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## Psychological Analyses of "Iseee" Response in Igbo Cultural Area of Anambra State, Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*"Iseee" response has continued to generate confusion; while some people attributed it to Igbo cultural practice, others ascribed it to African traditional religion. This has terribly severed interpersonal and inter-group relationship among Igbo people. It equally created cognitive and cultural conflicts. In an attempt to ascertain and solve the imbroglio, this study explored the psychological components of "iseee" response among Igbo people of Anambra state, Nigeria. A qualitative approach was adopted and twenty adults whose ages ranged from 22 - 67 with mean age of 44.5 and standard deviation 5.2 were proportionately selected. The participants consisted of ten pastors and ten African traditional worshippers. Five key questions were developed, validated and utilized for the interview. The results showed significant differences in understanding of "iseee". While all the African traditional worshippers agreed that "iseee" is a cultural practice and should be used wherever Igbos are gathered; 90% of the pastors interviewed maintained that it is a paganism practice and should not be used in Christian events. The researchers recommended for mutual understanding of "iseee" as a cultural practice. Such mutual understanding will help to fostering peace, as well as personal and community development.*

**Keywords:** Psychology, Iseee, Cognitive, Culture Conflicts

### **Introduction**

Achieving a common understanding of what constitutes cultural or religious practice may be critical to individuals and societal development. Words have denotative and connotative meanings; understanding them are essential to

achieving cognitive equilibrium (Avruch, 2002; Swallow & Wang, 2020). Cognitive balance may be a buffer to psycho-emotional health, psychopathological symptoms, frustration, intra and interpersonal conflicts. Wang (2021) asserted that



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cultural practices are critical factors in cognitive and emotional wellbeing across lifespan. Personal and community development may be related to harmonious relationship, intra and inter-group cordial coexistence. However, this may not be said about Igbo people of Anambra cultural area, where there is observed discrepancy in the use of "iseee" in responding to declarations and prayers. There is observed discriminate use of "iseee" among Igbo people, which may be due to religious differences. Different religious groups are prevalent in Igbo communities and may have direct or indirect influence in Igbo cultural practices and language (Obiechina, 1975).

In Igbo cosmology, prayers are critical components of human existence and practices and used in private and public gatherings. During prayers, the concepts of good health, longevity, procreation, wealth, good neighborliness, success in day-to-day engagements, among others are pledged (Esomonu, 1981). However, the prayers an individual offer often depends on audience, venue and purpose (Nnamdi-Eruchalu, 2010). There is no written patterns of offering prayers in Igbo cultural milieu, but themes of prayers do revolve around pledge for attraction of positive things and removal of negative things from us, listeners of the prayers and our loved ones (Ugwu & Ugwueye, 2004). In offering prayers, ala

(land goddess), chi (god), goddess, ancestors, water goddess, are called upon to participate in the prayers. Kola nuts, alcoholic drink, white chalk (nzu) and water are used during prayers (Anuolam, 1993; Ugwu & Ugwueye, 2004). Igbo culture requires the oldest man present or the owner of the house to say the prayers. Kola nut is a point of contact with the gods, which is broken into lobes after prayers. The alcoholic drink is used in libation (pouring small quantity on the ground for the gods before drinking as a mark of respect). The white chalk (nzu) represents purity and is used to draw the four market days (Eke, Oye, Afor and Nkwo) in Igbo calendar. Some use it to rob in the eyes and biggest toes. At the end of prayers, people around do respond in unison "iseeee" (let it be so, amen, so shall it be) (Anuolam, 1993).

Isee in Igbo language means five. Some people do wonder the relationship between prayer response and five. Isee (5) represents five fingers or toes of human being (Ukaegbu, 2002). God created human being and bequeathed upon them five complete fingers and toes. The five in this perspective implies completeness (Obiechina, 1975). The number is significant due to the importance of five complete fingers in execution of day-to-day activities. Fingers or toes that are not up to five each are deemed incomplete and aberration in Igbo cosmology. It is the



