

Ikoro and Ekwe as indigenous communication systems: A study of traditional communication practices in Amaeke Item, Igbo community, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: This work looks at how the people of Amaeke Item in southeastern Nigeria have been communicating in their region without relying only on spoken or written language but through the use of Ikoro and Ekwe. The Ikoro and Ekwe are slit drums that serve as a powerful voice of the community. For generations, these instruments have functioned as a reliable source of information dissemination in the communities, but presently, this function is almost being replaced by public address systems, especially in the cities. This study adopted an ethnographic research method and obtained data through interviews and observations of traditional communication practices involving Ikoro and Ekwe in Amaeke Item. The data were analysed through content analysis using Symbolic Interactionism as the interpretive framework. This theory is used to re-emphasise the importance of these instruments as a salient medium of communication in Igbo land. However, like many native practices, they face challenges from modernisation and the increasing influence of digital communication, which often sidelines traditional knowledge systems. This study maintains that, despite what they face, the Ikoro and Ekwe continue to function as important symbols of cultural identity and traditional communication in Amaeke Item. They remain dominant signs of identity within the Igbo communication system and contribute to a larger struggle for African cultural recognition. This study recommends community-based documentation, digital archiving, cultural education, and appropriate integration of Ikoro and Ekwe into contemporary heritage preservation initiatives.

Keywords: Amaeke Item, Ekwe, Igbo culture, Ikoro, indigenous communication, symbolic interactionism, traditional media.

INTRODUCTION

From every indication and evidence, it is important to mention the imperative communication significance of drums in Igbo land. The drums, Ikoro and Ekwe, have remained significant in depicting the people's religious-cultural communication.

Indigenous communication systems in Africa, at its core, are a human necessity that transcends time, geography, and culture. While modern societies often privilege written texts, digital platforms, and spoken language as primary channels of communication, many African communities developed highly effective systems of information exchange long before the advent of these technologies.

Among the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria, traditional communication systems were not only functional but also deeply embedded in the cultural, social, and political fabric of society. One such system is found in Amaeke Item, where the Ikoro and Ekwe serve as powerful instruments of communication of what this study describes as “voices without words” (Nwaoga 1978).

Hence, what is constant in this world is change. This change affects everyone so long as one is living. Despite the documented importance of communication systems in African societies, there is limited community-specific documentation of the meanings, functions, and contemporary

relevance of Ikoro and Ekwe in Amaeke's Ime. The increasing use of electronics and digital communication also raises questions about the survival and transmission of the cultural knowledge associated with these instruments. So, the world keeps moving because it is a global world that rotates around the globe. Sometimes these changes may have much affect on how different types of people do things traditionally, or it may not. For instance, the Igbos, whose cultures have been traced back to the olden methods, have maintained some traditional activities; for instance, New Yam Festivals, masquerade performances, and even methods of communication are still maintained (Nwaoga 1978).

Therefore, from the onset, communication has existed even before mass media and digital communication. Before the advent of modern means of communication, traditional people communicated easily, and they still do today. Anunike (1990) states that:

“Before the advent of the (modern) mass media and their introduction to rural dwellers, various forms of traditional media had existed, they were and still are very powerful, popular and useful to the people that the presence of the mass media pose little or no threat to them, people identify them, use and respond to them more than they do to the mass media”.

The above statement highlights how needful communication is, and because of this, many African communities developed highly effective means of communication. Communication, therefore, is a vital tool in human existence, including the Igbos. Ohia (2026) notes, concerning Igbo masking, as it underscores the integral role of music and rhythm in sustaining masquerade, that “drumming patterns not only structure performance but also communicate messages to both human and spirit participants” (135). This indicates that the voiceless drums have communication value, as the intricate dialogue between the drum ensemble and the masquerades mirrors the communicative relationship between the community and the ancestral realm. Similarly, Ohia (2021) explains that “through the drums and their communication power, they could help to maintain order and coherence, and this is achieved largely by the sound produced.... The drums also reenact history and events as they are useful means of communication” (97). It is noteworthy that in Ogba land of Rivers State, Nigeria, due to the communication power of the drums, a masquerade, at the sound and mention of its name by the drums, develops higher spiritual ability when in frenzy of the dance. Although Igbo communities exhibit considerable cultural diversity, they share a number of linguistic and cultural practices that contribute to a broader sense of Igbo identity. Akidi (2013) states that no matter that there could be differences in culture, custom, tradition and institution, we still maintain that Igbo customs

are the same. This is because of the way they value their culture. This culture, most especially in the area of the communication system, binds the Igbo people together. The Igbos realise that educating their children in their language will enhance the future growth of Igbo culture and tradition. Ejiogu (1986) writes that people will be educated not only to love their fatherland, but also to water and nurture it.

