

# Exploring the Architectural Identity and Culture of the Ikwerre Ethnic Group in Rivers State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

*This paper investigates the architectural identity and culture of the Ikwerre ethnic group in Rivers State, through an analysis of traditional practices, spatial organization, and structural forms. This paper provides insights into the relationship between Ikwerre Architecture and Ikwerre culture. The study highlights the unique attributes of Ikwerre identity as expressed in their built environment and cultural practices, to establish the key features of Ikwerre Architectural identity and culture. A mixed-method research design approach was employed for the study. A sample size of 400 respondents was selected and the data was concerned with the frequency and categorical distribution of the participants based on specific demographic characteristics such as gender, qualification, status, years of experience, and age. The findings indicate a noteworthy agreement among respondents regarding specific architectural features such as Obiri Oro and Obiri Oha ( family and community halls), Obokoro, Egelege (Village Square ), Ahia (Market), meeting spaces, courtyard designs, compound layouts, centralized head of family's house, Farmlands, decorative murals, the use of Uli (color pigment), cowries and plates to decorate walls contribute to the architectural identity of the Ikwerre people while these cultural practices such as language, dressing, traditional religion, cultural festivals, Men and Women meetings, cultural celebrations, arts and craftsmanship, dance and music, farming, and oral tradition (proverbs, storytelling, and songs) contribute to the cultural identity of the Ikwerre people in Rivers State. This study recommends that the relationship between Ikwerre Architecture and culture should be sustained to promote Ikwerre Architectural identity. Architecture as a tool to portray identity, the Ikwerre communities would not be void of identity. By incorporating traditional elements into architectural forms, built environments can effectively preserve and convey the essence of Ikwerre culture for future generations, thereby contributing to the ongoing discussion on cultural preservation.*

**Keywords:** Architecture, culture, identity, Ikwerre ethnic group

## INTRODUCTION

Culture is “the entirety of a group’s way of life, encompassing its values, beliefs, aesthetic principles, language, thought patterns, behavioral norms, and communication styles.” [1–3]. Culture is defined as “a multifaceted system of concepts, attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviors, practices, rituals, and lifestyles of people within a cultural group, including the artifacts they create and the institutions they create [4–6]. Culture is also described as symbols, languages, beliefs, values, and artifacts that form the rudiments of any society. This definition indicates that culture has two main components: ideas, symbols, and material artifacts. The first component, known as non-material or symbolic culture, includes the values, beliefs, symbols, and languages that characterize a society.

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The second component, material culture, includes all physical objects within a society, such as clothing, eating utensils, means of transportation, tools, and technology, each of which is rich in symbols, items, or elements that represent something and trigger various responses and emotions. Some of these symbols function in nonverbal communication, while others are tangible physical objects [2, 3].

“Architecture is using form and space to create shelter.” The architecture of a society reflects its culture, environment, and art at a given period in relation to the level of cultural influence [7]. The quotation from another great architect Philip Johnson capsulates the conclusion; thus, the Future of Architecture is Culture. Culture and Architecture are two interlinked concepts that help man to evoke identity as an individual and a social being” [8]. Architecture as a profession has its roots in culture.” To a large extent, culture exerts some influence on architecture in every society because humans express themselves socially and culturally. Culture and architecture are both interdependent and inseparable. Society is a product of culture and architecture; therefore, they are related [8].

The Ikwerre people also referred to as “Iwhuruoha,” [9–12] form a distinct ethnic group and are the most populated in the state of rivers. Historically, they were the original inhabitants of Port Harcourt, the state capital. As part of Nigeria’s Niger Delta region, “the Ikwerres are a small but unique tribe, with distinct linguistic, social, and cultural traits that set them apart from neighboring ethnic groups.” Their leadership structure is traditionally patriarchal and gerontocratic, emphasizing the authority of the elderly [13]. The patriarchal nature of Ikwerre society makes the woman subordinate to the man [14, 15]. They are found in four local government areas of Rivers State: Port Harcourt, Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre, and Emohua local government areas of Rivers State.

The Ikwerre people, an ethnic group within Rivers State, Nigeria, possess a distinct cultural and architectural heritage that is deeply intertwined with their socio-political structures, beliefs, and natural environments [16]. This paper explores how these elements manifest in Ikwerre architecture and contribute to the overall identity of the group. Understanding these factors is essential for appreciating the cultural identity of the Ikwerre people and how they are reflected in their architecture.

This paper aims to explore the architectural and cultural identity of the Ikwerre people in Rivers State to preserve the rich cultural heritage of the Ikwerre ethnic group. The study formulated the following objectives To Identify key elements of Ikwerre Cultural Identity and key features of Ikwerre Architectural Identity.

### **Key Elements of Ikwerre Culture**

Ikwerre people have distinct linguistic, social, and cultural traits and formations that distinguish them from other neighboring tribes. Ikwerre’s leadership follows a patriarchal and gerontocratic structure. In this system, leadership authority and access to the throne are reserved for the eldest son of each family. Society is inherently patriarchal, with women holding subordinate positions to men [13, 14].

