

Ogbunike cave in Anambra state, Nigeria, as a symbol of African heritage: A study on its tourism potential and the role of agencies in preservation

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ABSTRACT

The Ogbunike Cave in Anambra State, Nigeria, is a sacred and historically significant cultural heritage site in Igbo culture, and yet it remains underdeveloped as a heritage tourism destination due to poor infrastructure, weak policies, and inadequate preservation. This study examines the cave's role as a symbol of African heritage, focusing on its cultural importance, tourism potential, conservation challenges, and critically analyzing the roles of governmental and non-governmental agencies in its management. This study applies two key theories Cultural Heritage Theory and Sacred Place Theory, with a primary emphasis on Sacred Place Theory due to its focus on the spiritual and cultural relevance of heritage sites in African traditions. Employing quantitative method of research, data collection for the study was carried out by surveying 120 participants in Anambra State, Nigeria within Ogbunike cave locality which included residents, tourists, and heritage site managers. Findings were interpreted using descriptive statistics and the research outcome revealed a strong recognition of the cave's cultural, historical and touristic value, with most respondents acknowledging its appeal to both local and international visitors. However, key challenges identified such as inadequate management practices, environmental degradation within the cave area, and poor infrastructure hinder its conservation and tourism appeal. While government and non-governmental agencies are involved, their efforts were deemed insufficient by the respondents requiring stronger collaboration for effective management. The study concludes that a collaboration between governmental and non-governmental agencies is essential to enhance the cave's tourism development and management as well as actively engaging local communities through awareness of its cultural, historical, and economic significance.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism, Heritage Conservation, Igbo Tribe, Nigeria, Ogbunike Cave, Tourism Development

I. INTRODUCTION

Within the silent embrace of a cave, cultural heritage speaks through ancient whispers etched in a stone. Cultural heritage is an essential aspect of human civilization, as it encapsulates the traditions, beliefs, historical artistry, and natural landmarks that define a people. Across Africa, cultural heritage sites serve as powerful representations of indigenous cultural identity, history and spirituality. Among these sites, the Ogbunike Cave, located in Anambra State, Nigeria, stands out as a significant natural and cultural treasure that embodies the essence of African heritage and tourism. The cave, which represents a huge network of interlinked channels and chambers, has been revered by the local community for centuries due to its deep spiritual, historical, and cultural relevance to the Ogbunike people of southeastern part of Nigeria. This sacred site is often considered as a place of mysterious importance, has not only served as a sanctuary for indigenous religious practices, but has also evolved into a tourist attraction, drawing curious visitors from different parts of Nigeria and beyond who visit the cave to witness its mystic allure. The cultural relevance of Ogbunike Cave goes beyond its physical attributes, as it represents the living traditions and historical consciousness of an African heritage. Consequently, the cave holds immense historical and spiritual relevance to the people of Ogbunike and the wider Igbo community in Nigeria, serving as a sacred site for traditional rituals, communal ceremonies, and religious pilgrimages. Moreover, it also demonstrates the geological development within the region, providing researchers with insight into natural rock formations and underground ecosystems. According to Ejikeme (2021), on exploiting the tourism potential of the Ogbunike cave, she underlined that the cave has been used historically for spiritual purification, initiation rites and ancestral worship, strengthening the idea that cultural heritage is from depth with indigenous African religious practices. The preservation of such site as Ogbunike cave is therefore crucial not only for historical documentation but also for sustaining indigenous knowledge systems and African traditional belief systems.

Furthermore, the Ogbunike Cave can play an important role in increasing the cultural tourism of Nigeria, an industry that is gradually gaining momentum in recent times as the government and private investors have started to identify economic gains such as the heritage site can be brought to the nation. The tourism sector in Nigeria, although can tap in a unique appeal of sites such as the Ogbunike Cave to attract both domestic and international visitors. Cultural tourism, as defined by Timothy and Nyaupane (2009), involves the movement of people to places of historical, spiritual, and cultural importance to experience, learn, and appreciate its significance. The Ogbunike cave, with its long-standing history and deep-rooted traditions, provide tourists with a glimpse into a unique aspect of Igbo culture, particularly in terms of mythology, folklore, and spiritual beliefs. Therefore, people visiting the site require trained persons for the directed tour, where they learn about the historical use of the cave, its natural characteristics and the myths around its formation.

Despite its cultural and economic capacity, the protection of the Ogbunike Cave faces numerous challenges that threaten its sustainability as a heritage and tourism site. One of the major concerns is the environmental decline, caused by both natural and human factors. Irregular tourist activities, deforestation in the surrounding areas, and poor conservation efforts have shed significant wear and tears on the structure of the cave. Additionally, insufficient government policies and funding for heritage site maintenance have given a significant challenge for its long-term protection. As Onyima (2016) notes, Nigeria's cultural heritage management strategies remain weak, with many heritage sites suffering from neglect, lack of proper infrastructure, and insufficient promotional activities to boost awareness and tourism.

Another important issue is the gradual erosion of indigenous traditions associated with the cave. Modernization and westernization of African societies has declined in traditional practices, in which young generations have shown less interest in cultural heritage sites. As a result, the spiritual and communal functions of the Ogbunike cave are in danger of being overshadowed by contemporary developments and modernization that seems to be the order of the day. Scholars such as Olumide (2019) also emphasized the need for cultural education programs, which integrate historical sites into school curriculum, which fosters appreciation for indigenous heritage among the youth. If properly exploited, heritage tourism can serve as a powerful tool for both cultural protection and economic empowerment, providing employment opportunities to local communities, while ensuring that the holy site remains relevant in the rapidly changing society.

