

# SEMIOTIC LITERACY AND PRACTICES IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEM: A CASE STUDY OF *NSIBIDI* IDEOGRAMS IN CALABAR, CROSS RIVER STATE

**Ukoha O. Igwe (PhD, CLN)**

Department of Library and Information Science  
Faculty of Education, National Open University of Nigeria, Jabi, Abuja  
Email: [uigwe@noun.edu.ng](mailto:uigwe@noun.edu.ng)

**Nkata U. Kalu (PhD)**

Department of Library and Information Science  
Faculty of Education, National Open University of Nigeria, Jabi, Abuja  
E-mail: [nkkalu@noun.edu.ng](mailto:nkkalu@noun.edu.ng)

**Ngozichukwu A. Chukwuma**

Department of Arts  
University of Calabar.

## Abstract

This study examined Semiotic Literacy and Practices in African Traditional Communication System: a case study of Nsibidi ideograms in Calabar, Cross River State. Nsibidi Ideograms are ideographical representations used mainly by the Ekpe society. Two research questions were raised to guide the study. Relevant literature and empirical studies related to the study were reviewed. The methodology adopted was Research Survey Design (RSD). The population of 506 members of Ekpe fraternity was used. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to get a sample size of 112. A structured questionnaire was used to sample opinions from the respondents who are mostly Chiefs, Young Initiates, Opinion Leaders, and foreign members of the group within Calabar Metropolis. Data were collated, analyzed, and presented through simple frequency, percentage and table. It was discovered among others that the level of usage of Nsibidi ideograms is high among the study locale. In addition, the effect of Nsibidi ideogram as an African traditional system is also high among the study group. It was therefore recommended among other authorities, government, and stakeholders concerned should promote Nsibidi ideograms by extension African communication system by organizing regular training, seminars and symposiums to people.

**Keywords:** Nsibidi Ideograms, Traditional Communication System, Semiotics, Literacy

## Introduction

Communication, generally, plays a significance role in all human daily endeavors. It can be argued that no meaningful interaction, development, associations, and dealings can take place without engaging the option of communication. It is seen as the act of exchanging information between persons, groups, and or societies through a commonly known behaviours, signs, and symbols that the

participants must not fail to understand. Communication is a two-way mode of expression between the encoder and the decoder which involves a process by which a sender passes information to the decoder or receiver. Such information may involve contacting, relaying, and transferring ideas, news, secrets, messages, orders, and information from individuals, groups, and communities to others through a medium such

as *Nsibidi* in African traditional communication system.

African traditional communication practices are trusted and majority of Africans seem to believe in what comes out of them and usually use them. Hence, *Nsibidi* ideogram perhaps is counted among the numerous of these communication practices which enable Africans to communicate freely with one another. Sadly, *Nsibidi* ideograms as a semiotic communicative device that often serves as part of African traditional communication system have not been fully utilized which has led to its lagging in growth and spread as a global scheme.

Nevertheless, scholars have proved that a lack of skills in communication results in false understanding. The language has four communication skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) where the representations are in the forms of signs and symbols. Signs and symbols are usually regarded as semiotics. The signs may be verbal and nonverbal. It is a type of scientific inquiry that studies virtually everything we do, use to represent the world around us, and to make messages about something. Therefore, semiotics are considered a subject, a movement, a philosophy, or science (Aydogan & Arkbarov, 2014; Pfeiffer 1998).

Hence, the phenomenon that distinguishes human characteristics from the non-living entities is *semiosis*. Semiosis can be defined as the inherent capacity of all living organisms to produce and understand signs. In other words, living creatures can communicate through the use of signs. On the other hand, Semiotics is the academic field dedicated to the study of signs concerned with the process of creating meaning. It includes the study of signs and sign processes, indication, designation, likeness, analogy, allegory, metonymy, metaphor, symbolism, signification, and communication. Communication itself is a particular process of semiosis that is a sign

process which indicate that ultimately the aim of the sign process is to understand how communication is possible since all communication presumes shared codes (Peirce, 1998; Noth, 2014)

According to Abdullahi-Idiagbon, (2010) the essence of semiotics is the isolation of systems of signification and the rules that govern their use. Sign, in semiotics particularly, is seen as a subjective or individual property. Because meaning is subjective, it thus takes time for members of a society or cultural community to understand it. In other words, men create meaning out of the available forms of signs sometimes in an immeasurable gradual manner. Those meanings are based on how we interpret our world based on values and experience and make them understandable to others through representation and communicative structures. Whereas, the ability to inscribe and interpret signs and communicative structures in a generally acceptable form makes someone semiotic literate.

