



Society of
Nigerian Artists
EDO STATE CHAPTER

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Nigerian Artists
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Edo State Chapter

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Reclaiming Heritage: The Cultural Significance of Returned Benin Artefacts in Contemporary Nigeria

Yusuf Seidu Okus

ABSTRACT

In 1897, many treasures from the Benin Kingdom were stolen during the British punitive expedition. Now, these treasures—like bronze statues, ivory carvings, and royal items—are finally being returned to Nigeria. This return is not just about objects; it represents fairness and cultural justice in today's world. This article chronicles the diplomatic odyssey and moral awakening across Europe and America as well as Nigeria, which culminated in the return, so far, of these Benin artefacts to Nigeria. By highlighting the contributions of individuals, scholars, activists, and institutions, it explores the sacrifices made in confronting colonial legacies. The article also examines the profound cultural significance of these artefacts in contemporary Nigeria, situating their return within Afrofuturist discourse and global socio-cultural plurality; and ultimately underscores the possibility of reconciling history with justice, reclaiming heritage and exploring in a global context all possible value chains that show that heritage is a shared human legacy.

KEYWORDS: Benin artefacts, Cultural heritage, diplomatic Odyssey, Moral awakening, Afro futurist discourse, Socio-Cultural plurality, preservation

INTRODUCTION

To many researchers, the year 1897 remains ahistorical marker for the people of Benin kingdom – the year that saw the plundering of the Benin kingdom and its cultural heritage by the British soldiers through a reprisal war deployed to tactically bring Benin kingdom under Britain's colonial agenda as a protectorate. (Laiwola, 2010:2)

In the words of Laiwola (ibid. xix), “The year 1897 means much to me and my people; it was the year the British invaded our land and forcefully removed thousands of our bronze and ivory works from my great grandfather, Oba Ovonramwen's palace.”

The Oba's palace, established in the 13th century by Oba Ewedo, which once featured a vast complex adorned with brass plaques, intricate carvings, and cowrie-inlaid floors. It suffered great destruction during the British invasion of 1897. (MOWAA Preview Programme. 2024: *City Circuit Tours; Museum in The Making: a new model for West Africa's museums and heritage ecosystem*).

That year, 1897, as Rear Admiral Harry Rawson and his British military nefariously and greedily looted the Oba palace and pillaged costly and highly sophisticated artworks as war booty, what they didn't care to know was that they were carting away the very essence of the spirituality, visual history and records cum religious life of the Edo people—a cultural rape that haunts Britain and the entire West till date. In their imperial colonialism agenda, the British forces succeeded in truncating a thriving African civilization. (Plankenteiner, 2007: 13).

And so, for over a century, the Benin artefacts—intricately cast brass and bronze plaques, royal regalia, ivory carvings, and other treasures—were dispersed to European and American museums, universities, and private collections.

Their displacement became emblematic of cultural dispossession under colonial violence. Yet, over a century later, global tides are shifting, as activists, scholars, historians, anthropologists, cultural influencers and policymakers ignited debates and amplified conversations on restitution, echoing calls by African voices long ignored. The question was not merely *where* the artefacts belonged, but *what justice looked like in practice*.

By the early 2020s, after several cultural advocacies and diplomatic conversations by various stakeholders from different fronts, restitution gained unprecedented momentum: Germany pledged to return more than 1,100 artefacts, the Netherlands repatriated 119 in a single act, U.S. museums relinquished dozens, and UK institutions like Cambridge's Jesus College broke historical ground by restituting the Okukor cockerel. These returns, while partial, signal a tectonic shift: heritage once extracted as spoils of war from Benin kingdom now flows back as gestures of reconciliation and global unity.

The repatriation of Benin artefacts means so much to so many people in Edo State in particular, and Nigeria/Africa in general. The return of the Benin Bronzes is more than just sending objects back—it's about reclamation of heritage, healing, justice, and respect. Western politicians, thought leaders, culture promoters, scholars, and culture activists and rights advocates made tireless efforts to make this possible. For contemporary Nigeria, it means rebirth, creativity, and pride. For the world, it's proof that stolen heritage can be returned, and history can be rewritten with fairness and goodwill.

The Nigerian Observer asserts in *Countdown to Celebrating the Return of Benin Artefacts (1)* that "While partial, these acts mark a tectonic shift: heritage once looted as spoils of war is now flowing back as gestures of reconciliation and cultural justice." (2025, September 12: 9; digital copy).

The Long Diplomatic and Institutional Journey

Over the years, the Benin artefacts have become significant symbols of injustice and the legacy of colonial violence; yet the long road to restitution of thousands of these and other stolen African cultural objects has been fraught with international politics, economic maneuvering, copyright claims and counter claims.

Layiwola (2010:4) argues that for many decades past, several requests made to return the Benin artefacts had cut no ice, except in 1938, when some form of repatriation was made to the Benin monarchy. The then king of Benin, Oba Akenzua II was in ecstasy, singing and dancing as he received part of Oba Ovonramwen's regalia that was found in a private collection in the United Kingdom. To Oba Akenzua, the regalia form parts of a sartorial tradition passed on from generation to generation and, therefore, has no meaning when kept in showcases for viewing pleasure.

In the 1960s, the Nigerian federal government, in an attempt to adequately equip the newly built National Museum in Benin City, had to buy back some of the looted artefacts from Britain at a huge sum. During the Second World Black and African Festival of Art and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977, all attempts made by the Nigerian government convince the British Museum to loan Nigeria the looted Queen Idia ivory mask to use as the mascot and symbol of FESTAC'77 was blatantly rejected with the excuse that the Ivory mask was too fragile to travel. (ibid)

The Benin Dialogue Group (BDG): Since 2007, the BDG facilitated exchanges between Nigerian representatives, the Benin Royal Court, and European museums. Meetings across Hamburg, Cambridge, and Benin City produced a framework for joint stewardship. While initially criticized for favoring loans over restitution, the BDG laid the groundwork for trust, scholarly exchange, and eventual restitution.

Formal Request for Return of Antiquities in British Museum: A major milestone in the age-long diplomatic efforts to return Benin artefacts was achieved on the 25th of October 2021. The *Nigerian Museum*, reports that the "Director-General of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Professor Abba Isa Tijani, submitted the *DEMAND BY THE*

NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT FOR THE RETURN OF NIGERIAN ANTIQUITIES IN TE THE BRITISH MUSEUM to the Chairman of Trustees of the British Museum, Sir Richard Lambert, and The Trustees of the British Museum, through the director of the British Museum, Dr. Hartwig Fischer” (P.2).

Today, however, it’s no more news that the treasures of Benin are gradually finding their way back home. Thanks to many years of diplomatic efforts, debates and advocacy interventions by African and Western cultural activists, social scientists, thought leaders and other actors who pushed, counter-pushed, and continue to push, for the return of Benin artefacts to their ancestral home.

Other significant milestones in the odyssey of Benin Artefacts from dispersal to repatriation include the include Nigeria’s National Commission for Museums and Monuments holding talks with the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow, Scotland, for repatriation of cultural artefacts from Scotland. According to Abdulateef Bello, “Discussions on the return of these precious objects were initiated earlier in the year when Glasgow City Council’s City Administration Committee approved of a recommendation made by the cross-working group for repatriation to return the items to Nigeria after having established that the artefacts which were acquired as gifts, bequest and purchases from auction houses were actually taken from sacred sites and ceremonial buildings during the British Punitive Expedition of 1897.” (Ibid. P.16).

The German Example: Germany emerged as the most decisive European state actor. In July 2022, it signed a declaration with Nigeria to transfer ownership of 1,100 artefacts, with Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock leading ceremonies in Abuja. Her speech acknowledged that the bronzes “belong in Benin City,” embodying Germany’s readiness to confront colonial complicity.

