Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

Available online at https://www.gajrc.com
DOI: https://doi.org/10.36348/gajhss.2026.v08i06.001

OPEN ACCESS

ISSN:2706-901X (P)
ISSN:2707-2576 (O)

Original Research Article

From Law to Lived Reality: Institutional Trust, Cultural Resistance, and the Effectiveness of Child Rights Enforcement in Subnational Nigeria

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Article History
Received: 20.12.2025
Accepted: 14.02.2026
Published: 03.11.2026

1.0 Abstract: Failure of institutions and cultural resistance, particularly in remote areas and lower administrative levels, have a negative impact on the implementation of children's rights in Nigeria. Despite the fact that the Child Rights Act (CRA) has been formally adopted, there is still a shortage of observance and participation of the local communities. Research shows that trust in institutions and cultural resistance significantly influence the implementation of children's rights in the South-East of Nigeria. The staff of the Public Complaint Commission (PCC) as a statutory ombudsman institution were the main actors in this study. The team, led by the Institutional Theory and Cultural Relativism Theory, used a mixed-methods design that involved 65 PCC staff in Enugu and Ebonyi States. The quantitative data were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests, and binary logistic regression, while qualitative information came from semi-structured interviews. The results show that trust in institutions plays a major role in enhancing the participation of the community, while cultural resistance has a negative effect on the implementation of the CRA. Both variables, when combined, determine the perceived and real performance of the PCC, with trust being the factor that relieves culture of its constraining nature. This research have pointed out that the effectiveness of enforcement is contingent upon the capacity of the institution to merge legal authority with socio-cultural legitimacy. The policy proposals make it clear that the institutional design should be transparent, community-oriented, and culturally sensitive, among other things, to help rebuild the trust and execute the Child Rights Acts in societies that are plural in nature.

Keywords: Child Rights, Institutional Trust, Cultural Resistance, Enforcement, Southeast Nigeria.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

The protection of the rights of the child has become a significant ethical and legal issues of the 21st century. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which was adopted in 1989, has been a significant change for the global community in the way it recognizes and protects the rights of children. In fact, the CRC is close to universal in its ratification and globally accepted as the most fundamental human rights instrument for children (Ruck, 2018). However, the focus of successive reports on the state of children's rights has been the gap existing between the commitment made in law and what has been done

in practice. Vaghri *et al*., (2022) and Reynaert, *et al.,* (2009) research suggest that while laws dealing with the issue of child rights and protection are widespread, the enforcement results depend on factors like institutional integrity, public trust, and the cultural legitimacy of the law. In particular, in situations where trust in the judicial system is low, people are unwilling to involve the state even in cases of child abuse while they take care of the matter themselves or remain silent (Skivenes & Benbenishty, 2022). This gap is indicative of a bigger problem in human rights management: the signing of legal instruments does not automatically lead to changes at the grass-root level (Baumann, 2017).

Globally, there is increasing awareness that institutional trust and cultural compatibility are the main factors on the efficiency of child rights protection. For example, Sweden and Canada are high-trust societies where the enforcement of child protection laws is not only quick but also supported by the local community (Archard, 2014). On the other hand, postcolonial and low-income countries are characterized by doubt provoked by the state's failure in the past, corruption, and the existence of conflicts between law and culture (Akinlabi, 2025; Farrukh & Kamla, 2025). In such places, trust in institutions becomes the link connecting formal structures and people's behavior. The absence of it turns legal interventions into actions against people that are least expected to help (Harris-Short, 2003). Therefore, the worldwide children's rights debate has evolved from creating laws to the profound issue of gaining people's trust in institutions and binding them to the norms culturally.

These issues take on different feature in Africa. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), signed in 1990, was intended to modify universal standards to fit African contexts. However, the coexistence of the two system of law, formal and customary, in Africa frequently results in the children's rights being violated through contradictions of those systems (Strohwald, 2023). Regardless of constitutions, patriarchal norms and religious doctrines are still influencing the way childhood, discipline, and parental authority are understood (Mubangizi, 2020). The less than ideal situation of the public institutions - welfare agencies that are not well funded and poorly coordinated, as well as courts with limited jurisdiction - is at the heart of the reduction of the capacity for the law to be enforced (Worluh-Okolie & Okoye, 2024). The failure of the legal system in Africa, as it is related to widespread "systemic inertia and social ambivalence" by which the continent's silence on child abuse and exploitation is produced, has been pointed out by Diriwari (2017). Therefore, the children's protection becomes a challenge the state institutions have to prove their credibility and legitimacy against (Ibe, 2024).

The case of Nigeria is a good example to illustrate this paradox. The Child Rights Act (CRA) of 2003 was a local initiative to bring the CRC in line with the Nigerian context, hence, creating a framework for welfare that is one of the most comprehensive in Africa. The problem is, that after more than two decades, enforcing the law is still very much fragmented. The CRA has only been localized in 25 out of 36 states, and the application of the law is going on in fits and starts (Giwa, 2023; Enweonwu, 2024). According to research reports, out of every 10 children in Nigeria, 6 have fallen victims of physical, sexual, or psychological violence before reaching the age of 18, and yet, less than 5% of them have gotten any formal help or justice. Nationwide, more than 43% of the population have declared in surveys that they have little trust in institutions that are responsible for law enforcement with the percentage of people living in the southeast and sharing this opinion going over 60%. Among the root causes most pointed at by the researchers are deep-seated institutional distrust and cultural norms that give family discretion a higher hand than statutory intervention when it comes to the handling of cases of abuse of children (Ihua-Maduenyi, 2011; Okaru-Bisant, 2018; Ibe, 2024).

The conflict between law and culture highlight the children's rights issue in Nigeria. Even though the CRA provides for children's rights to survival, development, and protection, in many communities the intervention of the state in family or disciplinary matters is seen as an intrusion (Ogunde, 2021). Culture-wise resistance, which can be seen in the form of silence, abuse rationalization, or preference for community mediation, weakens the enforcement process. At the same time, the inefficiency of the bureaucracy makes it hard for victims to bring their cases to the open and thus, impunity thrives in these areas (Giwa, 2023; Diriwari, 2017). Hence, the Nigerian child protection system is a reflection of what Vergili (2025) refers to as a "legislative mirage" - an intricate legal system that is far from the people's daily lives.

The issues are even more severe at subnational level. Southern Nigeria that consists of the five states of Ebonyi, Enugu, Anambra, Imo, and Abia, is an area where communal norms and statutorily law are at loggerheads. The former place great emphasis on communal harmony, paternal authority, and gender hierarchy (Justin, 2025; Okondu, 2023). The poll results also suggest that the elders in the traditional community frequently advise against bringing domestic abuse cases to the public, as they view it as a private matter (Monanu, 2013), on

the other hand, social workers in Enugu report that they are being attacked when they appear to assist in child maltreatment cases (Ojiemudia, 2023). Okwulogu (2025) claims that this is "cultural displacement"- the idea that the rights of children are something foreign that is imposed from the outside. Besides, the weak institutional condition such as the lack of funds, bad inter-agency coordination, and shortage of staff training, aggravate the situation even more (Connelly & Ikpaahindi, 2017; Diriwari, 2017).