In a broader context of African cultural identity, the recognition and propagation of heritage sites such as the Ogbunike cave is essential in opposing the effects of globalization. Across the continent, several United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, [UNESCO] recognized heritage sites have been successfully integrated into national tourism strategies, contributing significantly to local economies. For instance, Gorée Island in Senegal, the Great Zimbabwe Ruins in Zimbabwe, and the Rock-Hewn Churches of Lalibela in Ethiopia have all demonstrated how cultural heritage can be leveraged for both preservation and economic growth (UNESCO, 2021 p.32). Nigeria, despite its rich historical and cultural resources, has yet to fully capitalize on its heritage tourism potential, making studies like this important in highlighting the need for policy frameworks that support heritage conservation and tourism development.

Given these considerations, this study aims to examine the role of Ogbunike Cave in African cultural heritage and tourism, critically analyzing the roles of governmental and non-governmental agencies in its preservation. By analyzing the various dimensions of the cave's importance, this research will contribute to ongoing discussions on heritage conservation, sustainable tourism, and the preservation of indigenous traditions. Through an exploration of the challenges facing the site and potential strategies for its promotion, the study will provide insights into how cultural heritage can effectively be harnessed for national development. If these issues are not addressed immediately, the Ogbunike cave may deteriorate by losing its ability to its cultural importance and economic development. Therefore, it is important to check the challenges affecting its conservation and detect effective strategies for its permanent protection and promotion.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Results from previous ethnographic studies have shown that despite its unique historical and cultural significance in Igbo cultural heritage, the Ogbunike Cave remains underdeveloped as a heritage tourism destination (Oguamanam & Nwankwo, 2015; Ugwu et al., 2022; Ejikeme, 2021) The cave's vast network of sacred tunnels which makes it a unique emblem of African heritage have not translated into sustainable tourism or economic benefits for the surrounding communities. Several African countries have leveraged their cultural landmarks for tourism development, but a country like Nigeria continues to underexploit sites like the Ogbunike Cave due to inadequate government policies, weak conservation strategies, and lack of infrastructural support (Onyima, 2016).

One of the pressures facing the Ogbunike cave is the increasing environmental decline caused by both natural and anthropogenic factors. Over time, uncontrolled deforestation, urban expansion and pollution have affected the integrity and authenticity of cave cultural relevance, causing concerns about stability and protection. (Mafiana et al.,

2022). Furthermore, the lack of well-defined legal frameworks for the protection of heritage sites in Nigeria has left many such locations vulnerable to neglect, consequently this is the case for Ogbunike cave. Although both governmental and non-governmental organization such as National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) and Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) respectively are nominally charged with the site's conservation and promotion, however their initiatives lack the scale, coordination, and community involvement necessary to effect lasting change. As a result, the Ogbunike Cave's full potential to attract domestic and international visitors and to generate cultural awareness, local employment, and economic growth remain unrealized. Therefore, this gap between the cave's inherent value and its current management highlights the urgent necessity for a collaboratively designed strategy that addresses infrastructural, environmental, and institutional gaps. Given these challenges, this study seeks to investigate the role of the Ogbunike Cave in African cultural heritage and tourism, examining and critically assess the role of governmental and non-governmental organization in its development.

1.2 Research Objectives

Specifically, to:

- i. To assess the historical and spiritual significance of the Ogbunike Cave in Igbo culture.
- ii. To evaluate the contribution of the cave in cultural tourism and local economic development.
- iii. To identify and analyze the challenges faced by protection (such as infrastructural deficit, environmental decline, and management deficiencies) and promoting the Ogbunike cave as an attractive tourist destination (shortcomings) and promote Ogbunike Cave as an appealing tourism destination.
- iv. To examine the role of governmental and non-governmental organizations in the management of the site.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

At its core, the conceptual framework of this study explores the role of Ogbunike Cave's as a symbol of African heritage, examining its cultural significance. Tourism potential, the pivotal role of governmental and non-governmental agencies in its preservation, challenges and opportunities as well as the caves' significance in African heritage. Ogbunike Cave situated in Ogbunike town of Anambra state in Southeastern Nigeria. Ogbunike cave is located around Ogba hill was likened by many as the height of a story building because of its phantom-like stature, making it one of the natural wonders in the Southeastern region of Nigeria. The cave was developed on a sandstone formation contrary to the widely held view that caves normally develop on the limestone regions (Ejikeme, 2021). The theoretical framework of the study is anchored on heritage tourism theories and cultural identity models, which analyze the significance of cultural sites like Ogbunike Cave in relation to tourism development, community engagement, and preservation strategies. The empirical review presents past studies on cultural tourism and heritage management, focusing on similar sacred sites in Africa and beyond, identifying key trends, best practices, and gaps that this study seeks to address. By synthesizing existing literature, this study establishes a foundation for understanding the interplay between cultural heritage, spirituality, and tourism, setting the stage for discussions on leveraging Ogbunike Cave as a key cultural asset while addressing challenges to its full potential.

