

Traditional And Modern Approaches to Museum Preservation in Imo State, Nigeria: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract - This study examines and compares traditional indigenous preservation methods and modern museum-based practices used in safeguarding cultural artifacts in Imo State, Nigeria. Cultural artifacts in the state face increasing threats from environmental degradation, inadequate institutional support, and the gradual erosion of indigenous knowledge systems. Using a descriptive research design, the study draws data from museum professionals, traditional custodians, government officials, members of cultural heritage associations, and academics through questionnaires and document review. The findings reveal that while museums in Imo State demonstrate capacity in areas such as documentation, monitoring, and routine maintenance, their effectiveness is constrained by inconsistent funding, infrastructural limitations, and uneven staff training. The study also establishes that traditional preservation methods remain culturally relevant and technically effective, although their continued practice varies across communities and is often undervalued within formal conservation systems. The study further shows strong support for the integration of traditional and modern preservation approaches, as neither system alone is sufficient for sustainable heritage conservation. Anchored on Cultural Materialism and Indigenous Knowledge Systems theories, the study concludes that a hybrid preservation framework that harmonizes scientific conservation techniques with indigenous knowledge offers a culturally grounded and sustainable approach to artifact preservation in Imo State.

Index Terms: Cultural Heritage, Artifact Preservation, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Museum Conservation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The preservation of cultural artifacts has long been recognized as a fundamental means of safeguarding human history, identity, and collective memory. Museums across the world have traditionally served as custodians of tangible heritage such as relics, artworks, textiles, manuscripts, and tools that document the evolution of societies over time. In

recent decades, technological advancements have transformed museum preservation through the adoption of climate-controlled storage, digital documentation, pest management systems, and advanced conservation techniques designed to protect artifacts from environmental degradation and human interference (Thompson 22). Renowned institutions such as the British Museum and the Louvre exemplify how modern preservation practices combine scientific conservation with education and tourism, thereby enhancing public engagement with cultural heritage.

Alongside these institutional approaches, many indigenous societies continue to rely on traditional preservation methods that are deeply embedded in cultural values, spirituality, and environmental knowledge. These methods, which include wrapping artifacts in organic materials, applying natural oils, smoking wooden objects, and storing sacred items in shrines or secluded spaces, have been passed down through generations and remain effective within their cultural contexts (Ndoro and Pwiti 23). In the African setting, preservation is often carried out by traditional custodians such as elders, priests, and artisans who are entrusted with safeguarding family heirlooms, ceremonial regalia, and ritual objects. These practices emphasize not only physical protection but also the spiritual and symbolic meanings attached to cultural materials, reflecting Africa's resilient heritage systems despite historical disruptions such as colonialism and looting.

In Nigeria, artifact preservation reflects a complex interaction between modern museum institutions and indigenous knowledge systems. While national museums such as the National Museum, Owerri, play a formal role in conserving cultural materials, challenges such as inadequate funding, outdated facilities, and limited skilled personnel continue to

undermine effective preservation efforts (Shyllon 67). Consequently, many communities, particularly in Imo State, have maintained responsibility for protecting culturally significant objects using traditional methods rooted in Igbo cultural practices. Artifacts such as masquerade regalia, musical instruments, and ritual symbols are preserved in family shrines, village squares, and sacred forests through methods believed to ensure both physical durability and spiritual sanctity (Okafor 112). This study therefore examines the comparative roles of traditional and modern preservation methods in Imo State, with the aim of highlighting their effectiveness, challenges, and potential for integration in achieving sustainable cultural heritage conservation.

II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The preservation of cultural artifacts in Imo State remains a significant challenge despite the richness and diversity of Igbo cultural heritage. Artifacts such as ancestral masks, carved wooden figures, indigenous musical instruments, ritual objects, and historical documents continue to face threats of deterioration caused by environmental exposure, improper storage, termite infestation, high humidity, and lack of routine maintenance. Museums such as the National Museum, Owerri, which are statutorily responsible for safeguarding these materials, are constrained by inadequate funding, outdated preservation facilities, and shortages of trained conservation personnel. These limitations have weakened institutional capacity to ensure the long-term protection of cultural heritage, resulting in gradual material decay and loss of historical integrity (Chukwu 83; Thompson 37).