The Ikwerre people hold a worldview deeply connected to nature and the cosmos [17, 18]. Their understanding of the universe and the forces that govern it are reflected in both their spiritual practices and architectural designs [19]. The foundation of Ikwerre society lies in the family (Oro), which serves as the core of broader society, villages, and clans (Onunmara, Mgbu). The family is where a child first learns about society, its norms, and values, and develops a sense of belonging to the community [17].

Equally fascinating is Ikwerre entertainment, showcased through Ereghu dance, Ikwerre wrestling, and various musical groups such as Jimmy Conter, Majority, Tufiakwa, and Promoter Eze. These musical performances are captivating as their tracks often carry important moral lessons. The Ikwerre waist dance is particularly unique among the ethnic groups in the Rivers State. Wrestling serves as a measure of a warrior’s strength and is highly honored. The significance of these cultural practices is profound; they form the foundation for the lasting peace and development of the Ikwerre people’s

experience. For instance, the hereditary nature of chieftaincy and the use of spiritual methods to determine the rightful heir helps prevent disputes over chieftaincy succession [19].

Communal life offers a strong welfare system that supports various economic activities. Additionally, during burial, women gather to cook food for visitors at no cost and contribute food items and firewood. Men, whether family members or not, provide the necessary burial services for free. Similarly, all palm wine tappers are required to supply their wine either for a small token or sometimes at no charge. This collective effort helps alleviate the financial burden of burial. These practices contribute to the peace and development seen in the traditional Ikwerre society, Imaah (2004) [19] Further opines that the wrestling festival is a key element of Ikwerre culture, with competitions held at the village square (Egelege). During these festivals, various drums such as Ikwiriku, Ekwenkalu, Ngele, and Mbamba vary in type, shape, and size. The Ekpo and Ekpe masquerades are also integral to their traditions and are performed in the village square. The Ikwerre people are known for their diverse cuisine, which includes dishes such as ibaji (yam pepper soup), Oha soup, okpotoro and okasi soups, vegetable soup, periwinkle soup, and pounded yam. Periwinkles (isam) are a staple in many meals. The kitchen was designed to accommodate distinctive cooking techniques.

The culture of the “Iwhuruoha” (Ikwerre) people is deeply connected to the cultural bond shared by all Ikwerre clans, towns, villages, and communities, as reflected in their various spatial distributions. [17]. The cultural similarities among the Ikwerre people are highly noticeable in areas such as dancing, music, and the use of instruments such as xylophones (Wohgolo) and local guitars (Ubor). Freestyle wrestling is also a key social activity in all towns and villages of Ikwerre. Additionally, their fashion, architectural styles, and farming practices are consistent across most, if not all, of the “Iwhuruoha” (Ikwerre) towns and villages.

Another culturally significant institution that connects the “Iwhuruoha” (Ikwerre) people is the Oha, which is unique and distinct in heritage across each “Iwhuruoha” community. A member of the Oha (referred to as Nye Oha) belongs to a group of compounds or communities that form the Oha, and members are typically arranged by seniority, starting with the oldest, often the Owhor holder, of the family or community. It is important to note that the Oha institution in the Ikwerre clans is not politicized; it has a robust system that is rarely exploited or manipulated. Due to its sacred nature, membership is based on age, honesty, and integrity rather than personal wealth or status. The Oha group generally consists of elderly men and village elders who have reached the appropriate age in the community; women are not typically included. This may be because the “Iwhuruoha” people follow a paternalistic inheritance system, where only male children inherit their fathers’ property [17].

### **Features of Ikwerre Architecture**

Architecture is defined as the art and science of building design. [20] observes that “architecture is the conquest of human imagination over materials, methods, and men”. Le Corbursier defined architecture as “the masterly correct and magnificent display of masses brought together in light.” [21] quoting Van der Rohe says, “When technology reaches its ultimate fulfillment, it transcends into architecture”. These definitions emphasize architecture as a process with a lot of creativity, imagination, and assemblage of materials in a distinctive and ordered manner to achieve peculiar requirements and character. The culture of a person shapes their architecture; however, various circumstances can eliminate key aspects of their culture, thereby influencing their architectural style. The layouts of traditional Ikwerre villages often reflect their cosmological understanding because villages are typically organized around central open spaces (courtyard design) [19] that serve as communal areas for gatherings, ceremonies, and discussions.

Every Ikwerre settlement paid attention to the village and compound layout as family units, which reflected the simple agrarian culture of the Ikwerre people [19] (Figure 1), which had courtyard designs to emphasize their collective ownership and the patriarchal nature of the Ikwerre people (Figures 2–5).