2.1.1 The Historical and Cultural Significance of Ogbunike Cave

The Ogbunike Cave, located in Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria, is one of the most significant natural and historical landmarks in West Africa. The cave has been a site of spiritual and historical relevance for centuries, deeply embedded in the traditions of the Igbo people. Oral histories trace the origins of the cave to ancient times, with local myths and legends linking them to divine intervention and mystical occurrences (Odum, 2019). However, according to the locale's narrative, the Ogbunike cave is traditionally known as "Ogba". In the culture of Ogbunike community, Ogba was believed to be a deity residing within cave who possessed the omniscient ability to uncover crimes, especially theft (Ejikeme, 2021). In ancient times in the Ogbunike community when someone was accused of a crime, he could prove his innocence by entering the cave. And according to the people's beliefs then, the guilty ones never return alive. Hence residents used the name of the town "Ogbunike" where the cave was located to describe the site, which is today referred to as the Ogbunike cave. Also, other myths associated with the cave's existence include that before the arrival of the Europeans to the town in 1894, when they built St Monica's College suggest that people of Ogbunike used to worship the cave believing in its spiritual and supernatural powers (Odum, 2019). Ogbunike cave was believed by the communities that it has been in existence since creation. Though it was not created by man but rather discovered by a man. The tourists guide said that Ogbunike cave was discovered by a man called "Ukwa" from Umucheke kindred in Ifite. Ukwa was a great hunter during one of his hunting expeditions; he encountered a gigantic phantom who sat majestically on his throne in the thick forest. (Ejikeme, 2021). Nevertheless, the cave was believed to have served as a refuge for early settlers, warriors, and spiritual leaders who sought protection during times of conflict

and uncertainty. Historical records indicate that the Ogbunike Cave played a crucial role during the pre-colonial and colonial eras.

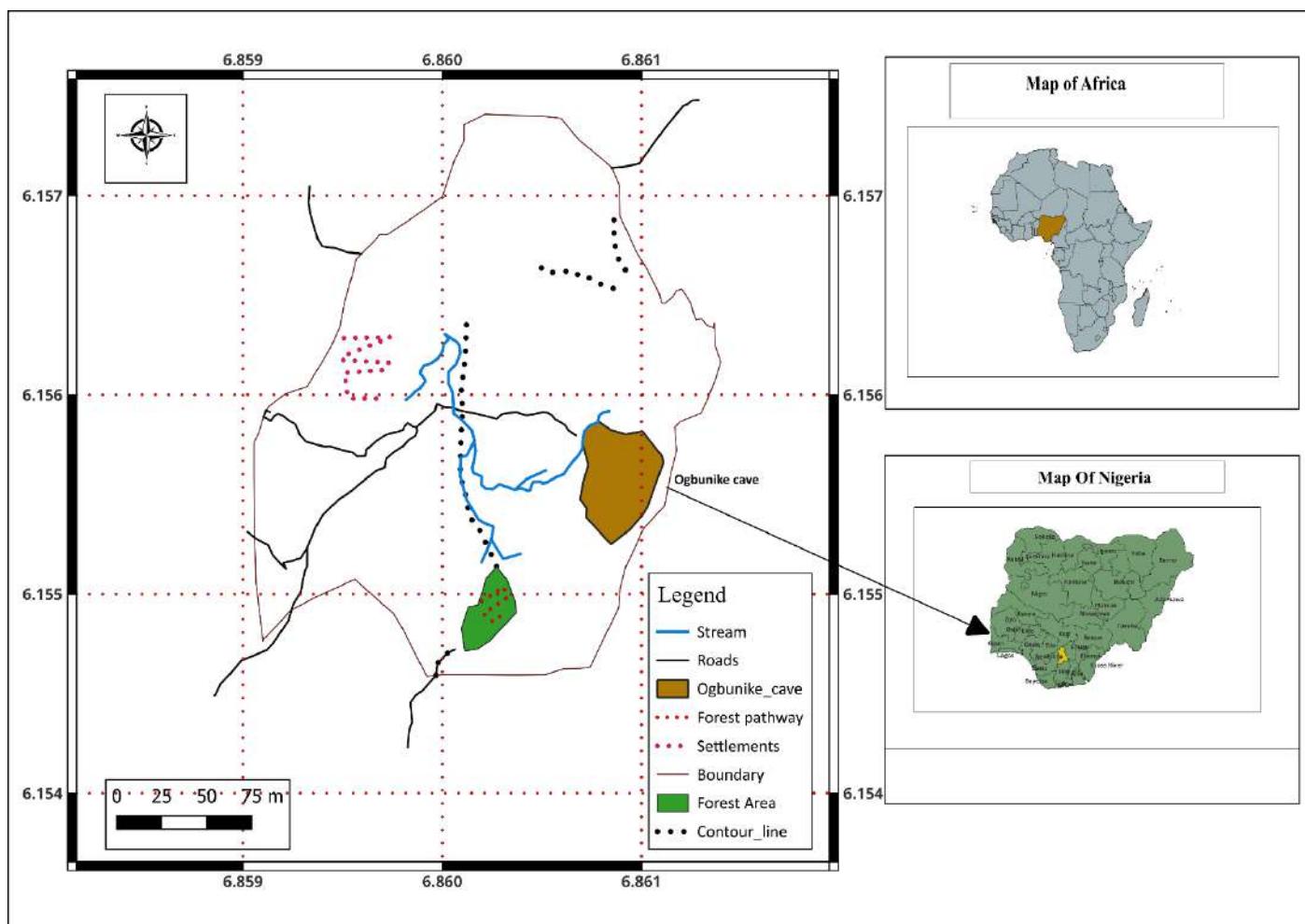


Figure 1

Map of the Ogbunike Cave

Source: Researchers construct through QGIS mapping, 2025.