At the same time, traditional preservation methods widely practiced in Imo State remain largely unrecognized and unsupported by formal heritage institutions. Indigenous custodians, including elders, shrine keepers, and cultural practitioners, continue to rely on time-tested methods such as oiling wooden artifacts, wrapping sacred items in natural fibers, storing objects in elevated lofts, or housing them in shrines. Although these methods have preserved artifacts for generations, they are often dismissed by modern institutions as unscientific or obsolete, creating a disconnect between museums and local communities (Ndoro and Pwiti 29). This lack of collaboration has contributed to mistrust, poor documentation, and fragmented preservation efforts,

leaving many artifacts either inadequately conserved in museums or hidden in private and sacred spaces without professional support. The absence of an integrated, community-inclusive preservation framework therefore poses a serious threat to the sustainable conservation of cultural artifacts in Imo State, necessitating a comparative examination of traditional and modern preservation methods.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

- i. How do modern museum-based preservation practices compare with traditional indigenous methods in safeguarding cultural artifacts in Imo State?
- ii. In what ways can traditional preservation methods and modern museum techniques complement each other to achieve sustainable cultural heritage conservation in Imo State?

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the study seeks to compare traditional indigenous preservation methods and modern museum-based practices used in safeguarding cultural artifacts in Imo State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine and compare museum-based (modern) preservation practices and traditional indigenous methods used in safeguarding cultural artifacts in Imo State.
- ii. Analyze how traditional preservation methods and modern museum techniques can complement each other in achieving sustainable cultural heritage conservation in Imo State.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage refers to the tangible and intangible expressions of a people's history, identity, beliefs, and creative achievements that are inherited from past generations and preserved for present and future use. As Lowenthal explains, cultural heritage

represents resources from the past that communities identify as reflections of their evolving values, knowledge, and traditions (41). It includes physical artifacts such as sculptures, masks, tools, textiles, monuments, and historical objects, as well as intangible elements like oral traditions, rituals, festivals, and indigenous knowledge systems, which UNESCO recognizes as central to cultural continuity. In this sense, cultural heritage functions as a bridge between the past and the present, reinforcing identity, social cohesion, and a shared sense of belonging within communities.

In Imo State, cultural heritage is deeply embedded in everyday social and spiritual life, where artifacts are not merely preserved as historical objects but are actively integrated into cultural practices. Items such as masquerade regalia, traditional musical instruments, carved wooden figures, and ritual symbols are preserved in museums, family shrines, village squares, and sacred forests, reflecting the living nature of Igbo heritage. Okafor notes that these artifacts carry both physical and spiritual significance, as their preservation is believed to ensure ancestral continuity and cultural sanctity (112). The study emphasizes that cultural heritage in Imo State remains dynamic, sustained through community participation and traditional custodianship rather than through institutional preservation alone (Ndoro and Pwiti 23).

Cultural Conservation

Cultural conservation refers to the deliberate processes and practices aimed at safeguarding cultural heritage by maintaining both its physical condition and its cultural meaning. According to Staniforth, conservation is not limited to preserving objects but extends to protecting the values, identities, and historical contexts they represent (12). This approach aligns with Feilden and Jokilehto's view that conservation involves measures designed to retain the authenticity, integrity, and significance of cultural materials while preventing deterioration (18). Cultural conservation therefore encompasses documentation, restoration, preventive care, and community education, all of which contribute to sustaining heritage across generations.

Within the context of Imo State, cultural conservation operates through both modern museum-based methods and traditional indigenous practices. Museums employ scientific techniques such as

controlled storage environments, documentation systems, pest management, and professional restoration to enhance the material durability of artifacts, as observed by Nwankwo in her assessment of museum conservation practices in Nigeria (66). At the same time, indigenous custodians rely on culturally rooted methods such as ritual protection, oiling wooden objects, and storage in sacred spaces, practices which Ndoro and Pwiti argue are essential for maintaining cultural relevance and spiritual meaning (33). The study highlights that the lack of integration between these two systems has weakened overall conservation outcomes, underscoring the need for an inclusive framework that harmonizes modern conservation science with indigenous knowledge systems in Imo State.