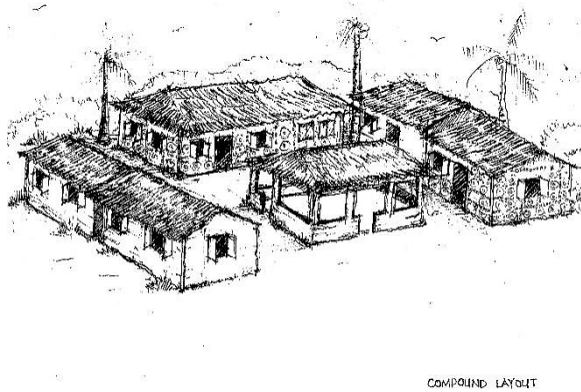
Homes are generally built into an I-structure [22]. The I-structure evolves into compound layouts open to a courtyard (courtyard; often cluster settings). The buildings had murals/motifs on the walls (decorative ornaments), Uli (color pigment), cowries, and plates were also used to decorate the walls (Figure 6); subsequently, intense attention was needed in the plastering process. Artisans were hired to craft artistic designs on both the interior and exterior walls [23–26]. Ikwerre people have two typical public building types, the Obiri (obiri oro and obiri Oha) (Figures 7 and 8) and Obokoro, which serve as meeting halls and open spaces, such as Egelege (village square) for wrestling festivals, cultural



**Figure 1.** Pen house and Yam barn.



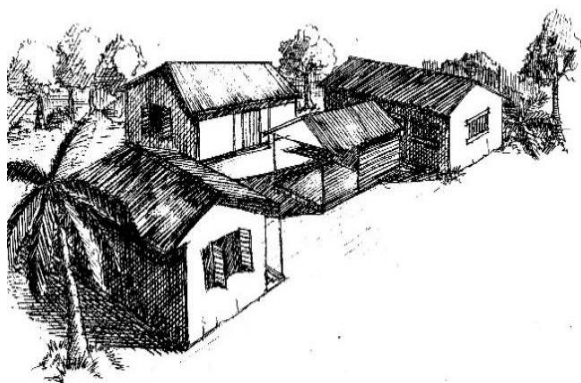
**Figure 2.** Compound layout 1.



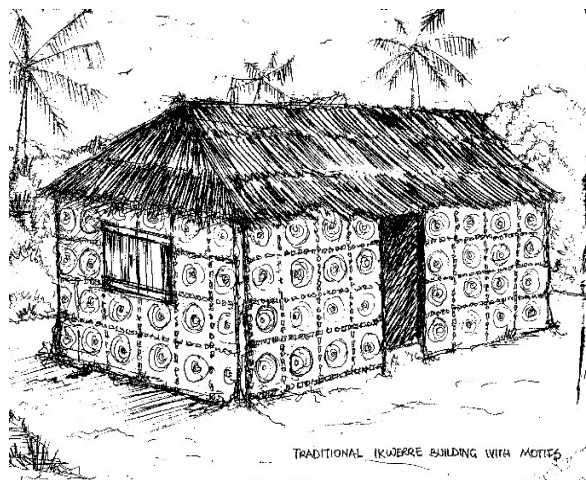
**Figure 3.** Compound layout 2.



**Figure 4.** Compound layouts 3.



**Figure 5.** Compound layouts 4.



**Figure 6.** Traditional building with motifs.

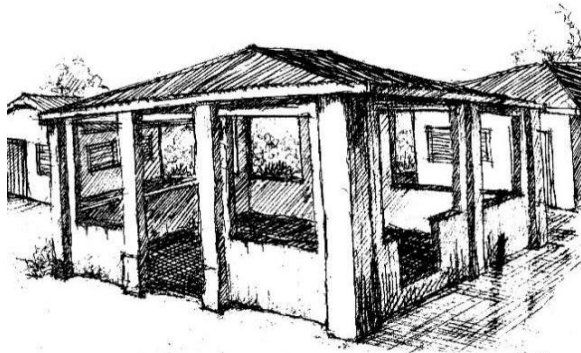


Figure 7. Obiri 1.

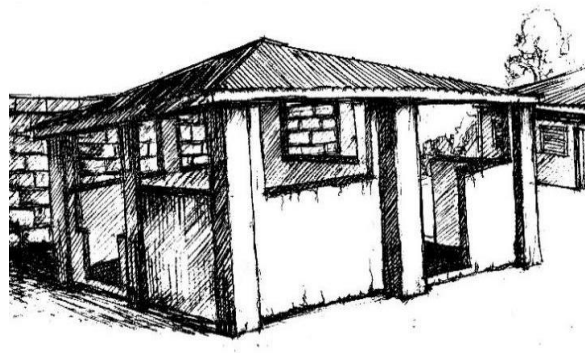


Figure 8. Obiri 2.



Figure 9. Open space for cultural activities.

dances, and other festivals (Figure 9), Ahia (market) for buying and selling, sacred groves for spiritual and communal activities, and ubi (farmland), where they practice their agrarian culture. All these spaces and communal activities helped foster peace and cultural unity among the Ikwerre people and their neighbors.

### Spatial Organization

To comprehend spatial organization, one must first understand the concept of space. Aristotle compared space to a container, describing it as an empty vessel that requires boundaries to exist. As a result, space is always defined by limits. The concept of space is divided into three categories: geographical space, life space, and architectural space [27]. An architecture that reflects identity employs a design system and spatial organization capable of conveying semantic relationships between spaces used for different purposes. Spatial organization involves the design and arrangement of spaces to achieve a specific goal, which influences the frequency and nature of interactions between elements. This organization dictates the order, sequence, and positioning of spaces. Ikwerre architecture is

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orderly, and the layout of traditional Ikwerre villages often reflects their cosmological beliefs. Villages and compounds are generally arranged around central open spaces following the courtyard design.