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acknowledgement of the essence and essentials of five, which represents completeness is behind the use of *iseee* in response to prayers in Igbo culture. Thus, *iseee* entails complete affirmation to prayers. It is plausible to aver that completeness of a prayer(s) means manifestation of prayer requests. "Isee" is affirmative response for efficacy and completeness of prayer(s). Its English language translation is let it be so. May our prayers be answered. It equally means amen. However, "iseee" response has become a subject of controversy in contemporary discourse (Ubesie, 1978). The literary meaning of "iseee" is being jettisoned to suit already made mindset. Rather, it is being associated with paganism or African traditional religion. Its cultural relevance is challenged terribly. It is difficult for an individual to respond with *iseee* in the church to the hearing of others, without being singled out for special prayer, attack or punishment. In some situation, the person may be adjudged to have come to attack the pastor, spiritually. The response "iseee" is equivalent to other affirmative response patterns to prayers. However, the current conflict emanating from use of "iseee" other than amen in response to prayers may have multifaceted causative factors: poor understanding of Igbo language, inability to differentiate Igbo culture and paganism, poor Christian religious teachings and annihilation of Igbo cultural practices. The negative

effects of the attitude on collective prayers among Igbo people of different religious affiliation is deleterious. Due to the fact that praying is embedded in Igbo culture, its role in community peace, interpersonal relationship and development is numerous (Nnamdi Eruchalu, 2010). Prayers, patterns, and responses of People of Igbo culture have internal and external significance. The processes of praying, pouring libation and responding *iseee* by all the persons available create unique cultural identity (Nnamdi-Eruchalu, 2010). The unique identity may be critical for self esteem, intrapersonal peace and personal development. It equally helps in maintaining cohesion among the people. Cordial interpersonal relationship is germane to community growth and development. According to Wang (2020), imbibe of cultural practices among people of the cultural area or inhabitants are essential for cognitive and socio-emotional development among children. They found that children exposed to their cultural practices displayed high self-acceptance, peer acceptance and cognitive functioning. Thus, exposure of Igbo people early in life to the cultural underpinning of prayers, instruments of prayers (*nzu* = white chalk, *odo* = yellow chalk, *oji* = cola nuts, *ose oji* = alligator pepper, *mmiri* = water) and response "iseee" may yield similar positive results. Interestingly, perception of "iseee"



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response as a cultural practice may be important in its propagation and general acceptance.

The cultural conflict is destructive not only to cultures involved but people from the dying culture (Avruch, 2002). This is due to the fact that culture is the socially inherited, shared and learned ways of living possessed by individuals in virtue of their membership in social groups. Cultural conflict emanates from incompatible and different philosophies and ways of living, resulting in contradictory aspirations and behaviors. The incompatibility sometimes results in communities, intra and intergroup strife (Banaszkiewicz & Buczkowska, 2016). According to Avruch (2002) cultural conflict affects people's identity. Identity is a defining factor of an individual, which may be critical in interpersonal relationship, self-perception, self-evaluation, psychological stability and wellbeing. Identity stability may be significant in intra and interpersonal adjustment in human daily psycho-social engagement.

The cognitive conflict emanating from the use of *iseee* instead of *amen* in response to prayers is a result of learning, which is rooted in cultural annihilation, and domination by the European colonizers. Christian religion and English language was brought to Igboland during colonialism as instruments of domination

and perpetual cultural imperialism. The religion and language had extensive and negative influence on Igbos and their culture (Ukaegbu, 2002). Although the religious and cultural imperialism benefitted and still benefit the colonizers, it has resulted to self rejection, cultural conflict, cognitive dissonance, perpetual dependence and interpersonal rancor among the Igbo cultural area. The willful rejection of Igbo language (*iseee*) is a pointer to low self-esteem and poor self-realization. The cognitive conflicts affect other domains of human functioning.

About seven decades ago, Leon Festinger proposed an explanation of human behaviour in the face of contradictory beliefs, ideas and values and the resultant effects. In Festinger's original formulation of dissonance theory he stated that cognitions (i.e., bits of information about oneself or the social and physical world) could either be relevant or irrelevant to one another. When relevant cognitions are found to be incompatible, the individual will experience cognitive dissonance, defined as a drive-like physiological reaction (similar to hunger), which produces psychological discomfort and motivates the individual to reduce the conflict (Festinger, 1957). Because dissonance is negative, and people rarely want to experience negative emotions, these basic assumptions of the theory generate two general hypotheses: (1) the aversive



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feeling of dissonance will motivate people to reduce dissonance, and (2) people will try to avoid situations and information that could increase a specific state of dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance may arise when we become aware that our actions contradict our attitudes, such as responding *iseee* or *amen* to prayers in a meeting of people from different cultural background. Importantly, however, Festinger's view of situations that could produce dissonance was wider than is usually assumed. Thus, in his view, a violation against physical reality, such as standing in the rain and realizing that you are not getting wet, would most definitely cause a state of dissonance. A further key concept in the original theory is the dissonance ratio. Most situations in our daily lives involve both dissonant and consonant cognitions, and the amount of dissonance – the dissonance ratio – was conceptualized as the proportion of dissonant to consonant cognitions (i.e.,  $D / D + C$ ). Furthermore, the more important the cognition, the more weight it has. In the example above, if the individual feels that having a nice family dinner with the in-laws is more important than adhering to a specific diet, then that cognition is more important. Thus, the cognition most resistant to change will dictate how an individual will reduce dissonance. The cognition most resistant to change has later been called the

generative cognition (Beauvois & Joule, 1996, 1999), and all other cognitions are assessed in relation to it.

