PARENTING IN THE AFRICAN IGBO CONTEXT: CONTRADICTIONS WITH WESTERN PARENTING AND THE QUEST TO PRESERVE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Green, Albert Ulutorti[1,] Peter C. Ndubueze[2], Okonkwo, Henry Ifeanyi[3], Nwankwo, Emmanuel Odidika[4], Umejiaku, Foresight Chindo[5] & Adaba, Ebubechukwu Solomon[6]

[1]Department of Religious Studies, University on the Niger
Albert.green@uniniger.edu.ng/https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3641-3948
[2,3,4,5,6]Department of sociology of Religion, St. Paul's Theological College, Awka

ABSTRACT
This paper explores the inconsistencies between traditional cultural beliefs and Western parenting techniques in the African-Igbo context within a globalized society. Anchored in Social Learning Theory, the study underscores how Igbo parenting has historically emphasized discipline, communal responsibility, respect for elders, and cultural transmission through proverbs, storytelling, and extended family involvement. In contrast, Western parenting often prioritizes independence, individualism, and negotiation, resulting in cultural conflict when these approaches intersect. Using a survey design and NVivo analysis of responses from 264 Igbo parents and young adults, the study examines perceptions of traditional values, challenges in adapting to Western customs, and the extent of integration between the two. Findings reveal that while the majority of parents strongly value traditional teachings (coded under the "Cultural Anchoring" node), they also acknowledge significant tensions when these practices are compared with modern methods. Although many respondents expressed confusion about Western approaches, the greatest difficulty identified was balancing both systems. Partial blending of traditional and modern practices is evident, but complete integration remains contested. The research suggests that Igbo parenting represents a stage of cultural negotiation, with tradition acting as the anchor while modern influences remain unavoidable. The study highlights implications for education, discipline, and cultural identity, while recommending cultural education programs, parent workshops, intergenerational dialogue, community support networks, and policy advocacy to preserve heritage and equip children for life in multicultural settings.

Keywords: African Igbo Parenting, Western Parenting, Cultural Heritage

Introduction

Parenting practices differ across cultures due to unique historical, social, and economic contexts (Lan, 2023; Yim, 2022). Among the Igbo of Nigeria, parenting is deeply rooted in community values that stress collective responsibility, respect for elders, and communal child-rearing. Traditionally, children are nurtured not only by their parents but also by extended family and community members. This approach instills morality, cultural knowledge, and belonging from an early age. By contrast, Western parenting often prioritizes individualism and self-expression (Hesborn et al., 2024; Zhao, 2024). These differences create potential conflicts when Igbo parents encounter or adopt Western methods, especially in globalized societies where cultural systems frequently intersect.

Cultural heritage plays a central role in shaping parenting. For the Igbo, cultural history is not static but a living force embedded in language, traditions, and values passed down through generations (Nwaneki et al., 2023; Orji & Ani, 2024). Preserving cultural heritage remains crucial for identity and belonging, yet global influences increasingly challenge this continuity. Parents are thus required to balance preserving tradition with preparing children to function in modern, multicultural environments. This struggle reflects a broader concern with the effects of globalization on cultural identity (Mohyeddin, 2024; Suharyanto, 2024).

The purpose of this study is to examine how African-Igbo parenting techniques differ from Western approaches and how these differences affect the upbringing of Igbo children. Specifically, it explores the dilemmas parents face in conserving their cultural heritage while adapting to modern practices. The study further highlights strategies Igbo parents employ to navigate these contradictions, offering insights into cultural resilience and negotiation in family life. Such an inquiry has practical significance for education, community development, and policymaking, as it provides knowledge to support families in maintaining cultural identity despite external pressures.

Several guiding questions underpin this research: What are the main differences between Igbo and Western parenting? How do these differences manifest in everyday family life? In what ways do Igbo parents adapt to Western influences while preserving their traditions? And how do children negotiate their identities within these cultural tensions? Addressing these questions is critical to understanding how parenting in Igbo society evolves in response to modern challenges. Parenting in the Igbo context lies at the intersection of tradition and modernity. Historically, Igbo parenting emphasized discipline, elder respect, communal duty, and cultural transmission through proverbs and moral instruction. These practices nurtured socially responsible and culturally conscious individuals. However, migration, urbanization, and globalization have introduced Western parenting values that favor autonomy, negotiation, and child-centered authority. This shift has created uncertainty for parents seeking to identify the most effective parenting models that balance cultural preservation with global competence.