Artifact Preservation

Artifact preservation refers to the systematic processes involved in safeguarding cultural, historical, and artistic objects to ensure their longevity, stability, and continued relevance. Caple defines artifact preservation as the range of activities intended to prolong the life of cultural materials while retaining their original character and significance (9). These activities include protection against environmental threats such as humidity, pests, improper handling, and material decay. Preservation is therefore not merely a technical exercise but a culturally grounded practice that reflects a society's commitment to sustaining its historical memory and material culture across generations. The study emphasizes that effective artifact preservation must address both physical protection and the cultural meanings embedded within objects.

In the context of Imo State, artifact preservation exists at the intersection of modern museum practices and indigenous community-based methods. Museums rely on scientific techniques such as controlled temperature and humidity, documentation, monitoring, and restoration to preserve artifacts, while indigenous communities preserve objects through ritual care, controlled access, and culturally informed handling practices. Chikwendu and Uji observe that traditional African preservation methods demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of material durability and cultural continuity, even though they are often excluded from formal conservation discourse (65). The study highlights that when artifacts are preserved solely through

institutional means without regard to cultural context, their symbolic and spiritual significance may be diminished, underscoring the need for preservation approaches that balance material care with cultural meaning.

Preservation Practices in Imo State

Preservation practices in Imo State are deeply rooted in indigenous cultural traditions that predate colonialism and the establishment of formal museum institutions. Traditionally, artifacts such as ancestral masks, sacred stones, ritual drums, royal regalia, and ceremonial objects are preserved within family lineages, shrines, secret societies, and community spaces. These objects are regarded as sacred embodiments of ancestral presence rather than ordinary material items, and their preservation is governed by taboos, rituals, and communal responsibility (Chikwendu and Uji 65). Methods such as oiling wooden artifacts with palm oil, smoking objects with medicinal herbs, and storing items in sacred or secluded spaces have been used for generations to protect artifacts from decay and spiritual contamination (Ogundiran 122).

Alongside these indigenous practices, modern preservation efforts in Imo State are carried out mainly through institutions such as the National Museum, Owerri. The museum employs professional conservation techniques including documentation, storage in cabinets, monitoring, and limited environmental control to safeguard cultural materials. However, studies cited in the work indicate that these institutional efforts are constrained by inadequate facilities, poor storage infrastructure, insufficient funding, and limited collaboration with local communities (Ekong and Essien 47). As a result, many families prefer to keep artifacts in private or sacred spaces rather than donate them to museums. The study therefore reveals that preservation practices in Imo State remain fragmented, with limited integration between museum-based and traditional systems, highlighting the need for a collaborative and culturally inclusive preservation framework.

VI. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Current State of Museum-Based Artifact Preservation Practices

Empirical studies reviewed in this study reveal that museum-based artifact preservation practices are

largely shaped by institutional capacity, availability of trained personnel, and adequacy of preservation infrastructure. Okonkwo's study on the development of modern museums in Nigeria shows that although museums are recognized as important cultural and educational institutions, their preservation functions are weakened by inconsistent policy implementation and weak administrative structures (59). Similarly, Nwankwo's investigation into conservation practices in Nigerian museums identifies challenges such as fluctuating humidity, pest infestation, outdated conservation tools, and insufficient professional training, all of which accelerate the deterioration of artifacts (112). These findings suggest that while museums adopt modern preservation principles, practical constraints limit their effectiveness.

Further empirical evidence highlights that documentation and monitoring practices exist but are often poorly sustained. Eze's study on museums in southern Nigeria demonstrates that although museums contribute to heritage awareness and preservation, outdated archival systems and limited community involvement undermine conservation outcomes (67). International cases such as the British Museum incident reported by The Times further illustrate how poor documentation and weak internal controls can lead to the loss or damage of artifacts, despite the presence of modern conservation facilities. Collectively, these studies indicate that museum-based preservation practices remain vulnerable when institutional commitment, funding, and accountability are inadequate, reinforcing the concerns raised in the present study regarding museums in Imo State.