Dapo Sijuade (*The Nigerian Museum*, September 2022: 18) reports that the declaration goes beyond mere restitution. The agreement made provision for an ambitious cultural cooperation between the two countries that will see Germany participating in series of archeological exploration activities in Nigeria, training for Nigerian Museum staff, support for the building of a new museum in Benin, while promoting international travelling and joint exhibitions between the two countries.

This historic declaration has been welcomed by the United Nations educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO, as an example of a successful international cooperation that allows the African continent to reclaim its heritage. (ibid). This agreement is part of a broader effort by Western nations to address their colonial past by returning cultural treasures to Africa. On 21st December 2022, Germany formally returned 22 Benin Bronzes to Nigeria as the first step in the larger repatriation effort. While Germany agreed to return the artifacts, they will not all be physically returned to Nigeria. Approximately one-third of the artifacts will remain on loan in Berlin, Germany, for at least 10 years on loans for exhibits.

German museums like Berlin’s Ethnological Museum, MARKK, and Stuttgart’s Linden Museum released prized collections. Behind these decisions were tireless advocates such as Barbara Plankensteiner, a leading anthropologist and museum director, who coordinated provenance research and framed restitution as ethical, not merely legal.

The United Kingdom: A Patchwork of Return: Though the British Museum still resists full restitution, smaller UK institutions like Jesus College of the University of Cambridge became pioneers. Jesus College, Cambridge, has been reported as “the first institution in the world” to commit to unconditional return of Benin artefacts in their holding to their original home. The institution returned the Benin Bronze cockerel (known as the Okukor) on Wednesday, October

27, 2021, because of historical injustices, colonial-era looting, and a concluding report by Jesus College's own Legacy of Slavery Working Party which found the statue belonged with the Oba of Benin. The college returned the artifact as an act of restitution, with the Oba of Benin expressing gratitude for this leading step in returning cultural heritage stolen during the 1897 British raid on the Benin Kingdom.

The then Director-General of National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), Prof. Abba Isa Tijani, who led a delegation of Nigerian dignitaries to the event expressed NCMM's pleasure to be part of the process, emphasizing that "...we want to enable Nigerians to see what belongs to them, objects of their history of cultural and religious importance which have been away for so long." (Ibid. P.6)

Almost simultaneously, the University of Aberdeen returned its Benin Bronze to Nigeria on October 28, 2021, through a formal handover ceremony at the university's Kings College Centre. Yinka Olajubu (*The Nigerian Museum*, September 2022. P.7) documents: present at the handover ceremony were Malam Suleiman Sani, the Deputy High Commissioner to Nigeria in UK and the Director-General of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), Professor Abba Tijani. Also among the Nigerian team at the event were Prince Aghatise Erediauwa, the younger brother of the current Oba of Benin, Oba Ewuare II, Chief Charles Uwenmsuyi-Edosomwan, the Obasuyi of Benin, Prince Isa Bayero, a Prince of the Kano emirates and Malam Abdul Gimba, Director Museums, NCMM.

The artefact was acquired by the University of Aberdeen at an auction in 1957 but was among thousands of artifacts taken by British soldiers during the 1897 destruction of Benin City in present-day Nigeria.

The bronze, which depicts an Oba (King) of Benin, was returned because the University felt it was acquired in "reprehensible circumstances" after being looted by British soldiers during the 1897 expedition to Benin City, making its unconditional full repatriation the most appropriate action. The University acknowledged that the circumstances of its acquisition were "reprehensible", hence the decision that "unconditional return is the most appropriate action" to take.

Also in 2022, the Horniman Museum restituted 72 artefacts after community consultation. Activist-scholar Dan Hicks, author of *The Brutish Museums*, galvanized public debate, challenging Britain to confront its colonial museum culture.

In the United States, Museums Choosing Morality: U.S. institutions such as the Smithsonian Institution returned 29 bronzes in 2022, while the Metropolitan Museum of Art restituted select artefacts. These actions were influenced by provenance research, but also by moral persuasion from scholars and Nigerian negotiators like Professor Abba Isa Tijani, Director-General of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) at that time.

The Netherlands: Mass Return in 2025: In February 2025, the Netherlands committed to unconditional restitution of 119 artefacts—its largest return to Africa. By June, Oba Ewuare II and Edo dignitaries danced in The Hague as drums and chants sanctified the repatriation. Dutch scholars like Tonko Bogaard and museum professionals from Leiden had long pressed for this moment, underscoring that cultural justice is compatible with scholarship and public display through partnerships.

Our Western Friends' Goodwill & Sacrifices

Personal Brio: As earlier posited in my introduction, we must give kudos to all our Western friends of Benin who labored and sacrificed a lot for us to get to where we are today with the repatriation agenda. The Europeans, Americans and other foreign personalities went against

their own people to resiliently fight for the restitution and reclamation of Benin heritage. Among other rare virtues, they showed political courage, scholarly advocacy, selflessness and empathy.

Individuals like Annalena Baerbock risked political critique at home by prioritizing moral redress over national prestige. Dan Hicks reframed restitution as an urgent ethical obligation rather than academic debate. Barbara Plankensteiner is an important museum director and coordinator for German museum responses, who helped lead provenance research and organized cooperation. She bridged academic research with diplomacy, ensuring decisions were grounded in rigorous provenance studies. Dutch lawmakers reframed national policy to favor restitution as a matter of justice, not loss.

Institutional Sacrifices: Museums like Horniman relinquished some of their most prized exhibits, sacrificing tourist drawings and prestige. American institutions faced criticism from donors and heritage groups yet persisted in restitution.

Scholars and activist Campaigns: People like Dan Hicks (author of *The Brutish Museums*) and international researchers helped change public opinion, pushing museums to treat restitution as a moral duty. The 2018 Sarr–Savoy report also changed how governments and museums thought about restitution, giving a strong intellectual basis for action. Artists like Emeka Ogboh, Monday Midnite, academics like Peju Layiwola, and intellectuals such as Achille Mbembe and Souleymane Bachir Diagne amplified global debates, reframing restitution as part of Africa’s cultural renaissance. Their voices pressured Western institutions to align action with ethics.

Cultural Significance of Returned Benin Artefacts in Contemporary Nigeria

The return of Benin artefacts to Nigeria transcends the physical relocation of objects; it is a profound act of cultural, spiritual, and intellectual restoration. Their homecoming resonates across multiple dimensions of Nigerian life, symbolizing continuity, justice, and future possibility.

Restoration of Historical Memory: The artefacts embody chronicles of dynastic reigns, ritual practices, trade diplomacy, and cosmological beliefs. Their return bridges ruptured generational memory, offering a tangible link between ancestors, the present, and the future.

Oral Traditions Reaffirmed: The Edo are profoundly concerned with their past achievements, which they preserve not in written words but in oral traditions. The Edo view of their past is decidedly monarchical. (Ben-Amos, 1980: 13) The returned artefacts validate Edo oral histories once dismissed by colonial narratives.

Educational Relevance: Nigerian schools and universities now integrate the artefacts into curricula, cultivating pride and cultural literacy among youth.

Spiritual and Ancestral Reconnection: In Benin cosmology, bronzes and ivories were consecrated objects infused with *ase* (spiritual authority). **Ritual Continuity:** The artefacts’ return revives suppressed ritual practices—Oba Ewuare II’s celebrations in 2025 symbolized ancestral welcome. **Healing the Sacred Rift:** Restitution functions as spiritual atonement, undoing the desecration caused by colonial looting.