All these factors combined, reveal the main issue which is at the heart of the matter, despite the existence of strong legal provisions, the implementation of children's rights at a local level in Nigeria is still affected by insufficient institutional trust and deep-rooted cultural resistance. In general, laws and agencies are not trusted very much, most notably in the area of Southeast, where the power of the community quite often goes beyond that of the state authorities (Okondu, 2023; Justin, 2025). The problem is thus a systemic one rather than a legislative issue - the network of protection does not have the social support and institutional trust that are needed for it to be followed. As a result, abuses continue to be carried out under the veil of culture and bureaucracy, thus, revealing the difference between the normative pledge and the moral side of Nigeria's child protection system. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to address three interrelated research questions:

- How does institutional trust influence community engagement with child rights enforcement mechanisms in Eastern Nigeria?
- In what ways does cultural resistance undermine or reshape the implementation of the Child Rights Act at state and community levels in Eastern Nigeria?
- How do institutional trust and cultural resistance jointly affect the perceived and actual effectiveness of child protection institutions in Eastern Nigeria?

The significance of this research is to link theoretical and practical differences that exist in the debate of the enforcement of the rights of the child. Global research has, to a large extent, through various publications (Vaghri *et al*., 2022; Ruck, 2018), highlighted the universality of child rights. Meanwhile, regional research has acknowledged legal pluralism in Africa (Strohwald, 2023). Still, hardly any piece of work has empirically combined institutional trust and cultural resistance as two sides of the same analytical coin for Nigeria. This study breaks the national-level generalization by looking at the local communities and their perceptions of formal child rights as either acceptable or to be rejected. The results of the study will be a step further in human rights localization theory and a good source of culturally aware and trust-based methods of implementation. Ultimately, the protection of children's rights in Nigeria and consequently Africa is dependent on the return of public trust to institutions that are the defenders of those most vulnerable, rather than on mere legal transplants from international regimes.

2.1 Conceptual Overview

The argument about safeguarding children has moved from merely recognizing it in law to understanding how different societies adopt and implement the rights of the children. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was the first global agreement that recognized the need to see childhood not only from a moral perspective but also from a legal one (Detrick, 2019; Ruck, 2018). However, after several decades, we still witness that many formal promises do not bring a real change. Research shows that the establishment of legal instruments for child welfare in various countries is not the only factor; the results depend on the institutional capacity and cultural context of the place (Vaghri *et al.,* 2022; Reynaert, *et al*., 2009). Consequently, executing child rights should be considered a journey that is influenced by trust, legitimacy, and the cultural aspects of the law. Intervention in the rights of children is the place where the ideal/legal world meets the reality of people's lives. Here, the institutional competence, public confidence, and moral consensus determine legal effectiveness.

According to Daly (2020), the protection of rights is only possible if the institutions have not only the procedural competence but also social legitimacy. In well-governed societies, citizens trust state agencies to take care of child welfare, and this trust is the main driver of voluntary compliance (Skivenes & Benbenishty, 2022). Still, in places where corruption or neglect has caused the decline of trust, people become indifferent and even hostile towards state interventions. Mubangizi (2020) termed this the "democratic deficit" in human rights enforcement, which is to say, the loss of people's trust in institutions as providers of justice. As a result, the social base of even the most elaborate legal frameworks can become weakened if they continue to be seen as imposed from outside rather than arising from shared moral values. The issue here is the coexistence of postcolonial and plural societies' statutory laws with customary norms. Baumann (2017) argue that global child rights have to be compatible with local norms to gain acceptance instead of isolating the community. Strohwald (2023) points out that in the Africa situation, the patriarchal and communal values have been major factors in the

challenges of child protection, as the norms stressing parental authority sometimes contradict individual rights. Nigeria's adoption of the Child Rights Act (CRA) in 2003 was a landmark event in law, however, the longevity of such issues as early marriage and corporal punishment indicates the extent to which the statutory reform is limited (Giwa, 2023; Enweonwu, 2024). Therefore, cultural resistance should not be understood as mere ignorance but as the normative contestation— the "protection" and "discipline" moral concerns presenting alternative priorities.

The key factor that leads the enforcement to trust institutional structure. The system that works well depends on the mutual trust between the citizens and the authorities, according to Skivenes & Benbenishty (2022). Lack of support from the people follows the situation, when a body like Nigeria's Public Complaint Commission (PCC) which is supposed to be for the public, is considered to be just another politicized agency out of touch with communities (Ibe, 2024; Worluh-Okolie & Okoye, 2024). On the other hand, there are no limits to legitimacy enhancement through engagement in the decision-making process and by showing cultural sensitivity thus giving the agencies the needed moral power to act in the private as well as the communal sectors. The most important question then will not be whether or not laws are in place but rather if people believe in them, i.e. whether institutions are regarded as trustworthy jani custodians of justice that are in line with local moral orders.

On the other hand, culturally resistant those people who in fact show at the same time institutionally fright. In their works, Ikeh (2023) and Okondu (2023) predict that communities will fully resist any enforcement activities because it means that state power is being imposed uninvited in their private lives. Hence, the alleged alienness of law norms is the main reason for communities coming up with narratives that defend their traditional way of life. However, as Monanu (2013) and Aduba and Ibekwe (2020) state, even though culture is made up of various systems, it is still a flexible one and can be of great help to the welfare of children if the welfare is approached through dialogue instead of force. Therefore, the problem is to deal with culture- to be able to reform by collaborating, not by imposing.

The interaction between the implementation of child rights, the trust in institutions, and the cultural resistance, characterizes the Nigerian puzzle - a system that is legally ambitious but socially fragile. The law enforcement is effectively achieved only if institutions are trusted. Trust, on the other hand, is strengthened when laws are in accordance with cultural norms. In a situation where any of these fail, protection will be merely symbolic - rights avowed but not realized. Consequently, the literature positions the enforcement of child rights as a legal and socio-cultural issue that calls for institutional reforms, cultural translation, and the revival of public trust in the state's moral authority.

2.2 Institutional Trust and Community Engagement in Child Rights Enforcement

Trust in institutions is the main parameter that explains how the enforcement of rights can be done effectively, especially in cases where the legal framework itself is not welcoming to the issue. Child protection means institutional trust of the people in state and quasi-state agencies to act fairly, transparently, and in the best interests of children, i.e., to protect them and not exploit them (Skivenes & Benbenishty, 2022). Trust that is strong has a positive influence on the incidence of crimes being reported, the cooperation between people and the interventions, which are the support from the trust, whereas the low trust call to the intention of avoiding, passing by the silence, and relying on the informal settlements, thus weakening the enforcement process (Ibe, 2024). In sub-Saharan Africa, lack of institutional trust results from the influences suffered during the colonial period, the corruption and the perpetual inefficiency of the governments (Mubangizi, 2020). In these circumstances, the people tend to feel that the government is anti-access and it is impotent, particularly, the marginalized populations. Strohwald (2023) points out the fact that citizens, instead of statutory institutions, mostly go to communal or religious authorities who he says are more reliable in solving child-related disputes. This substitution is not an overlook due to institutional fragility but a reflection of their smart way of dealing with the reality which means, trust is generated from the performance and moral standpoint of the institution as seen by the people.

Research confirmation from Nigeria illustrates this instance. For instance, Worluh-Okolie and Okoye (2024) find that public enforcement bodies like the Public Complaint Commission (PCC) are victims of credibility failure because of their inconsistency, politically driven decisions, and limited possibility of communication. Giwa (2023) explains that because of inefficient and bureaucratic ways of doing things, the office is detached from the realities of the people, who are thus discouraged to try the formal justice route, but the opacity of the procedures makes the trust further disintegrate. Conversely, Ibe (2024) connects this confidence breakdown to a bigger crisis of legitimacy which he argued leads to the human rights enforcement system being subverted. A comparative review unearths that institutional trust can be cultivated through the implementation of the rights to fairness

and the responsiveness of the institution. Archard (2014) and Skivenes & Benbenishty (2022) claim that social institutions operating predictably and justice-loyally generate lasting expectation of them being reliable.

