EBIRA TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Abstract

Research Problem: *Traditional rulers have historically played significant roles in maintaining peace and resolving disputes within their communities. However, the emergence of modern governance structures and formal legal courts has reduced the influence and authority of traditional institutions, raising concerns about their capacity to effectively manage conflicts in Ebiraland. This study therefore examined the role of traditional institutions in conflict resolution in Ebiraland, with particular attention to the challenges affecting their effectiveness.*

Methods/Theory: *The study was anchored on the Conflict Management Theory and adopted a qualitative research design. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with traditional rulers, community leaders, academics, and residents, while secondary data were sourced from books, journal articles, and other relevant publications.*

Results: *The findings revealed that traditional institutions remain relevant in resolving communal and family disputes because of their proximity to the people, cultural legitimacy, and deep understanding of indigenous customs and values. Nevertheless, their effectiveness is constrained by political interference, modernization, youth restiveness, and constitutional limitations.*

Conclusion: *The study concluded that traditional institutions continue to play a vital role in promoting peace and resolving conflicts in Ebiraland despite the challenges confronting them.*

Key Contribution to Knowledge: *The study contributes to existing literature by demonstrating that traditional institutions remain viable and culturally acceptable mechanisms for grassroots conflict resolution and peacebuilding in contemporary Nigerian society.*

Recommendation: *The study recommends that government should strengthen traditional institutions through legal recognition, policy support, and capacity-building initiatives, while communities should cooperate with traditional rulers to enhance sustainable peace and effective conflict resolution in Ebiraland.*

1.1 Introduction

Peaceful coexistence is an essential feature of every society; hence, the need for institutions that discourage conflict and promote peace amid rising incidences of conflict. Prior to the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria by the British Colonial Administration in the 1914 amalgamation of northern and southern protectorates, traditional rulers of various nationalities played the role of enhancing peace within and outside their territories. The role of maintaining peace and harmony did not stop at 1914 because the British indirect rule system of government was anchored on traditional rulers of various ethnic nationalities up to Nigeria's independence in 1960. By 1960 the power of traditional rulers were reduced and placed under regional, state and local government depending on the categories. However, traditional institutions are societal structures that have evolved over time, embodying the customs, values, and norms of a community or culture. These institutions play crucial roles in maintaining social order, preserving cultural identity, and facilitating the smooth functioning of a society (Ajayi & Ojo, 2017)

Traditional institutions encompass a wide range of entities, including family structures, religious organizations, tribal councils, and local governance systems (Aporto, 2013). They are often rooted in historical practices and are passed down through generations, contributing to the continuity and stability of a community. Traditional institutions foster a sense of belonging and unity among community members. They provide a framework for social interaction and cooperation, reinforcing shared values and customs. Many traditional institutions serve as mediators in conflicts, offering a platform for dispute resolution. Traditional institutions within the community often play key roles in facilitating dialogues and finding solutions to disputes. They are custodians of cultural heritage. They transmit cultural practices, rituals, and knowledge from one generation to the next, ensuring the continuity of identity and traditions (Arowosegbe, 2016).

In Nigeria, traditional institutions have played significant roles in enhancing national integration and sustainable development. The role of traditional rulers, such as Emirs, Obas, Attah, Ohinoyi, Obi among others have been enormous and have contributed to national integration through the resolution of conflict, promotion of cultural unity, involvement in diverse health and educational campaign and among others. In Kogi State particularly, there are more than fifteen ethnic groups with different cultures (Lawal, 2013). Each of these groups have traditional rulers who handles their affairs. The Igala people are ruled by the Attah of Igala, the Ebira people are ruled by the Ohinoyi, the Kabba people are ruled by the Obaro of Kabba and many other firstclass chiefs in their domain of authority.

All these traditional rulers have been actively involved in conflict resolution, promotion of cultural unity, and involvement in campaigns capable of enhancing development. Ebiraland, is blessed with lots of chiefs, elders such as the Ohinoyi of Ebiraland, Ohindase of Okengwe among others but the paramount ruler of the Ebira people is the Ohinoyi of Ebiraland (Husseini, 2006). These traditional institutions have been in existence from time immemorial and have held the people together in unity, peace and love. Existing studies have established a positive link between traditional institutions and conflict resolution in different parts of the country (see Nweke, (2019) and Orji (2022)) but these studies concentrated on other regions like the Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole. A

particular focus was not paid to the peculiar situation of Ebiraland. This study examined the Ebira traditional institutions and the roles they have played in enhancing conflict resolution as a way of extending past studies on traditional institutions and conflict resolution.