Cultural Identity and National Pride: The artefacts' homecoming is a collective assertion of dignity. Symbol of Sovereignty: Proof that Nigerian heritage cannot be indefinitely withheld. Collective Ownership: Though rooted in Edo heritage, the artefacts are embraced as national treasures enriching Nigeria's diversity.

Catalyst for Creative Renaissance (Afrofuturism): Through Afrofuturist imagination, the artefacts serve as portals to re-envision Africa's future by engaging with its past. Artistic Inspiration: Nigerian artists and filmmakers reinterpret motifs, blending tradition with futuristic aesthetics. Digital Futures: Digitization and virtual exhibitions allow global engagement on Nigerian terms. Narratives of Empowerment: Afrofuturism situates the artefacts as living seeds for innovation and future agency.

Socio-Economic and Developmental Value: Restitution has tangible impacts on Nigeria's cultural economy. Cultural Tourism: Artefacts attract visitors, strengthening Benin City as a cultural hub. Employment and Skills: Conservation labs and curatorial training create jobs and expertise. Diplomatic Leverage: Restitution enhances Nigeria's soft power in global cultural politics.

Global Socio-Cultural Plurality: The artefacts' return enriches Nigeria and the world. Shared Heritage: Access is maintained through exhibitions, digitization, and partnerships. Dialogue of Equals: Restitution reshapes relations, moving from paternalism to collaboration. New Inquest into Historical Benin Role in the Development of the Atlantic World Prior to 1897 British Invasion: The artefacts embody a visual reference to "the larger role played by Benin kingdom and its empire in the beginning phases of the evolution of the Atlantic World" (Ekeh, 2016: 6) and how, commercially Benin benefitted handsomely from its earlier contacts with the Europeans before the punitive expedition by the British soldiers.

Justice, Healing and Symbolic Reconciliation: The homecoming symbolizes the undoing of historical injustice. Symbol of Healing: Artefacts become instruments of reconciliation, transforming wounds into dialogue. Model for Restitution: Nigeria sets a precedent for other African nations seeking cultural justice.

CONCLUSION

The return of Benin artefacts is more than restitution—it is reconciliation. It demonstrates that when nations, institutions, and individuals choose justice over possession, history can be healed.

Western actors—politicians like Annalena Baerbock, scholars like Dan Hicks, museum leaders like Barbara Plankensteiner, and institutions like the Horniman, Smithsonian, and Leiden—made profound sacrifices. They relinquished prestige, confronted colonial legacies, and sometimes risked backlash to honor justice.

For Nigeria, the artefacts' homecoming is a rebirth: a restoration of Edo memory, a catalyst for Afrofuturist creativity, and a symbol of cultural confidence in a plural world. For the global community, it is proof that heritage, once fragmented by violence, can be re-woven through dialogue, sacrifice, and goodwill.

By praising Western goodwill, we affirm that restitution is not merely a transfer of objects but a covenant of solidarity. The Benin artefacts' return is thus both a homecoming and a beacon—a promise that cultural heritage, when reclaimed, can illuminate a shared human future.

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Camera Angles in Photography: An Exploration of Techniques, Representations and Communicative Strategies for Artistic Documentation

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Sophia Jovita Ejameh
Umobuarie Ebilenen

Abstract

It is a fact that is well known that a picture can speak a thousand words and for centuries artists have been using photography to tell stories and portray complex emotions. One of the most important features of a photograph is the angle at which an image is shot. The various camera angles in photography help to enhance the theme, mood and narrative in a photograph and also convey the same story differently, either portraying same image as powerful or vulnerable. The camera angle marks the specific location at which the camera is placed to take a picture. Where the camera is placed in relation to the subject can affect the way the viewer perceived the subject. This paper examines two camera angles: the high-angle shots and the low-angle shots. For example, shooting from low angles show the subject to be big, powerful and domineering while shooting from high angles make the subject seem small, weak and frightened. It is important to know when and why you want to use specific camera angles for shooting, whether you want your characters to seem powerful or vulnerable. Each picture with the same subject gives a different meaning and emotions. Conclusively, the theme, mood and narrative of a photograph can change significantly depending on the angle and position in which the camera is held, even with the same subject, perspective and composition can alter the depth and dimension. The main difference between a high-angle shot and a low-angle shot is the camera's position relative to the subject. The following recommendations were made: Try new shots and experiment with camera angles, choose your camera shot based on how much you want to include in your photo. Choose angles that evoke the desire feeling, whether power or weakness, it will bring that extra bit of meaning to your shot. Use camera angles to draw viewer's attention to specific elements of the scene or subject.

Keywords: Photography, Camera angles, low-angle shot, High-angle shot

INTRODUCTION

Photography has become a part of our everyday lives; almost everyone has a camera in their cell phone which they use to take photos every day. We constantly see photographic images on our electronic devices, in print media and advertising.

Photography is the process of capturing light with a device called a camera and creating an image which is known as a 'photograph'. A photograph is an image recorded that the human eye could perceive. According to Open House Pictures (2022) it's a well-known fact that an image can speak a thousand words and for decades artists have been using photography to tell stories and portray complex emotions with a single still image.

Although major part of photography storytelling is achieved with lighting, models, props and different backgrounds, one of the most important features of a photograph is the angle at which the image was taken. The variance of camera angles in photography is used to help enhance the theme, mood and narrative in a photograph. Advanced camera shots are those that indicate camera angle and are often used to affect the mood or narrative of the photograph.

Camera angles in photography are used to influence viewer perception, mood and storytelling by altering the perspective of a subject or scene. Common angles include low-angle shots, high-angle shots, eye-level angle, Dutch angle and many more.

Different angles in photography allow you to convey the same story differently, shifting emphasis. Different perspectives add majesty or diminish the same object, depending on the angle from which the object is photographed and its location in image (center, corner), the viewer will understand the main idea differently. (Ksusha, 2024)

There are various types of camera angles that can assist in achieving the intended narrative goal in a photograph. This paper will examine two of the camera angles, the low-angle shots and the high-angle shots. In low-angled shots, the subject is photographed from below eye-level; the camera is placed below the subject, looking up. This can make the subject appear bigger, dominant, powerful, or imposing while in high-angle shots, the subject is photographed from above eye-level; the camera is placed above the subject and tilted downwards. This angle can make a subject look smaller, weak, vulnerable, or insignificant

What is Photography?

Photography is a visual medium that existed in the 1800s. Since then, it has evolved both in form, technology, purpose and expression. Photography is a multifaceted craft that is constantly evolving over time. (kyle, 2022).

Photography is the art, application and the practice of creating durable images by recording light, either electronically by means of an image sensor, or chemically by means of a light - sensitive material such as photographic film. (Ohimai, 2023).

The word Photography literally means ‘drawing with light’, which derives from the Greek photo, meaning light and graph, meaning to draw. Photography is the process of recording an image – a photograph – on a light sensitive film or digital electronic or magnetic memory. Wikipedia.

Photography is the art of capturing light with a camera, usually via a digital sensor or film, to create an image (Belisle, 2013; Peres, 2008; Ohimai, 2020).

Digital photography is the process of taking photographs by using an electronic sensor to capture light rather than film. These images are then stored digitally on a memory card and are easily transferable as a digital file. (kyle, 2022).

What is a Camera?

A camera is an instrument used to capture and store images and videos, either digitally via an electronic image sensor, or chemically via a light-sensitive material such as photographic film. (Remsense, 2024).

Camera is a device for recording an image of an object on a light-sensitive surface: it is essentially a light tight box with an aperture to admit light focused onto a sensitized film or plate. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

What is a photograph?

A picture made using a camera, in which an image is focused on light-sensitive material and then made visible and permanent by chemical treatment, or stored digitally. (Oxford Languages, 2024).

