Random Sampling technique was used to sample respondents for the study. Two Local Government Areas (designated as Community) from each of the five core Igbo states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo) and one LGA each from Rivers, Delta, Lagos and Ogun States were randomly selected. One LGA represents a stratum, bringing the total strata to 18 communities.

Study Population

Participants for the narrative/unstructured interview: 2 elders (1 male and 1 female) were selected from each community bringing the total number of participants to 28. FGD was limited to 15 (5 children, 5 youths, and 5 adults) participants from each community. Additionally, one practical session of moonlight games was organized in each community involving same group and number used in the FGD.

Data and analysis
In this section of the study, the data will be presented and analysed. Two separate data will be presented and analysed before discussion of the findings. First is the opinion of participants on the relationship between playing Igbo games and proficiency in Igbo. Second is the presentation of a number of sung-games as elicited during the practical sessions in the sampled communities.

Traditional Children's Games and Indigenous Language Proficiency
In this aspect of the inquiry, participants were asked to express their opinion about the effect of playing traditional Igbo games and speaking Igbo language. The data representing their responses are presented below.

Group Abia
Ọ bụ Igbo ka e ji eme egwuregwu ụmụaka…o nweghi nke di n'asụsụ Bekee…Nke a mere na ọ ga-enyere umuaka aka ịsụ asụsụ Igbo. N di anaghị asụ Igbo di ka n di nọ n'obodo n di ọzọ maọbụ ofesi, o ga-enyere ụmụaka aka ịmụta ịsụ Igbo.

Igbo is the language used to play children's games…there is none in English…So, it will help children to speak Igbo. It will help those children in diaspora who do not speak Igbo to learn Igbo.

Group Anambra
Egwuregwu ndi a, di ka "Akpankoro kpankoro", o bu Igbo ka eji egwu ha niine. O nweghi ka iga-esi were asụsụ Bekee mee ya, o burugodu na ịtụgharịa ha o gaghi adaba. Ọ bụrụ na ụmụaka Igbo bido na-egwu egwuregwu ndi a, o ga-enyere ha aka i na-asu Igbo mgbe obula.

It is Igbo that is used to play all these games, like "*Akpankorokpankoro*", There is no way you can use English to do them; even if you translate them, it will not work. If Igbo children begin to play these games, it will help them to speak Igbo all the time.

Group Ebonyi
Ha na-asụ Izii, ha na-asu Ịzaa, ha na-asụ Igbo, na-asụkwa Ushi mgbe ha na-egwu egwuregwu. Ekwenyere m na ụmụaka Igbo kwesiri ị na-asu Igbo…Ha na-asu Igbo na-egwuegwu, o ga-enye aka ịgbasa asụsụ Igbo.

They speak Izii, Izaa, Igbo and Ushi while they play. I believe that Igbo children should speak Igbo. If they speak Igbo while playing, it will help to spread Igbo language.

Group Enugu
Igbo ka umaaka ji egwu egwuregwu mgbe o bula ha gbakoro. Mgbe anyi di na nwata, o bu Igbo ka anyi ji eme ha, amaghi m ma enweela mgbanwe…Iji Igbo egwu egwuregwu Ndia na-enyere asụsụ Igbo aka, maka na o ga-eme ka umuaka Igbo na-asu Igbo.

It is Igbo (language) that children use to play games any time they gather. When we were children, it was Igbo that we used to play; I don't know if there are changes…Using Igbo to play these games will help Igbo children because it will help them to be speaking Igbo.

Group Imo

Igbo ka e ji eme ha dum - "Onye Elena anya n'azu, mmonwu anyi na-abia n'azu"; Oo Igbo ka e ji eme ha. O ga-ara ahu inu ebe a suru Bekee na ha…Ebe o bu sọọsọ Igbo ka e ji eme ha, o ga-enyere umuaka Igbo aka isu Igbo, ma Ndi ma asu ma Ndi amaghi asu.

It is Igbo that is used to perform all of them "Do not look behind, our masquerade is coming from behind", It is Igbo that is used to perform them. It is hard to see where English is used in them…Since it is only Igbo that is used in doing them, it will help Igbo children to speak Igbo, both those who know how to speak and those who do not know how to speak.

Group Delta

O nweghi asụsụ ozo e ji eme egwuregwu Igbo na-abughi Igbo. Etu a ka o di kemgbe. O na-egosi na o bu ndi Igbo nwe egwuregwu ndi a…Iji Igbo mee egwuregwu ndi a bara nnukwu uru maka isu asụsụ Igbo. N'oge ugbua ndi Igbo anaghizi asu asụsụ ha, nkekanke umuaka. O buru na umuaka Igbo na-egwu egwuregwu Igbo, o ga-enyere ha aka ina-asu Igbo.