Contemporary realities further complicate parenting. Western-style schooling, mass media, and changing gender roles in households often clash with traditional expectations. Families therefore face tensions as they struggle to prepare their children for success in a rapidly globalizing

society while maintaining cultural roots. The core challenge is how Igbo parents reconcile these contradictions, selectively integrate elements from both systems, and raise children who are simultaneously culturally grounded and globally adaptable.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore how Igbo parents negotiate the tensions between traditional cultural parenting practices and Western models in their quest to preserve cultural heritage while adapting to modern realities. The objectives are: (1) to examine how Igbo parents perceive the influence of traditional values in their parenting; (2) to identify the challenges they face in adapting to Western practices; and (3) to analyze how they integrate both traditional and modern approaches in raising their children. These objectives are pursued through three guiding research questions: (1) How do Igbo parents view the influence of traditional values on their parenting? (2) What challenges do Igbo parents face in adapting to Western parenting practices? (3) How do Igbo parents integrate both traditional and modern parenting methods?

African-Igbo Parenting Practices

African-Igbo parenting practices are rooted in communal values that have been passed down through generations. Central to this system is communalism, which encourages collective child rearing where children are regarded as belonging not only to their biological parents but to the entire clan (Nwoke, 2013; Ok, 2025). This approach fosters solidarity and shared responsibility, ensuring that children grow up within a web of guidance and accountability. Storytelling, proverbs, and traditional rituals are integral to this system, serving as cultural tools for teaching morality, discipline, and respect for elders (Carr & Harrison, 2015; Rahim & Rahiem, 2012; Thambu, 2017). These traditions emphasize character building and transmit collective memory, giving children a strong foundation for ethical and social behavior (Eaude, 2019).

Education, both formal and informal, is equally central to Igbo parenting. Beyond schools, children learn from elders and community members who act as cultural custodians (Onwuatuegwu & Paul-Mgbeafulike, 2023). The holistic aim is to nurture socially responsible, intellectually capable, and culturally grounded individuals. Unlike individualistic models of parenting, the Igbo method ties child development to broader cultural continuity.

A critical element of this parenting system is the extended family network (Nwobodo, 2024; Okoro, 2020). Igbo children are raised not only by parents but also by grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins (Emodi-Onwuk, 2023; Osiri, 2020). This collective involvement diversifies children's influences, as they learn from multiple mentors with different life experiences. Elders provide moral authority and practical training, teaching skills ranging from traditional crafts to cultural norms (Molpeceres et al., 2012; Shih & Tseng, 2025). Extended kinship also provides safety nets in times of need, offering financial and emotional support. The result is a deepened sense of belonging and identity that ties the child firmly to community values.

Western Parenting Practices

Western parenting generally emphasizes individualism and autonomy, reflecting cultural norms that prioritize independence and self-expression (Fevre et al., 2020). From an early age,

children are encouraged to form their own identities, make decisions, and take responsibility for personal growth (Fuligni & Tsai, 2015; Raby, 2014; Shweder et al., 2013). Parents often act as facilitators, providing resources and guidance while encouraging children to pursue their interests. This emphasis on autonomy cultivates critical thinking, decision-making skills, and emotional openness (Benito-Gomez et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2014; Sanders et al., 2019). Open communication between parents and children is encouraged, creating an environment where feelings and perspectives are valued. While this builds confidence, it may also lead to weaker communal ties, as children are often taught to prioritize personal needs (Choi, 2014).

Western parenting styles are often categorized into authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful (Echedom et al., 2018; Ramadhan et al., 2021; Tom & Amah, 2024). The authoritative style is widely considered most effective, balancing warmth with boundaries and fostering discipline alongside emotional support. Authoritarian parenting stresses strict obedience but risks stifling independence (Marianowicz-Szczygieł, 2023; Yengo, 2023). Permissive parenting allows freedom with little structure, sometimes leading to underdeveloped self-regulation. Neglectful parenting, by contrast, involves disengagement and can negatively affect emotional and social outcomes (Hussain & Warr, 2019; Khan; Sorkhabi & Mandara, 2013). These variations underscore the Western focus on choice and personal growth, though they also reflect the challenges of raising children in highly individualistic contexts.

Comparative studies highlight tensions that arise when African-Igbo families confront Western parenting norms. Orji and Ani (2024) note that many Igbo families struggle to maintain their cultural heritage while adapting to modern Western expectations. Agu (2021) shows that Western individualism often conflicts with Igbo communalism, creating stress for both parents and children who must navigate competing values. Such conflicts raise questions about identity formation, discipline, and intergenerational communication. Children caught between traditions may experience confusion regarding loyalty to family obligations versus personal independence.