According to Chandler (2003) culture is a major factor in producing and interpreting signs. Africa as the cradle of civilization, intellectualism, and humanity possesses the most unique means of communication in the world despite the modern means of communication like the mass media and the new media of the internet and social media (Osho; 2010; Sulaiman 2011). In other words, Africa as the source of modern civilization is not only unique in culture, values, and tradition, but in its means of communication. Arguably, the totality of means of communication is believed to be originated from the earliest Africans which points to the fact that the use of *Nsibidi* ideograms as part of semiotic literacy practices in African traditional communication system has been part of African cultural heritage

However, it's meaningful to understand the African communication system and identify some of its practices with reference to the non-verbal aspect-visuals. There are numerous ways Africans express themselves both verbally and non-verbally. The non-verbal aspects include the use of semiotics- the science of signs and symbols. Akpabio (2003) maintain that indigenous communication are processes that directly utilizes symbols, values, and institution which directly appeal, and readily connect with the people and thus enhance the variety and effectiveness of the message that circulates in the community.

Akpabio (2003) also states that communication's primary goal is to transmit an intended meaning accurately and effectively, which means communication is merely a means to an end. This implies that the primary focus of communication is on explicit content rather than on form or stylistic features. Hence, semiotic writing or representations are very important in African traditional system for the fact that they stand for different things and are generally and conventionally accepted. They are dynamic human activities that touches every domain of living or meaningful development and peaceful co-existence in the African society (Uche, 2012).

The essence of any form of language, spoken, written, non-verbal, etc, is to generate meaning once users find it communicative. Nevertheless, available facts like; 1, the period required for the evolution of a language; 2, the number of effort required in creating acceptable orthographic symbols and 3, the widespread of illiteracy in a speech community – all lend credence to the assertion that non-verbal means like *Nsibidi* is one of such effective non-verbal communicative codes.

*Nsibidi* ideograms as a form of non-verbal communication are ancient ideograms peculiar to the Efiks, Ejagham, Ibibio, and by

extension, some parts of Igboland -Ohafia, Abiriba, and Arochukwu. The concept of *Nsibidi* also referred to as *nsibiri*, *nchibiddi* or *nchibiddy*, is an ancient system of artistic symbols, locally developed as a unique form of ideographic writing long before the advent of Europeans to Africa. Factually, *Nsibidi* debunks the notion that information dissemination in pre-colonial Africa was accomplished only through oral traditional channels. Being Africa's oldest scripted form behind hieroglyphics, *Nsibidi* has been used to document history, celebrate the people's heritage, instruct values, reinforce communication, deliberate on key issues, and resolve conflicts (Feelnubia, 2014; Agbo, 2019).

It is no doubt that the *Nsibidi* hermeneutic system is developed by the *Ekpe*, esoteric order of Efik origin then to other South-south and South-east regions in Nigeria. Oluwatoyin (2018) argues that *Ekpe* is a name from Efik, Ejagham, and Efut Nigerian ethnic groups respectively, which is a variant of 'leopard', demonstrating this esoteric body. *Nsibidi* therefore may be seen as a hermeneutic system, a cognitive configuration embracing a symbol network as well as ideas about the epistemic logic that informs that symbolism.

Ischie (1997) maintains that in its basic form *Nsibidi* relies on abstract and pictographic signs. Specifically, it comprises representations of words and morphemes (logography) as well as representations of ideas and concepts (ideography), which form an extensive vocabulary storehouse. There are thousands of *Nsibidi* signs covering a range of topics and emotions, including romance, warfare, sacred secrets and rites, social institutions, gender relations, family structures, and legal hierarchies. In addition to delineating the human condition, *Nsibidi* serves as a pathway to understanding the linguistic patterns of cultures that have developed and utilized the model.