There is no other language used in Igbo games other than Igbo. This is how it has always been. It shows that these games are Igbo games…Using Igbo to play these games is very important because Igbo is being spoken. These days, the Igbo do not speak their language, particularly children; if Igbo children are playing Igbo games, it will help them to speak Igbo.

Group Rivers

O na-etinye aka ikwalite asụsụ Igbo. Mgbe umuaka na ibe ha na-egwuegwu, o burugodu Ndi amaghi asu Igbo, ha ana-amuta asụsụ. Oru nchocha egosila na umuaka no n'ulo anaghi amuta asụsụ osiiso, mana umuaka Ndi ha na ibe ha na-egwu egwu na-amuta asụsụ osiiso, dika "bia ebe a", "wete ya", "jide ya", "o ji ihe m", ha na-amuta asụsụ osiiso karia.

It helps to boost use of Igbo language. When children are playing among themselves, even if they cannot speak, they are able to learn. Research has shown that children who stay indoors do not learn language fast, but children who play with other children learn faster, such as saying: "come here", "bring it", "hold it", "he is with my thing"; they learn language faster.

Group Ogun

Egwuregwu na-enyere umuaka aka isu asụsụ Igbo maka na egwu na-aka aga umuaka aga n' onu. Ihe ahu o guru n'egwu, o ga-aka mara ya karia nke ikwuru na nkiti. Umuazi kitaa gụgide egwu o dinala m ma na o ruru 29, 30, o ga-enyere ha aka isu asụsụ Igbo…Mgbe mbu umu m nuru "kedu onye ga-abu…", ha juo m, "gini bu 'kedu'?" M si ha 'kedu' bu 'what'. Ya bụ, egwuregwu Igbo ga-enye aka ikwalite asụsụ Igbo.

Games help children to speak Igbo because games help them to be more expressive. What he sang as song, he will know it more than what is said ordinarily. If children of nowadays continue to sing traditional songs that I know they are up to 29, 30, it will help them to speak Igbo…When my children first heard "kedu onye ga-abu…?", they asked me "what is 'kedu'?", I told them 'kedu' is 'what'. So. Igbo games will help to boost use of Igbo language.

O kara di mkpa maka ndi no n'uzo di ka anyi. Ọ gaghi adi mma ma o buru na ha laa obodo a huta na ha amaghi asu Igbo. Mgbe ahu a na-ele ha anya dị ka ndi mba ozo.

It is more important for those in diaspora like us. It will not be proper for them to travel home and it is noticed that they cannot speak Igbo. That time, they will be perceived as strangers.

Group Lagos

Etu o bula e siri lee ya, egwuregwu umuaka na-enyere ha aka imuta asụsụ maka na o bu asụsụ Igbo ka e ji eme egwuregwu ndi a. Di ka Barney and Friends, o bu English ka e ji eme ya. Umuaka Igbo na-ekiri ya na-eso ha asu Bekee…

However, you see it, children's games help them to learn language because it is Igbo language that is used in the games. Just like Barney and Friends, it is English that is used in the games. Igbo children that watch it join them in speaking English…