A representation of a person or scene in the form of a print or transparent slide; recorded by a camera on light sensitive material. (Vocabulary.com, 2024).

What are Photography Camera Angles?

An angle refers to the tilt or orientation of the camera lens when shooting. Even with the same subject, the impression can change drastically depending on whether the camera is angled upward or downward. (Tamron, 2025).

Angle in Photography means camera position relative to subject. The position directly affects the final image result. Shooting angle determines overall perspective, an object's appearance, its proportions and its interaction with the background. (Ksusha, 2024).

The camera angle marks the specific location at which the camera is placed to take a picture. Where the camera is placed in relation to the subject can affect the way the viewer perceived the subject. (Open House Pictures, 2022).

From low angles that show the subject to be powerful and domineering to high angles that can make the subject seem small and weak, the type of angle used in your photography can make or break the story you are trying to tell. (Open House Pictures, 2022).

Why is Camera Angles Important for Photography?

Camera angles are important in photography because they define voice, presence and visual purpose. They are a subtle tool, with a major impact. The camera angle and shot size chosen can alter the image and tell a completely different story, a slight variation in the way a camera is tilted can make a huge difference.

Shooting angles are important because they help the photographer direct the viewer's attention to the elements he needs, emphasize certain details, or create dramatic effects. For example, shooting from a low angle can make a subject appear larger and more impressive while shooting from above can give an image a sense of vulnerability or diminish the subject's importance. (Ksusha, 2024).

Trying new shots and experimenting with camera angles will prevent your photo collection from becoming boring and uninspired. Even at a slight variation to the way you tilt your camera can make a huge difference in the resulting image. (Open House Pictures, 2022).

Types of Camera Angles and Their Effects

Low-Angle Shot

Low-angle shots require looking up at your subject from below their eye level and shooting upwards which may require the photographer sitting down or squatting. Low angle shot makes your subject seem bigger, closer, taller and wider.

A low-angle shot is whenever the camera is pointed up, rather than level or down. It's often used to emphasize height. For example, shooting tall buildings from ground level is a low angle shot by default. (Haacker, 2020).

The low angle shot has the effect to make the subject look dominant, powerful, dangerous or heroic. As stated by Iannom (2025), Low camera angle shots are a perfect camera angle for signaling superiority or to elicit feelings of fear and dread.



Fig. 1. Low angle shot. Pet dog. Photo credit: Ksusha Kazak.



Fig. 2. Low angle shot. The Matrix. Photo Credit: SC Lannom



Fig. 3. Low angle shot. Photo credit: Kevin Landwer-Johan
Karen (2025) is of the view that low angle shot can alter the power dynamics within the scene, giving the impression that the subject is in some way powerful, heroic or even dangerous.



Fig. 4. Low angle Shot. Fire service truck. Photo by Patience Ohimai.

The angle, from which the above subject was shot, makes it larger, dominant, powerful and threatening. It gives the impression that the subject is powerful, intimidating and impressive.

High-Angle Shot

High-angle shot is when the camera is positioned above the subject in focus, looking down on the subject before taking a shot. These are often shots from high elevations such as a high building, crane or the use of a drone.

A high-angle shot is a shot in which the camera is physically higher than the subject and is looking down upon the subject. The high angle shot can make the subject look small or weak or vulnerable. (Twinsday, 2024)



Fig. 5. High angle shot. Avengers. Photo credit: Dave Rhuberg.



Fig.6. High angle shot. Photo credit: Kevin Landwer-Johan

High angle shots can significantly alter the impression of photographs, it has the effect to make the subject taken seem smaller, vulnerable, weak, frightened or insignificant. It usually creates a feeling of inferiority.

According to Karen (2025) this camera angle can cast characters as pawns in a larger scheme, overshadowed by external forces or trapped in situations beyond their control. It is a tool that can be harnessed to create empathy, sympathy, or even pity for the characters predicament.



Fig. 7. High angle Shot. Fire service truck. Photo by Patience Ohimai

The above photograph shows a high angle shot which makes the subject appear smaller, weaker, or vulnerable. It imparts a sense of dominance over the subject, it evokes emotions of vulnerability, powerlessness, or insignificance. It also captured the relationship between the subject and its surroundings.

It is important to know when and why to use specific camera shot angles, whether you want your characters to seem powerful, vulnerable or intimate. Each picture with the same subject has a different meaning; the shot taken from the high angle perspective makes the subject look smaller, weaker, or vulnerable while the shot taken from the low angle perspective makes the subject look big, dominant, powerful and threatening. The power of camera angles cannot be understated.

Each of the camera angles has a contrasting effect. A high angle makes the subject look little, frightened or weak, while a low angle creates a sense of superiority, power and dominance. (kyle, 2017).

That's why Lannom (2025) states, it's not enough to just understand shot size. Camera angles and their degrees can totally change the meaning of a shot.

Conclusion

The impression of a photograph can change significantly depending on the angle and position in which the camera is held. Even with the same subject, perspective and composition can alter the depth and dimensionality, emphasizing dynamism and power. The main difference between a high-angle shot and a low-angle shot is the camera's position relative to the subject. According to Landwer-Johan (2024), A good photograph is one that communicates a fact, touches the heart and leaves the viewer a changed person for having seen it.

Photography can serve many purposes and has many facets. Photography can tell a story, it can capture a moment in time, it can document and it can be art. (Eden Gallery, 2021).

Camera angles are essential tools for effectively conveying the subjects' impression. Low-angle shots emphasize dynamism- to make the subject seem taller, bigger, stronger, more

powerful or intimidating. Low-angle shots are used to convey a sense of power and authority, that's why they are often used in superhero and action films and also to represent heroic characters while high-angle shot expresses powerlessness- to make the subject look small, weak, vulnerable and frightened. High-angle shots are used to convey danger, depression and shock. It is normally used in horror movies, thrillers or suspense films. It also provides an overview of the scene where the shot was taken.

A scene may be shot from several camera angles simultaneously; it will give different experiences, effects and emotions. Shots from different angles can change the overall impression of the same subject. Experimenting with different angles can make images more dynamic and engaging.

Recommendation

It is recommended that photographers and lovers of photography should:

- Try new shots and experiment with camera angles, you can create unique and engaging photographs that will grab viewer's attention.
- Choose your camera shot based on how much you want to include in your photo.
- Choose angles that evoke the desire feeling, whether power or weakness, it will bring that extra bit of meaning to your shot
- Use angles to draw viewer's attention to specific elements of the scene or subject

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An Appraisal of the Equipment and Materials for Inkle Loom Weaves for Beginners

**Sophia Jovita Ejameh
Daniel Osaruue Idahosa
Ebilenlen Umobuarie**

Abstract

Inkle looms seem to be one of the easiest looms to manipulate. At a glance, one would notice that the warp pegs are meant to hold narrow weaves. However, most textile designers seem not to have heard about it and as such, they do not know how to manipulate the loom for weaving. This paper tends to focus on appraising the equipment (inkle loom) and materials used for inkle loom weaving, its traditional textile technique, and the challenges in maintaining its relevance in modern textile production due to inadequate understanding of its equipment and materials. This paper examines the structure and functions of the inkle loom; evaluates the materials used in inkle weaving and explores the advantages and limitations of this traditional technique. Moreso, this study reveals the inkle loom's simplicity, portability, and versatility that make it an ideal tool for creating narrow, decorative bands, while emphasizing on the choice of materials which significantly influences the quality and durability of the final product. The research also highlights the importance of preserving traditional weaving techniques and promoting innovation in the textile industry. This study provides a comprehensive appraisal of the equipment and materials used in inkle loom weaving, shedding light on the potential of this traditional technique in modern textile production. Therefore, this paper anticipates finding variations in the quality and performance of equipment and materials, which may affect the overall quality of the textiles produced. Potential problems that may be identified include equipment durability, material sourcing, and sustainability.