Statement of Research problem

The fall in the influence of traditional institutions as a result of the absence of constitutional backing and other challenges established by past studies threatens the influence and ability of these institutions as it concerns conflict resolution. Ebiraland in particular is a town that has experienced divers forms of conflict ranging from land dispute and disputes over political or clan interest. Hence having an effective conflict resolution mechanism can not be over emphasized. Traditional institutions have been effectively managing conflict resolution processes in line with the customs and traditions of the the people. However, the continued decline in the influence of traditional institutions has made it necessary to examine the role of traditional institutions in conflict resolution in Ebiraland in this modern era. Studies have established a positive link between traditional institutions and resolution in different regions in Nigeria but not much has focused on Ebiraland. This present study addressed this gap through the examination of traditional institutions and conflict resolution in Ebiraland. The core objectives of this study are:

i. to examine the effectiveness of traditional institutions in conflict resolution in Ebiraland

ii. To suggest ways in which the influence of traditional institutions on conflict resolution will be upheld

Conceptual Clarification

Conflict

Conflict is a universal phenomenon that exists in every society, organization, and human relationship. Generally, conflict refers to a situation where two or more parties perceive opposition in their interests, resulting in disagreement, tension, or struggle. According to Coser (1956), conflict is a struggle over values, status, power, and scarce resources in which the aims of opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals. This definition emphasizes the competitive nature of social relationships and the role of scarcity in generating disputes. Similarly, Deutsch (1973) defines conflict as a situation in which incompatible activities occur between individuals or groups, making cooperation difficult. Marx (1867) viewed conflict as an inevitable outcome of social inequality and class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. He argued that society is characterized by continuous competition between dominant and subordinate groups over economic resources and political power. Traditional scholars perceived conflict as destructive and harmful to social stability. However, modern scholars argue that conflict is not entirely negative. Coser (1956) maintains that conflict can promote social change, innovation, and institutional reforms when properly managed. Conflict may therefore serve positive functions such as strengthening group unity, improving communication, and addressing injustices within society.

2.1.2 Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution refers to the process of reducing, managing, or eliminating disagreements and disputes between disputing parties. Burton (1990) stated that conflict resolution is a process through which the

underlying causes of conflict are identified and addressed in order to satisfy the basic human needs of the conflicting parties. Burton argued that conflicts cannot be permanently resolved unless issues such as identity, security, recognition, and participation are adequately addressed. Similarly, Deutsch (1973) defines conflict resolution as the process of preventing or reducing destructive conflict through communication, cooperation, negotiation, and mutual understanding.

Several methods are commonly used in conflict resolution. Negotiation involves direct discussion between parties aimed at reaching a mutually acceptable agreement. Mediation occurs when a neutral third party assists conflicting parties in finding a peaceful solution. Arbitration involves a neutral person making a binding decision to settle the dispute. Other methods include conciliation, dialogue, peacekeeping, reconciliation, and adjudication. Fisher and Ury (1981) emphasize that successful conflict resolution depends on focusing on interests rather than positions and seeking solutions that benefit all parties involved. Conflict resolution is important because unresolved conflict often leads to violence, insecurity, destruction of property, displacement, and loss of lives.

2 Empirical Review

Archibong (2021) explained in "The Role of Traditional Rulers in a Democratic Society like Nigeria" that traditional leaders play important roles in the democratic process of any society.According to this study, the addition of traditional rulers and the enforcement of traditional practices like oath taking and swearing before the deities of the land or before ancestral symbols or shrines and the implementation of the required punishment can reduce crime and ensure a peaceful and united environment which aids national integration and sustainable development. The relevance of this study is great but a focus on Nigeria as a whole gives a broad perspective that makes it difficult to understand and discuss situations in smaller communities such as Ebiraland. This study was conducted to fill the gap in literature by focusing on Ebiraland in Kogi State.