From the data above elicited from participants during FGD, it is evident that there is a strong connection between playing traditional Igbo children's games and Igbo language proficiency among children. This is essentially because, as reported by most of the participants, the language of the games is Igbo and, therefore, playing the games is synonymous with speaking the language. Precisely, while talking about the language of the games, a respondent from Abia opined that *…o nweghi nke di n'asụsụ Bekee* "There is none in English", signifying that all the games are based in Igbo language. This result is strengthened by the opinion of a participant from Lagos who stated that, *di kaBarney and Friends, o bu English ka e ji eme ya, umuaka Igbo na-ekiri ya na-eso ha asu Bekee* "Just like Barney and Friends, it is English that is used in the games; Igbo children that watch it join them in speaking English" thus suggesting that Igbo children will be more proficient in Igbo when they play Igbo games based on Igbo language. Echoing the same sentiments, a respondent from Anambra asserted that *O nweghi ka ị ga-esi were asụsụ Bekee mee ya, o burugodu na itugharia ha o gaghi adaba* "It is not possible to use English to play these games; even if they are translated, it will not suffice" thus underlining the uniqueness of Igbo language in facilitating the games. The participant from Ebonyi was no less assertive when she stated the Igbo varieties used by children in the games; *Ha na-asu Izii, ha na-asu Izaa, ha na-asu Igbo, na-asukwa Ushi mgbe ha na-egwu egwuregwu*" They speak Izii, they speak Izaa, they speak Igbo, they also speak Ushi while playing the games". This is to say that Igbo children in traditional times used the varieties of Igbo at their disposal, as well as the standard variety, in the course of the games. Recounting her childhood experience, a participant from Enugu submitted that it was Igbo she used in playing the games, thus *Mgbe anyi di na nwata, o bu Igbo ka anyi ji eme ha* "When we were children, it was Igbo we used in playing the games". In support, a participant from Imo stated that the Igbo-based games is beneficial to children who can speak Igbo and those who cannot speak *Ebe o bu sooso Igbo ka e ji eme ha, o ga-enyere umuaka Igbo aka isu Igbo, ma ndi ma-asu ma ndi amaghi asu* "Since it is only Igbo that is used, it will help Igbo children, those who can speak and those who cannot speak". In the view of the participant from Delta, the use of Igbo in these games makes the games Igbo *O na-egosi na o bu ndi Igbo nwe egwuregwu ndi a* "It shows that these games are owned by the Igbo". The implication of this view is that language is used to delineate ownership; consequently, since it is Igbo, no other ethnolinguistic group will lay claim to it. Highlighting the nexus between games and language learning, a respondent from Rivers notes that *Oru nchocha egosila na umuaka no n'ulo anaghi amuta asụsụ osiiso, mana umuaka ndi ha na ibe ha na-egwu egwu na-amuta asụsụ osiiso, di ka 'bia ebe a', 'wete ya'...* "Research has shown that children who are indoors do not learn language fast, but children who play with others learn language faster such as 'come here' 'bring it'…".Similarly, while comparing sung-games with mere person to person exchanges, a participant from Ogun states that *…maka na egwu na-aka aga umuaka n'onu* "Children are more expressive with songs", thus indicating that through sung-games, children can access their language faster than through ordinary conversations.

Traditional Igbo Children's Recreational Sung-games
The second data to be analysed consist of sung-tales and sung-riddles that enhance children's communication and expression skills. These sung-games are played by groups of children in different settings in the communities sampled. On the whole, out of over a hundred sung-games recorded, six (6) games were selected for analysis. The singular factor behind the minimal number is space; using more data will mean utilizing more space than is required. The data is presented below

1. Nwaaka dimkporo (A character in an Igbo sungfolktale)

Oguu: Gịnị mere Nwaaka dimkporo?   Soloist: What happened to *Nwaka dimkporo?*

Okwee: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Oguu: Ụkwa dagburu Nwaaka dimkporo;   Soloist: Breadfruit fell on Nwaka dimkporo and killed him;

Okwee: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Gịnị ga-emere m ụkwa ahụ?   Soloist: What will happen to the breadfruit?

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Mkpọrọ mawara m ụkwa ahụ;   Soloist: A splinter split the breadfruit;

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo .   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Gịnị ga-emere m mkpọrọ ahụ?   Soloist: What will happen to the splinter?

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Akịka ga-eriri m mkpọrọ ahụ;   Soloist: White ant will eat up the splinter;

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Gịnị ga-emere m akịka ahụ?   Soloist: What will happen to the white ant?

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Ọkụkọ ga-eriri m akịka ahụ;   Soloist: A chicken will eat up the white ant;

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Gịnị ga-emere m ọkụkọ ahụ?   Soloist: What will happen to the chicken?

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Egbe ga-eburu nwaọkụkọ ahụ;   Soloist: A kite will carry the chicken;

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Gịnị ga-emere m egbe ahụ?   Soloist: What will happen to the kite?

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Ụta gbagbuoro m egbe ahụ;   Soloist: Let a bow kill the kite;

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Gịnị ga-emere m ụta ahụ?   Soloist: What will happen to the bow?

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Ọkụ rejiere m ụta ahụ;   Soloist: Let fire burn the bow;

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dikporo.*

Og: Gịnị ga-emere m ọkụ ahụ?   Soloist: What will happen to the fire?

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Mmiri menyuoro m ọkụ ahụ;   Soloist: Let water quench the fire;

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Gịnị ga-emere m mmiri ahụ?   Soloist: What will happen to the water?

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Mmadụ ṅụsịara m mmiri ahụ;   Soloist: Let human being consume the water;

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Gịnị ga-emere m mmadụ ahụ?   Soloist: What will happen to the human being?

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Ọnwụ ga-egburu m mmadụ ahụ;   Soloist: Death will kill the human being;

Okw: Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.   Chorus: Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo.*

Og: Gịnị mere mmadụ?   Soloist: What happened to human being?

Okw: Ọnwụ gburu mmadụ.   Chorus: Death killed human being.