### **Form and Shape**

A viewer or listener experiences a work of art as a cohesive entity, or as a combination of form and content. The concept of architecture cannot be fully realized without considering its shape. The visible appearance of anything provides the most significant and immediate impression of a built or physical environment. A well-defined form incorporates proportions, size, scale (measure), and harmony [28]. This form is, essentially, a mental construct. The traditional Ikwerre Architecture comprised mostly rectangular or square shapes open to courtyards and open spaces (Figures 2, 3–5).

### **Materials for Construction**

The houses were constructed using mud, bamboo, and thatch, with the task of building these structures, typically as a family effort. The work is divided among family members, with parents and older children usually responsible for gathering the raffia and preparing the thatch, whereas other family members provide support [19, 22]. The materials used for the construction of these houses have progressed to concrete blocks, aluminum, and many other modern materials.

### **Techniques for Construction**

Traditional buildings are typically constructed using post-and-beam construction with reinforcements. The key difference in reinforcement lies in the use of hardwood poles as columns and supporting members, with bars tied in mat form for additional support. These buildings were often covered with thatch, bamboo, or mud and were constructed using a skeletal framework. Poles or columns were positioned at the four corners of the house, following a specific structural grid, where the pole units were driven into the ground in a precise pattern. The alternating use of bamboo and sugarcane, both internally and externally, provides texture and creates an insulating cavity that offers soundproofing, water resistance, and thermal protection. Each door and window opening has a column installed to mark the locations of these openings [22].

In traditional African societies, architectural forms are rooted in both environmental adaptation and cultural identity [7, 29]. Nigerian architecture has been extensively studied for its adaptability to the environment and cultural richness [7]. Ikwerre is no exception, with designs influenced by climate, available resources, and social organization. Traditional Ikwerre structures utilize materials such as clay, palm fronds, and bamboo. These materials are locally sourced and reflect an environmentally sustainable style. The use of these materials offers natural insulation against humid climates, demonstrating an intimate understanding of local ecological conditions [22].

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of culture and architecture proposes that they are intertwined and influence each other. The concept of identity is intricate, and architectural identity is even more complex. This complexity arises because architecture acts as a mirror, reflecting various cultural, political, social, and economic influences that shape a city.

### **Theoretical Frameworks on Culture and Architecture**

This framework, environmental-behavior theory [30], explores the reciprocal relationship between people and their physical environment, emphasizing the impact of cultural factors on architectural design and the use of space. Exploring how cultural factors shape architectural forms and spatial arrangements, Rapoport's theory of culture and architecture generated a comprehensive framework that highlights the interplay between culture and the built environment. His work has been instrumental in understanding how cultural factors shape architectural forms, spatial arrangements, and space use.

Rapoport's "House Form and Culture" (1969) provides a groundbreaking theoretical framework to understand the relationship between architecture and culture. Emphasizing the role of cultural, social, and behavioral factors in shaping house forms supports the aim of this study.

The place identity theory, also known as the theory of place attachment or place-based identity, is a psychological and sociological framework that explores the emotional and cognitive bonds between individuals and specific places. It examines how people develop a sense of attachment, belonging, and identification with particular environments, whether they are urban neighborhoods, rural landscapes, or cultural landmarks. Recognizing the emotional connections that people have with these places can promote their value and the importance of their conservation. Place identity theory is highly applicable to architecture and culture, as it provides a framework for understanding how people develop a sense of attachment, belonging, and identity with specific architectural spaces and cultural contexts. When applied to architecture and culture, place identity theory offers valuable insights into how the built environment can shape and reflect cultural identity, foster a sense of community, and influence individuals' emotional connections with spaces.

### **Empirical Review**

Kroeber and Kluckhohn's "*Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*" (1952) remains a landmark work in anthropology. The empirical synthesis of diverse definitions of culture established a foundational framework for understanding this complex and multifaceted concept. While work has its limitations, especially its Western-centric focus and lack of fieldwork, it was essential to advance the conversation on culture. The systematic categorization of cultural definitions helped guide subsequent empirical studies, making their work highly influential in shaping both the theory and practice of cultural research.

Rapoport's "House Form and Culture" (1969) [30] provides a groundbreaking theoretical and empirical framework to understand the relationship between architecture and culture. By emphasizing the role of cultural, social, and behavioral factors in shaping house forms, Rapoport challenged previous deterministic models and opened up new directions in architectural research. While his work has faced criticism, particularly in terms of its applicability to contemporary global housing issues, it remains a foundational text in architectural anthropology, vernacular architecture, and environmental design. It provides insights into the importance of cultural sensitivity, sustainable design, and the interplay of environmental and cultural factors that continue to resonate with architects, planners, and researchers today.