Abdulsalam et al. (2020) stated in "Roles of Traditional Rulers in Conflict Resolution for Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria," that the roles played by the traditional institutions in Kwara State were immense. Abdlsalam et al (2029) found that all the traditional institutions in Kwara State played significant roles in the enhancing development irrespective of the ages, marital status and the name of their titles. Abdlsalam et al (2029) further noted that traditional institutions enhanced peace their communities through sound conflict resolution processes.The relevance of this work is based on the fact that, it considered the role of traditional rulers in sustainable development but the work was done in Kwara State making it difficult to generalise its findings since the customs and traditions of the communities in Kawara differs from Ebiraland hence, the need to fill the gap to add to literature.

Wilfred (2015) in his work titled, "The Role of Traditional Rulers in the Rehabilitation of Ex-convicts in Nigeria" also examined how traditional rulers aids in rehabilitating ex-convicts into communities Nigeria. Based on the submissions of Wilfred (2015); the role played by traditional rulers in this area cannot be overemphasised. Wilfred (2015) opined that these institutions have been instrumental in re-integrating ex-convicts back into the society by assisting them in ways that will enable them settle in the society. When these people are well settled in the land they can contribute their quota to the development of the land thereby

enhancing development. The ability of the traditional rulers in settling these ex-convicts in their societies aids national integration. Despite the fact that Wilfred (2015) considered the role of traditional institutions in conflict resolution, it's focus was on the reconciliation of ex-convicts with the society only. This study however goes beyond just that to understanding how Ebira traditional institutions enhanced conflict resolution regardless of the type of conflict. Since his study did not consider Ebiraland, this study intends to fill this gap in literature and add to the existing bulk of knowledge

Nweke (2019) in "The Role of Traditional Institutions of Governance in Managing Social Conflicts in Nigeria's Oil- Rich Niger Delta Communities: Imperatives of Peace Building Process in the Post-Amnesty Era" also investigated the roles traditional institutions played in managing of conflict in the Niger Delta areas of Nigeria. The Traditional rulers were highly involved in the activities and meetings that led to the management of the conflict which aided in the restoration of peace in the affected communities. This study will extend the work of Nweke to Ebiraland to examine the roles of traditional institutions in enhancing local integration and conflict resolution as a way of filling the gap in literature and adding to knowledge in this area.

Williams (2021) in, investigated the link between traditional institutions and conflict resolution and opined that the resolution of conflict could be achieved by taking a traditional dimension which included the use of traditional institutions. By implication, traditional institutions can facilitate the existence of peace and national integration. Williams found that the involvements of traditional institutions in the management of conflicts were part of the cures mentioned were relevant in achieving sustainable development. The relevance of this work is the fact that the work examined the roles of traditional institutions in achieving sustainable development through conflict resolution, the work paid no attention to Ebiraland creating a lacuna in literature. The findings of this study shall fill that gap.

Orji (2022) in "Roles of Traditional Rulers in Conflict Resolution in South Eastern States" investigated the roles that traditional institutions play in the south Eastern States especially in the area of development and in the area of conflict resolution. The study found that most of the development initiatives were organized, brought up and overseen by traditional rulers due to the position they occupied and the knowledge they have about their cultures and traditions. The findings of Orji (2022) revealed insight on the functions of traditional institutions in the resolution of conflict and enhancement of sustainable development. However, the findings of this study only examined the traditional rulers from the East and did not pay attention to Kogi State or Ebiraland, hence, the need to conduct this study as a way of filling the gap in literature and adding to the existing bulk of knowledge in this Area of study.

Gobattoni, et al. (2015) in "Sustainable Rural Development: The Role of Traditional Activities in Central Italy" developed a ground-breaking attitude model to traditional activities in Central Italy, identifying factors influencing attitudes and suggesting strategies for sustainable rural development. According to the study, the enabling environment for such local integration was made possible by traditional institutions who governed in line with the customers and traditions of the land. This implies that for local integration to take place, there must be traditional institutions in place to create the enabling environment. This discovery makes the findings of this work relevant. However, it is

limited to Italy necessitating the need to conduct another study to cover Ebiraland as a way of adding to the existing bulk of literature and bridging the gap created.