While much literature highlights the challenges of these cultural clashes, it often overlooks resilience. For example, Frounfelker et al. (2017) focus on negative psychological outcomes but give limited attention to the creative strategies African parents use to reconcile differences. In reality, many Igbo parents adopt hybrid approaches: maintaining storytelling and extended-family mentoring while also encouraging children's independence and decision-making. This adaptation helps families preserve cultural integrity while equipping children to succeed in global contexts. A further gap lies in the lack of qualitative research that captures the lived experiences of Igbo parents. Studies such as Anyanwu-Acholonu (2018) suggest that parents actively reflect on how best to transmit cultural identity, yet many accounts remain underexplored. There is limited analysis of the specific tools—rituals, narratives, mentorship, or blended schooling—parents deploy to integrate tradition and modernity. Without this, scholarship risks portraying Igbo families as passive victims of globalization rather than active agents of cultural negotiation.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura in the 1960s. This theory asserts that individuals acquire behaviors, attitudes, and standards through the observation and imitation of others, especially role models in their social milieu. Bandura underscored the significance of modeling, positing that children acquire knowledge not alone via direct experience but also by witnessing the behaviors and outcomes of others. This theory is especially pertinent to parenting, as it emphasizes the significance of parents and caregivers as major role models in influencing children's behavior and attitudes. Amid cultural inconsistencies, as those encountered by Igbo households adapting to Western influences, Social Learning Theory elucidates how children internalize many cultural norms and behaviors through observation. Within the African Igbo framework, Social Learning Theory elucidates the process by which youngsters assimilate traditional values while concurrently adapting to contemporary stimuli (Chukwudebelu et al., 2024; Mbalisi et al., 2025). Igbo parents endeavor to impart cultural legacy to their children by serving as active role models, exemplifying the significance of community, respect, and ethnic pride. In contrast, children exposed to Western principles may see and imitate behaviors that emphasize individualism and autonomy. This interaction fosters a dynamic educational setting in which children navigate their identities, integrating elements from both cultures. Utilizing Social Learning Theory to examine parenting within the Igbo setting enables researchers to comprehend how cultural conflicts influence children's development and the methods parents adopt to navigate this process.

Methodology

The survey research design of this study examines African-Igbo parenting behaviors in the face of traditional and Western influences. the quantitative component uses surveys to collect data from a broader sample. Three hundred parents and sixty adults will participate in the study, maintaining a balanced gender ratio. After 300 surveys were issued, 264 were returned, an 88% response rate. Participants were chosen using these criteria: Parents aged 25-50 who raise children aged 0-18. Adults 18-30 who have experienced family parenting. All participants must be Igbo and have lived in traditional and modern contexts. Demographics of participants include: Parents: ages 25-50. Adults: 18-30. Men and women are equally represented in both groups. Participants from primary to higher education. Low, middle, and high socioeconomic backgrounds. The study will collect quantitative data on participants' parenting practices using a standardized questionnaire. The data will be analyzed using Nvivo, using the assigned values for responses (SA=4, A=3, D=2, SD=1), bellow, the weighted scores for each question and analyze the findings are calculated. Below is the analysis for each research question and its corresponding items.

Results

RQ1: How do Igbo parents view the influence of traditional values on their parenting?

Question	SA	A	D	SD
Traditional values are essential for my parenting.	200	57	4	3
I often refer to cultural teachings when raising my children.	260	4	0	0
Traditional values conflict with modern parenting methods.	170	80	10	4

The replies showed a substantial clustering under the node "Cultural Anchoring" when coding using NVivo's framework. As a necessary and consistent cultural reference, the majority of parents (SA + A = 257 and 264, respectively) coded to traditional values. This suggests that cultural importance is a recurring trend. With 250 responders recognizing conflicts between customs and contemporary parenting, the "Conflict and Contradiction" node was noteworthy as well. This dual coding demonstrates that although parents cherish tradition, they also see difficulties in integrating it with modern practices.

RQ2: What challenges do Igbo parents face in adapting to Western parenting practices?

Question	SA	A	D	SD
Western parenting methods are confusing.	100	100	50	14
I feel pressured to adopt Western practices.	50	70	64	80
I struggle to balance traditional and Western values.	244	20	0	0

Two significant parent nodes were identified using NVivo coding in this case: "Confusion and Uncertainty" and "Balancing Struggles." Interpretive challenges in implementing Western approaches are demonstrated by responses categorized under bewilderment (200 parents agreeing). Only 120 parents agreed with the weaker "pressure to adopt Western practices" node, indicating that internal misunderstanding is more important than outside pressure. Nearly all respondents (264) thought that "balancing struggles" was the greatest theme, and it was primarily categorized under the parent node "Integration Challenges."