"Ikwerre Culture and Architecture: Hidden Dimensions" (2004) by Napoleon Ono Imaah offers a rich examination of the architectural practices of the Ikwerre people in Rivers State, Nigeria, the study provides an in-depth investigation of how the built environment of the Ikwerre people reflects hidden cultural meanings, spiritual beliefs, and social structures, uncovering how their built environment reflects deeper cultural, spiritual, and social dimensions. Imaah's "Ikwerre Culture and Architecture: Hidden Dimensions" (2004) is a significant contribution to the understanding of how traditional architecture serves as a reflection of cultural identity, spiritual beliefs, and social organization. Through his empirical research and interdisciplinary approach, Imaah uncovers the "hidden dimensions" of Ikwerre architecture, revealing the deep connections between the built environment and the cultural values of the Ikwerre people.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study applied a mixed-method research approach, which is a combination of Qualitative and Quantitative Research methods. This study adopted an in-depth case study; participant observation, Interviews, and questionnaires were used to obtain the necessary data. Field notes and photographs were used to record the observations. The Purposive and Stratified sampling techniques were used to recruit the participants in the study. The sample size of the study was 400. The collected data were analyzed using the Deductive Thematic Analytical method and SPSS.

The questionnaire was designed based on research questions. The instrument was divided into three sections. Section A contained the social and demographic information of the respondents and Sections B – C contained structured questions from the research variables. In Section B, what are the key elements of the Ikwerre Cultural Identity, and in Section C, what are the key features of the Ikwerre Architectural Identity?

A guide was prepared for the interviews. The interview guide contained a list of questions asked in the interviews. This was to ensure that the same number of questions and basic issues were covered in all interview sessions. However, the interviews were conducted in a standardized format.

### Survey Response Rate

The study aimed to survey 400 respondents from the four local governments that make up the Ikwerre ethnic nationality in Rivers State (Table 1), with the sample size determined using Taro Yemen's sampling technique. A response rate of 90.25% was achieved, meaning that 361 out of the 400 questionnaires distributed were returned.

Table 2 and Figures 10 and 11 reveal that at a total summary rate of 400 questionnaire distribution (based on the calculated sample size of the study) and a 345-response rate (based on compliance and availability of respondents), a survey success rate of 86.25% is recorded and consequently forms the representative model of the study. A total of 39 questionnaires were not retrieved due to one reason or the other ranging from time factor and unwillingness of the respondents, which represents a response rate of 9.75%, while a total of 16 questionnaires were invalid, showing a response rate of 4.0%.

Table 3 presents the respondents' perceptions of the importance of various elements of Ikwerre's cultural identity. Each element is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where higher mean scores indicate higher perceived importance.

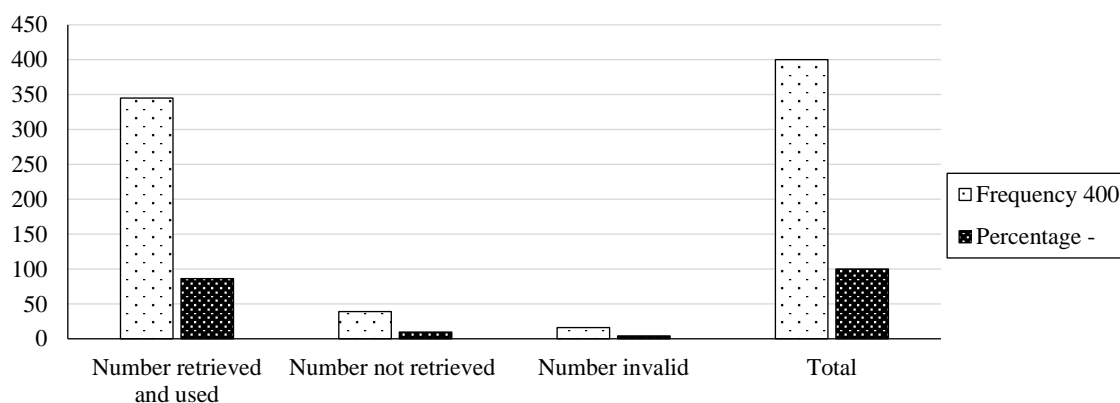
1. *Language (Ikwerre Dialect)*: With a mean score of 4.83 (SD = 0.47), language is perceived as the most important element of Ikwerre's cultural identity, with 85.2% of respondents strongly agreeing with its importance.
2. *Dressing*: This element also scored highly (M = 4.55, SD = 0.74), with 63.2% of the respondents strongly agreeing, highlighting its significant role in cultural identity.
3. *Oral tradition (proverbs, storytelling, and songs)*: Scoring a mean of 4.48 (SD = 0.69): This element is highly treasured, reflecting the importance of oral traditions in cultural communication.
4. *Dance and music*: With a mean score of 4.31 (SD = 1.11), dance and music were considered important cultural elements.
5. *Cultural festivals and cultural celebrations*: Both elements have mean scores of 4.21 (SD = 1.13) and 4.22 (SD = 0.75), respectively, indicating a high perception of their importance.