Perhaps, semiotic literacy could provide an insight into the meaning and understanding of African traditional communication systems through the application of *Nsibidi* ideograms of the Efiks of Calabar Cross River State Nigeria. This study, therefore, ascertains semiotic literacy practices and African traditional communication system using *Nsibidi* ideograms as a case study

### Statement of the Problem

Over time, colonialism and the advancement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) appears to have taken over the African traditional communication systems like the *Nsibidi* ideograms of Calabar. These media are arguably powerful communication system that meets most of contemporary society's information need. Yet, within this purview, rural people do not seem to be abreast with these technologies. The rural people rarely have access to mainstream communication systems and their exposure to them is highly limited by several issues. However, they tend to attach much significance to their indigenous communication system, indicating that the systems are still relevant today, and are, therefore, worthy to be researched.

There have been alarming issues with African traditional semiotics. These are largely attributed to the low level of semiotic literacy. Most people have little or no knowledge about the semiotic signs/symbols that abound in Africa, particularly the famous *Nsibidi* ideograms that have been used for communication over the years. The reading and understanding of semiotics seem to be difficult, specific to Nigeria, due to considerations that there is a low literacy rate, especially among the rural dwellers. The consequence of this is the ineffective interpretation of signs and symbols.

Different researches have been carried out on traditional communication systems, semiotics, literacy, and ideograms, but there has been no

clear linkage between the study of ideograms as a tool for semiotics literacy and the *Nsibidi* of Calabar. Hence, the designed to provide insights into the *Nsibidi* ideograms of the Calabar, Cross River State, as a semiotic communicative device that has long been appreciated, yet has also been retarded in its growth and development and its consequent adoption as a universal scheme.

This, therefore, creates a gap in research and brings to birth the research into semiotics literacy and practices in African traditional communication system using the *Nsibidi* ideograms of the people of Calabar in Cross River as a case study, to ascertain if a sustainable good literacy level of *Nsibidi* ideograms will impact positively on the understanding of African traditional communication system.

### Research Questions

- i. What is the level of usage of *Nsibidi* ideograms among the Efiks in Calabar?
- ii. What are the effects of *Nsibidi* ideogram on traditional communication system among the study locale?

### Literature Review

#### *Nsibidi* Ideograms

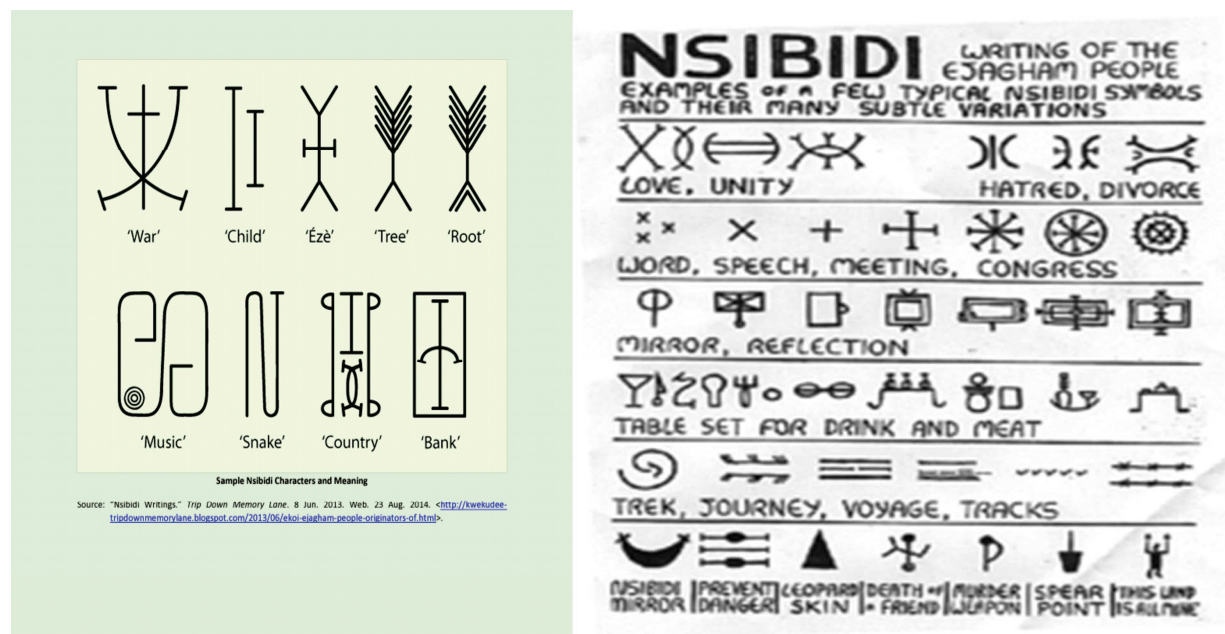
In general term, an ideogram are symbols presented in a geometric shape used to convey ideas or concepts. According to Dictionary.com (2021) it is a character symbolizing the idea of a thing without indicating the sounds used to say it. Examples include *Nsibidi*, numerals, and Chinese characters. According to *Elechi (2006)*, *Nsibidi*(also known as *nsibiri*, *nchibiddi* or *nchibiddy*) is a system of symbols indigenous to what is now Southeastern Nigeria that are pictograms, though there have been suggestions that some are logograms or syllabograms. The symbols are at least several centuries old—early forms appeared on excavated pottery as well as what are most likely ceramic stools and headrests