The structure of the cave, consisting of several tunnels and chambers, the function of the cave has contributed to its position as a symbol of a cultural milestone and flexibility among the Igbo people. Beyond its historical importance, the cave is also recognized for its role in traditional religious practices. The annual Ime Ogbe festival, celebrated by the local community, is dedicated to honoring the spiritual essence of the cave. During this festival, priests and traditional patrons perform rituals, sacrifice, and pray to please the gods living within the cave (Odum, 2019). These rituals strengthen the cultural and religious relationship between the cave and the local population, making them only a physical structure but more than a living heritage site. In modern times, the Ogbunike Cave has become an important tourist attraction, attracting visitors interested in history, culture and adventure. (Ugwu et al., 2022). Without proper management, the historical and cultural essence of the Ogbunike Cave risks being lost to neglect and modernization pressures. The historical significance of the Ogbunike Cave extends beyond its immediate cultural and religious relevance. The integration of sustainable tourism practices with heritage conservation efforts could transform the Ogbunike Cave into a globally recognized cultural site, while ensuring that future generations continue to benefit from their historical, spiritual and economic value.

2.1.2 Ogbunike Cave as a Symbol of Spirituality and Cultural Identity

Ogbunike Cave holds a deep spiritual and cultural significance for the Igbo people and Nigeria as a whole. The cave is not only a geological formation, but a revered holy site where spirituality and identity is intimate. Oral traditions detect the origin of the cave divine Intervention, connecting them with local beliefs with ancestral spirits and deities. Rituals, prayers, and sacrifices are conducted at the cave to seek blessings and protection (Ejikeme, 2021). The Ime Ogbe festival serves as a prominent expression of the cave's spiritual significance, bringing together traditional custodians and believers for purification rites. The cave reinforces indigenous belief systems and promotes communal

unity. Beyond spirituality, the cave historically served as a place of asylum, decision-making and community ceremonies (Devlin, n.d.). Additionally, they preserve indigenous knowledge through oral traditions passed down by custodians and village chiefs (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). Modernization and urbanization threaten the cultural and spiritual significance of the cave. The decline in traditional worship and the rise of western religious practices have contributed to reduced reverence for sacred sites (Bienose-Osagiede et al., 2023). Furthermore, unregulated tourism can degrade the cave's cultural integrity (Ugwu et al., 2022). Sustainable conservation policies that balance heritage preservation with responsible tourism are therefore encouraged to protect the site's cultural and spiritual essence.

2.1.3 Challenges Facing the Ogbunike Cave

Despite their cultural and economic significance, cultural heritage sites like the Ogbunike cave face multiple threats, including urbanization, environmental degradation, inadequate conservation policies, and globalization (Onyima, 2016). While these sites can run tourism and economic growth, their existence depends on active security measures. A major threat is urbanization. As cities expand, many heritage sites are encroached or demolished to make way for modern development. In Nigeria, poor urban planning has damaged many historical sites (Adenaike et al., 2022). The Ogbunike Cave, though designated as a protected site, faces threats from human encroachment due to inadequate government intervention (Okeke, 2024). Without proper zoning laws and heritage protection policies, cultural sites remain at risk.

Environmental decline and climate change also create important challenges. Many cultural heritage sites are unsafe for erosion, floods and deforestation. Rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns contribute to the structural weakening of historical sites (Oguamanam & Nwankwo, 2015). The Ogbunike Cave, for instance, is at risk due to excessive humidity and water infiltration. Pollution from nearby settlements further threatens their ecological and cultural integrity. To address these environmental concerns requires a combination of scientific protection techniques and permanent tourism practices.

Inadequate money and poor maintenance further obstructed the conservation of cultural heritage sites. Many African governments allocate limited resources for cultural protection, giving priority to other economic sectors (UNESCO, 2021). As a result, heritage sites remain underfunded and poorly maintained. Public-private partnerships could provide viable solutions by ensuring better site management and investment in conservation efforts, thus addressing these challenges demands such collaboration of governmental and non-governmental who are responsible for implementing heritage conservation strategies at cultural sites and natural environment such as the Ogbunike Cave prioritizing efforts based on its ecological value and vulnerability (Niemiller & Taylor, 2019).

2.1.4 Role of Agencies in Preservation of the Ogbunike Cave

Both government and non-government agencies are responsible for implementing heritage protection strategies that protect the natural environment of a cave to prioritize conservation efforts based on the ecological value and vulnerability (Niemiller & Taylor, 2019). Governmental agencies such as the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) in Nigeria, as well as the Federal and State governments can be pivotal in formulating policies and regulations aimed at protecting cultural and natural heritage sites like the Ogbunike Cave. Their roles can include:

Legal Protection: Applying and implementing the law that protects the cave from vandalism, unauthorized development and other threats. *Management:* Overseeing the day-to-day management of the cave, including visitor management, infrastructure maintenance, and preservation activities. *Research and Public Education:* To conduct research on the ecological and cultural importance of the cave, as well as educating the public and stakeholders about its importance.

Moreover, NGOs specializing in conservation and heritage preservation in Nigeria such as Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) which focuses on nature conservation and Biodiversity Preservation Center (BPC) which are dedicated to preserving threatened wildlife species among others play crucial roles in safeguarding sacred and cultural sites with contributions such as: *Community Engagement:* To engage with local communities to raise awareness about the cultural importance and importance of the cave. *Advocacy and Lobbying:* Advocating continuous tourism practices and environmental protection measures is to be integrated into government policies. *Capacity Building:* Providing training and resources to local stakeholders for continuity and conservation efforts.

Nevertheless, the preservation gap at sacred cultural sites like Ogbunike Cave arises from a lack of cohesive efforts between governmental authorities and local communities, despite the existing regulations. While government bodies such as NCMM provide the required framework for heritage protection, they often fail to effectively attach local stakeholders (Shyllon, 1996) which is where the NGOs thrive. Conversely, NGOs introduce innovative conservation strategies but struggle with scalability and sustainability (Ukpoju et al., 2023). This disconnect obstructs capacity for integrated conservation efforts. Therefore, it is necessary that government and non-government agencies play an important role in the protection of the Ogbunike cave through a collaborative approach including local stakeholders, tourism agencies and protection experts. By fostering shared partnerships, these agencies can.