**Table 1.** Questionnaire Administered and Retrieved.

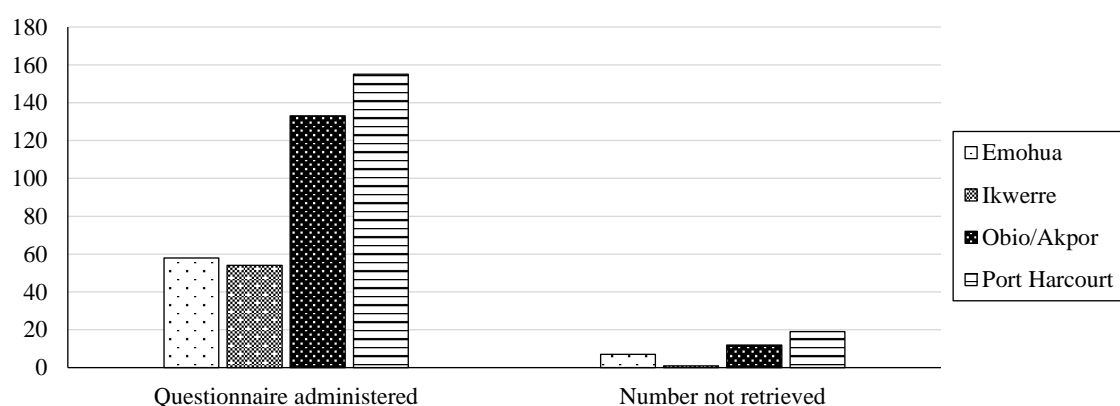
S.N.	Response rate	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Questionnaire administered	400	-
2.	Number retrieved and used	345	86.25
3.	Number not retrieved	39	9.75
4.	Number invalid	16	4.0
5.	Total	400	100

**Table 2.** Distribution of the study sample size/ questionnaire response rate.

S.N.	LGA	Questionnaire administered	Number retrieved	Number invalid	Number valid	Number not retrieved
1.	Emohua	58	51	2	49	7
2.	Ikwerre	54	53	1	52	1
3.	Obio/Akpor	133	121	5	116	12
4.	Port Harcourt	155	136	8	128	19
	Total	400	361	16	345	39



**Figure 10.** Analysis of the questionnaire administered and retrieved.



**Figure 11.** Analysis of the questionnaire distributed to the sample size.

**Table 3.** How strongly do you agree or disagree with the importance of the following as key elements of Ikwerre Cultural Identity?

Cultural identity	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Standard Deviation ( $\sigma$ )	Decision
Language (Ikwerre Dialect)	345	1 0.3%	2 0.6%	1 0.3%	47 13.6%	294 85.2%	4.83	0.47	High perception
Dressing	345	5 1.4%	6 1.7%	3 0.87%	113 32.8%	218 63.2%	4.55	0.74	High perception
Traditional religion (deities and spirits)	345	11 3.2%	26 7.5%	12 3.5%	201 58.3%	95 27.5%	3.99	0.95	Low perception
Cultural festivals	345	27 7.8%	8 2.3%	6 1.7%	129 37.4%	175 50.7%	4.21	1.13	High perception
Cultural celebrations	345	9 2.6%	3 0.87%	3 0.87%	218 63.2%	112 32.5%	4.22	0.75	High perception
Arts and craftsmanship	345	56 16.2%	41 11.9%	33 9.6%	97 28.1%	118 34.2%	3.52	1.47	Low perception
Dance and music	345	17 4.9%	22 6.4%	11 3.2%	85 24.6%	210 60.9%	4.31	1.11	High perception
Farming	345	62 17.9%	59 17.1%	44 12.7%	174 50.4%	6 1.7%	3.01	1.21	Low perception
Food	345	49 14.2	35 10.1	28 8.1	107 31.0	126 36.5	3.66	1.42	Low perception
Oral tradition (proverbs, storytelling, and songs)	345	3 0.87%	7 2.0%	2 0.6%	142 41.1%	186 53.9%	4.48	0.69	High perception
<i>Weighted average/SD</i>							4.08	0.99	

Conversely, the elements with lower mean scores suggest that they are perceived as less critical, including:

1. *Farming*: This element had the lowest mean score of 3.01 (SD = 1.21), with a significant proportion of respondents either disagreeing or agreeing or disagreeing with its importance.
2. *Arts and Craftsmanship*: With a mean score of 3.52 (SD = 1.47), this element had more varied perceptions, indicating moderate importance.
3. *Food*: This element had a mean score of 3.66 (SD = 1.42), indicating moderate importance among respondents.
4. *Traditional Religion (Deities and Spirits)*: Scoring a mean of 3.99 (SD = 0.95), this element has a relatively lower perception of importance than language and dressing.

Overall, the findings suggest that elements such as the Ikwerre dialect, dressing, oral traditions, dance and music, and cultural festivals and celebrations are highly important components of Ikwerre Cultural Identity. By contrast, elements such as farming, arts and craftsmanship, food, and traditional religion are viewed as less critical. The weighted average of 4.08 and standard deviation of 0.99 reflect a generally high perception of the importance of these cultural elements, with some variability.

Table 4 presents respondents' perceptions of the importance of various elements of Ikwerre's architectural identity. Each element is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where higher mean scores indicate higher perceived importance.