from the region of Calabar, with a range of dates from 400 to 1400 CE.

Slogar (2007), maintained that there are thousands of *Nsibidi* symbols, of which over 500 have been recorded. They were once taught in a school to children. Many of the signs deal with love affairs; those that deal with warfare and the sacred are kept secret. *Nsibidi* is used on wall designs, calabashes, metals (such as bronze), leaves, swords, and tattoos. It is primarily used by the *Ekpe* leopard secret society (also known as *Ngbe* or *Egbo*), which is found across Cross River among the Ekuts, Efiks, Ejagams, Ibibios and also among the Ohafia, Abiriba, Arochukwu people of Abia State.

Slogar (2005) asserts that outside knowledge of *Nsibidi* came in 1904 when T. D. Maxwell noticed the symbols. Before the British colonisation of the area, *Nsibidi* was divided into a sacred version and a public, more decorative version which could be used by women. Aspects of colonization such as Western education and Christian doctrine drastically reduced the number of *Nsibidi*-literate people, leaving the secret society members as some of the last literates in the symbols.

**Pix 1: An *Nsibidi* inscription of the Ekik people of Calabar**



Source: <http://www.feelnubia.com/index.php/culture/tongues/133-the-ancient-Nsibidi-writing-system.html>

### Semiotics Literacy

Semiotics is concerned with how meaning is constructed, transmitted and understood through signs, and symbols which has some aspects of cultural and sociological dimensions. Hence, culture then becomes the

major factor that is used in the production and interpretation of signs and symbols. Semiotics is the study of signs, their forms of expression, and contents. Signs in the non-metaphorical sense are phenomena produced intentionally by humans and taken by humans to show the

intention of the producer, and it's content. Beyond the most basic definition as 'the study of signs', there is considerable variation among leading Semioticians as to what semiotics involves.

One of the broadest definitions is that of Umberto Eco, who states that 'semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign' (Eco 1976). Semiotics involves the study not only of what we refer to as 'signs' in everyday speech, but of anything which 'stands for' something else. In a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures, and objects. Contemporary Semioticians study signs not in isolation but as part of semiotic 'sign-systems' (such as a medium or genre). They study how meanings are made and how reality is represented (Chandler, 2003).

While for the linguist Saussure as stated in Chandler (2003), 'semiotics' was 'a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life'. To the philosopher Charles Peirce, the field of study which he called 'semeiotic' (or 'semiotic') was the 'formal doctrine of signs', which was closely related to logic (Peirce 1931). Chandler (2002) maintains that semiotics deals with those general principles which underlie the structure of all signs whatever and with the character of their utilization within messages, as well as with the specifics of the various sign systems and of the diverse messages using those different kinds of signs.

Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2015) defines semiotics as the study of sign which is initially subjective, as a result of which the discipline cannot offer any universal "theoretical assumption, model and empiricism". He observes that semiotics did not only later become publicized and conventionalized but also interspersed with syntactic, semantics, and pragmatics based on their respective reflection on language rules and meanings. Semiotics is a field of study involving

different theoretical stances and methodological tools and it became a major theoretical approach to cultural studies in the late 60s partially as a result of the work of Barthes (1957) titled *Mythologies*

Peirce (1931), maintain we interpret things by relating them to familiar systems of conventions. Both the encoder and decoder of a sign require a shared knowledge of culture to aid their interpretation. The sender must have conceived and interpreted a sign in a certain way before packaging it to a receiver who must share in the encoder's knowledge to effectively interpret it in turn. Otherwise, the communication process will break down. At the centre of this mutual context is culture (Abdullahi-Idiagbon, 2015).

### History and Philosophy of *Nsibidi* Symbols

The *Nsibidi* hermeneutic system developed by the *Ekpe*, /*Mgbe*/ *Ngbe* esoteric order of South-South and South-Eastern Nigeria, is an example of a body of knowledge and practices that provide rich ground for adaptive exploration in terms of philosophy, culture, and mysticism. *Ékpè*, /*Mgbè*/ *Ngbè*, are names from *Éfik*, *Éjághám* and *Éfút* Nigerian ethnic groups respectively, all these names being variants of "leopard", demonstrating this esoteric body as centered on the associations of the leopard as a primary symbolic resource, according to Nigeria's 2013 application to place the *Ékpè* (leopard) initiation society on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

According to Sublette (2007) the origin of the word *Nsibidi* is not known. One theory traces the word to the Ekoid languages, where it means "cruel letters", reflecting the harsh laws of the secret societies that hold *Nsibidi* knowledge. In Calabar, *Nsibidi* is mostly associated with men's leopard societies such as *Ekpe*. The leopard societies were a legislative, judicial, and executive power before colonization, especially among the *Efik* who exerted much influence over the Cross River.

The origin of *Nsibidi* is most commonly attributed to the Ejagham people of the northern Cross River region, mostly because colonial administrators found the largest and most diverse *Nsibidi* among them. *Nsibidi* spread throughout the region over time and mixed with other cultures and art forms such as the Igbo *uri or uli* graphic design (Slogar, 2007). In 1909 J. K. Macgregor who collected *Nsibidi* symbols claimed that *Nsibidi* was traditionally said to have come from the *Uguakima*, *Ebe*, or *Uyanga* tribes of the Igbo people, which legend says were taught the script by baboons, although one writer believes Macgregor had been misled by his informants (West African Journal of Archaeology, 1995).

*Nsibidi* has is a wide vocabulary of signs usually imprinted on calabashes, brassware, textiles, wood sculptures, masquerade costumes, buildings, and on human skin. *Nsibidi* has been described as a "fluid system" of communication consisting of hundreds of abstract and pictographic signs. *Nsibidi* was described in the colonial era by P.A. Talbot as "a kind of primitive secret writing", Talbot explained that *Nsibidi* was used for messages "cut or painted on split palm stems". J.K. Macgregor's view was that "The use of *Nsibidi* is that of ordinary writing. I have in my possession a copy of the record of a court case from a town of *Enion* [*Enyong*] taken down in it, and every detail ... is most graphically described". *Nsibidi* crossed ethnic lines and was a uniting factor among ethnic groups in the Cross River region (Slogar, 2007).

### Empirical

Ezema (2013) research on Semiotic translation and the expression of African thoughts and cultural values in English. The study identifies different situations which give rise to translation from the indigenous African languages. The relationship between language and thought on one hand and between

language and culture on the other. Also stressed in the research is the role of language in promoting cultural understanding. An attempt was made in the research to identify different types of translation. As many scholars have already written on intralingua and Interlingua types of translation, the study focuses on offering possible solutions to the problem of distortion of African thoughts and cultural values arising from semiotic translation from the native African languages.

Olatunji, (2013) also research on "Uses of Semiotics in periods of hostilities, armed conflicts and peace-building among the Yoruba, South-West Nigeria". Findings from this study reveal that the use of signs helps in disseminating information among the Yorubas using "Aroko" which involves sending an item or a combinable number of items to a person from which the decoder (or receiver) is expected to infer a piece of information. He concludes that signs on a general note may not have uniform interpretations among people of diverse cultures. This implies that the uses of signs and symbols among the Yoruba in conflict and peace-building situations may not have global applicability. However, the study signified that semiotic practices provide a deep insight into communications systems (notable semiotics) among homogeneous people, particularly in contemporary sub-Saharan African societies.