In the light of the above, study's findings are expected to contribute to the development of guidelines for the selection and use of equipment and materials in inkle-loom weaving, ultimately enhancing the craft's sustainability and productivity. Textile designers should therefore be able to use this equipment for productivity, self-reliance and self-sustainability.

Keywords: Inkle Loom, Inkle-loom weaving, equipment, materials, appraisal, sustainability, traditional craft.

Introduction

The world of textile is a fascinating and time-honored craft that bridges the realms of traditional artistry and contemporary textile innovation. This seminar paper, "An Appraisal of the Equipment and Material for Inkle Loom Weaves," delves into the intricate world of inkle weaving; a craft that is as functional as it is aesthetic.

Inkle weaving, a method primarily used to produce narrow, durable woven bands, has a rich history that spans centuries and continents. From the intricate belt designs of medieval Europe to the vibrant strap patterns found in South America, the inkle loom has served as a medium for cultural expression and practicality. In modern times, it continues to captivate artisans and designers with its versatility and simplicity. According to Ajiginni & Otu, (2019), "Inkle weaves is a traditional textile technique that has been used for centuries to create narrow, decorative bands or straps.

In recent times, weavers all over the world have seen the need and advantages of this narrow band weaving loom because weaves made from this loom are mostly used for belts, bag straps, narrow trimmings for clothing decoration, etc.

In the light of the above, this paper will provide a comprehensive overview of the equipment and materials integral to the art of inkle weaving. The discussion will explore:

1. **The Inkle Loom:** This study will examine the structural elements and types of inkle looms, from traditional wooden frames to modern adaptations. Understanding the loom's construction, tensioning system and portability will provide insights into its functionality and role in various weaving projects.
2. **Weaving Materials:** it is essential to know that the threads, yarns, and fibers used in inkle weaving should be carefully selected, considering what the woven project will be used for. This includes natural yarns like cotton, wool, and linen, as well as synthetic materials such as nylon and polyester, highlighting their unique properties, durability, and suitability for specific applications.



Fig 1: Inkle Weave Yarn.

Source: <https://nimble-needles.com/wool-and-tools/what-is-a-skein-of-yarn>.



Fig 2: Threaders

Source: <https://daleslooms.co.uk/product/peg-threader-for-peg-looms-and-weaving-sticks>.

3. **Weaving Accessories:** Tools like shuttles, heddles, and threaders, often overlooked, are critical to the success of the weaving process. Their design and quality can significantly influence the efficiency and output of the weaver.
- 4.



Fig 3.



Fig 4.

Fig 3 & 4: Flat Shuttle

Source: <https://warpedfibers.com/wind-weaving-shuttle-and-bobbins>



Fig 5.



Fig 6.

Fig 5 & 6: Bolt Shuttle

Source: <https://warpedfibers.com/wind-weaving-shuttle-and-bobbin>

5. **Cultural and Economic Contexts:** Beyond the technicalities, reflection on the cultural significance of inkle weaving, its role in preserving heritage, its potential as a sustainable craft industry as well as the weaving loom as equipment for the woven fabric becomes significant.

This seminar seeks to foster a deeper appreciation for the tools and materials that make inkle weaving possible. By understanding these elements, it suffices to say that this paper is aimed at inspiring innovation and preserving this beautiful craft in both educational and entrepreneurial contexts.

Overview of Inkle Loom Weaving

Inkle loom weaving is a time-honored craft that involves the creation of narrow, decorative bands or straps through a specialized loom called an inkle loom. This versatile and accessible weaving technique has been practiced for centuries and continues to thrive due to its simplicity, portability, and adaptability to various patterns and designs.

What is an Inkle Loom?

The inkle loom is a small, hand-operated device specifically designed to weave narrow fabrics. The inkle loom itself is a simple, portable weaving device designed to weave narrow warp-faced fabrics (Ibrahim & Sergeant, 2022). Unlike larger looms, it is compact and easy to use, making it ideal for beginners and experienced weavers alike. The loom typically features a series of pegs mounted on a wooden frame to hold and tense the warp threads. Its straightforward design allows for quick setup and efficient weaving, even in small spaces.

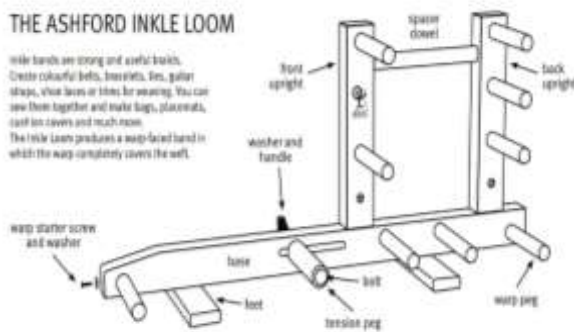


Fig 7.

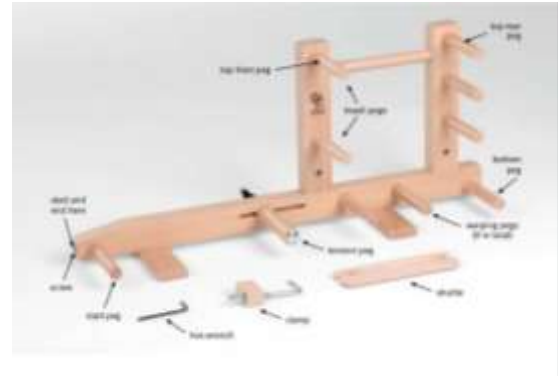


Fig 8.



Fig 9.

Fig 7, 8 & 9: Inkle Looms.

Source:

https://www.ashford.co.nz/images/download_pdfs/learn_to/learn_to_weave_on_the_inkle_loom.pdf

Key Features of Inkle Loom Weaving

1. **Narrow Widths:** The loom is best suited for weaving narrow textiles, such as belts, straps, trims, and lanyards.
2. **Warp-Faced Weaving:** Inkle weaving is primarily warp-faced, meaning the warp threads dominate the design, while the weft threads are mostly hidden.
3. **Pattern Versatility:** Patterns are created by manipulating the arrangement and tension of the warp threads, allowing for intricate geometric and striped designs.

Materials Used in Inkle Weaving

Inkle weaving accommodates a wide range of materials including:

- **Natural Fibers:** Cotton, wool, and linen are traditional choices, valued for their durability and aesthetic appeal.

- **Synthetic Fibers:** Polyester and nylon offer added strength and vibrant color options.
- **Specialty Threads:** Metallic and textured threads can be incorporated for decorative purposes.

Applications of Inkle Loom Weaving

Inkle loom weaving has a wide range of applications, from practical items to decorative accents. Common products include:

- Belts, straps, and lanyards
- Bag handles and camera straps
- Trims for garments and upholstery
- Bookmarks and jewelry

Cultural and Historical Significance

The roots of inkle weaving extend to various cultures across the globe. In Europe, it was used to make decorative trims for clothing, while in South America, similar weaving techniques were integral to traditional attire. Today, inkle weaving serves as a medium for preserving heritage crafts and fostering creativity.

Modern Relevance

Inkle loom weaving remains popular among hobbyists and professional weavers for its ease of use and ability to produce intricate designs without requiring extensive equipment. Its compatibility with sustainable and upcycled materials aligns with contemporary trends in eco-conscious crafting.