Og: Mmadụ mere gịnị?   Soloist: Human being   did what?

Okw: Mmadụ ṅụrụ mmiri.   Chorus: Human being drank the water.

Og: Mmiri mere gịnị?   Soloist: Water   did what?

Okw: Mmiri menyuru ọkụ.   Chorus: Water quenched fire.

Og: Ọkụ mere gịnị?   Soloist: Fire   did what?

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Okw: Ọkụ rejiri ụta.	Chorus: Fire burnt the bow.
Og: Ụta mere gịnị?	Soloist: The bow did what?
Okw: Ụta gbagburu egbe.	Chorus: The bow killed the kite.
Og: Egbe mere gịnị?	Soloist: The kite did what?
Okw: Egbe buru ọkụkọ.	Chorus: The kite carried the chicken.
Og: Ọkụkọ mere gịnị?	Soloist: The chicken did what?
Okw: Ọkụkọ riri akịka.	Chorus: The chicken ate the white ant.
Og: Akịka mere gịnị?	Soloist: The white ant did what?
Okw: Akịka tara mkpọrọ.	Chorus: The white ant ate up the splinter.
Og: Mkpọrọ mere gịnị?	Soloist: The splinter did what?
Okw: Mkpọrọ mawara ụkwa.	Chorus: The splinter split the breadfruit.
Og: Ụkwa mere gịnị?	Soloist: The breadfruit did what?
Okw: Ụkwa dagburu Nwaaka dimkporo.	Chorus: The breadfruit crushed *Nwaka dimkporo*.
Ee Nwaaka dimkporo.	Yes, *Nwaka dimkporo*.

 (See Ugonna, 1985, *Abu na Egwuregwu Ọdinala Igbo*, pp. 85-86)

This sung-tale (*abuifo*) involves a narrator and an audience (children) constituting the chorus that respond to any question posed each time a new character cum action is introduced in the narrative. While the first part of the narrative gives the account of the various incidents that take place, the second part, through the narrator, appraises the cognitive skill of the participating children by asking them questions on what each of the dramatis personae in the sequence of events in the story did. So, that makes the session of the narrative interactive. The story is told in Igbo and the children are expected to respond in Igbo. This sung-tale is actually based on cause and effect or retributive justice; in the first stanza, the narrator rolled out a chain of eleven events involving eleven (living and non-living) characters and the fate that befell each of them, starting from the breadfruit (*ụkwa*) that killed a certain person named *Nwaaka dimkporo* to death that killed a certain person. In the second stanza, which is the challenging part, the children are expected to recollect the eleven chains of events in reverse, starting from the end, right to the beginning. What makes the second stanza even more challenging is that, while the first stanza is sung in normal pace, the second stanza is expected to be delivered on a faster note, making it more difficult to recollect the incidents and characters.

Communication Skills: The repetitive nature of the narrative helps the children to imbibe, memorize, retain and internalize what they have heard as well improve their fluency. This quiz form of the sung-folktale makes it a veritable educative tool for the Igbo child.

NWAAKIADIMKPORO

2.Nne onye, nne onye? **(Whose mother, whose mother?)** (Igbo Sung chain-riddle)
Oguu: *Nne onye, nne onye?*   Whose mother, whose mother?

Okwee:*Nne m e-e*	My mother e-e!
Nne onye nà-èri jī?	Whose mother eats yam?
Nne m e-e	My mother e-e!
Nne onye nà-èri edè?	Whose mother eats cocoyam?
Nne m e-e	My mother e-e!
Nne onye nà-èri ekē?	Whose mother eats python?
……………	(Silence)
Nne onye nà-èri anū?	Whose mother eats meat?
Nne m e-e	My mother e-e!
Nne onyenà-èri ijīji?	Whose mother eats housefly?
…………..	(Silence)
Nne onye nà-èri nkitā?	Whose mother eats dog?
…… ……..	(Silence)
Nne onye nà-èri ògèdè?	Whose mother eats plantain?
Nne m e-e	My mother e-e!).

Nne Onye Nne Onye is a sung chain-riddle in which the lead singer sings on a fast note and quizzes the chorus/respondents by mixing up edible and inedible items with a view to confusing the participants and getting them to go for the inedible options. This sung chain-riddle play requires the participating children to give an affirmative response to every eatable option mentioned by the lead singer, or otherwise, remain silent in the course of the song. The lead singer would deliberately be faster than usual to elicit quick response from the listeners some of whom are likely to fail the test by concurring to an inedible item, which will cause other participants to laugh derisively.