### **The Present Study**

In view of the foregoing, the present study examined peoples' understanding and perception of the use of "*iseee*" in responding to prayers in different forum (church service, marriage ceremonies, child naming ceremonies, baptism event etc). This study is germane due to the danger associated with the cultural, cognitive and language conflicts that the use of "*iseee*" may arouse. Therefore, the researchers hypothesized that there will be significant differences in people's understanding and perception in the use of *iseee* in different places among Igbo people in Anambra State, Nigeria.

### **Design and Statistics**

The study adopted cross-sectional survey. Thematic and descriptive statistics was used for analyses.

### **Measurement**

Five key interview questions were generated and validated for the study. After the generation of the key questions to be used for the interview, they were subjected to face and content validation. A total of fifteen lecturers in the department of Psychology, department of Sociology/Anthropology, and department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka reviewed the



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face and content validity. All the questions that passed face and content validation benchmark were further subjected to thematic assessment. The key questions for the study were: 1. What is isee? 2. Is isee and amen the same thing? 3. Should isee be used in every gathering including church service, baptism, naming ceremonies, marriage ceremonies etc 4. What do you think when you hear isee? 5. Does isee have cultural or religious undertone?

### **Participants**

A total of twenty participants were proportionately selected for the study. Ten of the participants were pastors and ten African traditional worshippers whose age ranged between 22 - 67 years with mean age of 44.5 and standard deviation 5.2. They were selected from Awka metropolis. This procedure was adopted to maintain balance in arriving at

reliable results and ecological relevant findings.

### **Procedure**

The proportionate sampling technique was adopted for the study. The researchers selected participants from two different culturally and religious ideological groups in Igbo cultural area. The researchers obtained approval letter from the Head, department of psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants and their consent duly obtained for the study. Participants were interviewed individually at their chosen venue and time. Participants were interviewed in their chosen language. The duration of the interview was 5 minutes including exchange of pleasantries. All the selected respondents were people from Igbo extraction



**Results**

Table 1, showing thematic responses of African Traditional worshippers.

<i>S/No</i>	<i>Questions</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>Percentage of responses</i>
1	What is iseee?	Iseee implies let it be as prayed.	10
2	Is iseee and the same thing with amen?	The two are the same.	10
3	Should isees be used everywhere?	Iseee should be used in every setting.	9
4	What do you think when you hear iseee?	I feel that Igbo people are praying.	10
5	Is iseee related to culture or African traditional religion	Iseee is Igbo cultural practice.	10

The results in table 1 showed the percentage of responses of the interview respondents among the twenty participants. The question one showed that 10 respondents agreed that iseee means let said prayers prayers be answered. 10 respondents agreed that

iseee and amen mean the same thing. 9 respondents indicated that iseee should be used in every setting where is offered either christian or cultural events. Also, 10 respondents said that they feel that Igbo people are praying. 10 respondents agreed that iseee is Igbo cultural practice.

Table 2, showing thematic responses of pastors

<i>S/NO</i>	<i>Questions</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>Percentage of responses</i>
1	What is iseee?	Let our prayer be answered	10
2	Is iseee and the same thing with amen?	Isee and amen are not the same	7
3	Should isees be used everywhere?	Iseee should not be used in church	9

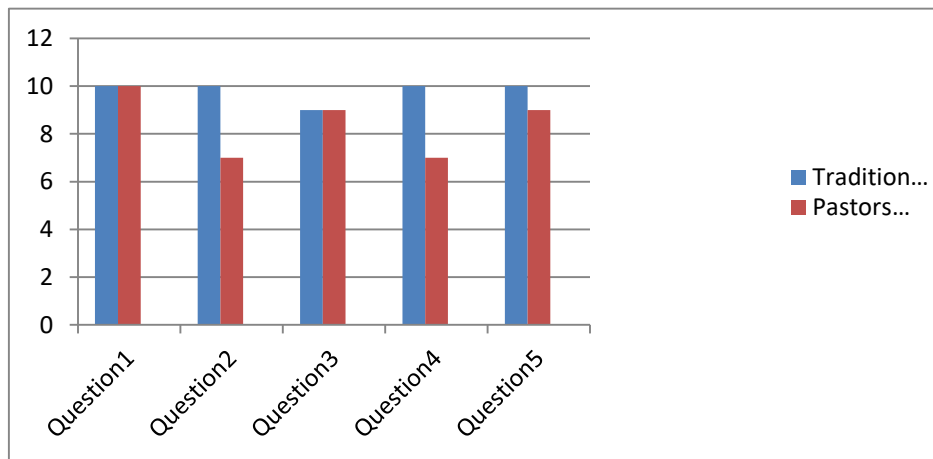


4	What do you think when you hear iseee?	I think that Igbos are praying with cola	7
5	Is iseee related to culture or African traditional religion	Isese is African traditional religion	9