Objectives of the Seminar

1. To understand the components of the inkle loom and their functions.
2. To examine the materials used in inkle weaving, such as threads and accessories.
3. To assess the advantages and limitations of various materials and tools.

1. The Inkle Loom: Structure and Function

The inkle loom is compact and straightforward in design (罗, 2014). Its key components include:

- **Frame:** Typically made of wood, the frame provides stability for the weaving process. Its portability makes it ideal for hobbyists and small-scale weavers (Portalés, Pérez, Casanova-Salas, & Gimeno, 2021).
- **Warp Pegs:** These are used to hold the warp threads in position and create the tension needed for weaving.
- **Tensioning Device:** Ensures consistent tension throughout the weaving process, preventing slack threads.
- **Warp and Weft Path:** Guides for threading the warp and weft threads to form the fabric.

Advantages of the Inkle Loom

- Lightweight and portable.
- Easy to set up and use.
- Affordable compared to other types of looms (Başaran & Bekiroğlu, 2023).

2. Materials for Inkle Weaving

The choice of materials influences the quality, durability, and aesthetic of the finished product (Zhu, Ahmed, Parsons, Wang, Tan, Liu, Rudd & Liu., 2018).

Threads

1. **Cotton Threads:**
 - Smooth, strong, and ideal for beginners.
 - Provide a consistent texture.
2. **Linen Threads:**
 - Strong and durable, perfect for functional straps or belts.
 - Requires careful handling to avoid fraying.
3. **Wool Threads:**
 - Offers elasticity and warmth, suitable for decorative purposes.
 - Can create a softer finish.
4. **Synthetic Threads** (e.g., polyester):
 - Resistant to wear and tear.
 - Available in a variety of colors and finishes.

Accessories

- **Shuttles:** Used to pass the weft thread through the warp. Available in wood or plastic.
- **Warp Separators:** Keeps the threads evenly spaced.
- **Beaters or Comb Tools:** For packing the threads tightly to create a dense weave.
- **Scissors and Needle Tools:** Essential for cutting and finishing.

3. Appraising the Equipment and Materials

Durability and Quality

- High-quality wood ensures the loom's longevity.
- Strong, colorfast threads enhance the lifespan and vibrancy of the woven bands.

Versatility

- The inkle loom accommodates various thread types, making it versatile for different projects.
- Adjustable warp length allows for customization of designs.

Challenges and Considerations

- Threads prone to fraying (e.g., linen or silk) require skillful handling.
- Consistent tension is crucial; improper tensioning can lead to uneven weaves.

4. Applications of Inkle Loom Weaving

Inkle woven bands have numerous applications:

- Decorative trims for garments.
- Functional items like belts, lanyards, and guitar straps.
- Historical reproductions of textiles.
- Unique handmade gifts and accessories.

Inkle looms offer several benefits in the weaving process, making them a valuable tool for both novice and experienced weavers. These looms are particularly known for their simplicity, portability, and versatility in creating narrow, warp-faced fabrics.

Key Benefits of Inkle Looms

- **Portability and Accessibility:** Inkle looms are compact and easy to transport, making them accessible for weavers who may not have space for larger equipment. This portability allows for weaving in various settings, promoting creativity and flexibility.

- **Versatility in Products:** Inkle looms are used to produce a wide range of items, including guitar straps, camera straps, shoelaces, belts and fashion accessories. This versatility supports both artistic expression and practical applications, enhancing clothing and other items aesthetically.
- **Encouragement of Creativity and Innovation:** The simplicity of Inkle weaving allows for significant experimentation with patterns and designs. With over 400 patterns available, weavers can explore both traditional and modern designs, fostering creativity and innovation in textile arts.
- **Economic Empowerment and Skill Development:** In regions like the Niger Delta, inkle weaving is promoted as a means of economic empowerment. It provides opportunities for job creation and self-reliance, helping to address socioeconomic challenges by equipping individuals with valuable skills in textile production.
- **Educational Resource:** Inkle weaving serves as an educational tool, offering insights into historical and traditional weaving techniques, sharpens weavers, and learns numerical skills, while also introducing new, innovative designs. This educational aspect can enhance the skill set of weavers and promote cultural heritage.

Recommendation

Inkle looms are a practical and versatile tool in the weaving community, offering benefits such as portability, versatility in product creation, and opportunities for creativity. They also play a significant role in economic empowerment and skill development, particularly in regions seeking to address socioeconomic challenges through traditional craft.

In the light of the above, weavers, lovers of this art of fabric production, as well as the textile industries in Nigeria should delve into the production and usage of inkle looms and its products for self-sustainability and economic growth.

Conclusion

The art of inkle loom weaving is deeply tied to the careful selection of equipment and materials. A well-maintained loom and quality threads can transform a basic project into a masterpiece. As we continue to explore traditional weaving techniques, understanding the tools of the trade remains key to preserving and advancing this craft.

Inkle loom weaving is a delightful and meaningful craft that combines artistry, tradition, and functionality. Its enduring appeal lies in its accessibility and potential for creative expression, making it a valuable skill in both historical and modern textile practices.

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Weaving Heritage: Preserving and Innovating the Itwoji Textile as one of Nigeria's Intangible Cultural Legacy

Oluwaseun Mabel Okuta

Abstract

The Itwoji handwoven fabric of the Igarra people carries deep cultural meaning, reflecting identity, heritage, and community values. Yet, this tradition is at risk due to industrial production, globalization, and the gradual loss of knowledge passed down through generations. This paper reflects on my research into the preservation and renewal of Itwoji, focusing on how traditional weaving techniques can be safeguarded while opening space for innovation. Using a combination of field interviews with local weavers and a literature review of Nigerian textile heritage and cultural preservation practices, the study explores new dyeing methods, loom adaptations, and digital tools for documentation. It considers how this textile can remain relevant in today's world without losing its authenticity. Beyond cultural preservation, the paper also highlights the potential of Itwoji to create opportunities in the creative industry, from cultural tourism to artisan entrepreneurship. Sustaining and reimagining practices like Itwoji not only protects Nigerian cultural identity but also demonstrates how heritage can contribute to economic growth and global recognition.

Keywords: Itwoji, Cultural heritage, Cultural preservation, Cultural identity, Indigenous knowledge transmission

Introduction

In Nigeria, handwoven textiles are more than utilitarian objects; they are archives of cultural heritage and identity. Across ethnic groups, textiles mark rites of passage, symbolize status, and communicate histories. Celebrated fabrics such as Yoruba Aso-Oke, Igbo Ukara, and Hausa embroidered cloths embody unique techniques and layered meanings (Picton, 1991; Beier & Beier, 1995). These textiles narrate values, cosmology, and memory, conferring identity and continuity. Within this heritage, the Itwoji fabric of the Igarra people of Edo State holds a distinctive place.

The Igarra, south of the Niger-Benue confluence, are renowned for vertically oriented broadloom weaving, producing Itwoji. Characterized by intricate Ikat patterns from warp tie-dyeing, Itwoji reflects ingenuity and symbolism (Okuta, 2025; Adire African Textiles, 2025). Beyond aesthetics, it is a cultural emblem of Igarra identity, heritage, and cohesion. As textile artist and cultural ambassador Mabel Okuta emphasizes, Itwoji preserves legacy while fostering innovation rooted in ancestral aesthetics (Okuta, 2025).

Despite its richness, Itwoji faces existential threats. Industrial mass production and imports have disrupted indigenous consumption, undermining handweaving (Erekosima & Eicher, 1981; Pessu, 2018). Machine-made fabrics reduce demand, while globalization shifts tastes toward global fashions (Nwabueze, 2009; Loto, 2008). In Igarra, these pressures weaken intergenerational transmission as youth migrate or seek other livelihoods (Okuta, 2025).