Communication Skills: Like other Igbo riddles, this riddle offers a medium of social communication between the children and the elders. The responsorial nature of the exchange between the leader and players is as entertaining as it is useful for raising children's consciousness and mental and cognitive capacity, and above all, enhancing their proficiency in Igbo language. It affords the opportunity to increase their vocabulary on Igbo names of food items and animals. It is a correct observation that "One vital aspect of the moonlight play is its atmosphere of freedom…. Children who are otherwise shy and retreating come out of their shells and for once exercise their power of expression… it is to its credit that moonlight provides a free atmosphere for expression and for learning the art of storytelling and poetry reciting" (Egudu and Nwoga, 1971, pp. 21-22).

3. Bufuonu nwarere ure/nwa mere aru (Throw away the rotten/abominable Child)

Oguuri*:*	*Bufuonu nwarere ure*	Soloist: Throw away the rotten child;
Okweuri:	*O ruo echi, a muta ozo*	Chorus: Tomorrow another will be born.
Og:	*Bufuonu nwa zuru ohi*	Soloist: Throw away the child that stole;
Okw:	*O ruo echi, a muta ozo*	Chorus: Tomorrow another will be born.
Og:	*Bufuonu nwa mere aru*	Soloist: Throw away the child that committed abomination
Okw*:*	*O ruo echi, a muta ozo*	Chorus: Tomorrow another will be born.

This is a song-game played among children. The game is played by a group of children in a large space. As the game begins, the children surround a volunteer and lift him in their hands. The leader begins the song *Tufuonu nwa mere aru o* (Throw away a child that committed abomination) and the other players will

respond with *O ruo echi a muta ozo* (Tomorrow another one will be born). Swinging a child requires cooperation and teamwork among the group of children involved. They are expected to communicate in Igbo and coordinate their actions to ensure the swinging motion is smooth and controlled, fostering teamwork skills. Typical of responsorial recreational songs, this song indirectly encourages and enhances children's speaking of the language. They are excited and are prepared to repeat the play as many times as possible singing, thereby achieving some level of competence.

Communication Skills: Involvement in the play motivates the use of Igbo and communication among the children. The responsorial nature of the game-song signifies that all the children are involved in the singing.

4. Ero m oo, Ero m oo (My Mushroom, my mushroom)

Ero m o, Ero m o	Soloist: My mushroom, my mushroom;
Ero m kpara aka n'ala foro	Chorus: The mushroom I picked from the ground.
Ero m fotara n'uzo iyi	Soloist: The mushroom I picked on the way to the stream;
Ero m kpara aka n'ala foro	Chorus: The mushroom I picked from the ground.
Ero m fotara n'uzo nku	Soloist: The mushroom I picked whilegoing to fetch firewood.
Ero m kpara aka n'ala foro	Chorus: The mushroom I picked from the ground.

This is a song-game played by children. The action of picking a mushroom from the ground is acted or demonstrated by the children by be N ding and stretching their hands towards the ground at each refrain (chorus). The leader initiates the game by announcing *Ero m oo, ero m o* (My mushroom, my mushroom), and the players respond with *Ero m kpara aka n'ala foo* (The mushroom I pulled from the ground). The leader follows with *Ero m fotere n'okohia* (Mushroom I pulled from a forest) and the players will respond with *Ero m kpara aka n'ala foo* (The mushroom I pulled from the ground), etc. As the song continues, the leader and players will re-enact the art of harvesting mushrooms from the bush, as they continue the singing; repeating the Igbo expressions as many times as the leader would like to   direct.

Communication Skills: The imaginative play encourages children to communicate verbally and non-verbally as they share ideas, negotiate roles, and express themselves within the context of the play scenario. Engaging in imaginative play fosters creativity and allows children to explore their imagination together. They can create stories, roles, and scenarios, enhancing their cognitive development and social interaction.

5. Onye ga-abu Oyi m?   (Who will be my Friend?)

Onye ga onye ga-abu …	Who will who will be …
Oyi m o?	My friend?
Onye ga onye ga-abu …	Who will who will be …
Oyi m o?	My friend?
Onye ga-abu oyi m o?	Who will be my friend?
Afugo m...	I have seen...
Oyi m o	My friend
Afugo m...	I have seen..
Oyi m o	My friend
Onye ga-abu oyi m o!	The one who will be my friend o!)