Traditional Methods Used by Indigenous Communities

Empirical studies consistently affirm the effectiveness and cultural relevance of traditional preservation methods employed by indigenous communities. Nicklin's ethnographic study documents the use of natural oils, controlled storage environments, and ritual practices across African communities, emphasizing that these methods are practical and well adapted to local ecological conditions (123–127). Lawal's work further demonstrates that indigenous societies in Nigeria preserve cultural heritage through oral traditions, specialized custodianship, and communal rituals, which ensure continuity and intergenerational transmission of knowledge (10–22). These findings

support the view that traditional preservation methods are not arbitrary but are grounded in long-standing experiential knowledge.

Studies focusing specifically on Imo State further reinforce this perspective. Umanah and Okwueze's research on indigenous artists in Imo State identifies physical preservation techniques, oral traditions, and community ceremonies as central to safeguarding artifacts and religious objects (21). Their findings highlight the role of elders and artisans as custodians of cultural heritage whose practices sustain both material integrity and cultural meaning. Similar conclusions are drawn by Ntieche in his study of West Cameroonian community museums, where the abandonment of indigenous methods in favor of poorly implemented Western techniques led to increased artifact deterioration (156–163). These empirical findings validate the continued relevance of indigenous preservation methods and their importance to sustainable cultural conservation.

Relationship Between Modern and Traditional Methods

Existing literature indicates that the relationship between modern museum preservation methods and traditional indigenous practices is often characterized by tension rather than collaboration. Flynn's study on integrating Indigenous curation methods with contemporary museum standards demonstrates that effective preservation outcomes depend on mutual respect and collaboration between museum professionals and indigenous communities (31–40). Where such cooperation exists, artifacts benefit from both scientific conservation and cultural contextualization. However, the study also notes that exclusion of indigenous voices often results in the loss of cultural meaning even when physical preservation is achieved.

Other studies emphasize the benefits of integration rather than isolation of preservation systems. Obi's research on museum–community engagement in Nigeria reveals that participatory practices such as co-curated exhibitions and collaborative heritage initiatives strengthen public involvement and cultural sustainability (84). Similarly, Ntieche argues that reappropriating indigenous conservation techniques alongside modern practices enhances both the physical condition and cultural relevance of collections (156–163). These empirical findings align with the present study's argument that neither

modern nor traditional methods alone are sufficient. Instead, a complementary relationship that integrates scientific techniques with indigenous knowledge systems is essential for sustainable artifact preservation in Imo State.

VII. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Cultural Materialism Theory and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Theory, both of which provide a strong analytical lens for understanding artifact preservation practices in Imo State. Cultural Materialism explains cultural practices as outcomes of material conditions such as environment, technology, and economic resources, emphasizing that human societies develop adaptive strategies to meet practical needs. According to Marvin Harris, cultural practices are shaped primarily by infrastructural realities, including available materials, climate, and modes of production, which in turn influence social and ideological systems (Harris 57). Within the context of artifact preservation, this theory helps explain why indigenous communities in Imo developed preservation methods such as oiling wooden objects, smoking artifacts, and storing items in shrines as rational responses to local environmental conditions and material constraints rather than as purely symbolic or ritual acts.

Applying Cultural Materialism to this study highlights how both traditional and modern preservation methods are shaped by their respective material contexts. Traditional preservation practices in Imo State emerged from long-term interaction with the local environment, limited technological resources, and communal systems of knowledge transmission. Similarly, modern museum-based preservation practices reflect contemporary infrastructural conditions such as access to conservation technology, professional training, government funding, and institutional policies. The theory therefore provides a framework for evaluating both systems without privileging one over the other, allowing the study to assess preservation practices based on effectiveness, sustainability, and contextual suitability rather than on assumptions of scientific superiority (Harris 65). This perspective supports the study's comparative approach by recognizing indigenous methods as practical adaptations rather than obsolete traditions.