2.2 Theoretical Review

The theoretical structure establishes the basis for analyzing the interplay between cultural heritage, spirituality, tourism, and economic development, particularly within the context of the Ogbunike Cave. This study applies two key theories Cultural Heritage Theory and Sacred Place Theory, with a primary emphasis on Sacred Place Theory due to its focus on the spiritual and cultural relevance of heritage sites in African traditions.

2.2.1 Cultural Heritage Theory

The cultural heritage theory suggests that cultural sites serve as a repository of shared values, traditions and historical memory, shaping community identity (Bauer, 2005). Heritage is dynamic, consistently develops through cultural practices and narratives to maintain relevance in generations (Mazzocchi, 2022). Sites like Ogbunike Cave contribute to the identity formation, social harmony and cultural diplomacy to attract tourists seeking historical and cultural understanding (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009).

Economically, heritage sites support sustainable development through tourism, generating revenue and job creation (UNESCO, 2021). However, challenges such as commodification, loss of authenticity, and conflict arise between modernization and protection (Madandola & Boussaa, 2023) While the theory shows the socio-economic importance of heritage sites, it does not fully address their spiritual and religious significance, necessitating an additional theoretical perspective.

2.2.2 Sacred Place Theory

The Sacred Place Theory provides a spiritual and cultural lens to understand sites like the Ogbunike Cave. This theory suggests that the holy places have internal spiritual values, which are often associated with myths, religious rituals and supernatural beliefs (Mgaya, 2023). Sacred sites serve as places for pilgrimage, communal worship, and cultural transmission, reinforcing ancestral connections and mystical experiences (O'Donnell, 2017).

The theory is relevant to Ogbunike Cave, which has religious and mysterious significance to the Igbo people. Traditional rituals, such as the Ime Ogbe festival, continue to affirm the cave's sacredness (Ejikeme, 2021). Unlike the cultural heritage theory, which mainly sees the heritage through an economic and historical lens, the sacred place theory integrates the spiritual characteristics of the principle spiritual agency and heritage sites (Jett, 1992).

Moreover, the sacred site are unsafe for commercialization, urbanization and cultural erosion (Sinthumule et al., 2021). Many African sacred places suffer from modernization and government's neglect, which has led to a decline in spiritual importance (Infield & Mugisha, 2013). Ogbunike cave encounters the same risks from environmental decline and irregular tourism, which strengthens the requirement of heritage protection policies that respect both the content and spiritual dimensions of the site. Given its alignment with the cultural and spiritual essence of the Ogbunike Cave, Sacred Place Theory serves as the primary framework for this study.

2.3 Empirical Review

Empirical studies have investigated economic, spiritual and social roles of cultural heritage sites, which reveal major trends in heritage tourism and protection. El Azazy (2022) analyzed the economic impact of heritage tourism in Africa, given that cultural sites promote national economies, they also face challenges such as environmental erosion and over-commercialization. Oriaku (2021) studied the impact of tourism on Ogbunike Cave, finding that poor infrastructure and management hinder its full tourism potential, despite the site's cultural significance. The study recommended associate conservation efforts associated with government and private stakeholders. Borokini (2016) explored the spiritual value of African sacred sites, revealing that these locations serve as places of pilgrimage, religious practice, and community gatherings. However, modernization has led to a decline in spiritual relevance in many holy sites. Bongmba (2000) while emphasizing the boycott of indigenous communities with decision-making processes, investigated community participation in heritage protection. His study recommended a community-based tourist model to balance economic gains with cultural protection. These studies show that economic benefits, spiritual importance and conservation challenges of heritage sites. However, research gaps persist regarding sustainable tourism strategies, economic contributions, and local community involvement in conservation efforts.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate the cultural significance of Ogbunike Cave and its contributions to African cultural heritage and tourism. It emphasized the roles of various agencies (governmental and non-governmental) in its preservation. The study's population included residents, tourists, tour guides, tourism experts, and heritage site officials in Ogbunike, Anambra State, Nigeria. A stratified random sampling technique ensured diverse representation among 120 respondents. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and interviews, complemented by secondary sources. Analysis involved

both quantitative methods (descriptive statistics, inferential tests using SPSS) and qualitative methods (thematic analysis), providing comprehensive insights into Ogbunike Cave's role in cultural heritage and tourism in Africa.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

In this section we examine the data collected from respondents, analyzing them in line with the study's objectives and research questions. The data is organized into tables for clarity, including questionnaire distribution, demographic information, and responses to research items. Each table is followed by a detailed interpretation to provide insights into the findings. The responses are analyzed using descriptive statistics, primarily frequency and percentage distributions.

4.1.1 Response Rate

A total of 130 questionnaires were distributed, with 120 successfully retrieved and analyzed, representing a response rate of 92.31%. The high response rate (92.31%) indicates a strong willingness of respondents to participate in the study, ensuring the reliability of the collected data. *Demographic Information of Respondents:* The demographic characteristics of respondents include gender, age, educational qualification, and occupation.

Table 1

Response Rate

Questionnaires	Number Distributed	Number Retrieved	Response Rate (%)
Distributed	130	120	92.31

4.1.2 Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 2 below shows that 56.1% of respondents are male, while 43.9% are female. This indicates a fairly balanced gender representation, suggesting that both males and females have considerable knowledge and interest in the subject matter.