In this sung-play, the lead singer searches among the children as they sing; each of the children having the expectation of being picked as the friend. The lead singer eventually picks one of the fellow children and presents him/her amid laughter to others who equally rejoice and accept the choice. The song can go on and on with the picking and presentation of friends by other children. This game requires a large number of children and a large space. Usually, the children form a circle while standing. Or alternatively in some areas, leader calls for a volunteer and one person of any gender would come out in the middle of the circle. The group starts the interrogative song *Kedu onye ga-abu oyim*? "Who will be my friend?" As they sing the song, they clap in unison to the rhythm of the song, and while they clap and sing, the volunteer looks around to identify a friend. When he identifies a friend, he will respond to the interrogative song by singing *afugo mu oyim, afugo m oyim afugo m oyim, onye ga-abu oyim o* (I have seen my friend, I have seen my friend, I have seen my friend, who will be my friend). The volunteer puts his hand around the shoulders of the identified friend, and as the song continues, he hops around with the friend in excitement, until the song ends, and the first volunteer retakes their place in the circle and the friend stays in the circle and becomes the next in line to identify their friend among the players in the circle. The game continues until all the children in the circle take their turns.

Communication Skills: The game provides opportunity for children to express themselves in Igbo. It is a game where, as a rule, every child takes their turn in picking out a friend as they sing together. Once a child is picked, it is an opportunity for them to respond to the question of "who will be my friend?" by singing "I have seen my friend".

6 (a). Onye Elena anya n'azu   (**Let No One look Back**)

Onye Elena anya n'azu o	Let no one look back
Mmanwu anyi na-aga n'azu o	Our masquerade is coming behind
Onye Elena anya n'azu o	Let no one look back
Mmanwu anyi na-aga n'azu o	Our masquerade is coming behind
Onye lee anya n'azu	If anyone looks back
Mmanwu anyi ga-apia ya uteri	Our masquerade will flog him

Another version of the song goes thus:

(b) Onye Elena anya n'azu

Onye Elena anya n'azụ	Let no one look back
Mmụọ be anyị na-agba n'ilo	Our village spirit is around
Onye Elena anya n'azụ	Let no one look back
Mmụọ be anyị na-aga n'ilo	Our village spirit is around
Onye lee anya n'azụ	If anyone looks back
Mmụọ be anyị ejide ya	Our village spirit will catch him
Onye lee anya n'azụ	If anyone looks back
Mmụọ be anyị ejide ya	Our village spirit will catch him

In the play where this song, *Onye Elena anya n'azu*, is rendered, the children squat in circular form while singing and clapping. One of them picks a stick or any other object, which others will be aware of, and starts running behind those squatting in circular form, and singing *Onye Elena anya n'azu* while the seated

ones will chorus *Mmonwu anyi na-abia n'azu*. Going by the injunction of the leader, no child is permitted to look back. This is because, the leader will surreptitiously drop the stick in their hand at the back of one of the seated children and then continue to run around. If the seated child is not aware that the stick is lying at her back, and the leader completes the circle and comes back to the position of the child, they will pick the stick and flog the child playfully, thus ending that episode of the game. But if the child senses that the stick was dropped at her back, she will pick up the stick and run after the leader, who will try to outrun the child by taking their position on the ground. The former lead singer quickly goes to squat where the second person got up from, if not caught before he/she takes that position. The child who now is in possession of the stick will continue the game by singing the song and laying the stick at the back of another child. The idea behind the game is to test the alertness and vigilance of the children. The seated children are not permitted to look back so that they will not see the leader drop the stick at their back, but they are permitted to feel their back and also sense by noting the point the leader is no longer with the stick, meaning that they have dropped it at the back of someone; and the play continues like that to the delight and pleasure of the children.

Communication Skills: Singing together and communicating non-verbally through movement fosters communication skills and enhances group dynamics. The volunteer leads the singing by asking all the children never to look back. In response, the seated children provide the reason why they should not look back. Thus, all the children are involved in the exchange, which improves their fluency in the language.

Discussion of findings

The discussion of findings will be based on three major themes, as follows: Games and language proficiency, inter-generational transmission of culture and language, and ethnolinguistic vitality, all in relation to the Igbo.