Despite the rich oral tradition of the Igbo people, *Ikoro* and *Ekwe* as indigenous communication systems have received limited critical attention in African literary and cultural scholarship. Existing studies have generally focused on drums and indigenous musical instruments in broad terms, leaving inadequate scholarly engagement with the specific communicative, social, cultural, and symbolic functions of *Ikoro* and *Ekwe* within Igbo communities. This limited attention constitutes a significant research gap, particularly in understanding how these indigenous drums function beyond entertainment as effective instruments for transmitting messages, regulating social activities, mobilising communities, preserving cultural values, and facilitating social interaction. Addressing this gap is academically and culturally significant because the study will contribute to African oral literature and indigenous communication studies by documenting, analysing, and interpreting the roles of *Ikoro* and *Ekwe* in Igbo society. Furthermore, the study will contribute to the preservation and transmission of indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage by drawing attention to an under-researched aspect of Igbo oral tradition and ensuring that the knowledge and practices associated with these traditional communication systems are better documented for present and future generations.

Therefore, the main objective of this study is to look at how the people of Amaeke Item in southeastern Nigeria have been communicating in their region without relying only on spoken or written language but through the use of *Ikoro* and *Ekwe*. Hence, the specific objectives are to:

1. Critically examine the representation of *Ikoro* and *Ekwe*.
2. Analyse how *Ikoro* and *Ekwe* depict communication systems in Amaeke Item.
3. Explore the functions of these drums in the community.
4. Examine the socio-cultural significance of *Ikoro* and *Ekwe* in Amaeke Item.
5. Examine the category of persons in Amaeke Item that are in charge of the drums.

Based on the objectives outlined above, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the representations of *Ikoro* and *Ekwe* as communication systems?
2. Are *Ikoro* and *Ekwe* distinct communication systems in Amaeke Item?

3. What functions do these instruments perform in the Amaeke Item community?
4. What is the socio-cultural significance of Ikoro and Ekwe in Amaeke Item?
5. What category of persons keep custody of these drums in Amaeke Item?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual review

The conceptual framework of the study focuses on the key ideas that explain how Ikoro and Ekwe function as indigenous/traditional communication tools in Amaeke Item. This section discusses traditional communication among the Igbo, Ikoro and Ekwe drums and their functions.

Traditional communication system

Traditional/indigenous communication systems such as Ikoro and Ekwe are quite different from modern mass communication systems, whose characteristics include: oral and symbolic transmission; community participation; cultural specificity; interpersonal/group communication; customary authority; and intergenerational transmission. Generally, communication involves the activity of exchanging ideas, information, and opinions from one person to another using recognised channels accepted by the participants. However, many communities developed indigenous communication systems adapted to their social organisation, cultural practices, and communication needs. This is also echoed by Ohia (2021), who postulated that every human society has developed indigenous and traditional modes and channels of communication, which characterise its existence, organisation and development. Traditional communication has been defined by Ugboaja (1985) as:

“forms of communication emanating from the interplay or synthesis of the traditional customs and conflicts of the community, its harmony and discord, its cultural affinities and disparities as well as its culturally specific values and practices which include among others, rituals, proverbs, music, dance, masquerades, Ikoro, Ekwe and others.

This is to say that traditional means of communication involve local communication methods that are unique when compared with modern means of communication. They serve the same purpose in the lives of the people so far as communication is involved. These communication modes and channels form the basis upon which these communities progress.

Ohia (2018) reiterates that drumming and dancing in the performance of Ogba myths, burial ceremonies, and sacrificial rituals are gendered practices. He explains that “some drumbeats and dances are exclusively for males

and some for females only. The dances can be differentiated from the drumbeats. Consequently, the sound denotes the sex involved; such drumbeat sounds are different in rhythm, and explain certain myth essence (90).