Infrastructural deficits worsen the crisis: obsolete looms, scarce raw materials, and limited institutional support constrain weavers (Inyang, 2023; IAR Consortium, 2021). These challenges mirror Nigeria's broader textile decline—from Africa's largest industry to widespread closures and job losses (IAR Consortium, 2021; Pessu, 2018). Addressing this requires reimagining Itwoji as a dynamic tradition adaptable to social and economic change. A framework is provided by UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural legacy, which defines legacy as customs and knowledge that are maintained via

community involvement (UNESCO, 2003). This highlights that safeguarding Itowoji requires not only documentation but also innovation for relevance and viability (Okuta, 2025).

Nigeria offers precedents. The global revival of Yoruba Adire shows how indigenous dyeing can be revitalized through fashion and entrepreneurship (Beier & Beier, 1995). Similarly, the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) promotes craft preservation, tourism, and creative industry development, showing how heritage supports empowerment (NCAC, 2024). These examples suggest models for safeguarding Itowoji through a living heritage approach balancing continuity and change.

This study positions Itowoji as a case for preserving and innovating handwoven fabrics within Nigeria's shifting landscapes. Drawing on field research with local weavers and reviews of heritage, policy, and artisanal innovation, it examines pathways such as education, collaborative dyeing, loom adaptation, and digital documentation. These strategies honor tradition while enabling creative evolution. Beyond preservation, revitalizing Itowoji can stimulate the creative economy, tourism, and artisan entrepreneurship, strengthening community resilience and national identity.

In summary, safeguarding Itowoji transcends conservation; it requires reinvention and lived practice. By weaving tradition and innovation, Igarra textile heritage can flourish anew, asserting Nigerian legacies in a globalized world.

Literature Review

Indigenous Nigerian Textile Heritage and the Position of Itowoji

Nigerian textile heritage is marked by a diversity of handwoven and hand-dyed fabrics that function as cultural archives embodying histories of ethnic identity, social organization, and artisanal mastery (Picton, 1991; Beier & Beier, 1995). Among the most celebrated are the Yoruba Aso-Oke, the Igbo Ukara, and the Akwete cloths of southeastern Nigeria. Aso-Oke is a premium handwoven cloth used in ceremonies and rituals, valued for its distinctive weaving patterns and fiber textures (Beier & Beier, 1995). Ukara cloth, historically tied to Igbo nobility, carries symbolic embroidered motifs. Akwete fabric is renowned for its complex weaving and has found new relevance in contemporary fashion markets (Anyanwu, Chukueggu & Orubu, 2022). Together, these textiles showcase Nigeria's intangible heritage, preserving artisanal skills, symbolic languages, and community histories.

Yet, while Yoruba and Igbo traditions receive extensive scholarly attention, the vertical broadloom weaving of the Igarra people—embodied in the Itowoji fabric—remains underexplored. This is significant given the fabric's cultural weight within Edo State. Produced by women using a vertical broadloom and Ikat-style warp-dyeing, Itowoji reflects technical sophistication and cultural symbolism (Okuta, 2025; Adire African Textiles, 2025). In Akoko Edo, Itowoji is a visible emblem of pride, social belonging, and identity, frequently worn at festivals, age-grade ceremonies, and rites of passage.

Historical Emergence and Symbolism of Igarra Weaving Tradition

The Igarra, or Anetuno, are the indigenous people of Etuno land in Edo State's Akoko Edo Local Government Area (Midwest Nigeria Handbook, 1970). Their settlement lies amid rocky savannah terrain ringed by the Kukuruku hills, which historically provided refuge during intertribal warfare. Culturally and linguistically, the Igarra share ties with the Ebira of Kogi State and maintain certain affinities with Yoruba groups, though their language and customs remain distinct. Oral traditions trace their migration from Idah in present-day Kogi, led by Prince Ariwo Ovejjo after a succession dispute in the Igala kingdom.

Upon settling in Etuno—named after UNO, an aboriginal leader—the Igarra developed a kingdom grounded in kinship and warfare. Men engaged in farming and hunting, while women

specialized in weaving Itowoji, sustaining household economies and reinforcing social status (Midwest Nigeria Handbook, 1970).

The Itowoji cloth is woven into the rhythms of community life. Its use during the Aba festival, celebrated every seven years, underscores its ritual importance. Colors and motifs mark lineage, age-grades, and values, functioning as symbolic texts that affirm social hierarchies and continuity. In this way, Itowoji serves as both material culture and a living archive of Igarra identity.

Intangible Heritage Framework and African Scholarship

UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage provides a critical framework for situating Itowoji within global discourses. The convention emphasizes heritage as practices and knowledge systems carried through community engagement, not just artifacts (UNESCO, 2003). This resonates with African scholarship, which frames heritage as a "living process" continually adapted to shifting contexts (Mwangi, 2016; Nzegwu, 2015).

Scholars stress that safeguarding requires community participation, transmission of skills, and innovation that preserves meaning while ensuring survival (Mbiti, 1990; Adeyemi, 2019). Intangible heritage such as weaving is a socio-cultural repository that strengthens identity and resilience in times of transformation (Onwuejeogwu, 2005). From this perspective, the Itowoji tradition is both a cultural text and a platform for renewal, demanding strategies that combine documentation with creative reinvention.

Threats to Continuity: Industrial Fabrics, Globalization, and Apprenticeship Loss

The survival of Itowoji weaving is threatened by multiple forces. Industrially produced textiles, both imported and domestic, offer cheaper alternatives, displacing demand for handmade cloth (Erekosima & Eicher, 1981; IAR Consortium, 2021). Globalization further shifts consumer preferences toward mass-produced fashions (Nwabueze, 2009). In Igarra, this erodes the transmission of weaving knowledge as younger generations migrate to cities in search of employment (Okuta, 2025).

The apprenticeship system, once central to sustaining weaving, is in decline. Weavers note dwindling youth interest and limited institutional support for tools, raw materials, and marketing (Inyang, 2023). These local struggles mirror Nigeria's broader textile industry collapse—from Africa's largest to a sector marked by closures and import dependency (IAR Consortium, 2021; Pessu, 2018).

Adaptive Strategies and Revitalization in Nigerian Textiles

Despite these pressures, Nigerian textiles show resilience through adaptive strategies. The Yoruba Adire renaissance demonstrates how resist-dyeing has been reimagined for global markets through fashion entrepreneurship and cultural branding (Beier & Beier, 1995). Government bodies like the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) have advanced preservation through training, exhibitions, and tourism programs that empower artisans (NCAC, 2024).

For Itowoji, similar opportunities lie in digital documentation, cooperative marketing, and design experimentation. Its vertical loom technique and Ikat-inspired motifs hold distinctive aesthetic value that could be leveraged for cultural tourism, festivals, and creative industries (Okuta, 2025). Such initiatives can secure continuity while embedding Itowoji in Nigeria's creative economy.

Research Gaps: Focus on Itwoji and Igarra Traditions

Despite cultural recognition, academic engagement with Itwoji remains limited compared to Yoruba and Igbo textiles (Picton, 1991; Beier & Beier, 1995). Its symbolic language and embedding in Igarra rituals call for more detailed ethnographic and policy-oriented research. Addressing this gap would advance knowledge of underrepresented traditions while contributing to strategies for sustainable cultural preservation.

The Itwoji fabric exemplifies the interweaving of history, ritual, and identity within Nigerian textile heritage. Yet its continuity depends on adaptive strategies that link tradition with modernity. Recognizing Itwoji within frameworks of intangible heritage highlights its role as a living cultural process, not a static artifact. By revitalizing weaving practices through innovation, education, and community participation, the Igarra people can preserve both identity and livelihood. In doing so, they ensure that Nigerian cultural legacies remain vibrant in a globalized world.