**Table 4.** How strongly do you agree or disagree with the importance of the following as key features of Ikwerre Architectural Identity?

Architectural identity	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Standard deviation ( $\sigma$ )	Decision
Obiri Oha (community hall)	345	0 0%	0 0%	3 0.87%	172 49.6%	170 49.3%	4.48	0.52	High perception
Obiri Oro (family hall)	345	1 0.3%	1 0.3%	0 0%	241 69.9%	102 29.6%	4.28	0.51	High perception
Obokoro (meeting hall for men and women)	345	0 0%	0 0%	13 3.8%	199 57.6%	133 38.6%	4.35	0.55	Low perception
Egelege (wrestling square)	345	27 7.8%	8 2.3%	6 1.7%	129 37.4%	175 50.7%	4.20	1.13	High perception
Decorations (murals on walls)	345	7 2.0%	18 5.2%	22 6.4%	107 31.0%	191 55.4%	4.33	0.95	High perception
Courtyard design	345	67 19.4%	51 14.7%	21 6.0%	77 22.3%	129 37.3%	3.44	1.57	Low perception
Obiri Oro (family hall) is positioned at the center of the compound	345	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	90 26.1%	255 73.9%	4.74	0.44	High perception
Head of the family's house at the center	345	33 9.6%	25 7.2%	19 5.5%	117 33.9%	151 43.7%	3.95	1.28	Low perception
Ahia space (market square)	345	40 11.5%	33 9.6%	18 5.2%	144 41.7%	110 31.8%	3.73	1.32	Low perception
The use of Egelege (wrestling square) for cultural dance and wrestling festivals	345	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	217 62.9%	128 37.1%	4.37	0.48	High perception
The use of village square for new yam festivals	345	61 17.7%	11 3.2%	4 1.2%	162 46.9%	107 31.0%	3.99	1.53	Low perception
Storage space for local musical instruments	345	0 0%	0 0%	7 2.0%	129 37.4%	209 60.5%	4.59	0.53	High perception
<i>Weighted average/SD</i>							4.20	0.90	

### **High Perception Elements**

Obiri Oha (Community Hall): With a mean score of 4.48 (SD = 0.52), this element was highly perceived as important, with 49.3% of respondents strongly agreeing. Obiri oro (Family Hall): This element scored highly (M = 4.28, SD = 0.51), indicating its significant role in architectural identity. Obokoro (Meeting Hall for Men and Women): Scoring a mean of 4.35 (SD = 0.55), this element is highly valued. Decorations (Murals on Walls): With a mean score of 4.33 (SD = 0.95), decorations are considered important. Obiri oro Positioned at the Center of the Compound: This element has the highest mean score of 4.74 (SD = 0.44), reflecting its crucial importance. Use of Egelege for Cultural Dance and Wrestling Festivals: Scoring a mean of 4.37 (SD = 0.48), this use of space was highly perceived. Storage space for local musical instruments: This element also had a high mean score of 4.59 (SD = 0.53).

### **Low Perception Elements:**

Courtyard Design: This element has a mean score of 3.44 (SD = 1.57), indicating lower perceived importance. Head of the Family's House at the Center: With a mean score of 3.95 (SD = 1.28), this element was perceived as moderately important. Ahia Space (Market Square): Scoring a mean of 3.73 (SD = 1.32), this element is moderately perceived. Use of Village Square for New Yam Festivals: This element had a mean score of 3.99 (SD = 1.53), indicating moderate perception.

Overall, the findings suggest that elements such as community halls, family halls, meeting halls, decorative murals, central family halls, village squares, wrestling spaces, and storage for musical instruments are perceived as highly important components of Ikwerre Architectural identity. By contrast, elements such as courtyard design, the head of the family's house placement, market squares, and the use of village squares for festivals are viewed as less critical. The weighted average of 4.20 and standard deviation of 0.90 reflect a generally high perception of the importance of these architectural elements, with some variability.

### **Elements of Ikwerre Cultural Identity**

Question one of the studies was formulated to examine the elements of the Ikwerre Cultural Identity. The study found that 294 (85.2%) strongly agree that language represents Ikwerre Cultural Identity, 47 (13.6%) agree, 218 (63.2%) strongly agree that dressing represents Ikwerre Cultural Identity, 113 (32.8%) agree, 201 (58.3%) agree that traditional religion represents Ikwerre Cultural Identity and 95 (27.5 %) strongly agree. 175 (50.7%) strongly agree that cultural festivals represent Ikwerre Cultural Identity, while 129 (37.4%) agree. 218 (63.2%) agreed that cultural celebrations represent Ikwerre Cultural Identity, while 112 (32.5%) agreed. A total of 118 (34.2%) strongly agreed that arts and craftsmanship represented Ikwerre Cultural Identity, while 97 (28.1%) agreed. 210 (60.9%) strongly agree that dance and music represent Ikwerre Cultural Identity, while 85 (24.6%) agree. 174 (50.4%) strongly agree that farming represents an Ikwerre Cultural Identity. 186 (53.9%) strongly agreed that oral tradition (Proverbs, storytelling, and songs) represents Ikwerre Cultural Identity, while 142 (41.1%) agreed. The study found that the majority of respondents strongly agreed that the items were elements of Ikwerre culture. The findings of the study are consistent with those of Jennifer (2011) [31], who argued that architectural identity is commonly conceived and represented as a fixed or historically continuous concept within established domains such as architectural design, heritage conservation, architectural history, and literature, Okonkwo (2013) [32], who noted that the immediate post-colonial city growths were gradual in process and responded to the not very dynamic socio-economic activities of independent Nigeria, and Obot (2007) [33], who stated that architecture is generally concerned with many specific considerations, including dimensions, weights, stresses, and styles.