Sani, and Olaniyi (2023) in "Traditional Institutions and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria" opined thattraditional stated in that institutions as custodian of culture and tradition have continued to play a very significant role before and during colonial independence of many African societies. In Nigeria they provide a system of administration with an utmost aim of maintaining a stable governance through tradition, customs, and law and order. But with the advent of democracy, the role of traditional institutions became less recognized in the democratic system of government. The study examined the role and relevance of indigenous traditional institutions to good governance. The study was a quantitative research. Data was obtained from secondary sources including journals, articles and publications. The study revealed that traditional institutions play a very significant role of sustaining culture and traditions, informally managing of conflict, maintaining peace, custodian of oral traditional history of the people among others before and during colonial era. But with the advent of democracy, their power and duties became less recognized in the democratic system of government because traditional institutions were negated to the back door and politicized.

Functionalism theory of Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917) was employed to explain how society is an integrated whole, where all parts are interconnected and traditional institutions as part of the society, play a vital function of maintaining stability and contributing to the wellbeing of its members in terms of law, order and governance. The study concluded that if the goal of government at all levels is to provide good governance to the people, rapid in social wealth and economic development, traditional institutions need to be integrated and assigned greater responsibilities in Nigerian's contemporary democratic system of government because they have the ability to promote grassroots governance and local integration. The relevance of this work is the fact that the work examined the roles of traditional institutions in achieving local integration, but, the work paid no attention to Ebiraland creating a lacuna in literature. The findings of this study shall fill that gap.

Jenkins (2020) in "Putting Postmodernity into Practice: Endogenous Development and the Role of Traditional Cultures in the Rural Development of Rarginal regions" stated that post-modernity has led to a re-evaluation of tradition. Jenkins (2020) considered one aspect of this re-evaluation which was the role of traditional cultures and their implications for a rural development process which is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable in the marginal regions of Europe. The links between traditional cultures, territoriality and sustainability suggested that a culturally homogeneous world is an unattractive prospect in sustainable development terms. Actor-network theory was explored as an approach which could be used to inform policy, in particular by conceptualising how a re-valorisation of cultural resources could provide local actors with strategic capacity for endogenous development and for the harnessing of extra-local forces in a market economy. The rural development path for marginal regions that emerges integrates tradition with the imperatives of the postmodern world in which economic rationality is combined with an appropriate degree of local development. Although, Jenkins (2020) examined traditional institutions in achieving local integration and development but, the work paid no attention to conflict resolution

in Ebiraland. The findings of this study shall fill that gap

Garba, et al.(2018) in "Traditional Institutions and National Integration for Sustainable Development in Nigeria" stated that the available evidence shows that pre-colonial Nigerian societies had a formal and organized system of government before the advent of colonialism. Non participatory roles of traditional institutions in the present day Nigeria as compared to their roles in managing both men and materials in pre-colonial Nigeria is accounting mainly for the decades of social conflicts that is manifesting itself in our socio-economic and political circuit. This development does not only render traditional institutions irrelevant but also creates threats to peace, security and stability in the country. The aim of the study was to critically examine the two concepts traditional institutions and national integration in Nigeria. The methodology employed by the study was the use of secondary data and observation. Some of the recommendations of the study was that constitutional role be given to those institutions, promotion of cordial relationship between government and those institutions would reduce conflicts among the locals, also, recognition of traditional institutions by the government at all levels was encouraged to enhance their performance especially in managing issues related to grassroots integration and development in the country. This study points out the importance of traditional institutions in facilitating local integration and conflict resolution but to understand how tow traditional institutions have handled conflict resolution in Ebiraland this study on Ebira traditional institutions and conflict resolution is important.