Table 2

Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	67	56.1
Female	53	43.9
Total	120	100

The majority of respondents (35.3%) in Table 3 fall within the 26-35 age bracket, followed by 18-25 years (29.4%). This suggests that younger individuals are more involved or interested in cultural heritage and tourism at Ogbunike Cave.

Table 3

Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-25	35	29.4
26-35	42	35.3
36-45	27	22.1
46 and above	16	13.2
Total	120	100

4.1.3 Historical and Spiritual Significance of the Ogbunike Cave

The results in table 4 show that 35.3% of respondents strongly agree that the Ogbunike Cave has a strong historical connection to the Igbo people and their ancestors, while 42.0% agree. A minority of 15.1% disagree, and 7.6% strongly disagree.

Table 4*The Ogbunike Cave have a Strong Historical Connection to the Igbo People and their Ancestors*

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	42	35.3
Agree	51	42.0
Disagree	18	15.1
Strongly Disagree	9	7.6
Total	120	100

4.1.4 Contribution of Ogbunike Cave to Cultural Tourism and Economic Growth in Nigeria

Table 5 reveals that 36.7% of respondents strongly agree and 40.8% agree that the Ogbunike Cave attracts local and international tourists, thereby promoting cultural tourism. Meanwhile, 13.3% disagree, and 9.2% strongly disagree. This suggests that the cave is seen as a valuable cultural tourism site.

Table 5*The Ogbunike Cave Attracts both Local and International Tourists, Promoting Cultural Tourism.*

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	44	36.7
Agree	49	40.8
Disagree	16	13.3
Strongly Disagree	11	9.2
Total	120	100

4.1.5 Major Challenges Affecting the Conservation and Promotion of the Cave

The results in Table 6 shows that 39.2% of respondents strongly agree and 40.0% agree that poor government funding is a major challenge in the conservation of the Ogbunike Cave. Meanwhile, 12.5% disagree, and 8.3% strongly disagree. This suggests that inadequate government investment is a critical issue affecting the preservation of the cave.

Table 6*Poor Government Funding is a Major Challenge in the Conservation of the Ogbunike Cave*

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	47	39.2
Agree	48	40.0
Disagree	15	12.5
Strongly Disagree	10	8.3
Total	120	100

The results in Table 7 indicate that 38.3% of respondents strongly agree and 42.7% agree that the lack of proper infrastructure limits tourism potential at the Ogbunike Cave. However, 11.7% disagree, and 7.4% strongly disagree. This highlights that infrastructure development is necessary for the enhancement of tourism activities.

Table 7*Lack of Proper Infrastructure Limits Tourism Potential at the Ogbunike Cave*

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	46	38.3
Agree	51	42.7
Disagree	14	11.7
Strongly Disagree	9	7.3
Total	120	100

4.1.6 Roles Played by Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations in the Preservation of the Ogbunike Cave

Table 8 below reveals that 8.1% of respondents strongly agree and 14.4% agree that government agencies play a role in protecting the Ogbunike Cave through cultural policies. Meanwhile, a staggering 44.2% disagree, and a further 33.3% strongly disagree. This suggests that the respondents do not feel the impact of the government in the preservation and management of the cave and even though government policies on preservation efforts may exist, they may require more effective implementation.

Table 8*Government Agencies Play a Role in Protecting the Ogbunike Cave through Cultural Policies*

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	10	8.1
Agree	17	14.4
Disagree	53	44.2
Strongly Disagree	40	33.3
Total	120	100

The results in table 9 show that 58.3% of respondents either strongly agree (20.8%) or agree (37.5%) that NGOs have contributed to awareness and conservation efforts for the Ogbunike Cave. This significant majority suggests that NGOs play a crucial role in promoting the cave. However, 25.0% of respondents either disagree (25.0%) or strongly disagree (16.7%), indicating some skepticism or perceived shortcomings in the current efforts. This suggests that NGOs play a significant role in promoting the cave, but more collaborative efforts with the community and major governmental bodies may be needed for effective conservation.

Table 9*Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have Contributed to Awareness and Conservation Efforts for the Ogbunike Cave.*

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	25	20.8
Agree	45	37.5
Disagree	30	25.0
Strongly Disagree	20	16.7
Total	120	100

4.1.7 Bridging the Perception-Implementation Chasm: Introducing the Critical Gap Analysis Framework

The profound disconnect between policy and practice at Ogbunike Cave is quantified in this survey. Therefore, the Critical Gap Analysis table below dissects this dichotomy by outlining four (4) operational dimensions where governmental shortcomings and NGO innovations collide and where their disconnection actively undermines conservation.

Table 10*Critical Gap Analysis of Governance vs. NGOs / Grassroots Efforts*

Threat Dimension	Governmental Agency Shortfalls	Non-Governmental (NGO) /Community Efforts	Preservation Gap
Environmental Protection	No erosion control or species monitoring	Community-based sanitation project and biodiversity monitoring programs	Data not integrated into state systems
Cultural Safeguarding	Rituals excluded from management plans	Oral history documentation	No protocol for elder-ranger knowledge transfer
Tourism Management	Unregulated visitor access	"Cave Guardian" vigilante /volunteer patrols	No formal training or equipment provision
Crisis Response	Bureaucratic response delays to floods/erosions	Community alerts during flooding	Zero inter-agency contingency plans

Table 10 above compares how governmental agencies and NGOs/communities led initiatives approach threats to Ogbunike Cave highlighting systemic preservation gaps. The analysis reveals significant gaps between government and NGO/community efforts across key areas. Environmental protection lacks erosion control and species monitoring at the government level, while community initiatives focus on sanitation and biodiversity, but data remain unintegrated into state systems. Cultural safeguarding efforts exclude rituals from management plans, with no protocols for elder knowledge transfer. Tourism management suffers from unregulated access and volunteer patrols without formal training. Crisis response is hindered by bureaucratic delays, with community alerts filling the gap, but no inter-agency contingency plans are in place. Overall, coordinated integration is urgently needed.