Games and language proficiency

Based on the findings on the co-relationship between Igbo games and language proficiency, it is evident that a strong connection exists between the two. This finding is in consonance with researches in children education that point to the fact that games have been continually associated with language learning and the development of communicative fluency in a language (Crookall, 2007; Ranalli, 2008; Li and Topolewski, 2002; Baltra, 1990). One of the conclusions of a study carried out by Egenfeldt-Nielsen (2011) is that language teachers are interested in using games for language education with young learners, and that games may have a specific role to play in the design of curricula for early language learning. Akintunde and Ohiare-Udebu (2021) maintain that traditional games deserve a place in the language classroom due to the functions they play, which among others, is that games are correlated to language development and proficiency in the classroom. It has been argued that one of the benefits of using games as a tool for language learning is that the children are immersed into the culture of the game (Halleck, 2007; Peterson, 2010). Given the symbiotic connection between language and culture, an immersion of this nature through games facilitates proficiency in the language. Meyer (2012) supports the notion by stressing that the significance of game-based language learning for children is underlined by the ways in which games and playful learning are associated with early language learning. Research has also confirmed that by engaging in games, learners can acquire vocabulary more quickly and easily (Angelova and Lekova, 1995; Atake, 2003; Deng, 2006; Wang et al, 2011). As reported by a participant from Ogun State in this study, her children learnt some Igbo vocabularies in the course of playing Igbo games. This is corroborated by Dewey's (in Pound, 2005) "learning by doing", which posits that children learn best by doing and by acting in the world. Thus, when children play games, they are offered lots of opportunities to do something, to act, and to move about, through which they acquire a greater quantity of meaningful vocabulary, often unconsciously (Freeman, 2000). This position is further buttressed by Richards and Rodgers (2001) who explained that games which have bodily intelligence, or kinetic values as outlined in Gardner's "Multiple Intelligences" can help students memorize and utilize new vocabulary more efficiently. Similarly, Atake (2003) maintains that children are challenged to use certain vocabulary expressions during games because they are impressed by

competing and interacting with their mates. The study by Wand, et al (2011) found a relationship between games and language learning by children. They found a significantly positive relationship on the effects of using games in terms of enhancing vocabulary acquisition and students' English proficiency, among other findings. Their study underscored the effectiveness of employing games to teach children English due to the fact that it enhanced their language proficiency as a result of increased motivation and interaction in the language of the games. Undoubtedly, games and movements during play is pivotal in boosting children's language proficiency which they use spontaneously.

Inter-generational Transmission of Culture/Language
It is evident from fieldwork questionnaire in this study that participants were not transmitting their heritage culture to their children; even the few that assented to the act do not affect the transmission with the expected frequency. It is evident that the transmission of cultural elements goes hand in hand with the transmission of language, given that language is the tool used to express culture. In the field of heritage language maintenance, there is a consensus among researchers (Portes and Hao, 1998, Li, 1999, Guardado, 2002, Park and Sarkar (2007) that parents are strategically positioned to transmit their native languages/culture to their children. Although community and institutional support is paramount in heritage language maintenance, the role of parents is crucial and significant due mainly to their status as home managers.

Incidentally, the language policy in the Nigerian Policy on Education (2004) prioritizes English (above indigenous languages) as the sole official language, as well as making English the major instructional tool and compulsory subject of study without which students cannot qualify for tertiary education. More so, in Nigeria, the attainment of high proficiency in English is seen as a mark of education and therefore highly estimated. Consequently, most parents, across ethnolinguistic groups, including Igbo start early to ensure that their children are proficient in both spoken and written English.

A lot has been said and written about the endangered status of Igbo, due mainly to negative attitude of indigenous Igbo toward their heritage language. Most worrisome is the fact that, in most instances, the pursuit of a high proficiency in English is facilitated at the expense of Igbo; in other words, Igbo children acquire English as a first language without acquisition of any skill in Igbo language, thereby making them monolinguals in English, which is an exception all over the world. The cumulative effect of aversion to the heritage language is cultural naivety; if you don't know your language, you may not know your culture. Since language is the most powerful component of culture, according to Fishman (1991), the acquisition of Igbo is a big step towards symmetry with the culture and all its variegated attributes. A major factor behind the disinclination towards Igbo folklore is language use or non-use. It is a truism that language and culture have a symbiotic relationship. Language is a core constituent of culture as well as being the instrument used to express culture. Thus, language provides a window to a particular culture; it is through this linguistic avenue that culture is accessed. The implication of this lingo-cultural congruity is that, on the one hand, a strong proficiency in a language can be equated to a high understanding of the culture; on the other hand, a weak proficiency in a language can be correlated to a low appreciation of the culture in question.

There is consistent evidence among scholars that parental use of heritage language (HL) at home is an important factor in enhancing children's heritage language and cultural maintenance. Portes and Hao (1998) found this in their study regarding patterns of language adaptation of more than 5,000 second generation students in the United States. They emphasize that parental use of the HL with their children within a supportive home environment can lead to a greater possibility of maintaining children's HL and culture. Similarly, Guardado (2002) conducted semi-structured interviews with parents of four Hispanic families about their children's Spanish loss and maintenance in Vancouver, Canada. The four families were divided into two groups (i.e., language maintenance families and language loss families) based on children's proficiency in both languages, Spanish and English. The findings reveal that the parents in language maintenance families encouraged their children to use the HL in an active and positive way, whereas the

parents in language loss families underscored only the ideal importance of the HL without actual promotion of children's HL use. Park and Sarkar (2007) also investigated immigrant parents' attitudes toward their children's heritage language maintenance through a questionnaire and interviews with nine Korean immigrant parents in Canada. The results imply that positive attitude of parents toward their children's heritage language maintenance will help their children develop the language skills and culture in a multilingual setting. Overall, all participants expressed the view that parents played a very significant role in their children's HL and culture maintenance.