Scholars of African communication have long argued that indigenous systems such as these are not primitive or inferior but are instead highly structured and context-driven. Ugboajah (1985) emphasises that traditional African communication systems are rooted in communal life and are designed to meet the specific needs of the people. Similarly, Doob (1961) notes that communication in traditional societies often relies on shared cultural symbols, making them both efficient and deeply meaningful. These systems are passed from one generation to another and are derived from societal experience and thought over a long period of years (61). Hence, the Ikoro and Ekwe are not just instruments; they are cultural texts that require interpretation, participation, and collective memory. Others in Igbo land include: Opi, Ogele, Oja, Egbe and Igba. These instruments are used for communication. Opara states that they serve as means of conveying information from the council of chiefs to the community through the town criers. She also says that the people obey and dance to the tune of the information which was relayed by the traditional communication system (43). With the information relayed, people of the same community gather without hesitation to address issues that arise in the society. Traditional communication serves and signifies a lot for people who are bound together in one common culture. In all cases, each community attaches meanings to the sounds that these instruments produce, which have survived over the years against all odds.

From the psychological perspective, Finnegan (1970) viewed communication as not just a response, but the relationship set up by the transmission of stimuli and the evocation of response. This psychological stimulus, which evokes responses from individuals, is worth discussing. She affirms, concerning the functions of the drums in Africa, that “the instruments communicate through direct representation of the spoken language itself, simulating the tone and rhythm of actual speech (50).

According to Hall (1959), culture functions as an unspoken system of communication that extends beyond spoken words (p. 71). It shapes how individuals interpret symbols, behaviours, values, and social practices within a particular society. Thus, cultural knowledge enables people to communicate meanings through non-verbal forms and shared practices, making culture an essential framework for understanding indigenous communication systems.

Theoretical framework

Symbolic interactionism theory

Symbolic Interactionism provides an appropriate framework for examining Ikoro and Ekwe because it emphasises how meanings are created, communicated,

and sustained through social interaction. The approach is associated with the ideas of George Herbert Mead and was subsequently developed and named by Herbert Blumer. From this perspective, the sounds produced by Ikoro and Ekwe do not possess universal meaning; rather, community members learn and interpret through shared cultural experiences. This theory was formulated by Mead and Blumer (1969). Their argument is based on the knowledge that people create and interpret meanings through social interaction. Blumer says that meaning does not exist inherently in objects or actions; rather, it emerges through the ways people interact with and interpret them. When Ikoro and Ekwe are looked at, including the sounds these instruments produce, one can say that they are not self-explanatory. Rather, the meanings are learned, shared, and sustained within the cultural context of that community. Analytical categories such as shared meanings, symbols, social interactions, interpretations, cultural learning, identity, and community response are embedded. For example, Ikoro and Ekwe are used as symbols of information and cultural identity in the rural communities. The community members respond when they hear the sound of the instruments for the dissemination of vital information. This is because the instruments cannot speak, but when used, the individuals in the community involved understand vividly what they are saying. In Igbo land, for instance, the sound of Ikoro may be interpreted in different ways depending on the listener and the community. It could mean a call for war, an announcement, a warning, dance, and so on. So, Ikoro and Ekwe are wooden instruments functioning as symbols of negotiation that are strengthened through repeated use in the community, which makes it possible not to lose their communicative value. "Voices without words" simply discusses the sounds of these instruments, which cannot be spoken but interpreted within community settings. This is because these sounds are shaped by culture and the collective experience of the people.

Scholars working with this framework seek to understand how people make sense of their social worlds and form behaviour based on the subjective meanings they attach to symbols and everyday face-to-face interaction. In this study, the theory becomes an imperative tool as individuals use the interpretive process during interactions with human beings, spirits, and even with the symbols of the drums: Ikoro and Ekwe. Symbolic interactionism theory is the primary theoretical framework for this study as it points to the importance of Ikoro and Ekwe as a salient medium of communication. Symbolic interactionism theory raise some major discuss questions.

METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on Ikoro and Ekwe as indigenous traditional communication systems in Amaeke Item, Bende Local Government Area of Abia State, South-East Nigeria.