RQ3: How do Igbo parents integrate both traditional and modern parenting methods?

Question	SA	A	D	SD
I blend traditional and modern practices in my parenting.	100	100	50	14
My parenting style is influenced by both cultures.	40	60	80	84
I seek advice from both traditional and modern sources.	50	50	80	84

"Blended Parenting Practices" was highlighted in the coding tree under this RQ. There was a great readiness to integrate both approaches, as evidenced by the first item (200 parents agreeing). A lesser internalization of hybridity is suggested by the fact that fewer respondents (100 vs. 164 disagree/SD) acknowledged dual cultural impact. Likewise, there was little reliance on two sources of guidance (100 agreed vs. 164 disagreed/SD). This node would seem less packed in NVivo than RQ1 and RQ2, indicating that although blending is accepted, complete integration is still debatable.

Findings

i. **Traditional values remain central**: Over 90% of parents coded under "Cultural Anchoring" node, emphasizing their indispensability in parenting.

ii. **Conflict exists**: NVivo coding showed a strong "Contradiction" theme where parents acknowledged clashes between traditional and modern approaches.

iii. **Confusion about Western parenting**: Over 200 responses coded under "Confusion and Uncertainty," showing difficulty interpreting Western methods.

iv. **Balancing struggles dominate**: Nearly unanimous coding (244 SA, 20 A) under "Integration Challenges," suggesting the hardest task is balance, not outright rejection.

v. **Partial integration**: Although many parents claim to blend practices, fewer fully internalize dual cultural influences or actively consult both traditional and modern sources.

According to the NVivo-guided analysis, Igbo parents place a high value on traditional cultural parenting methods but find that interacting with Western methods causes them a great deal of conflict. Although blending is recognized, it frequently occurs superficially, and true integration is difficult to achieve. According to these findings, Igbo parenting is a condition of cultural negotiation in which modern influences cannot be disregarded but tradition serves as the anchor, resulting in a constant battle for equilibrium.

Discussion of Findings

1. Emphasis on Traditional Values: The data strongly indicates that Igbo parents hold traditional values in high regard and frequently reference cultural teachings, which are integral to their parenting practices.

2. Challenges with Western Practices: There is a notable challenge in adapting to Western parenting methods, with confusion being a significant barrier. This highlights the need for resources and support to help parents navigate these complexities.

3. Struggle for Balance: The struggle to balance traditional and Western values is evident, suggesting that parents are seeking ways to harmonize these differing influences in their parenting styles.

4. Integration of Practices: While many parents express a desire to blend traditional and modern methods, the findings indicate that this integration is not universally applied, with some parents still leaning heavily towards one influence over the other.

Implications for Parenting in a Globalized World

Parenting in a globalized environment carries significant challenges, as parents must protect cultural heritage while adapting to new and sometimes conflicting influences. Globalization makes it harder to integrate diverse perspectives into child-rearing without weakening cultural identity. This has prompted a reassessment of conventional practices, encouraging a more adaptable approach that retains core values while embracing useful modern methods. The outcome is often a hybrid parenting model designed to instill resilience and adaptability in children, equipping them for multicultural contexts. Yet concerns remain that cultural norms may be diluted and children risk losing touch with their heritage (Mollenhauer & Friesen, 2013; Salins, 2023; Urbaite, 2024). Parents thus play a pivotal role in mediating these forces to ensure their children develop both global competence and strong cultural identity.

For African-Igbo parents, the challenge of balancing traditional values with modern pressures is particularly acute. This process involves engaging with both ancestral teachings and

global norms. Instilling cultural pride through education about Igbo heritage is vital, but parents also seek to prepare children with critical thinking skills and openness to new ideas. Through this dual focus, children can thrive in rapidly changing environments while remaining anchored to their roots. Educational programs, community networks, and cultural organizations often provide tools that reinforce traditions while introducing modern parenting practices. Successfully integrating these components strengthens the parenting process and equips children to manage complex identities in a globalized world. Research confirms that Igbo parents recognize the need to balance both sets of influences, viewing cultural continuity as central but also acknowledging the benefits of modern methods (Agu, 2021; Mgbemena & Muonwe, 2021). Such findings are valuable for shaping instructional materials, community initiatives, and future studies on parenting dynamics within the Igbo community.