Olawoyin (2023) in "Traditional Administrative System and Community Development in Nigeria: Roles and Relevance of Traditional Institution in Local Community Development" opined that the 1999 Nigerian constitution has been unavoidably silent on specific roles for traditional rulers in the country. Thus, traditional institutions play a crucial part in policy development and implementation in the country. Consequently, the lack of constitutional roles for traditional institutions severely limited their utility at the grassroots. The study assessed the roles of the traditional administrative system of selected communities in Osun State towards the integration of traditional core values into mainstream administration in Nigeria and also assesses the relevance of traditional institutions in managing inherent conflicts of the selected communities in Osun State. The study engaged qualitative research through key informant interviews and in-depth interviews. The findings showed that traditional institutions in Nigeria play active roles in the development process in the country. Despite their difficulty, the roles were more visible in cultural dissemination and managing conflicts in the local communities. The study concluded that the traditional administrative systems and structures had influenced community development in the southwest region immensely but are limited in function and operation largely by the absence of roles in the Nigeria constitution. This finding makes this work relevant but it failed to consider Ebniraland creating a gap in literature which this study filled.

Theoretical Framework

This study is adopted the Conflict Management theory which describes conflict as an inevitable aspect of human interaction. This theory is heavily based on the works of Follet (1925), Pondy (1967), Thomas and Kilmann (1974). Their model identifies five main approaches to conflict handling, namely competing, collaborating, compromising,

avoiding, and accommodating. These demonstrate that conflict response varies depending on the situation being handled (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). The theory also emphasized that conflict should not be suppressed but integrated through cooperative problem-solving arguing that constructive engagement leads to better outcomes (Follett, 1925). Similarly, Pondy (1967) conceptualized conflict as a process that develops through stages. His work highlighted that conflict evolves over time and must be managed at different stages.

The theory is based on certain assumptions. First, it assumes that conflict is inevitable in all human; second, it posits that conflict is not inherently negative; third, it assumes that different conflict situations require different management strategies, and no single approach is universally effective; fourth, it assumes further that effective conflict management depends on the availability of competent institutions and appropriate mechanisms for resolution; fftth, it recognizes that poorly managed conflict can escalate into violence and disrupt social stability and finally, it acknowledges that both formal institutions, such as courts, and courts, and informal institutions, such as traditional authorities, play important roles in managing conflict within societies.

The theory has been criticized on several grounds. Some arguments against this theory are that it is more descriptive than predictive. Andrew (1995) discussed a situation that implies that conflict management does not fit into a neat linear sequence as Pondy (1967) presents showing clearly a sharp criticism that suggests that the theory is only descriptive. It has also been criticized for focusing heavily on interpersonal and organizational settings, making it less effective in explaining complex communal, ethnic, or structural conflicts. In addition, the theory tends to emphasize the management of conflict rather than its full resolution or transformation, thereby limiting its scope. Despite these limitations, the theory remains highly relevant to this study on the challenges of Ebira traditional institutions in conflict resolution. It provides a clear framework for understanding the different methods employed by traditional rulers in managing disputes within their communities. It also supports the understanding that conflict is not necessarily eliminated but managed in ways that preserve social order and stability. The theory is therefore adopted for this study because it best explains the practical role of Ebira traditional institutions in managing conflict rather than assuming that conflict can be completely eradicated.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the challenges confronting Ebira traditional institutions in conflict resolution. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and views regarding the role of traditional institutions in managing conflicts. Data were collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with selected traditional rulers, community leaders, and other relevant stakeholders who possess adequate knowledge of conflict resolution processes in Ebiraland. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, whereby emerging themes and patterns were identified, interpreted, and presented in line with the objectives of the study

Presentation of Results

Ebiraland is the ancestral home of the Ebira Tao people found in Kogi State. Historically they migrated from the old kwararafa kingdom

along with the Igalaland people, Idoma people among others (Sani, 1993) As these ethnic groups moved, each found its own settlement and the Ebira Tao people today can be found in four local governments in Kogi State namely Okene, Adavi, Ajokuta and Okehi (Husseini, 2006). These people are ruled traditionally by the Ohinohi who is the paramount ruler of the people. History has it that the Ohinohi traditional institutions is a recent development that was introduced in 1956 by the colonial administration (Sani, 1993). However, before the establishment of the Ohinoyi title, there were other traditional institutions which existed in form of clan heads, district heads and the elders in council. The various traditional institutions mediated conflict through a number of ways. Interviews conducted revealed that traditional institutions could resolve conflict through their abilities to serve as peace educators (S. Bello, personal communication 3rd December, 2025).