Complementing Cultural Materialism, the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Theory emphasizes the legitimacy and value of local knowledge developed through generations of lived experience and cultural practice. IKS Theory recognizes indigenous preservation methods as holistic systems that integrate environmental knowledge, spirituality, social organization, and cultural identity. Battiste and Henderson argue that indigenous knowledge represents a sophisticated intellectual tradition rooted in observation, experimentation, and communal validation rather than written documentation alone (35). In Imo State, traditional custodians such as elders, shrine keepers, and artisans preserve artifacts through culturally informed practices that maintain both material integrity and symbolic meaning. With the IKS Theory, this study affirms the cultural authority of indigenous communities and supports an integrative framework where modern museum practices and traditional preservation methods can coexist and complement each other in achieving sustainable cultural heritage conservation.

VIII. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive research design, which was considered appropriate for examining and comparing traditional and modern methods of museum preservation as they exist in their natural settings in Imo State. The design enabled a systematic description of current preservation practices without manipulating any variables, thereby allowing an in-depth understanding of institutional and indigenous approaches to artifact preservation. The population of the study comprised key stakeholders involved in cultural heritage preservation in Imo State, including museum staff at the National Museum, Owerri, traditional custodians such as elders and shrine keepers, officials of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, members of cultural heritage associations, and academics in relevant fields. The total population was estimated at 225 respondents. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants, as the study required respondents with specialized knowledge and direct involvement in artifact preservation. This technique ensured that individuals who possess relevant experience and cultural authority were deliberately included in the study.

Data for the study were collected using both primary and secondary methods. Primary data were obtained through structured questionnaires administered to selected respondents, allowing the researcher to gather detailed insights into preservation practices, challenges, and perceptions from both museum professionals and indigenous custodians. Participant observation was also employed to enable firsthand assessment of how artifacts are handled, stored, and preserved in museum and community settings. Secondary data were sourced through document review, including museum records, policy documents, archival materials, and cultural reports relevant to artifact preservation. The method of data analysis adopted for this study was descriptive analysis, which involved organizing, coding, and interpreting responses obtained from the structured questionnaires administered to respondents. The data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages to identify patterns and trends relating to traditional preservation methods, museum-based practices, challenges of conservation, and areas of convergence between both systems. This approach enabled a clear interpretation of respondents' perceptions and supported the comparative objective of the study by providing a systematic basis for analyzing similarities and differences between traditional and modern preservation practices.

IX. RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	150	66.7
	Female	75	33.3
	Total	225	100.0
Age	18–20	10	4.4
	21–30	60	26.7
	31–50	110	48.9
	51 years and above	45	20.0
	Total	225	100.0
Marital Status	Single	60	26.6
	Married	130	57.8
	Divorced	25	11.1
	Widowed	10	4.4
	Total	225	100.0
Educational Status	Primary	13	5.7

	Secondary	132	58.7
	Tertiary	80	35.6
	Total	225	100.0

Source: Field Analysis, 2025

The demographic distribution presented in the table shows that the respondents were fairly representative of different social groups relevant to cultural artifact preservation in Imo State. In terms of gender, males constituted the majority of respondents, accounting for 66.7 percent, while females represented 33.3 percent of the sample. This distribution reflects the cultural reality in many heritage-related institutions and traditional custodial roles, where men are more visibly involved in museum administration and traditional leadership structures. However, the substantial proportion of female respondents indicates meaningful female participation in cultural heritage activities, particularly in areas such as community-based preservation, cultural associations, and educational roles.

With regard to age, the majority of respondents fell within the 31–50 age bracket, representing 48.9 percent of the total sample, followed by those aged 21–30 at 26.7 percent. This suggests that most participants were within the active working-age population, possessing both the experience and physical capacity required for involvement in preservation activities. Respondents aged 51 years and above accounted for 20 percent, reflecting the inclusion of elders and traditional custodians who play critical roles in indigenous preservation practices, while the 18–20 age group constituted a smaller proportion at 4.4 percent. In terms of educational status, respondents with secondary education formed the largest group at 58.7 percent, followed by those with tertiary education at 35.6 percent, indicating a generally moderate to high level of literacy among participants. This educational distribution suggests that respondents were adequately positioned to provide informed insights into both traditional and modern preservation practices, thereby strengthening the reliability of the study's findings.

Research Question One: How do modern museum-based preservation practices compare with traditional indigenous methods in safeguarding cultural artifacts in Imo State?