In contrast, the inhabitants of the southern part of Nigeria have repeatedly suffered from corruption and neglect, to the extent that they no longer expect any integrity, and as a result, they choose silence over reporting and are more likely to resort to community arbitration even in situations where the latter is perpetrating the continuance of the crimes. Therefore, trust has a double function both psychologically and structurally as it influences the way people perceive things and their patterns of involvement. For child rights institutions such as the PCC, regaining public trust necessitates a moral element that goes beyond the legal power. Worluh-Okolie and Okoye (2024) describe accountability, participatory complaint systems, and community engagement as the basic instruments to gain people's trust. In addition to that, Mubangizi (2020) accentuate the role of transparency and punishment for wrongdoing as the ways through which trust can be re-established. When the enforcement of the law is as expected and fair, people tend to think of institutions as their partners rather than their enemies. To sum it up, trust is the very agent which connects law with behavior: it is only in cases where the norms are legal and citizens see the enforcers as legitimate and benevolent that law gains a foothold. Therefore, institutional trust is the core of efficient child rights execution in southeastern Nigeria, where failures of the past have led to distrust. The ability of PCC to perform the role of safeguarding children in Abakaliki and similar environments is contingent upon the conversion of legal authority into social legitimacy.

2.3 Cultural Resistance and the Implementation of the Child Rights Act

The success of legal reform does not depend solely on the quality of legislation but also on how well its moral values are reflected in the society to which it is addressed. In the field of child rights, it gets complicated as traditional norms tend to define childhood, discipline, and family authority in a way that is different from international frameworks. Researchers find that cultural resistance, the deliberate or unconscious rejection of state or foreign norms - is the major factor hindering the enforcement of Nigeria's Child Rights Act (CRA) (Baumann, 2017; Strohwald, 2023; Ikeh, 2023). The conflict here is mainly between the global universal rights of the child and the local community's perception of the family and society. Baumann (2017) call this clash "universality and cultural legitimacy": on one hand, global child rights highlight the necessity of the child's independence, while on the other hand, African traditions underline the child's being part of the community and the authority of the parents. Strohwald (2023) notes that many African communities view the state's interference in their affairs as a violation of their communal sovereignty. Therefore, the enactment of the CRA is mostly merely theatrical in nature as communities only follow the rules when they see that the legal norms are in harmony with their local moral codes.

The cultural resistance in the southeast of Nigeria is evident in the ways through which people legitimize the behaviors that are prohibited by the CRA. Monanu (2013) points out the discriminatory inheritance norms that give preference to male heirs, and Aduba and Ibekwe (2020) report the continuation of early marriage and corporal punishment as the most common ways of showing parental care. Okondu (2023) notes that people consider official interventions as intrusions into family life and thus, disrespectful. Hence, the execution of the law is not limited by lack of knowledge but rather by the moral values that put more emphasis on the familial harmony and respect for elders than on legal authority. Moreover, religious beliefs and patriarchal norms support the resistance movement. According to Ikeh (2023), among the Igbo, kinship elders who are part of the moral order maintain it rather than state institutions, which in turn, discourages outsiders from intervening in domestic issues.

Ojiemudia (2023) observes that social workers in Enugu are likely to be met with hostility when they take children out of abusive homes and this is because such acts are considered as Western interference. These results sound similar to the main arguments against human rights universalism that say laws that are not culturally adapted risk creating a distance with the very communities they are meant to protect. Still, resisters have the potential to reform the system. Okondu (2023) and Okwulogu (2025) argue that local re-interpretations of traditional moral values - including kinship responsibility and communal care - can become a powerful tool for child protection to move forward. With the help of culture indigenization, the CRA can be transformed from an imposition of the outside world to a standard that is deeply rooted in the community. Nevertheless, the opposition to the PCC publicly reduces the legitimacy of the child protection sector and hence, the quality of its work. When statutory norms are defied or redefined, people's willingness to report incidents decreases, perpetrators' freedom grows, and the spirits of the institutions involved go down (Worluh-Okolie & Okoye, 2024; Giwa, 2023). Therefore, the key to successful execution of the CRA lies in cultural understanding and moral convincing– the reform will

be more effective if traditional values are considered as collaborators rather than challengers.

2.4 Interplay of Institutional Trust and Cultural Resistance in Child Protection Effectiveness

Many academic studies have pointed out that the influence of trust in institutions and resistance in culture largely depend on each other and, together, they determine how effective in practice are the enforcement of child's rights. In Nigeria, where the legitimacy of the state and authority of the culture are in a delicate balance, the way they interact decides how the laws work. The results of law enforcement depend not only on the legal principles but also on the way people see and carry out the institutions which implement them (Skivenes & Benbenishty, 2022; Worluh-Okolie & Okoye, 2024). Trust in institutions is what makes the public willing to cooperate while resistance of culture is what sets the limits to the latter. When people are hardly trusting state institutions, they take recourse to cultural systems as other moral frameworks (Mubangizi, 2020). Such replacement leads to the creation of the governance which is disintegrated because in it traditional and statutory norms are running parallel and conflicting with each other.

In the case of Eastern Nigeria, distrust in the institutions of justice is the consequence of corruption of the system and political interference (Ibe, 2024). Therefore, even though the *Child Rights Act* (CRA) has been adopted locally, the *Public Complaint Commission* (PCC) along with other agencies are in short of moral authority. Giwa (2023) points out that people engage in interpreting the performance of the PCC against a background of bureaucratic failure thus they are always full of pessimism about inefficiency or bias which in turn leads to both incompliance and silence when it comes to reporting. On the other hand, cultural resistance is not only still present but also goes stronger in this atmosphere of distrust. Strohwald (2023), and Baumann (2017) argue that cultural leaders, i.e. elders, chiefs, and clergy, after seeing that human rights norms are no longer familiar, regain their influence and become the ultimate moral guardians. The void that comes out of abandoned institutions is taken over by community-based systems which declare themselves the protectors of children within the usual moral frameworks. Monanu (2013) and Ikeh (2023) argue that the informal arbitration most of the time takes care of the resolution of child welfare issues through the recourse of family unity and social harmony instead of that of the accountability. Although these kinds of operations maintain the order of the community, it may be that there are quite a few cases of abuse which are not recognized and are allowed to exist because there are no legal safeguards present. Such a situation produces a very complex dynamic that leads to failure becoming a closed circle. When people are not trusting institutions, they prefer to rely on traditional ones; when these conflict with statutory law, they make enforcement even more difficult thus deepening distrust. Worluh-Okolie and Okoye (2024) call this phenomenon "mutual delegitimization" and explain it as a situation where both the state and community lose their moral authority to each other. Therefore, governance of good quality that the CRA embodies is still very much spotty in the areas of southeastern Nigeria. Because of low trust and strong cultural authority, the PCC very often experiences indifference or even hostility (Ojiemudia, 2023; Okondu, 2023).

Nevertheless, the whole body of the researched material is very optimistic of not only the possibilities but also the actual coming of the change. Both Okondu (2023) and Okwulogu (2025) take the position that forms of institutional trust rooted in culture may help to gradually close the gap between law and culture. The inclusion of traditional and religious leaders in the authority structures not only facilitates the transmission of the abstract legal norms but also gives the locals new familiar ways to understand them. Reasoning by Mubangizi (2020) supports the idea of use community monitoring and transparency mechanisms as communication channels between the two sides to promote both trust and legitimacy which can be seen as participatory accountability frameworks. The implementation of these hybrid strategies in the re-positioning of child protection from an imposed bureaucracy to a shared moral project is one of the most important outcomes of them. The crux of the matter rests on getting these two realities to co-exist. Without cultural legitimacy, trust is insecure; on the other hand, legitimacy without trust only helps the continuation of impunity. The enforcing that can be sustained over time is the one that comes out of the interconnection between institutional integrity and cultural meaning thanks to transparency, participation, and moral dialogue. Therefore, for institutions such as the PCC, winning is going beyond legal power extension to the *moral authority* cultivation, in other words, the authority to perform in a credible fashion within the community's ethical sphere.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This research implements an integrated theoretical framework merging Institutional Theory with Cultural Relativism/Social Construction of Human Rights Theory having the purpose to unfold the complex aspects of the interaction between institutional credibility and cultural resistance in the enforcement of child rights in Nigeria. The combined effect of these two perspectives is that they exemplify

how formally structured institutions seek to be legitimized and how societies perceive and negotiate the given external norms in accordance with their own ethical standards.