Traditional rulers in Ebiraland have served as invaluable peace educators within the community, playing a vital role in promoting harmony, conflict prevention, and reconciliation. Their authority, cultural knowledge, and influence enable them to impart peace education in various ways, fostering a culture of peace and coexistence among community members. They have done this by upholding and promoting traditional values such as respect, tolerance, and mutual understanding. Through their words and actions, they exemplify these values, encouraging community members to embrace them in their interactions with others (A. Boyi, personal communication 11th January 2026)

Through dialogues, mediation, and awareness campaigns, traditional rulers have been able educate the people of Ebiraland on the importance of resolving disputes peacefully and seeking common ground through dialogue and negotiation (D. Jatto, personal communication 12th April 2026). When conflicts arise, no matter how little, traditional rulers become mediators and facilitators of reconciliation processors. They bring conflicting parties together, listen to their grievances, and facilitate dialogue aimed at finding mutually acceptable solutions. Drawing upon their wisdom, impartiality, and cultural understanding, traditional rulers guide parties towards reconciliation, forgiveness, and healing, thereby restoring harmony within the community and in the process educate the people on the need for peace.

They play a role in educating community members about the consequences of violence and the benefits of peace. For instance, the Ohinoyi has at different occasions addresses the people of Ebira on radio stations and via diverse media platforms on the need to shun violence and embrace peace (F. Victor personal communication 3rd December 2025).To achieve this, the former Ohinoyi Alhaji Ado Ibrahim has spoken to his people on the need to embrace peace by explaining the consequences of violence in line with the culture and tradition of the people (F. Victor personal communication 3rd December 2025. Furthermore, these traditional rulers lead by example, demonstrating integrity, humility, and a commitment to the well-being of the community. Their ethical leadership inspires trust and confidence among community members, fostering a sense of collective responsibility for maintaining peace and security. This exemplary lifestyle also serves as a means of educating the people.

Secondly, in Ebiraland, traditional rulers hold significant authority as heads of traditional courts, playing a pivotal role in administering justice and resolving disputes according to customary laws and traditions (S. Bello, personal communication 12th March 2026).

Traditional courts serve as important institutions for dispute resolution and conflict management within the community. The traditional court has no particular structure other than the place of the traditional rules that seat on issues and declare judgments in line with the laid down custom and traditions of the land (A. Muhammad personal communication 11th January 2026).

Traditional rulers are the custodians of customary laws and traditions in Ebiraland. They possess deep knowledge of the community's legal norms, practices, and precedents, which govern various aspects of social, economic, and familial life. As heads of traditional courts, they interpret and apply these customary laws to adjudicate disputes and render judgments that reflect the community's values and cultural heritage. Traditional rulers preside over these traditional courts, where they hear and adjudicate a wide range of cases, including disputes over land, inheritance, marriage, family matters, and conflicts between individuals or groups within the community. They conduct proceedings in accordance with customary procedures, ensuring fairness, impartiality, and adherence to due process. Traditional rulers may be assisted by council members or elders who provide guidance and expertise in legal matters (E. Musa personal communication 15th May 2026).

Their authority is respected by all members of the community, regardless of ethnic or social affiliation. They are believed to be unbiased and deliver judgements justly even when a non-indigene is involved in the dispute. As such, they are trusted to facilitate dialogue, negotiate settlements, and enforce agreements without bias or favoritism. This neutrality enhances the legitimacy of their decisions and promotes compliance among conflicting parties. Particularly, they excel in the art of mediation and conciliation (T. Onimisi, personal communication 11th January 2026). They possess strong interpersonal skills, empathy, and patience as traditional fathers, enabling them to bridge communication gaps and facilitate constructive dialogue between conflicting parties. Through mediation sessions held in their traditional palaces, they create a conducive environment for parties to express their grievances, explore common ground, and reach mutually acceptable solutions. In addition, traditional solution to conflict in Ebiraland often emphasises restorative justice principles aimed at repairing harm, restoring relationships, and promoting reconciliation. Traditional rulers focus on addressing the underlying causes of conflicts and restoring harmony within the community. They encourage conflicting parties to acknowledge their responsibilities, make amends, perform relevant sacrifices where such cases arises and commit to peaceful coexistence moving forward.