The results in table two showed that 10 respondent stated that iseee means let our prayers be answered. 7 respondents averred that iseee is different from amen. 9 respondent said that iseee should not be used in church gathering or other

Christian religious gathering. Also, 9 respondent maintained that cola nut and African traditional religion is being practiced. 9 respondents agreed that iseee is related to African traditional religion.

Figure 1, bar chart showing percentages of responses of the two groups



**Discussion**

This study explored the attitude and understanding of "iseee" response by persons of Igbo extraction. The study confirmed the hypothesis that there was significant differences in peoples (Pastors and African traditional worshippers) attitudes and understanding

of iseee in Igbo cultural area of Nigeria. Both groups agreed on the meaning of "iseee" but differed significantly among other four key questions. The differences in other key questions may be significant in the cognitive dissonance, religious and cultural conflicts observed among the





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people (Festinger, 1975). While traditional worshippers believed that "iseee" can be used in every setting both in traditional religion practice and Christian religion events, most pastors interviewed argued that "iseee" should not be used in the church. They further maintained that it is inappropriate to use it during church services because it has African traditional religious undertone. Additionally, both groups differed significantly in whether "iseee" is an Igbo cultural practice or African traditional religion. While ten African traditional worshippers interviewed asserted that "iseee" is an Igbo cultural practice, pastors stated that "iseee" is embedded in African traditional religion.

The findings were expected given the existing widening gap in interpersonal relationship between African traditional worshippers and adherents of Christian faith. The deep rooted cultural and religious conflicts among different religious adherents in Igbo cultural area of Anambra state Nigeria may be responsible for the situation where a traditional religion worshipper and pastor are normally invited to offer separate prayers in an event that consist of the two groups. This type of scenario is capable of severing interpersonal and intergroup relationship, which may be critical in community and national development (Ukaegbu, 2002). Harmonious interpersonal relationship plays critical

role in personal development (wellbeing, longevity, cognitive functioning, intrapersonal peace and human growth and development) and societal development (high productivity, human capital development, communal stability and security) (Nargunde, 2013).

However, one finding that pointed out the deep-rooted conflict was the general agreement by the respondents that "iseee" is the same as amen, yet many of the respondents rejected its usage in church settings. It becomes pertinent to understand whether the differences in language is responsible for the disagreement. One may assert that the disagreement is manifestation of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). The study has some implications.

#### **Implication of the Study on Intra and Interpersonal Peace**

The consequences of disagreement in understanding and usage of "iseee" among Igbo people of different religious leaning may be colossal. On the personal level, it enhances cognitive dissonance, which may affect other cognitive tasks and functioning. According to Avruch (2002), cognitive conflict impairs sensory information processing speed, sensory analysis and cognitive development. The differences in understanding of "iseee" may affect interpersonal relationship among Igbo people of different religious group. Disruption of cordial relationship have



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potential of degenerating to communal and intergroup crises. Also, the differences may alter intrapersonal peace. Intrapersonal peace is central to goal achievement, individual stability, socio-emotional functioning and wellbeing (Nargunde, 2013).

On societal level, it is critical for communal development, societal security, intergroup co-existence and high human capital development (Wang, 2021). People's attainment of collective understanding of "iseee" as a cultural practice is likely to enhance harmonious interpersonal relationship, which has been found to be a significant factor in peace and development of the society (Banaszkiewicz & Buczkowska, 2016). Additionally, achieving a common ground in cultural practices may be capable to fostering wider participation.

### **Conclusion**

The study unearthed the observed differences in understanding the place of "iseee" response in Igbo cosmology. The existing gap in the conceptualization of the word is posing serious challenge to the cordial inter-group and cultural relationship, which has been found to promote communal development, human development, and societal peace. The sharp disagreement in the settings of usage of the word serves as a pointer to the deep seated cultural conflict in Igbo communities. The culture conflict calls for urgent attention to harmonize the

understanding of "iseee" as Igbo language, which contextually means five but denotes, "let it be as asked, wished or prayed". Once there is understanding of connotative and denotative meanings; there is likely to be equilibrium in cognitive functioning (Swallow, & Wang, 2020).

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