Methodology

This study employs ethnographic methods to examine the cultural, technical, and symbolic dimensions of the Itwoji weaving tradition in the Igarra community. Combining interviews, visual documentation, archival research, and experimental practice, the study is guided by heritage preservation theory and creative economy perspectives, with strong ethical commitment to respectful community engagement and safeguarding indigenous knowledge.

Fieldwork and Interviews

Fieldwork involved interviews with weavers, cultural custodians, and elders active in preserving the Itwoji tradition. A key video interview was conducted with Oziofu Akpeji, an experienced dyer with nearly two decades of practice. She provided insights into dyeing techniques, the role of Ikat, and the use of synthetic chemicals, while expressing interest in natural alternatives. Her testimony highlighted challenges artisans face, including health risks and limited resources. Questions explored weaving processes, symbolism, craft sustainability, and market shifts. Elders added historical and cultural depth, situating Itwoji within Igarra identity. This approach ensured diverse perspectives and aligned with best practices in ethnographic heritage research.

Visual Documentation

Photographic and video recordings complemented interviews, capturing stages of vertical broadloom weaving from yarn preparation and warp tying to fabric display. Documentation of tools, workspaces, and artisans' tactile skills preserved practical knowledge often absent in written sources, while also creating resources for community heritage archives.

Archival and Textual Research

Archival investigation examined historical texts, ethnographies, and scholarly works on Nigerian weaving traditions such as Aso-Oke, Adire, Ukara, and Itwoji. This contextualized technical developments, cultural meanings, and socio-economic dynamics shaping textile preservation. Policy documents from the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) and UNESCO's intangible heritage guidelines further situated the study within national and global preservation frameworks.

Experimental Dyeing Practice

In response to sustainability concerns, the research tested natural dyes such as turmeric and logwood on Ikat yarn from Igarra. Trials revealed difficulties with polyester blends, which

limited dye uptake, underscoring tensions between economic viability and environmental goals. Nonetheless, the experiments fostered dialogue on eco-friendly innovation in Itwoji dyeing while maintaining design integrity and safeguarding artisan health

Analytical Framework

The analysis drew on heritage preservation theory, which frames intangible cultural heritage as a lived practice requiring community agency and adaptive transmission (UNESCO, 2003; Adeyemi, 2019), and on creative economy approaches that emphasize the economic viability and innovation of artisan crafts in modern markets (NCAC, 2024; Beier & Beier, 1995). Together, these lenses offered a holistic view of Itwoji weaving's resilience and potential for sustainable development.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed strict ethical standards, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and accurate representation of participants. All contributors were briefed on the study's purpose and data use, with the option to withdraw at any time. Visual and textual materials were shared back for validation to reduce misrepresentation. Intellectual property rights of artisans were respected, in line with UNESCO's guidelines on intangible cultural heritage, and the research committed to supporting community efforts in documentation, education, and sustainable transmission of weaving knowledge.

By integrating ethnographic inquiry with visual documentation, archival research, and experimental practice, this methodology captures the multifaceted nature of the Itwoji weaving tradition. Grounded in ethical collaboration and robust theoretical frameworks, the study generates knowledge aimed at both documenting and actively supporting the innovation and safeguarding of this distinctive Nigerian textile heritage.

Findings and Discussion

Cultural Symbolism of Itwoji

Itwoji fabric symbolizes the identity, heritage, and belonging of the Igarra people. Worn during festivals like the Aba Festival, it marks age-grade, social status, and intergenerational ties. Its intricate Ikat patterns and traditional colors convey ancestry, cosmology, and communal values. As a living emblem, Itwoji fosters pride and asserts Igarra distinctiveness, continuously woven into communal life by older and younger generations.

The Loom and Weaving Techniques

Itwoji is made on a vertical broadloom, less common than horizontal looms, shaping its unique technical and aesthetic qualities. Warp yarns undergo Ikat resist dyeing—tightly tied and dyed multiple times—to create precise patterns. While synthetic dyes are common, natural alternatives are being explored for health and environmental reasons. Weaving demands skillful loom operation, tension control, and precise pattern alignment, reflecting high craftsmanship transmitted through apprenticeship. The loom serves as both a practical and symbolic axis of cultural continuity.

Transmission of Knowledge

Weaving skills are passed through family and community apprenticeships, teaching both technique and cultural meaning. However, generational shifts, migration, and economic changes erode this system. Youth increasingly see weaving as less viable, and limited institutional support hampers sustained knowledge transfer, threatening Itwoji's cultural authenticity.

Challenges

Contemporary pressures include imported machine-made textiles, economic competition, generational disinterest, undervaluation in policy, and health risks from chemical dyes. Limited access to raw materials further complicates sustainable practice.

Preservation Pathways

Community efforts, like festivals and special events, keep Itowoji heritage alive and visible. Museums and cultural centres preserve and display textiles, while schools and craft programs introduce younger generations to the weaving tradition. Projects that document techniques, through video archives and oral histories, create valuable resources that help pass on skills and nurture cultural pride.

Innovation Pathways

Integrating eco-friendly dyes, exploring loom modifications, and experimenting with weave patterns ensure economic viability while preserving aesthetics. Digital documentation supports pattern sharing and marketing. Collaborations with fashion designers reimagine Itowoji for global and local markets, fostering cultural entrepreneurship.

Positioning Itowoji in Creative Industries and Tourism

Itowoji serves as both cultural heritage and economic resource. Community cooperatives and artisan enterprises can leverage their uniqueness to develop sustainable livelihoods, cultural tourism, and niche markets, linking heritage preservation with economic empowerment while maintaining authenticity and intergenerational vitality.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Itowoji textile is a powerful symbol of the Igarra people's identity, heritage, and community values. More than just a fabric, it carries collective memory and social cohesion. It is worn during major festivals, like the Aba Festival, signaling age-grade, social status, and intergenerational connection. Its intricate Ikat patterns and traditional colors tell stories of ancestry, cosmology, and communal life, making Itowoji a living expression of Igarra culture. At the heart of its creation is the vertical broadloom loom, which gives the fabric its distinctive technical and aesthetic qualities. Weavers prepare warp yarns using the Ikat resist-dye technique and operate the loom with precision, a skill passed down through generations. Preserving both the loom and weaving methods is essential to maintaining Igarra cultural heritage.

Yet, the tradition faces serious challenges. Imported, machine-made textiles are cheaper and more widely available, reducing demand for handwoven cloth. Many young people leave the community for urban jobs, and generational interest in weaving is declining. Limited recognition and support from cultural policies, combined with scarce access to training and materials, further threaten the craft's survival.

Despite these pressures, preservation efforts persist. Local festivals and Itowoji-focused events keep the tradition visible, while museums and cultural centers showcase the textiles and educate the public. Schools and craft programs teach younger generations, and community projects, including video archives and oral histories, document techniques and cultural knowledge.

Innovation also plays a vital role. Natural dyes like turmeric and logwood address environmental and health concerns, while loom modifications and experimental weave patterns allow creative growth without compromising tradition. Digital tools help replicate patterns,

share designs, and reach new markets. Collaborations with fashion designers reimagine Itowoji for local and global audiences, opening doors for cultural entrepreneurship. By treating Itowoji as both cultural heritage and economic resource, communities can create sustainable livelihoods, develop cultural tourism, and strengthen local creative industries. Itowoji is not just a textile—it is a living archive of Igarra identity and creativity. With community support, thoughtful innovation, and policy backing, its legacy can thrive for generations, blending cultural pride with economic opportunity.

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