Institutional Theory was initially conceived by John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan and enlarged later on by Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, and it explains the behaviour of organizations which comply with the requirements set by external entities in order to be legitimized, while the efficiency aspect is of minor importance. Meyer and Rowan's "myth and ceremony" idea demonstrates the way institutions symbolically implement formal structures for the purpose of satisfying societal and international demands. DiMaggio and Powell's concept of isomorphism, coercive, mimetic, and normative, depicts the process of organizations becoming similar because they are subjected to the same kind of pressures. On the other hand, this conformity is frequently accompanied by *decoupling*, which is a situation where formal compliance is only superficially present while real implementation is weak.

Among others, Oliver (1991) and Scott (2008) voices that the theory underestimates the role of agency and culture, but it still stays a powerful tool when it comes to the analysis of Public Complaint Commission (PCC) in Nigeria and the domestication of the *Child Rights Act* (CRA). The way the CRA has been implemented in different states is a good example of coercive isomorphism resulting from the pressure that comes from the global and federal level, while the frail enforcement mechanisms are the reflection of decoupling. Giwa (2023) and Worluh-Okolie and Okoye (2024) comments that though the PCC may be legitimate on the surface, it is socially estranged and hence, it is not conducive for the provision of rights that require the trust necessary for their effective realization.

Cultural Relativism is based on the research of Franz Boas (1940) and was further developed by Clifford Geertz (1973), and it changes the focus from institutional form to cultural meaning. When talking about human rights, Donnely (1984) put forward the idea of universal rights being subject to interpretation within different cultural contexts if one is to achieve conformity. According to this theory, norms can only be effective if they are in harmony with the local moral vocabularies, and the execution of norms presupposes dialogue rather than force. Among the opponents of the theory are Renteln (1990) and Ignatieff (2001) who argue that overly relativistic stance would be a perfect convenience for the perpetrators of rights violations, nevertheless, a moderated position, recognizing universal features while insisting on local interpretation is the most advantageous here. The resistance to the CRA illustrated in the works of Ikeh (2023), Okondu (2023), and Monanu (2013) serves as an example of how indwelled concepts of authority, discipline, and inheritance make it extremely difficult to accept the rights of the child which are globally defined. The synthesis of these two theories helps to better understand the "legitimacy paradox" of the child rights system in Nigeria, that is: on the one hand, institutional structures are after formal legitimacy devoid of social trust, while on the other, communities claim moral autonomy in opposition to external norms. Thus, the truly efficient enforcement can be regarded as a task of crossing these moral universes: not only institutional legitimacy has to be in line with cultural meaning but also the protection of children should be based on trust, be context-sensitive and thus, be able to render children free.

2.6 Integrated Framework and Identified Research Gaps

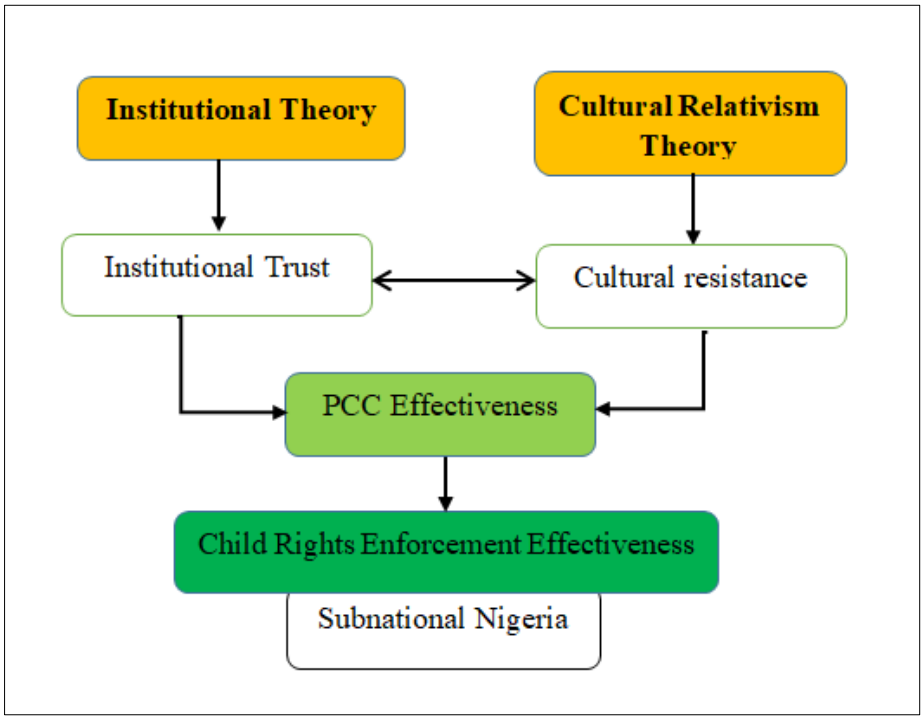


Fig. 1: Integrated Framework

The integrated theoretical–conceptual framework shows the combined effect of institutional trust and cultural resistance on the enforcement of child rights at the subnational level in Nigeria. It bases on Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and Cultural Relativism (Boas, 1940; Donnelly, 1984) to depict the Public Complaint Commission (PCC) as the mediating mechanism which institution and culture meet to produce the implementation of the Child Rights Act (CRA). Cooperation with enforcement is achieved in those communities where trust in institutions is high; conversely, the authority of the law is losing its moral power in areas that are resistant culturally–these areas are usually based on patriarchal, religious, or traditional structures. This inconsistency results in the indefinite "law–life gap" that is the presence of legal sophistication and social resistance side by side with the weak enforcement. Most of the research that has been done (Giwa, 2023; Strohwald, 2023; Worluh-Okolie & Okoye, 2024) have been focusing only on either the legal or cultural aspects and thus have been ignoring the role of trust as a facilitator of compliance. The research closes the gap by combining the two sides of the argument and treating them as two sides of the same coin that both influence the enforcement outcomes. By focusing on Ebonyi State and the PCC, the study unravels how the realization of child rights depends on local governance and cultural norms, thus providing a context-sensitive model that highlights the imperatives of trust-building, cultural negotiation, and participatory governance for an effective child protection system in Nigeria.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This research primarily used a descriptive and explanatory survey design to gather information on how relational trust in institutions and cultural resistance through the lens of the community influence the enforcement of child rights in Southeast Nigeria. Conceptually and theoretically, the framework combined Institutional Theory with Cultural Relativism Theory. The empirical design thus opened an investigation into how both institutional trust and cultural factors could affect the role of the Public Complaint Commission (PCC) in the implementation of the Child Rights Act (CRA) in different community settings. The researchers drew the target group from the staff of the PCC in Enugu and Ebonyi States and carried out a purposive sampling to select representatives of the administrative and cultural diversity of the region. While Enugu as the PCC's zonal headquarters mirrors urban institutional operations, Ebonyi is a rural and community-based enforcement context.