Ethnolinguistic Vitality
It is also evident in this study that participants did not take advantage of the ethnolinguistic vitality options available to them, in their settings. Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) proposed the term Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EV) to describe the social variables that make a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations. They suggest that EV is influenced by three factors: the status, demography and institutional support. The status is linked to economic, social, socio-historical, and language value or worth, implying that language groups with more status are likely to have more vitality than those with less status. Demographic factors include the concentration of group members in different settings, their number and   distribution, and immigration trends, which greatly influence the EV of linguistic minority groups. Institutional support factors include the degree of formal and informal support a language receives from the government, community, religious institutions, and schools. In other words, the more informal and formal support a group's language receives, the more EV they are likely to have (Bourhis& Landry, 2008; Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977).

Regarding this study, Igbo language is a high-status language in Nigeria, being one of the languages with utilitarian values. The value or worth of the language is seen in its use in formal contexts such as the media (radio, television, newspapers, online platforms), education (as a subject of study and instructional tool in Primary education), politics and government (Houses of Assembly in South-East States), religion, in addition to various informal spaces such as music, trade, etc. The implication of status for ethnolinguistic vitality is that Igbo has sufficient prestige in Nigeria to account for its use by the speakers. In the aspect of demography, Igbo is one of the major and national languages in Nigeria in terms of numeric, the other two being Hausa and Yoruba. The Igbo are an ubiquitous group having their presence all over the country and beyond. As a matter of fact, aside the core ancestral South-East and two South-South States where the Igbo are traditionally domiciled, there are (un)confirmed reports that they constitute the second dominant group in, at least every city in Nigeria, irrespective of ethnicity. In Nigeria, the Igbo are estimated to be well over 30 million in population. The implication of this demography for ethnolinguistic vitality is that the Igbo do not lack opportunity to use their language wherever they are, either in the core states where they are dominant or in other states where they are also dominant as a second ethnolinguistic group aside the host community. This is to aver that the Igbo as a people have various opportunities to use their language daily and in various domains.

In the case of institutional support, Igbo, to some extent, enjoys support from government and community groups in Nigeria. Aside the core Igbo states where Igbo is taught as a subject, Igbo is also taught in institutions of learning in other states in Nigeria, including private schools that are prevalent in Nigeria's education system. Furthermore, there are presently many groups, individuals and institutions using online resources to teach Igbo language and culture, as well as advocacy groups that channel resources towards promoting the use of Igbo by its speakers. The implication of institutional support for ethno linguistic vitality of Igbo is that Igbo language has and still receives sufficient boost from various agencies to stimulate and enhance its use by the heritage speakers. Incidentally, as found in this study, the ethno linguistic vitality components such as status, demography and institutional support have done little to aid the vitality of Igbo among the speakers, particularly children and youths, hence the need to encourage the children to learn the language or deploy what they do for pastime as a tool for facilitating their use of the language.

Conclusion

The current study has stressed the primacy of applying traditional Igbo children's games, mainly because the cultural values and identity contained therein are already being eroded and forgotten by contemporary children in the homeland, not to talk of those in   diasporas. These traditional games are used to promote children's affective, cognitive and psychomotor or kinetic development through various measures such as boosting their emotional capacities and enhancing inter-personal relations, stimulating their psychic capacities and enhancing their problem solving skills, and boosting their physique, thus enhancing their strength and physical development. Moreover, these traditional games are veritable tools for language learning. Undoubtedly, games promote proficiency and communicative skills in the language of the game, hence the position of this paper that, since traditional Igbo games are encoded in Igbo language, it will serve the purpose of Igbo language maintenance and transmission to each subsequent generation. This game-based language learning module represents a holistic paradigm for ensuring the vitality of indigenous African languages, especially among the young ones who represent the future. Rather than undermining academic standards, incorporating traditional Igbo games in the curricular will strengthen children's bilingual capacities which is a precursor to the learning of other languages in the future as well as adapting to other cultures, thus ensuring   diversity.

Further research in this area needs to examine the game that fits the ages and   different stages of child development in the educational mould, such as kindergarten, playgroup, nursery, primary, and secondary education.

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