Ajibade, Ekpe and Bassey (2012) conducted a joint study on 'More than fabric motifs: Changed meaning of *Nsibidi* on the *EfikUkara* Cloth' in 2012 exudes that *Nsibidi* sign system is used among initiates of the *Ekpe* society in *Efik* land to communicate with one another and with

the *Ekpe*. The study maintains that among the Ejagham people of the Cross River, extending from Cameroon to Nigeria's Cross River State, the Ukara cloth and *Nsibidi* visual signs are very critical aspects of history, religion, and general cultural worldviews.

While the ukara cloth is prominent among initiates of the Ejagham's many Leopard Societies, the *Nsibidi* is a visual language, unspoken but forming the main body of motifs on the ukara fabric design. As a traditional African written language peculiar to the Ejagham peoples, Carlson (2003) has suggested that *Nsibidi* can "adapt to new historical circumstances and culture" when transmitted to non-Ejagham societies. Using evidence from fieldwork in villages in five local government areas where Efik clans are located in Cross River State, their study sort to find out if the meanings of key *Nsibidi* signs have changed or adapted when transmitted into a non-Ejagham cultural space in Calabar.

The study found that the transmission from the Ejagham culture to that of the Efik has brought on adaptations and changes in the meaning of *Nsibidi*. And, through its use in the design of the *ukara* fabric of the Ekpe society, *Nsibidi* has maintained its relevance among the Efik for many centuries because of its ability to adapt to new social and cultural situations, while remaining true to its original identity (Ajibade, Ekpe & Bassey, 2012).

## Methodology

The study used the survey research design. It covered semiotic literacy and practices in African traditional communication system. It focused on *Nsibidi* ideograms as they relate to semiotic and African traditional communication systems. The study was

carried out in the Calabar metropolis of Cross River State-Nigeria focusing on the *Ekpe* society of the Efiks. It only captured adult male respondents of the study locale since the primary users of *Nsibidi* ideograms are men who have come of age to become initiates of the *Ekpe* society.

The population of the study consisted of 506 *Ekpe* fraternity members among the Efiks of Calabar (Source: Fieldwork), Cross River State. The Efiks are one of the three ethnic groups (Efuts, Efiks and Ejagams) that form the indigenous population of Calabar Metropolis. They occupy the bulk of the riverine and hinterland of Calabar. They are mostly fishermen, farmers, traders, and blacksmiths. The Efik kingdom has the Obong of Calabar (Edidem) as the Grand patriarch. The Efiks are said to be the originator and technology of the *Ekpe* fraternity in which the *Nsibidi* script locate as a vital part of fraternal proceedings, and as a vehicle of artistic expression.

Purposive sampling technique was adopted in the study considering because some of the population of *Ekpe* fraternity are not lettered. A sample size of 120 respondents was selected and used for the study. Data were collected through the administration of a structured questionnaire to respondents, while Linkert 4-point scale was used to measure the opinions and perceptions of the respondents. In addition, face-to-face interviews was conducted with respondents in other to enrich the study. Hence simple tables, frequencies, numbers, and percentages were used in the analysis and interpretation of the information collected for the field.



### Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of the 120 administered questionnaires, 112 representing 93.3% returned and were used for analysis. The demographic variables were first presented and these include age, level of education, occupation, and *Ekpe*

status. The second part is the presentation of analysis of data in relation to the research questions. In both sections, the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents were presented using tables to show the distribution of the relevant variables.

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Age**

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY (f)	PERCENTAGE (%)
18-28	20	17.8
29-39	27	24.1
40 and above	65	58.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>100</b>

Field survey, 2020

Table 1 shows the age brackets of the respondents. The majority of respondents are 65 (58.1%) who are within the age bracket of 40 and above, while 27 (24.1%) of the respondents are within the age bracket of 29-39 and 20 (17.8%) are within the age 18-28. This implies that opinions used in drawing inference are that of the adults.

**Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Educational Qualifications**

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY (f)	PERCENTAGE (%)
No Formal Education	42	37.5
SSCE	41	36.6
Graduates	29	25.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>100</b>

Field survey, 2022

Table 2 shows the respondent's academic qualification. It indicates that 42(37.5%) do not have formal/western educational background, while 41(36.6%) of the respondents are School Cert holders and 29 (23.7%) are graduates. This implies that majority of the respondents have formal education.