The study adopts an ethnographic research method within a qualitative research design, which is appropriate for examining the communicative functions, meanings, and cultural contexts of traditional drums. The qualitative approach enables the researcher to interpret drum sounds, rhythms, patterns, and performances within their social and cultural contexts rather than treating them merely as musical expressions. The study population comprises adults and young men who possess knowledge and skills in drumming, as well as community members who participate in or witness the use of Ikoro and Ekwe during traditional festivals, funeral ceremonies, masquerade displays, emergency communication, warfare, community sanitation, childbirth, and coronation ceremonies. Some of these participants were interviewed to obtain firsthand information on the meanings, functions, and contexts associated with the drums. Given the communal nature of traditional communication and drumming's role in promoting social cohesion, cultural identity, continuity, and community participation, the study also examined the interactive contexts in which the drums are performed. Because it was impracticable to involve the entire population of Amaeke Item, ten participants were selected using a random sampling technique, giving members of the study population an equal and independent opportunity for selection. Data were collected through participant observation, interviews, tape recordings, and field notes. Participant observation enabled the researcher to observe the performance and use of Ikoro and Ekwe in their natural cultural settings, while interviews provided participants' explanations of the meanings and communicative functions of particular drum patterns. Tape recordings were used to preserve the actual sounds and rhythms for subsequent analysis, while field notes captured relevant observations, contextual details, and non-verbal aspects of the performances. The data were analysed using content analysis, following the ethnography of communication approach adopted for data collection. Content analysis provided a systematic and objective procedure for examining the communicative content of Ikoro and Ekwe, identifying recurring patterns and functions, and interpreting the meanings conveyed through their various rhythms, sounds, and performance contexts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Communication functions of Ikoro and Ekwe

Ikoro and Ekwe perform the following functions:

1. Information dissemination: Information is disseminated through the instruments in the communities.
2. Community mobilisation: Members of the communities are mobilised to gather for public functions such as funerals, chieftaincy coronations, sanitation and the

- reception of a guest.
3. Warning/emergency communication: The instruments are used to warn against emergencies such as war, epidemics, pandemics, pestilences, and others.
 4. Ceremonial communication: They are used as a common means of communication for ceremonies such as childbirth, coronations, etc.
 5. Political/administrative communication: Ikoro and Ekwe are commonly used for administrative means of communication, especially in passing information from the leaders of the communities such as the king, chiefs, elders and administrators of other hierarchies.
 6. Religious/spiritual communication: They are used to pass information to the public on religious and spiritual matters. Whenever the community intends to engage in annual sacrifices to the gods, Ikoro and Ekwe are used to disseminate such information faster.
 7. Entertainment and cultural identity: Ikoro and Ekwe are used for cultural and identity preservation because their use speaks volumes of the communities' cultural heritage and identity.

Meaning of different signals

Ikoro and Ekwe stand for a multiplicity of meaning because each sound is symbolic, and the symbolic forms are signals of meanings that are interpreted differently. Some are mystical, and interpretations of the drumbeats differ according to the level of consciousness, state of mind, and physical and mental alertness used as a means of communication; they make communication simple, sharing meaningful ideas, thoughts and feelings (information) through a channel between the drummers, the drums and the participants of the lived experiences.

Ikoro and Ekwe traditionally symbolise sacredness and are used to mark and consecrate or herald celestial beings and their presence among human beings. The drums sound to warn human beings of the outbreak of deadly pandemics, epidemics and diseases in the land. It is also interpreted to mean the language of the divination of the gods. Through Ikoro and Ekwe, communication, power, order and coherence are achievable. They symbolise religious art used in achieving higher mystical exercise and spiritual development. According to two informants, Andrew James and Chiebuka Nwaokolo, a dancer, when his name is called by the drums, he usually develops higher spiritual and intellectual ability when in a frenzy of the dance.

Cultural transmission: Ikoro and Ekwe are a vehicle for the transmission of culture in Amaeke Item. As the culture of the people, drums are both artistic and spiritual. The instruments serve as coded messages that teach cultural values and strengthen community bonds. Ikoro and Ekwe are not relics of the past but vibrant cultural systems for communication, identity, and continuity. They transform

sounds into communication, and communication into meaning. In the words of Chinedu Ben-Fred and Emekuku Orji, the sounds of Ikoro and Ekwe sustain both the living and ancestral worlds in Amaeke Item.