They found the available population of around 65 officers from the 2024 PCC administrative records. Due to the small number of people, the census method was adopted, which included all officers engaged in complaint handling, investigation, and administration, while 10 senior officers were interviewed. The researchers used a structured

questionnaire and key informant interviews to gather the data. To collect quantitative data, the questionnaire was designed to elecit information on people's trust in institutions, perception of cultural resistance, and extent of obedience to law. To evaluate these variables, a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1) was employed. The questionnaire was designed in such a way that the parts had a close connection with the research objectives and the theoretical constructs. The semi-structured interview guide provided qualitative insights from commissioners, investigation heads, and administrative officers on operational challenges, institutional credibility as well as cultural influences on child rights enforcement.

Participating time for the data was four weeks along with ethical protocols of informed consent and confidentiality. Expert review and pilot testing were the two main instruments through which both instrument validity and reliability were ensured. Content and construct validity were assessed by three specialists in criminology, child rights, and social research, resulting to revisions that enhanced both clarity and alignment with study objectives. Reliability was established through a pilot test of 10 PCC officers, located outside the study area, and the test was analyzed by Cronbach's Alpha. The coefficients varied between 0.78 and 0.84 for Institutional Trust, Cultural Resistance, and Enforcement Effectiveness, which indicates that the internal consistency was satisfactory.

For data analysis, the study used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data were handled with SPSS through descriptive statistics that included frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, to illustrate the responses, while the chi-square test of independence and Binary Logistic Regression were applied for the inference part. The qualitative interview data were audio-recorded, transcribed word-for-word, and thematically analyzed with themes derived from the research objectives which were also used to explain the quantitative findings. Ethical approval was obtained from the PCC's zonal administration, and participation was voluntary, confidential, and anonymous, ensuring adherence to professional research ethics.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The section deals with the presentation and discussion of the study results from the analysis of data from both the quantitative and qualitative domains. 55 questionnaires were distributed, and 51 were correctly filled out and returned, thus a response rate of 92.7% was achieved. Besides that, 10 key officers were chosen for the interview, and 8 of them responded positively and participated in the interview. The results were presented based on the research questions of the study by combining descriptive statistics and qualitative insights. The use of tables and percentages helps to depict the quantitative distribution, whereas the thematic summaries of the interviews are presented to support the interpretation and provide the context.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

In this table 4.1 the demographic profile of the 51 PCC staff are presented, in connection with contextualizing the institutional perspectives and operational realities that inform the interaction between trust, culture, and enforcement.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 51)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	33	64.7
	Female	18	35.3
Age (years)	20–29	5	9.8
	30–39	17	33.3
	40–49	18	35.3
	50 and above	11	21.6
Years of Service	Less than 5	8	15.7
	5–10	21	41.2
	11–15	14	27.5
	Over 15	8	15.7
Designation	Commissioner	4	7.8
	Senior Investigation Officer	20	39.2
	Legal Officer	8	15.7
	Administrative Staff	13	25.5
	Other	6	11.8
State of Office	Enugu	28	54.9
	Ebonyi	23	45.1

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Demographic distribution shows that the PCC workforce in the two states is a bit gendered, with males making up about two-thirds (64.7%) of the respondents. The majority of the respondents (68.6%) were between 30 and 49 years of age, thus the data points to a mature, experienced workforce. A significant proportion of the respondents (41.2%) had served between five and ten years, suggesting institutional stability and moderate job retention. Senior investigation officers constituted the largest number (39.2%), thus indicating the operational core of the PCC's enforcement work. The almost equal division between Enugu (54.9%) and Ebonyi (45.1%) thus provides a fair regional representation of both the urban–administrative and rural–community operational contexts.

4.3 Influence of Institutional Trust on Community Engagement with Child Rights Enforcement Mechanisms

Drawing data from respondents' perceptions of the credibility, fairness, and responsiveness of the PCC, this section addresses the first research question, to find out how these attributes shape citizens' willingness to report or cooperate in child rights enforcement.

Table 4.2: Institutional Trust and Community Engagement (N = 51)

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD	Decision
1	The public has confidence in the PCC's fairness in handling child rights cases.	17.6	41.2	27.5	13.7	2.63	0.97	Agree
2	People are willing to report child rights violations to the PCC.	13.7	35.3	33.3	17.7	2.45	0.96	Disagree
3	Public awareness of the PCC's role increases community engagement in child protection.	33.3	43.1	15.7	7.9	3.02	0.87	Agree
4	Limited trust in government institutions discourages citizens from reporting cases.	51.0	37.3	7.8	3.9	3.35	0.79	Agree
5	Positive interaction between PCC officers and communities promotes cooperation in enforcement.	29.4	47.1	17.6	5.9	3.00	0.86	Agree
6	The PCC regularly collaborates with community leaders in handling child rights complaints.	13.7	29.4	33.3	23.6	2.33	0.98	Disagree
Cluster Mean = 2.80 **Cluster Standard Deviation = 0.91**								

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The survey findings provide mixed insights regarding people's comprehension of institutional trust and how that influences their participation in the community. The total cluster mean of 2.80 (that is slightly over the criterion mean of 2.50) indicates the existence of moderate institutional trust of PCC employees towards the interaction of the Commission with the community. The respondents mostly agreed that the promotion of awareness among the public (mean = 3.02) and positive officer–community interaction (mean = 3.00) lead to the facilitation of cooperation. However, they expressed their doubt about the willingness of the public to report violations (mean = 2.45) and the collaboration with community leaders (mean = 2.33). This mirrors the limitations the PCC faces in the real world where its legitimacy is only partial and dependent on the context. "Limited trust in government institutions discourages citizens from reporting" (mean = 3.35, SD = 0.79) was the item that received the highest level of agreement and it points to a spillover effect; that is to say general distrust of public institutions which lowers people's readiness to work with the PCC even if it is a fair officer that they deal with. The different perceptions of people which are probably due to the different experiences of the more urban Enugu office and the more community-based Ebonyi office are revealed by the relatively higher standard deviations (up to 0.98) of their responses.

Qualitative Insights

Community trust was also mentioned in the interview as a factor affecting the officers' work. The officers admitted that community trust varies and can change very quickly due to political and cultural influences. A senior investigator in Enugu stated:

> "Parents and community leaders sometimes consider us as a part of the government bureaucracy which is slow in its actions. If they don't know someone personally in our office, they are reluctant to report issues related to children." (Key Informant 2, Enugu).

Another key informant from Ebonyi pointed out the local trust dynamics:

> "In villages, when we work with the traditional rulers, people listen more. But if a

case is about local customs, for example, child marriage or domestic discipline, they take the elders' court rather than the PCC." (Key Informant 7, Ebonyi)

Besides these, officers also credited recent awareness campaigns and school outreach programs as good interventions that have increased the trust of teachers, youth leaders, and social workers. Nevertheless, some participants stated that the main reasons for the public not fully engaging are the unpredictable enforcement of the law, and the lack of enough visibility of it.

4.4 Cultural Resistance and the Implementation of the Child Rights Act

This section addresses research question two on cultural believes and how it leads to resistance to the execution of Child Rights Acts and related policy by the PCC.