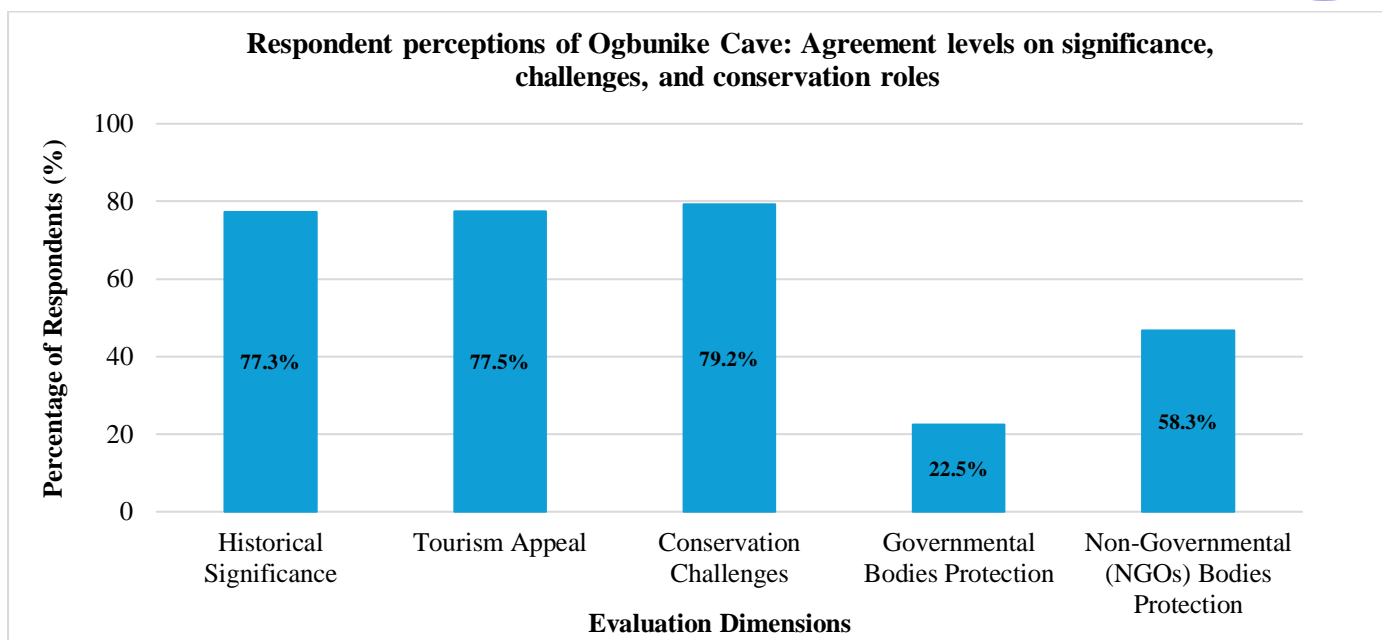


Figure 2
Agreement Levels on Ogbunike Cave’s Spiritual and Historical Significance, Challenges, and Conservation Roles.

The bar chart illustration in figure 2 compares the percentage of respondents who Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree with statements on each topic. Data drawn from the surveys in Tables 4–9 highlight that a strong majority agree the cave has historical/spiritual significance (77.3% agree or strongly agree) and that it promotes cultural tourism (77.5% agree/strongly agree). Also (79.2% agree or strongly agree) that there are conservation challenges at the cave which need management intervention. However, in contrast, only 22.5% agree the government agencies who are primarily responsible for heritage sites have effectively managed to do so over the years (8.1% strongly agree and 14.4% agree) while 77.5% disagree. Likewise, 58.3% (20.8% and 37.5%) believe NGOs have contributed to cave conservation, compared to 41.7% who express disagreement (25.0% and 16.7%).

4.3 Discussion

The findings from the primary data analysis reveal crucial insights into the historical and spiritual significance of the Ogbunike Cave, its role in cultural tourism and economic growth, the challenges facing its conservation, and the roles played by governmental and non-governmental organizations in its preservation. These findings are further corroborated by existing literature, which provides a broader context for understanding the importance of the cave within Nigeria’s and Africa’s heritage and tourism development. *Strong Historical/Spiritual Value:* 77.3% of respondents agree or strongly agree that Ogbunike Cave has a deep historical connection to the Igbo people, indicating widespread recognition of its spiritual and cultural importance. *Tourism Appeal:* Similarly, 77.5% agree or strongly agree that the cave attracts tourists both local and international visitors, which helps boost cultural tourism. This shows respondents see the cave as a valuable tourism asset. *Conservation Challenges:* Also, a large majority of the respondents (79.2%) agreed or strongly agreed that poor government funding for relevant bodies is a major challenge to conserving the cave. Which suggests inadequate budget and funding support and thus undermines the caves preservation efforts. *Weak Government Role:* Moreover, just 22.5% of the respondents supported the view that relevant governmental agencies protect the cave through cultural policies, management initiatives and support (8.1% strongly agree, 14.4% agree), while a high 77.5% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. The respondents feel that although government policies exist, they are poorly implemented or ineffective. *Moderate NGO Involvement:* Finally, around 58.3% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that non-governmental bodies also known as NGOs contribute to the cave’s awareness and conservation initiatives through community involvement (20.8% strongly agree, 37.5% agree), while 41.7% disagree or strongly disagree (25.0% disagree, 16.7% strongly disagree). This indicates that although some of the respondents see NGOs playing a positive role, they still think that a lot can be achieved through the NGOs who have a more direct impact to the grassroots communities, revealing pockets of skepticism or perceived shortcomings.