Gender/age dimensions: The use of the instruments – Ikoro and Ekwe are gendered. The drums are not beaten by women and young men below the age of twenty-five years. It is a taboo in Amaeke Item for a female to beat the drum for any reason; the same is applicable to young men below the age of twenty-five years. Therefore, women and underage men are prohibited from beating and keeping the drums in their custody, according to an informant, Igwe Obodo.

Effects of modernisation: It is apt that due to modernisation and the presence of digital communication, the frequency of current in the use of Ikoro and Ekwe has been drastically reduced, resulting from the use of mobile phones, public address systems, radio, social media and the internet. This generational difference in the use of the traditional systems has created a big vacuum in local communication. However, digital technologies have not completely erased or eradicated the use of Ikoro and Ekwe in Amaeke Item. For example, Table 1 suggests the coexistence and adaptation of traditional and contemporary media with their functions. This clearly exemplifies that digital communication does not mean the replacement of the traditional communication system. This was clearly affirmed by two informants: John Kalu and Chukwudi Oputa.

Contemporary use: Before phones and sirens, Ikoro and Ekwe were the pulse of Amaeke Item. Today, the drums serve mostly as sacred heritage symbols and museum pieces, and are actively used in cultural festivals, traditional music ensembles, and Ekwe, particularly for church services. In the words of Johnson Agu and Chukwuemeka Ekeoma, Ikoro is an artistic imagery that is referenced by contemporary African artists and writers as a metaphor for ancestral voice and authority, while Ekwe is integrated into modern Christian liturgy and cultural coronation rites to signal transitions or welcome special guests.

Ikoro and Ekwe

Ikoro and Ekwe are traditional wooden drums used by the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria for communication, music, and community alerts. The Ekwe is a portable instrument used for daily music and local announcements. It is usually played alongside other traditional instruments to create rhythms for dances and cultural festivals. The Ekwe is used by town criers to share routine news, invite people to general meetings, or signal local gatherings. It is only played by musicians and community members

Table 1. The coexistence and adaptation of traditional and contemporary media with their functions.

Traditional Medium	Contemporary Medium	Function
Ikoro	Public address system	Community announcement
Ekwe	Mobile phone/whatsapp	Information dissemination
Ikoro	Radio	Public mobilisation
Ekwe	Social media	Event notification

without strict ritual restrictions tied to the giant Ikoro. The Ikoro is a massive, immovable community fixture reserved for major emergencies and historic events to alert the town of severe crises like war, mender, defilement of the land, or sudden calamity. At the sound of the drum, community members are compelled to drop what they are doing and rush to the village square immediately. The Ikoro can only be beaten by specially trained elders or titleholders who understand the coded language of the drum.

Ikoro and Ekwe are traditional Igbo wooden slit drums that function both as musical instruments and as indigenous media of communication (Figure 1 and 2). While Ekwe is generally smaller and more portable, Ikoro is a larger, often monumental slit drum associated with Igbo communities and traditionally positioned at important communal spaces. Beyond their musical functions, the instruments communicate culturally coded messages through variations in rhythm, intensity and patterns of sound, which may announce important events, summon community members, signal emergencies or facilitate communal activities (Onuora, 2016; Okpara, 2016).

Between Ikoro and Ekwe, Onuora (2016) notes that there appears not to be any physical difference between the two log drums in that they are related in outward appearance and both serve as musical instruments and at the same time, information dissemination devices. According to Ohia (2025), in size, Ekwe is smaller and could be used by men, women and children. Ikoro is bigger, male-oriented, and closely associated with warfare and other heroic deeds. This is corroborated by Johnson Agu, IgweOgodo and Silk Eke in an interview. They affirm that Ekwe is generally smaller and accessible to a wider range of users, whereas Ikoro is larger and traditionally associated with male communal authority and major public occasions.