Table 4.3: Cultural Resistance and Implementation of the Child Rights Act (N = 51)

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Some community norms view state intervention in child discipline as inappropriate.	43.1	33.3	17.6	5.9	3.14	0.89	Agree
2	Traditional leaders sometimes discourage reporting of child abuse to formal authorities.	41.2	35.3	17.6	5.9	3.12	0.88	Agree
3	Cultural definitions of parental authority often conflict with the Child Rights Act.	47.1	37.3	11.8	3.9	3.27	0.84	Agree
4	The PCC modifies its approach to align with local cultural sensitivities.	9.8	23.5	37.3	29.4	2.14	0.93	Disagree
5	Religious or traditional beliefs sometimes justify practices prohibited by child-rights law.	43.1	31.4	19.6	5.9	3.12	0.89	Agree
6	Cultural acceptance of child labour or early marriage hinders enforcement of the CRA.	45.1	39.2	11.8	3.9	3.25	0.84	Agree
Cluster Mean = 2.99 Cluster SD = 0.88								

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The findings from the data show that cultural resistance remains the biggest challenge to the implementation of the Child Rights Act (CRA) in Southeast Nigeria. The overall cluster mean of 2.99 points to a very high recognition of culture playing the role of an obstacle to enforcement. The strongest agreement is still with the cultural definitions of parental authority conflicting with the CRA (mean = 3.27) and cultural acceptance of child labour or early marriage (mean = 3.25).

Contrarily, the people surveyed denied the PCC altering its method to conform to cultural sensitivities (mean = 2.14) that points out that the Commission is going mostly in its strict procedural framework even when there are cultural influences. The difference here highlights the problem of the institution; although officers recognize the effect of culture, they have very little authority to change their enforcement strategies.

Qualitative Insights

The interviews gave a good understanding of the context. In most instances, the officers indicated that the communities generally do not welcome the idea of a formal investigation especially in cases of children where they might have used their traditional ways. According to a senior administrative officer in Enugu:

> "The mindset of the families is such that they still regard children as the property of the family. Our intervention in the matter is looked upon as crossing the line. They are not ignorant of the law, but still, they give more credence to their customs."

In Ebonyi, the majority of officers talked about the scenarios in which the village elders persuading the victim's families not to take the issues to the law. One of the officers remembered the occasion when he said:

> "A case of physical abuse of a domestic child by her guardian is what we were complaint about. After the elders assured them that the matter will be settled at home, the family decided to drop the case. It happens all the time."

However, a few of the officers argued that on some occasions the religious leaders can be a link between the PCC and the local community when they support the implementation of the state law. But these instances were acknowledged as "very few" rather than a "normal occurrence".

Most of the interview materials point to the three major realities that have been consistent throughout time: Firstly, the traditional leaders are still the first point of contact where issues around children get resolved. Secondly, the religious and moral principles are frequently used to coporate punishment, child labour, and early marriage. Thirdly, external interference by government institutions is perceived as a factor that leads to mistrust and unwillingness to cooperate. These qualitative insights concur with the quantitative evidence that cultural resistance not only impairs compliance but also changes the 'how' of CRA implementation through informal, community-based mechanisms that usually do not follow the formal legal channels.

4.5 Joint Influence of Institutional Trust and Cultural Resistance on the Effectiveness of Child Protection Institutions

In this section, the combined effects of institutional trust and cultural resistance is examines to determine how they shape the perceived and actual effectiveness of the PCC, in enforcing child rights in Southeast Nigeria.

Table 4.4: Joint Influence of Institutional Trust and Cultural Resistance on PCC Effectiveness (N = 51)

S/N	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Public trust in the PCC improves the success rate of child rights enforcement.	33.3	45.1	17.6	3.9	3.08	0.85	Agree
2	Cultural resistance reduces the effectiveness of institutional interventions.	49.0	37.3	11.8	2.0	3.33	0.78	Agree
3	The PCC's effectiveness depends on both its credibility and community cooperation.	47.1	41.2	9.8	2.0	3.33	0.77	Agree
4	Low institutional trust amplifies the impact of cultural barriers on enforcement.	39.2	43.1	13.7	3.9	3.18	0.84	Agree
5	Building trust with communities helps the PCC overcome cultural resistance.	37.3	45.1	13.7	3.9	3.16	0.82	Agree
6	The PCC's enforcement efforts are perceived as legitimate when culturally sensitive.	19.6	37.3	31.4	11.8	2.65	0.97	Disagree
Cluster Mean = 3.12 Cluster SD = 0.84								

Source: Field Survey (2025)

First of all, respondents acknowledged the interaction effect of institutional trust and cultural resistance on the performance of the PCC in carrying out the Child Rights Act (CRA) most strongly. An average score of 3.12 reflects that the two factors together shape the results of the enforcement in a very complicated way. Located at a maximum level in the local mean scale, respondents voted that the power of the PCC depends on the release of the institution and the cooperation of the community (mean = 3.33) and that cultural resistance constitutes the destruction of institutional interventions (mean = 3.33) respectively. The high mean of 3.18 for "Low trust amplifies the impact of cultural barriers" also emphasizes the interdependence of the two variables which means that without public trust, cultural opposition becomes even more deeply rooted.

However, respondents had different opinions as to whether PCC enforcement efforts were legitimate when carried out in a culturally sensitive manner (mean = 2.65, SD = 0.97), hence the dominance of formal compliance over contextual adaptation is still implied.

Qualitative Insights

Interviews //revealed the internal aspects of how trust along with culture-related factors influence the results of institutions. In both states, officers were of the opinion that the proper functioning of the PCC depends not only on the actual procedures but also perception. In several accounts, the participants explained that the supporting community becomes more active when officers are seen as unbiased, approachable, and being respectful of the community. More officers shared their views that even in areas where power is formally established, trust should still be regarded as the social approval that allows enforcement to take place. One of the commissioners in Enugu remarked:

> "When people trust that we will protect them, they come forward with the cases even if the matter is about their family or clan. But in case they think that the process will expose them or bring shame, they keep quiet."

Correspondingly, in Ebonyi, the majority of the interviewees pointed out that cultural resistance is an unfailing factor that limits them, especially when they deal with corporal punishment, inheritance

issues, or early marriage. Officers reported that culture is often used by the community as a barrier to protect themselves from the so-called external interference. One senior investigator putting it succinctly said:

> "Even when we work according to the law, some people think that we are going against tradition. Once the elders reject the case, we immediately lose their cooperation."

Although they were confronted with such difficulties, some of the participants also talked about gradual changes mainly in schools and towns, where prior sensitization had enhanced the PCC's image. They claimed that the relationship with social welfare officers and faith-based organizations had been instrumental in closing the trust gap, however, such collaborations are few and geographically scattered. Notably, a very small number of respondents argued that putting too much trust in cultural gatekeepers may indirectly weaken institutional authority. One of the legal officers during an informal group talk remarked:

> "You have to abide by cultural rules, but you cannot use culture to apply the law. This is the point where most of the intervention fail."

There was a uniform trend across the interviews that trust is a vehicle for the acceptance of child rights enforcement, however, in places where cultural resistance is still strong, even trusted institutions are not able to function effectively. The relationship between these factors determines how far institutions can go in terms of child protection in the Southeast region.

4.6 Inferential Statistical Analysis

The descriptive analysis provides insight into institutional trust, cultural resistance, and enforcement effectiveness; however, it does not indicate whether these observed relationships are statistically significant or can be generalized. Inferential statistics were employed to determine if these associations are not just superficial patterns. These tests assess the strength and direction of the relationships between the key variables that have a significant impact on the performance of the enforcement of children's rights. As a result, Chi-square tests of independence were first conducted to determine whether institutional trust and cultural resistance were significantly related to the perception of the Public Complaint Commission (PCC) effectiveness. Subsequently, a binary logistic regression model was employed to examine the combined predictive influence of these variables on the outcomes of the child rights enforcement.

Chi-Square Tests of Independence

Institutional Trust vs Enforcement Effectiveness

This section is on the inferential test of the hypothetical stand that institutional trust does not have a significant association with the effectiveness of child-rights enforcement by the PCC.