Traditional courts in Ebiraland emphasise restorative justice principles aimed at repairing harm, restoring relationships, and promoting reconciliation. Traditional rulers focus on addressing the underlying causes of disputes and promoting healing and forgiveness among conflicting parties. They encourage offenders to take responsibility for their actions, make amends to victims, and seek community reintegration, thereby contributing to the restoration of social harmony.

In addition, traditional institutions in Ebiraland were found to play crucial roles in both preserving cultural heritage and resolving conflicts within the community. These institutions, deeply rooted in the customs and traditions of the Ebira people, employ various mechanisms that integrate cultural preservation into conflict resolution processes (Husseini, 2006). In Ebiraland, traditional symbols of authority are significant as they represent the

power and legitimacy of the traditional rulers. These symbols of authority are beautifully crafted staff, often made from wood or metal and intricately designed with cultural motifs and symbols. They are typically ornate and may include carvings or decorations that represent the history and heritage of the Ebira people. The key symbol of these traditional ruler's authority and leadership are used during official ceremonies, public appearances, and other important cultural events. Some of these symbols of authority are the "odi", "omu", "Okwute" and the traditional stool of these traditional institutions (A. Muhammad personal communication 12th March 2026).

These symbols are not just symbols of authority but they also serve as tools for traditional rulers to exercise their leadership. During conflict resolution and community meetings, the presence of these symbols signifies the legitimacy and the customary power of the Ohinoyi or other chiefs presiding over the event. The use of such symbols reinforces the cultural and traditional governance structures in Ebiraland, maintaining a connection to the community's heritage and ensuring that the authority of traditional leaders are visibly and widely recognized. For instance, in the Palace of the Ohinoyi the paramount ruler of the Ebira people, any decision or judgment passed by the Ohinoyi or any of the traditional rulers while sitting on their throne or the traditional stool of authority is binding on all parties (T. Subaru, personal communication 12th April 2026). When they are outside the palace, the staff of authority (okwute) which the traditional ruler carries around becomes the symbol of authority (Y. Abdullahi personal communication 11th February 2026)

Furthermore, customary laws are the backbone of traditional conflict resolution in Ebiraland. These laws are reflective of community values and customary laws are derived from the cultural norms and values of the community. Applying these laws ensures that conflict resolution is aligned with the collective ethos of the Ebira people and this is an important role of traditional institutions. Secondly, these customary laws are rooted in tradition; they are widely respected and accepted by community members, lending legitimacy to the conflict resolution process.Traditional conflict resolution often involves the broader community, which serves several purposes such as transparency and inclusiveness. Public hearings and community meetings ensure that the process is transparent and inclusive, which helps in building consensus and trust. Also, community involvement in cases that require public settlement brings collective memory into the conflict resolution process, where passed resolutions and cultural practices are recalled and applied. All these are facilitated by the traditional institutions in Ebiraland.

Resolution processes often incorporate cultural ceremonies and rituals which symbolize reconciliation. Ceremonies and rituals mark the end of conflict and the restoration of peace, providing symbolic closure and reinforcing cultural practices. These rituals are often handled by the traditional rulers in the community. The participation in these communal rituals strengthens social bonds and fosters a sense of unity and belonging among community members.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that the traditional institutions in Ebiraland have been instrumental in the resolution of conflict. Interviews with key informants have revealed that the institutions resolve conflict easily through their positions as peace educators, heads of traditional courts and their ability to preserve

the culture of the Ebira people. These finding strongly agree with the findings of past studies such as orji (2022), Nweke (2019), Gatba et al (2019) among others. The study also upholds the conflict management theory which this study is anchored on. The implication of this finding is that, despite the existence of modern structures, the traditional institutions in Ebiraland have not lost their relevance in conflict resolution.

5.1 Conclusion

The traditional institutions of Ebiraland are indispensable in navigating the complexities of local integration and conflict resolution. Their deep-rooted presence in the socio-cultural, economic, and religious fabric of Ebira society enables them to effectively manage and mitigate conflicts while fostering a cohesive and integrated community. However, challenges such as political interference, modernization, youth restiveness, and constitutional limitations affect their effectiveness. By blending traditional practices with contemporary needs, these institutions continue to play a vital role in sustaining peace and unity in Ebiraland.

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