Ikoro and Ekwe are idiophones because their primary sound-producing material vibrates when struck. As slit drums, they are hollowed wooden instruments in which the vibration of the wood produces the characteristic sound (Nwaoga, 1978). Idiophones are self-sounding instruments or technical waves which produce sound without the addition or use of an intermediary medium. The sound or message emanates from the materials from which the instruments are made. These wooden instruments announce the promulgation of laws, regulations, meeting arrangements for official communal works and generally spread official information to the community (Wilson and Wilson, 1994).

The sound of these two instruments penetrates the



Figure 1. Ikoro (Source: Ozi Ikoro. Retrieved from <https://ozikoro.com/the-ikolo-a-sacred-sonic-symbol-of-aguleris-cultural-and-spiritual-heritage/>).



Figure 1. Ekwe (Source: Timothy S. Y. Lam Museum of Anthropology Announcement. Retrieved from <https://lammuseum.wfu.edu/exhibits/virtual/beyond-drumming-african-musical-instruments/>).

listener's mind based on the information and the occasion involved. They are seen as total instruments of experience and knowledge for communication and decision-making in the face of familiar problems and challenges. Ikoro and Ekwe have been found to possess such roles in the community settings.

The informants, Johnson Agu, Igwe Obodo and Silk Eke, interviewed for this study reported that major communal announcements during the New Yam festival continue to be communicated through Ikoro and Ekwe, although electronics are increasingly used for supplementary communication. Similarly, in most communities, Ikoro is still used to announce the New Year (the Eke Mbu), which starts from the day of the New Yam Festival, and holds firm

to the traditions inherited from their ancestors, like that of the Ikoro dance, which is performed during New Yam Festivals. They maintained that all announcements, as far as the community is concerned, must be carried out using Ikoro or Ekwe and not radios, as the case may be.

It is worth looking at this extract from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* to throw more light on the nature of voices without words communicated by Ekwe:

Go-di-di-go-go-di-go. Di-go-go-di-go. It was the Ekwe talking to the clan; one of the things every man learned was the language of the hollowed out wooden instrument. Dim! Dim! Dim! Boomed the cannon at intervals. The first cock had not crowed, and Umuofia was still swallowed up in sleep and silence when the Ekwe began to talk, and the cannon shattered the silence. Men stirred on the bamboo beds and listened anxiously. Somebody was dead. The cannon seemed to rend the sky. Di-go-go-di-go-di-di-go floated in the message laden night air. . . and then sat down with other men listening to the endless wailing of the women and the esoteric language of the Ekwe. . . (Achebe, 1958).

From the above extract, Achebe (1958) says that one of the things men learned is the language of the Ekwe. At this particular time, before the town crier spoke, they already knew that somebody had died immediately when the cannon sounded. It is also worth mentioning that the sound produced covered the human voice. The most striking aspect of it all was the distance covered by this "voices without words or voiceless" communication, which was greater than articulated speech. So, as voices without words as Ikoro and Ekwe are, they send signals which rend the air while communicating to the hearts of those present. Achebe's fictional representation illustrates the broader cultural principle through which drum sound could convey recognisable messages.

In Amaeke Item, the sound of the Ikoro is not just heard; it is read and understood within its cultural code. For instance, in the Ikoro dance performed during the New Yam Festival, everybody knows when to change the dancing steps to another. These movements are done sequentially and at the same time. This is because, to an average Amaeke man, the sounds have a language that only they will be able to understand.

The communicative conventions associated with Ikoro appear to be transmitted informally through participation and observation, particularly among younger members who learn to associate with communal events. Here, you noticed that these unspoken words are imbibed by every male child in the community, and there is no formal education for it, which makes it different from modern technologies used for communication. In the use of Ikoro and Ekwe, meaning is condensed into rhythmic patterns

that can be quickly recognised by members of the community. They are seen as an extension of oral tradition, where sound replaces speech and still retains its communicative and expressive functions.

Apart from using Ekwe for information dissemination, in some documented Igbo ritual contexts, Ekwe and related drums have been associated with ceremonial communication and spiritual practices. The extent to which such practices remain active in Amaeke item; it can be used as a spiritual tool in Igbo land. There is a deep connection between the Ekwe and the spiritual world. It is used most often in rituals to awaken the dead. Nwoga(1975) notes that Ekwe and Ikoro are used in ceremonies that bridge the physical and spiritual worlds.