**Table 3: Occupation of the Respondents**

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY (f)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Public/Civil Servants	31	27.6
Farmers	12	9.8
Fishermen	25	22.3
Traders	14	12.5
Self-employed	30	26.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>100</b>

Field survey, 2022

Table 3 shows occupation spreading of the respondents, thus 31(27.6%) are public/civil servants, 12(9.8%) are farmers, while 25 (22.3%) are fishermen, 14(12.5%) are traders and 30 (26.7%) are self-employed. This indicates that the majority of the respondents are public/civil servants and it's closely followed by self-employed members of the study locale. By implication, it can be inferred that the respondents are made up of people from diverse occupations.

**Table 4: *Ekpe* Status of the Respondents**

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY (f)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Chiefs	12	10.7
Opinion leaders	33	29.4
Young Initiates	51	45.5
Non-indigene (Foreigners)	16	13.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>100</b>

Field survey, 2022

The analysis of Table 4 reveals the status of the respondents, hence, 12 (10.7%) are Chiefs, 33(29.4%) are Opinion Leaders and 51(45.5%) are Young Initiates while 16 (13.1%) are Non-indigene (Foreigners). Based on the analysis, majority of the respondents are young initiates while the least percentage of respondents are non-indigenes of Calabar. This implies that members of *Ekpe* society are encompassing because they are foreigners initiates who are not indigenes of Efik among the *Ekpe* fraternity.

**Data Analysis:**

**Decision Rule:** A 4 Likert scale of measurement was used in data collection, therefore, Strongly Agree and Agree will be interpreted as Agree while Strongly Disagree and Disagree will be interpreted as Disagree. Similarly, Very High and High will be interpreted as High, whereas Very Low and Low will be taken as Low.

**Research Question one: What is the level of usage of *Nsibidi* ideograms in among the *Ekpe* society in Calabar metropolis?**

**Table 5: Level of usage of *Nsibidi* ideograms**

Responses	FREQUENCY (f)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Very High	78	69.6
High	15	13.3
Very Low	13	11.6
Low	6	5.3
Total	<b>112</b>	<b>100</b>

Field survey, 2022

Table 5 shows the level of usage of *Nsibidi* ideograms among the *Ekpe* society in Calabar metropolis with 78 (69.6%) of the respondents argued that the level of usage is very high, while 15 (13.3%) stated that *Nsibidi usage* is high, as against 13(11.6%) who indicate the usage is very low and 6 (5.3%) of the respondents state low usage. The analysis in Table 6 affirms that the level of usage of *Nsibidi* ideograms among the *Ekpe* of Efiks in Calabar is high with cumulated frequency and percentage of 99 (83%) respectively.

**Research question two:** What is the effect of *Nsibidi* ideogram on traditional communication system among the *Ekpe* society of Efiks in Calabar?

**Table 6: *Nsibidi* ideograms have effects on traditional communication system**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY (f)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Strongly Agree	72	64.34
Agree	19	17
Strongly Disagree	12	10.7
Disagree	9	8
Total	<b>112</b>	<b>100</b>

Field survey, 2022

Table 6 shows the effect of *Nsibidi* ideogram on traditional communication system among the *Ekpe* society of Efiks in Calabar, 72 (64.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed that *Nsibidi* ideograms have an effect on traditional communication system among the *Efiks* in Calabar, 19 (17%) agree with the assertion, while 12 (10.7%) strongly disagree and 9 (8%) disagree. This implies that *Nsibidi* ideograms strongly have a high effect on Africa traditional communication system among the Efiks in Calabar with a cumulated frequency and percentage of 91(81.2%) respectively.