Differences in authority and discipline are among the most striking contrasts. In Igbo culture, discipline is often communal, with extended family members sharing responsibility (Fatimilehin & Hassan, 2015; Nwaneki et al., 2023). Parents and elders may employ physical punishment such as spanking, grounded in the belief that discipline fosters respect and character development. Authority is rarely questioned, reinforcing social cohesion. In contrast, Western parenting emphasizes autonomy, dialogue, and compromise, often favoring positive reinforcement over corporal punishment. This divergence creates challenges for Igbo parents who must reconcile culturally rooted methods with conversational, child-centered approaches common in Western contexts.

Education and socialization also reveal key inconsistencies. In Igbo society, education is tied to communal values, stressing respect for elders, vocational skills, and collective responsibility (Akunna, 2015; Ugwu, 2022; Chukwudebelu, 2024; Ezenwa, 2017). Children are encouraged to view learning as a way to uplift families and communities. In contrast, Western models emphasize individual achievement, critical thinking, and personal choice. Children are urged to pursue careers aligned with their interests, even if these diverge from traditional expectations. This individualistic orientation may cause disconnection from cultural heritage, creating tension for Igbo parents striving to secure quality education without undermining cultural values (Baltes & Silverberg, 2019; Killen et al., 2016).

Globalization has reshaped parenting among African-Igbo families, introducing both challenges and opportunities (Nwobodo, 2024; Onuzulike, 2014). Western media, technology, and ideologies have promoted greater focus on children's autonomy, self-expression, and emotional well-being. This shift contrasts with traditional collectivist and hierarchical systems. While global exposure provides access to diverse educational resources, it also heightens parental pressure to preserve cultural identity. Many Igbo parents adopt hybrid parenting models, combining communal discipline and cultural storytelling with modern practices like open communication and emotional validation. These hybrid strategies help children navigate both local and global contexts but also reflect the complexity of balancing cultural survival with adaptation.

Igbo parents hold diverse perspectives on blending traditional and modern practices (Ihejirika & Nwabude, 2022). Many stress that cultural values remain essential for shaping moral

character and social responsibility. At the same time, they recognize the value of modern parenting in fostering independence and emotional intelligence. Parents often voice tension between maintaining group-based discipline and authority versus adopting liberal approaches that promote autonomy and self-expression. This negotiation highlights both the resilience and adaptability of Igbo families.

Conclusion

Parenting in African-Igbo households reflects a complex negotiation between globalization and tradition. Authority and discipline expose some of the sharpest contrasts, as hierarchical and collective methods clash with Western dialogic and individualistic approaches. Similarly, education and socialization reveal tensions between the Igbo emphasis on community responsibility and Western ideals of personal success. These contradictions highlight the dilemmas parents face in raising children who can navigate both cultural identity and modern expectations. Globalization introduces both pressures and opportunities, prompting many parents to adopt hybrid models that blend traditional and contemporary practices. Such strategies allow for the preservation of cultural heritage while also equipping children with autonomy and adaptability in increasingly multicultural settings. Igbo parents demonstrate resilience in this balancing act, showing commitment to sustaining communal values while embracing useful modern practices. For Igbo families, preserving cultural heritage remains essential to identity, cohesion, and intergenerational continuity. Actively teaching children about traditions, customs, and communal obligations instills pride and moral responsibility, while also serving as a counterforce to cultural erosion in a globalized world. Preservation sustains social harmony, strengthens belonging, and empowers children to draw on their heritage as they engage globally. This is not merely symbolic but an investment in community stability and future resilience.

Recommendations

In line with the above discussion, the following are hereby recommended;

1. Create educational programs that teach kids about their Igbo culture, beliefs, and ancestry while also giving parents the skills they need to combine traditional and contemporary parenting techniques. These programs, which promote cultural identity while assisting with adaptation to global reality, could be provided through educational institutions, community workshops, or cultural centers.

2. Establish community-based forums where Igbo families can discuss parenting issues in a multinational setting, share resources, and trade experiences. Through mentoring, storytelling, and family get-togethers, intergenerational communication can close the gap between young people and elders in these networks, guaranteeing the passing down of both traditional knowledge and modern life skills.

3. Promote advocacy based on research that draws attention to the unique difficulties African-Igbo families confront as a result of globalization. Policymakers can be persuaded to support programs and allocate funds that preserve cultural customs, encourage parental

fortitude, and protect the generational transmission of heritage by highlighting the value of cultural diversity.

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