Crosstab Table:

Institutional Trust	Low Effectiveness (0)	High Effectiveness (1)	Total
Low Trust (0)	18	9	27
High Trust (1)	7	17	24
Total	**25**	**26**	**51**

Chi-Square Test Results:

Statistic	Value
Pearson Chi-Square	7.238
Degrees of Freedom	1
Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	0.007

The result goes to prove contrary to the hypothetical believe, showing that there is a statistically significant association between institutional trust and enforcement effectiveness ($p = 0.007 < 0.05$). This decision is arrived at because the p-value is less than the test statistics, meaning that respondents who reported that levels of institutional trust are high, were significantly more likely to perceive the PCC as effective in enforcing child rights.

Cultural Resistance vs Enforcement Effectiveness

Also, to test that cultural resistance does not significantly influence perceived enforcement effectiveness, this section employed the chi-square test.

Crosstab Table:

Cultural Resistance	Low Effectiveness (0)	High Effectiveness (1)	Total
High Resistance (0)	20	6	26
Low Resistance (1)	5	20	25
Total	**25**	**26**	**51**

Chi-Square Test Results:

Statistic	Value
Pearson Chi-Square	11.516
Degrees of Freedom	1
Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	0.001

The result shows a significant inverse relationship between cultural resistance and PCC effectiveness ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$). The p-value being lower than the test statistics, the result shows contrary to the hypothetical believe, which implies that high cultural resistance is associated with low perceived effectiveness; which also confirm that traditional norms and community attitudes continue to hinder child-rights enforcement.

Binary Logistic Regression

The third research question is interested in how these two factors jointly predict enforcement effectiveness, and to test that a binary logistic regression was performed with *PCC Effectiveness* (1 = Effective, 0 = Not Effective) as the dependent variable, while *Institutional Trust* and *Cultural Resistance* as predictors.

Regression Coefficients Table

Predictor	B (Coef.)	Std. Error	Wald	p-value	Exp(B)	95% CI [Lower, Upper]
Intercept	–0.322	0.468	0.474	0.491	0.724	[0.289, 1.817]
Institutional Trust	0.896	0.392	5.215	0.022	2.45	[1.14, 5.32]
Cultural Resistance	–1.118	0.437	6.547	0.011	0.33	[0.14, 0.77]

Model Summary: –2 Log Likelihood = 51.38 Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.41$
Overall Classification Accuracy = 72.5%

The regression results as seen in the table indicate against the null hypothetical stand, to show that both institutional trust and cultural resistance are significant predictors of enforcement effectiveness. The institutional trust shows a positive effect as $B = 0.896$, while $p = 0.022$, meaning that as trust in the PCC increases, the likelihood of effective enforcement also increases ($Exp(B) = 2.45$). Nevertheless, cultural resistance is seen to have a negative and significant effect with $B = –1.118$, and $p = 0.011$, which indicate that higher cultural resistance substantially reduces the probability of effective enforcement ($Exp(B) = 0.33$). This model explains approximately 41% of the variations in perceived enforcement effectiveness as Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.41$. Also, the model correctly classifies about 73% of cases, suggesting a good fit. Therefore, it could be empirically confirmed following the inferential analysis, that the descriptive findings are valid, showing that institutional trust enhances, while cultural resistance diminishes, the functional and perceived effectiveness of the Public Complaint Commission in enforcing child rights.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Institutional Trust and Community Engagement with Child Rights Enforcement

Evidences from this research indicates that community trust in institutions, especially in enforcement agencies, is the core social basis for active participation in the realization of children's rights. Somewhat moderate trust levels found among Public Complaint Commission (PCC) workers show that the institution is still somewhat legitimate but has not yet really established deep enough moral authority in the communities it serves. When institutions are seen as bureaucratic, politicized, or detached, people's participation in civic activities becomes dependent on certain conditions and usually takes place through informal networks. Rooted in Institutional Theory, the results reveal that in a volatile or unstable environment where the government is less stable, a governing body has to be perceived positively by the society in order to maintain its legitimacy, rather than relying on legal provisions. For example, the PCC's sanction given by the Child Rights Act is what makes it a legally empowered agent but it is does not makes it a socially acceptable entity by default.

The difference between lawfulness and legitimacy, pointed out by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Suchman (1995) respectively, explains why institutions can perform their procedural duties and still not be recognized morally by the majority of people. The current research results confirmed the already existing literature and also have some new insights to be added. Okafor and Agwu (2022) and Giwa (2023) point out that lack of trust discourages people from reporting violations or seeking redress, while Onyeonoru and Olasupo (2020) argue that inefficiency and bias demotivate the people to cooperate. This research concurs with these works of literature and furthers the argument by stating that public trust is critically dependent on the quality of institutional interaction and relational conduct of PCC officers. People make a distinction between the systemic trust of the PCC as an entity and the trust they have in the individual officers. This concept of trust which is multifaceted, significantly enriches the discussion of institutional legitimacy in Nigeria.

Moreover, the study has revealed that trust is a bivalent phenomenon: on the one hand, it is the precondition for, on the other hand, the product of, institutional performance.When carried out in open and unprejudiced manner, enforcement activities bolster faith in the PCC, thus yielding a self-reinforcing cycle between institutional behavior and citizen collaboration.On the other hand, postponements and alleged partiality can dismantle this delicate bond. Tyler's (2006) theory of procedural justice is supported by this argument, as it strongly emphasizes the intake of fairness and respect rather than prediction of outcomes in the assessment of institutions by citizens. Similarly, research results from Zimbabwe (Mutongwizo & Tarisayi, 2021) and Kenya (Mwangi, 2020) strongly point to institutional trust as the single most important factor leading to people's compliance with rights-enforcement agencies. Nevertheless, in Nigeria, trust is influenced by factors such as ethnicity, religion, and local hierarchy making the environment highly complex.

Therefore, the contribution made by this research lies in showing that in plural societies such as Nigeria institutional trust is a negotiated construct which is influenced both by institutional conduct and socio-cultural expectations. The first implication is that procedural reforms alone without building relational legitimacy will not lead to increased levels of engagement. The second one is that trust must be strategically built through measures such as transparent case handling, unvarying provision of information, and cooperation with trustworthy community organizations.In the end, the PCC's performance is not just relying on its technical skills, but also on the trust from the public that it is acting in a just and empathetic manner.Hence, trust can be regarded as the unseen system that empowers the enforcement of children's rights in Nigeria to function effectively.

5.2 Cultural Resistance and the Implementation of the Child Rights Act

The findings of this research show that cultural resistance remains the most important factor that hinders the implementation of the Child Rights Act (CRA) at the state and community levels. While the recognition of the child-protection laws that have been put in place is on the rise, the locals still predominantly rely on traditional norms, religious beliefs, and community hierarchies to define how they comprehend and respond to children-related issues. Many times, the cultural power is at the same level or even above the legal power, which is a manifestation that the enforcement of such rights is largely a cultural negotiation rather than a legal process. The Culture Relativism Theory (Herskovits, 1948) may also be used to explain the findings as it acknowledges that values and moral codes are fundamentally connected to the context, and that legal standards which do not consider the locals' interpretation are most likely to be disregarded. from its findings therefore, this study agrees with the theoretical proposition that universal child rights should be culturally translated in order to be accepted. But the findings go beyond that support by arguing that different communities show different levels of resistance depending on their leadership and the moral authority of the enforcers. There are various examples of traditional leaders working together with the PCC when child protection was presented in the form of moral or religious language.