Similarly, Ohia (2017) notes concerning the replacement of the performing artist's voice with the sound of drum/gong in the performance of Ogba funeral songs thus: "*Ebegesiele, ojenye, ojenye Go gom go gom go*. The performers go into frenzy, gyrate, somersault and cartwheel on hearing the sound of the drum/gong – go gom go gom go" (134).

They also serve the purpose of entertainment during musical and dancing performances. Ikoro is celebrated through dancing during the New Yam Festival at Amaeke Item, while Ekwe is used to support the beating of Ikoro for rhythmic sounds. At this point, the spirits of every individual in the community are revitalised.

Ikoro represents the voice of the people, unity, authority, and continuity. When it sounds, it commands attention and shows that something of communal importance is taking place. This proves that the Ikoro is a cultural foundation that embodies the voice, structure, and identity of the people.

Scholars have noted the challenges faced by these traditional instruments despite their rich values, especially in the area of the rapid spread of digital communication technologies. Thiong'o (1986), for instance, critiques this shift and sees it as part of "cultural domination, where local knowledge systems are devalued in favour of the Western models". He says that this should not be because "they are essential for true intellectual and cultural independence". Others advocate that traditional communication systems should coexist with digital communication technologies in order to help in preserving them instead of competing with them. They suggested that they should be incorporated into local radio programs to enhance local relevance and participation.

Conclusion

This study has been able to highlight the importance of Ikoro and Ekwe as "voices without words" or voiceless communication. It noted that these instruments represent the knowledge and cultural memory of the people in Igbo land, especially those of the same cultural identity. Ikoro and Ekwe function mainly for the dissemination of

information, cultural heritage and preservation of identity. The sounds produced by the instruments will be interpreted as symbols that represent the spirits, and they are locally used for cultural practices. In the current world of globalisation and modernisation, Ikoro and Ekwe thrive as local means of communication. However, modern communication systems such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines, social media, the internet, etc, have had serious adverse effects on the use of Ikoro and Ekwe, as the younger members of the community prefer the use of social media for information dissemination. It also observes the challenges faced by these instruments through modern technologies and globalisation. The study concerns itself with what should be done to preserve them for future generations because it sees Ikoro and Ekwe as not ordinary hollowed wood but as cultural and people's identity. In Amaeke Item, Ikoro and Ekwe function not only as traditional communication instruments but also as symbols of cultural memory, communal identity, and continuity. Their continued use demonstrates the persistence of indigenous communication practices despite the increasing availability.

Recommendations

The research, therefore, advocates the recognition and preservation of these historical traditional communication instruments, particularly in this era of digital technological change and calls researchers to conduct more studies in Ikoro and Ekwe.

1. Community documentation: Amaeke Item authorities should document the meanings, rhythms, occasions, and performance practices associated with Ikoro and Ekwe.
2. Cultural education: Relevant knowledge should be incorporated into local cultural and educational programmes to facilitate intergenerational transmission.
3. Digital preservation: Audio and audio-visual recordings of traditional signals should be archived digitally.
4. Cultural institutions: Museums and cultural organisations should support preservation and public documentation of the instruments.
5. Further research: Future studies should compare Ikoro and Ekwe practices across different Igbo communities and examine their adaptation to digital communication.

The study therefore contributes to a growing body of research that may want to explore this area and seek to celebrate the complexity of African knowledge systems.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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List of Interviews

Name	Town	Occupation	Method of collection	Date of collection
Johnson Agu	Amaeke	Farming	Interview	13-05-2026
Igwe Obodo	Item	Trading	Audio Recording	28-05-2026
Emekuku Orji	Item	Fishing	Audio Recording	29-05-2026
John Kalu	Amaokwe Item	Farming	Interview	29-06-2026
Silk Eke	Amaeke	Drumming	Observation	30-06-2026
Chukwuemeka Ekeoma	Amaeke	Teaching	Observation	26-07-2026
Chukwudi Oputa	Omoku	Teaching	Observation	30-07-2026
Andrew James	Bende	Drumming	Interview	20-07-2026
Chiebuka Nwaokolo	Item	Farming	Observation	21-07-2026
Chinedu Ben-Fred	Omoku	Teaching	Observation	30-07-2026