Table 2: Museum-Based Artifact Preservation Practices in Imo State

S/ N	Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
1	Museums in Imo State have adequate facilities for preserving cultural artifacts	60 (27%)	80 (36%)	10 (4%)	25 (11%)	50 (22%)	225 (100%)
2	Museum staff in Imo State are well trained in modern preservation techniques	50 (22.2%)	100 (44.4%)	30 (13.3%)	40 (17.7%)	50 (22.2%)	225 (100%)
3	Artifacts preserved in museums in Imo State are regularly maintained and monitored	180 (80%)	20 (9%)	—	20 (9%)	5 (2%)	225 (100%)
4	Government support for museum-based artifact preservation in Imo State is sufficient and consistent	50 (22.2%)	40 (17.7%)	40 (17.7%)	50 (22.2%)	45 (20%)	225 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The table 2 presents respondents' perceptions of museum-based artifact preservation practices in Imo State and provides insight into the effectiveness of modern preservation approaches. A majority of respondents expressed positive views regarding the availability of preservation facilities in museums, with 27 percent strongly agreeing and 36 percent

agreeing that museums in Imo State have adequate facilities for safeguarding cultural artifacts. However, a substantial proportion of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, accounting for 33 percent combined, which indicates persistent concerns about infrastructural adequacy. This mixed response shows that while some basic preservation facilities exist, they may not be sufficient or evenly distributed to meet contemporary conservation standards across all museums in the state.

The findings also reveal generally favorable perceptions of professional capacity and routine maintenance within museums. A combined 66.6 percent of respondents agreed that museum staff are well trained in modern preservation techniques, although a notable minority expressed dissatisfaction, pointing to possible gaps in continuous training and skill upgrading. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of respondents, 89 percent, affirmed that artifacts in museums are regularly maintained and monitored, indicating strong confidence in day-to-day conservation practices. In contrast, responses on government support were sharply divided, with similar proportions agreeing and disagreeing that government support is sufficient and consistent. This division highlights institutional and funding challenges that may undermine the sustainability of museum-based preservation efforts.

Research Question Two: In what ways can traditional preservation methods and modern museum techniques complement each other to achieve sustainable cultural heritage conservation in Imo State?

Table 3: Traditional Methods Used by Indigenous Communities in Artifact Preservation in Imo State

S / N	Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
5	Indigenous communities in Imo State still actively use traditional methods to preserve	30 (13.3%)	80 (35.5%)	15 (6.6%)	70 (31.1%)	30 (13.3%)	225 (100%)

	cultural artifacts						
6	Traditional preservation methods are effective in maintaining the physical condition of artifacts over time	150 (66.6%)	30 (13.3%)	–	35 (15.5%)	10 (4.4%)	225 (100%)
7	The practical viability of traditional artifact preservation techniques is recognized by both locals and professionals	50 (22.2%)	70 (31.1%)	5 (2.2%)	80 (35.5%)	20 (8.8%)	225 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The table 3 presents respondents' views on the use and effectiveness of traditional artifact preservation methods among indigenous communities in Imo State. The findings indicate that the continued use of traditional preservation methods is not uniform across communities. While 48.8 percent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that indigenous communities still actively use traditional methods, a substantial 44.4 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, suggesting that such practices may be declining in some areas. The small proportion of respondents who were undecided points to limited uncertainty, implying that most participants have clear experiences or observations regarding the presence or absence of these practices. This pattern reflects the influence of modernization, changing belief systems, and reduced transmission of

indigenous knowledge, which may be contributing to the gradual erosion of traditional preservation practices in certain communities.

Despite concerns about the extent of their continued use, respondents expressed strong confidence in the effectiveness of traditional preservation methods. A clear majority, totaling 79.9 percent, agreed that traditional methods are effective in maintaining the physical condition of artifacts over time, indicating broad recognition of their practical value. However, perceptions regarding the recognition of these methods by both locals and professionals were more divided. Although 53.3 percent of respondents acknowledged the practical viability of traditional techniques, a notable 44.3 percent disagreed, revealing skepticism, particularly within formal or professional circles. This divide highlights a gap between indigenous knowledge systems and institutional acceptance, underscoring the need for documentation, validation, and integration of traditional methods into formal preservation frameworks to ensure their sustainability and broader acceptance.

X. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings in table 2 examined the current state of museum-based artifact preservation practices in Imo State, reveal a generally positive but uneven preservation landscape. Data from the tables show that a majority of respondents acknowledged the availability of preservation facilities in museums, the regular maintenance and monitoring of artifacts, and the presence of trained personnel. This suggests that museums in Imo State are performing their core preservation responsibilities to a reasonable extent. However, the findings also exposed significant concerns regarding infrastructural adequacy, consistency of staff training, and, most notably, unreliable government support. These mixed responses indicate disparities in institutional capacity across museums and reinforce the study's position that preservation outcomes are shaped by material conditions such as funding, technology, and institutional structure. This aligns with Cultural Materialism Theory, which explains that cultural practices, including preservation methods, are largely determined by available material resources and infrastructural support. Where museums lack consistent funding and modern equipment,

preservation practices become constrained, regardless of professional intent.

Also, findings under the table 2, which focused on traditional methods used by indigenous communities, demonstrate that traditional preservation practices remain culturally relevant and technically effective, even though their continued use is uneven across communities. While respondents were divided on whether traditional methods are still actively practiced, a strong majority agreed that these methods are effective in maintaining the physical condition of artifacts. This indicates that indigenous techniques such as oiling, ritual safeguarding, controlled storage, and community-based custodianship possess proven preservation value. However, skepticism regarding their recognition by professionals reveals a marginalization of indigenous knowledge within formal conservation systems. These findings strongly support the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Theory, which emphasizes that knowledge developed through long-term cultural experience is valid, adaptive, and contextually grounded. The decline in the use of traditional methods in some communities, as noted in the study, is linked to modernization, erosion of traditional institutions, and lack of formal documentation, rather than inefficiency of the methods themselves.

Taken together, the findings of the study highlight a complementary rather than competing relationship between modern museum-based preservation and traditional indigenous methods. Museums demonstrate strength in documentation, monitoring, and scientific conservation, while traditional practices excel in cultural relevance, sustainability, and community ownership. The study's findings therefore validate its theoretical position that sustainable artifact preservation in Imo State requires the integration of both systems. Cultural Materialism explains the institutional limitations faced by museums due to material constraints, while Indigenous Knowledge Systems Theory affirms the continued relevance of traditional methods rooted in cultural practice. The findings of the study clearly shows that neither system alone is sufficient. Instead, a hybrid preservation framework that blends scientific conservation with indigenous knowledge offers the most effective and culturally appropriate approach to safeguarding Imo State's cultural heritage.

XI. CONCLUSION

Preservation of cultural artifacts in Imo State is a complex process that extends beyond technical conservation procedures to encompass cultural meaning, institutional capacity, and community participation. The coexistence of museum-based preservation practices and traditional indigenous methods reflects a dual heritage management system shaped by historical, cultural, and material realities. While modern museums provide structured environments for documentation and physical protection, indigenous preservation practices sustain the cultural, spiritual, and symbolic significance of artifacts within their original contexts. The study therefore establishes that effective and sustainable artifact preservation in Imo State depends on recognizing preservation as both a scientific and cultural responsibility, one that must balance institutional frameworks with indigenous knowledge systems. By situating artifact preservation within this integrated perspective, the study underscores the need for culturally grounded approaches that respect local realities while responding to contemporary conservation challenges.

XII. RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the findings of this study, it is recommended that museum infrastructure and institutional support in Imo State be strengthened through consistent government funding, upgrading of storage facilities, and the establishment of regular maintenance systems. Improving these areas will enhance the capacity of museums to preserve cultural artifacts effectively and sustainably, reduce deterioration caused by inadequate facilities, and ensure that preservation practices meet acceptable conservation standards over time.

Additionally, there is a need to document and formally integrate traditional preservation methods into museum conservation practices by engaging indigenous custodians who possess valuable local knowledge. Recording effective indigenous techniques and incorporating them into formal preservation frameworks will help safeguard endangered indigenous knowledge systems while improving culturally relevant preservation outcomes. This process should be supported by structured collaboration between museums and indigenous communities, encouraging knowledge sharing, joint

preservation initiatives, and active community participation in heritage management across Imo State.

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