Boost Government Funding: The findings indicate that there is a need to allocate dedicated funding for Ogbunike Cave’s preservation (e.g. tourism development funds or conservation funds). Since nearly 80% of respondents cited that funding is a major problem, hence increased investment is needed. Public–private partnerships or grants could also supplement limited government funding. *Improve Cave’s Infrastructure:* Investment in relevant infrastructures such as access roads, visitor facilities (restrooms, signage), and safety measures at the cave could boost its appeal and

preservation. The fact that 81% of respondents highlighted infrastructural shortcomings means upgrading physical access and amenities should be a major priority to support tourism and conservation activities. *Strengthening Policy and Enforcement:* furthermore, the results revealed that it is imperative to revise and enforce heritage protection laws with clear management plans, an area the government has struggled in over the years (Shyllon, 1996). Given also that 77.5% of respondents felt government policies are ineffective, making preservation policies concrete and monitored is critical. *Enhance Collaboration:* Form a multi-stakeholder management council (government, traditional leaders, NGOs, local community) to coordinate conservation efforts. The analysis from the study calls for collaboration and shared responsibilities in conservation initiatives at the cave. With examples of things like integrating NGO projects and community monitoring with official programs. This could include data sharing systems, volunteer training (e.g. cave guides/rangers), and joint crisis protocols as earlier indicated in the critical analysis in Table 10. *Leverage NGO and Community Initiatives:* As indicated from the findings (where 58.3% of respondents recognize). There is need for the non-governmental bodies or NGOs to collaborate with the local communities for instance, government could match NGO education programs or channel local communities through education programs and awareness on conservation of the cave and in partnering to achieve conservation projects. Empowering local volunteers (e.g. “cave guardians”) and formalizing their roles can improve on-the-ground protection.

The result from the study highlights the significance of the Ogbunike Cave as an emblem of African heritage while also revealing key challenges affecting its conservation. The cave is widely regarded as an important heritage site among the Igbo people, yet inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and weak conservation policies hinder its preservation and potential for broader tourism attraction. The study indicated that the role of governmental and non-governmental organizations is not highly felt in the preservation efforts needed for effective management and highlights the urgent need for collaboration to bridge operational voids such as integrated data systems, formal volunteer training, and co-designed crisis protocols.

Ogbunike Cave’s Visual Representation and Research Survey Documentation



Plate 1
The Ogbunike Cave Entrance Tunnel



Plate 2
The Caves Double Tunnel Exit



Plate 3
Intricate Rock Formations within the Cave's



Plate 4
The Ancient Rock of Ogba Deity at the Cave



Plate 5
The Caves Water Stream, Nkissa River



Plate 6
Research Assessment at the Cave's Interior

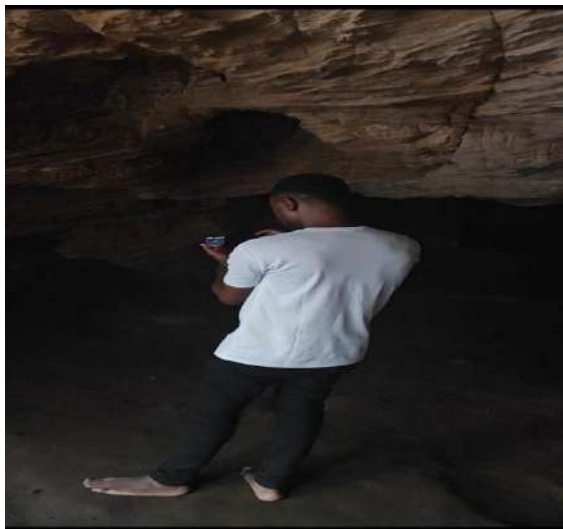


Plate 7
The Researcher Taking Documentation of the Cave Geological Features



Plate 8
The 317 Stairs that Leads to the Cave

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study highlights the deep cultural and spiritual significance of Ogbunike Cave, as widely recognized by the respondents and reflected in its strong tourism appeal. As it contributes not only to the cultural identity of Igbo heritage but also a spatial emblem of Africa's heritage. However, the challenges of conservation remain a significant threat to its sustainability. While the involvement of governmental and non-governmental organizations is acknowledged, their impacts and contributions remain inadequate to fully support the preservation of this heritage site. To safeguard Ogbunike Cave effectively, a strategic approach is required to strengthen governmental and non-governmental agencies commitment to the preservation of the cave through funding, policy implementation paired with targeted community initiatives that can enhance the caves sustainability and appeal without compromising the site's integrity. Ultimately, aligning cultural custodianship with sustainable tourism supported by reliable funding, collaborative governance, and continuous, metric-driven monitoring will ensure the preservation and continuous cultural significance of the Ogbunike Cave to the Nigerian and African society.

5.2 Recommendations

The government should invest in improving access roads, signage, and visitor facilities to attract more tourists and enhance their experience. There is a need for increased financial support from both government and private sector

organizations to fund conservation efforts and promote tourism. Local communities should be more involved in the conservation efforts, ensuring that their cultural heritage is preserved while also benefiting from tourism. The government should enforce policies aimed at protecting historical sites and ensuring their sustainability. Collaboration between government agencies and NGOs should be encouraged to boost infrastructure development and promotion of the cave. There should be more awareness programs to educate people on the historical, cultural, and economic significance of the Ogbunike Cave.

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