### **Features of Ikwerre Architectural Identity**

The second research question was formulated to examine the elements of Ikwerre Architectural identity. Analysis of the results found that 172 (49.6%) agreed that Obiri Oha Community Hall is a key element of Ikwerre Architectural Identity, while 170 (49.3%) strongly agreed, 241 (69.9%) agreed that

Obiri Oha Family Hall is a key element of Ikwerre Architectural Identity, 102 (29.6%) strongly agreed, 199 (57.6%) agreed that Obokoro (Meeting Hall for men) and women is a key element of Ikwerre Architectural Identity, 133 (38.6%) strongly agreed, 129 (37.4%) agreed that Egelege (Wrestling square is a key element of Ikwerre Architectural Identity, 175 (50.7%) strongly agreed, and 107 (31.0%) agreed that decorations (Murals on walls) is key element of Ikwerre Architectural Identity while 191 which represent 55.4% strongly agree, 129 by 37.3% agree that courtyard design is key element of Ikwerre Architectural identity while 77 which represent 22.3% strongly agree, 90 by 26.1% agree that Obiri oro (Family Hall) positioned at the center of the compound is key element of Ikwerre Architectural identity while 255 which represent 73.9% strongly agree, 117 by 33.9% agree that head of the family's house at the center is key element of Ikwerre Architectural identity while 151 which represent 43.7% strongly agree, 144 by 41.7% agree that Ahia Space (Market Square) is key element of Ikwerre Architectural identity while 110 which represent 31.8% strongly agree, 217 by 62.9% agree that the use of Egelege for cultural dance and wrestling festivals is key element of Ikwerre Architectural identity while 128 which represent 37.1% strongly agree, 129 by 37.4% agree that Storage Space for local musical instruments is key element of Ikwerre Architectural identity while 209 which represent 60.5% strongly agree, from the above majority of the respondent agree that the items in key elements of Ikwerre Architectural identity, we therefore conclude that details of key elements of Ikwerre Architectural identity. The findings of the study confirm the expectations of the study and are in line with the findings of Jennifer (2011) [31], who concluded that ideas of meaning open up to a dynamic concept of the built environment that enables architectural identity to be understood as an unstable construct that forms and alters according to historically specific socio-cultural, perceptual, and contextual conditions across time; Okonkwo (2013) [32], who stated that urbanization and city growth have over time been in relation to the level of the country's socio-economic development; and Obot (2007) [33], who stated that architecture is generally concerned with many specific considerations, including dimensions, weights, stresses, and styles. Architectural theory and history have traditionally been concerned with the study of monuments that bypass simple or vernacular buildings [34–40].

## CONCLUSION

The study underscores the significance of Ikwerre Architectural Identity and cultural identity, which face challenges amidst modernization and urbanization. Although traditional elements are highly valued, there is a risk of erosion due to changing perceptions and practices. However, people yearning to preserve their architectural identity and culture remain undisputed. Education, awareness, and strategic integration have emerged as key pillars for sustaining Ikwerre cultural heritage through architecture. From the results presented in Table 3, the study found that a significant proportion of the respondents agree and strongly agree that the items are elements of Ikwerre culture, language, dressing, Food, traditional religion, cultural festivals, cultural celebrations, arts and craftsmanship, dance and music, farming and oral tradition (Proverbs, storytelling and songs) are cultural element of Ikwerre in Rivers State.

Evidence from the descriptive statistics, we conclude that the Obiri Oha Community Hall, Obiri Oro Family Hall, Obokoro (Meeting Hall for men and women), Egelege (Wrestling Square), decorations (Murals on walls), courtyard design and position of the head of the family's house, Ahia (Market Square), Farmlands, Storage Space for local musical instruments, Echezi Egelege/playground/village square for cultural dance, and wrestling festivals are key elements of Ikwerre Architectural identity.

## Recommendations

- This study recommends that the relationship between Ikwerre Architecture and culture be sustained to promote Ikwerre Architectural identity.
- The study recommends that awareness should be created of the need to preserve the architectural identity of the Ikwerre people.
- The study recommends that architecture be used as a tool to preserve the cultural identity of the Ikwerre ethnic group.

- From the opinions recorded, it can be seen that they highly recommended recreating traditional solutions for modern times and future needs. To use what we already have, upgrade it, make it sustainable, and adapt it. By doing so, the rich cultural heritage and architectural identity of the Ikwerre people is preserved.

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