### Discussions of Findings

#### **What is the level of usage of *Nsibidi* ideograms among the *Ekpe* society in Calabar metropolis?**

The findings reveal that the level of usage of *Nsibidi* ideograms among the *Efiks* in Calabar is high. This implies that *Nsibidi* ideograms are highly used as a form of traditional communication among the *Efik*-speaking people. The findings from the study on the level of usage of the ideograms being high are in line with the studies of some of the many scholarly researches reviewed for the study. Slogar (2007), reveals that the *Nsibidi* ideograms are most graphically described *Nsibidi* crossed ethnic lines and were a uniting factor among ethnic groups in the Cross River region. Also, the findings are in line with the study of Andah (1995), which states that *Nsibidi* has a wide vocabulary of signs usually imprinted on calabashes, brassware, textiles, wood sculptures, masquerade costumes, buildings, and on human skin. *Nsibidi* has been described as a "fluid system" of communication consisting of hundreds of abstract and pictographic signs.

This is also demonstrated by the *Ekpe* society through their costumes like the famous *Ukara* cloth worn by initiates.

Nevertheless, contemporary visual arts scholars in recent times have been appropriating and domesticating the *Nsibidi* ideograms in their creative works. One of such prominent visual arts scholars is the Nigerian American Victor Ekpuk, who made a remarkable pictorial representation of the *Nsibidi* ideograms as a wall mural.

#### **What is the effect of *Nsibidi* ideograms on traditional communication systems among the study locale?**

Findings from research question two shows that *Nsibidi* ideograms has an effect on traditional communication system among the *Efiks* in Calabar. In view of the above, this finding agrees with the disposition of White (2012), who asserts that communication and culture are intimately related. He concisely puts it that out of communication come our cultures, and in our construction of cultures, we find a common sharing of meanings. In effect, *Nsibidi* ideograms as a means of communication form part of the cultural practices of the *Efiks* of Calabar built within the *Ekpe* society. In essence and over the years *Nsibidi* has been an integral part of the *Efiks*, the Ekois, and the Ejaghams and by extension, the people of Ohafia, Abiriba, and Arochuchwu in Abia State, Nigeria.

Also, the study conforms to that of Olulade (1998), who opines that traditional communication as used in Africa is an admixture of social conventions and practices that have become sharpened and blended into veritable communication modes and systems which have almost become standard practices for society. That traditional communication use symbols, values and indigenous institutions which enhance messages' effectiveness. Hence, *Nsibidi* ideograms as a form of indigenous communication among the Efiks enhances the effectiveness of passing of messages and instructions which pave the way in meeting

the economic, social, and cultural needs of the people.

Ekong (2020), states that the *Nsibidi* ideograms were the better means of communication among the progenitors- the Ejaghams, Efiks and the Arochukwus. He further reiterated that sometimes, the best way to capture people's attention is to use something they are already familiar with. People tend to give attention to stimuli they can relate with. People tend to assimilate judgments and make decisions in line with already existing knowledge or experiences. With the *Nsibidi* ideograms, communication was made simple and easy.

Also, according to Effiong (2020), an academic scholar of Calabar, *Nsibidi* is an ancient system of artistic symbols which debunks the notion that information dissemination in pre-colonial Africa was accomplished only through oral traditional channels. *Nsibidi* has been used to document history, celebrate the people's heritage, instruct values, reinforce communication, deliberate on key issues and resolve conflicts.

## Conclusion

In Africa, symbols, signs and graphics are commonly used semiosis to share ideas, and concepts and to communicate within the society, and this has been in keeping with African traditional communication system and culture. It, therefore, connotes that the bonds of society are the shared symbols, rituals, values, and beliefs of its members, and it is in these that the meaning of the societal communication system is contained. Indeed, African traditional communication system that is mostly expressed through semiotic practices provides the enabling structure for the actualisation of the general societal needs in areas of culture, rituals, entertainment, socio-economic and political stability. Particularly, semiotics literacy reveals how signs and symbols are used to communicate ideas and concepts within a given society, thus

placing the *Nsibidi* ideograms as a form of African traditional communication system and practices through which the Efiks and her neighbours communicate freely with one another.

## Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the following are recommendations made:

- i. The government and stakeholders in the communication language should promote *Nsibidi* ideograms and by extension African communication system by organizing regular training, seminars and symposiums for people.
- ii. The authority should make known the use of *Nsibidi* ideograms by enacting a policy that will inculcate *Nsibidi* into educational curriculum for students at all levels.
- iii. The traditional custodians should endeavor to bring the *Nsibidi* Ideogram back to the limelight by encouraging parents and guardians in using *Nsibidi* as their mother tongue.

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