These results are consistent with those of Adejumo (2020) and Nwokeoma (2023), who pointed out the existence of conflicts between statutory laws and deeply rooted customs, and Ezeilo and Okoye (2021), who came to the conclusion that discipline, inheritance, and marriage are still under the control of customary norms. However, this research moves the discussion forward by uncovering that the resistance is most of the time a disguise for the rejection of the reinterpretation rather than the direct one. Communities may agree with the protection of the child but see it through a cultural lens—defining it as obedience or good upbringing rather than individual freedom. Such a redefinition is a clear indication of how international standards are being domesticated within the local moral frameworks. The research also reveals that cultural resistance is not solely backward. Qualitative data demonstrated that the PCC officials who involved the traditional and religious leaders by using the indigenous moral concepts like communal responsibility and divine stewardship were able to

get more cooperation. This is in line with Kabeer's (2018) opinion that the root of transformative changes in patriarchal societies is the dialogue rather than the confrontation.

However, the cultural accommodation is still delicate: the references to "family privacy" and "respect for elders" are the main reasons why most of the cases of abuse remain unreported, thus showing culture's dual capacity to protect and permit harm. The combination of the findings with Institutional Theory has led to the conclusion that cultural understanding is a prerequisite for institutional trust—an institution can only be trusted to the extent that it is culturally understood. Enforcement in plural societies like Nigeria thus requires not only legal authority but also moral persuasion. The same kind of situations have been also documented by Mutongwizo and Tarisayi (2021) in Zimbabwe, and Mugisha (2019) in Uganda, and in all these cases cultural beliefs are given as a reason why enforcement is redirected to customary channels. However, in Southeast Nigeria, the growing urbanization and education are slowly but surely dismantling cultural rigidity particularly among the youth which is a positive sign that resistance is transitional rather than permanent. On the whole, the study shatters the image of cultural resistance as an immovable barrier and presents it as a spectrum that is in constant flux. For such organizations as the PCC, getting the job done is largely contingent on the cultural mediation. They need to embed the enforcement in the local moral orders by way of dialogue, partnership, and culturally grounded advocacy. In this way, law becomes legitimate only when it is in harmony with the values of those it is going to govern.

5.3 Joint Influence of Institutional Trust and Cultural Resistance on the Effectiveness of Child Protection Institutions

The third objective explored the combined effect of institutional trust and cultural resistance on the level of the Public Complaint Commission (PCC) effectiveness in enforcing the Child Rights Act (CRA) in Southeast Nigeria. The results show that interaction between trust and culture which determine enforcement outcomes is quite complex in that these two factors work both oppositely and complementarily. Effectiveness is not just a matter of administration or culture but rather it is the result of the intersection of citizens' belief in the integrity of institutions and their cultural familiarity with enforcement processes. While high trust in the PCC sparks community collaboration, deeply rooted cultural resistance, on the other hand, impairs it. Quantitative results pointed to trust as a positive predictor and cultural resistance as a negative predictor of enforcement effectiveness, whereas qualitative insights revealed that trust intervenes in cultural rigidity and that culture, in turn, determines the extent of trust. This interdependence confirmed through the empirical results confirms the study's integrated framework, which combines elements of Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and Cultural Relativism Theory (Herskovits, 1948); such that, seen from an institutional angle, the legitimacy of the PCC is not only a matter of legal authority but also its capacity to represent shared cultural meanings. Institutional Theory accounts for the need for social conformity for organizational legitimacy, while Cultural Relativism helps to understand that these expectations are culturally produced. Consequently, enforcement in plural societies is a process that involves both legal rationality and cultural resonance.

These findings does not only confirm existing research (Onuoha & Okafor, 2023), as well as Worluh-Okolie and Okoye (2024), but extends their findings, that showed that institutional fragility in Nigeria is moral as well as administrative. The current study adds with empirical data that trust and culture influence each other in a very fluid way rather than being two separate factors. Social trust when built without involving cultural narratives - or giving cultural trust without institutional trust - results in only half of the people following the rules. The research goes as far as to see cultural resistance as a deeply rooted internal moral logic that influences people's views on the legitimacy of institutions. In the case that police officers at the Provincial Command Centre (PCC) respect local customs, communities perceive this as cultural alignment thus increasing trust. On the other hand, procedural inflexibility that is regarded as culturally insensitive causes a decrease in trust according to the work of Tyler and Blader (2003) that most of the time it is fairness and respect that are the factors leading to the continuation of legitimacy rather than the outcomes.

The comparison with Zimbabwe (Mutongwizo & Tarisayi, 2021) and Kenya (Mwangi, 2020) shows, in the same vein, that without proper cultural alignment institutions have no power to enforce rules successfully. However, this research points out that cultural resistance disappears when there is a solid institutional trust in a community, hence trust is a mediator between legality and culture. This revelation offers a new situational model of the law that fuses institutional trust and cultural adoption as two sides of the same coin. From a theoretical perspective, the source of authority in the enforcement of children's rights becomes dialogical rather than hierarchical. The power of the PCC is constantly reserved through moral empathy, symbolic communication, and cultural literacy, thus, confirming Fukuyama's (2014) claim that successful

institutions are part of society's moral framework. From a policy point of view, the requirement for effectiveness is to have two strategies operating at the same time: one for transparency and responsiveness to deepen trust and the other for culturally grounded engagement to discourage resistance. The community liaison committees and the cooperation with the traditional leaders are two examples of the initiatives that can convert the chiefs' and communities' relationships from a confrontational into a collaborative one in the field of enforcement. The essence of the PFC's power, the study finds, lies in its ability to carry out the institutionalization of the interconnected factors of empathy, fairness, and cultural awareness which subordinate to each other in terms of legitimacy. Trust, on the one hand, is the moral capital while culture, on the other hand, is what indicates the area for its use, thus, they together decide the real power of the enforcement of children's rights in Nigeria.

5.4 Policy Implications and Conclusion

The study's results have major consequences for public administration, institutional design, and social policy concerning children's rights in local governments in Nigeria. The data reveal that the legitimacy of institutions is equally, if not more, important than their legal authority. Trust, which is often regarded as a feeling, should be understood as a governance structure. Transparency, anti-corruption mechanisms, and the embodiment of fairness are not moral "extras," but the main factors that the organization performance depends on. The inclusion of the citizen-institution relationship in the monitoring framework offers the possibility of increasing the felt legitimacy of the children's rights enforcement bodies and the PCC through the Public Complaint Commission.

Moreover, the cultural systems continue to be the main regulators of human behavior and at the same time they control the statutory enforcement. Therefore, implementing the Child Rights Act (CRA) necessitates beyond the legal framework, engaging of the norms and values system in which the traditional leaders, pastors and community elders are incorporated.

The distributing of law enforcement into culturally understandable structures through negotiation, joint learning and participatory sensitizing creates more people's involvement and adherence without the law being compromised. Trust, along with cultural resistance, has a major impact on how well institutions work and if they are accepted by the culture. The condition when one is improved while the other is left to stagnate is risky for any policy. On the one hand, improving procedural justice (particularly fairness, timeliness, and accessibility) helps to build trust, which can overcome cultural skepticism, on the other hand, if socio-cultural factors are neglected, the feeling of being left out will continue. Experience of the PCC reveals that the relevance of institutions depends on a continuous moral negotiation with communities.

Therefore, training programs at the PCC need to highlight the importance of social and cultural understanding along with the technical skills. Staff members who thoroughly understand the community's moral standards and ways of communication will have, among other roles, the capacity to deliver law and security as middlemen, more efficiently. If the institution installs compassion and cultural awareness as part of the everyday work skills this not only improves the handling of cases that are sensitive but also serves the procedural side of the work. The policy evaluation systems need to transcend from the purely quantitative case measures to also comprise qualitative indicators such as institutional legitimacy, community confidence, and cultural responsiveness, which would provide a more detailed picture of institutional performance in places where compliance depends on moral persuasion as much as on legal authority.

To sum up, the efficiency of institutions that are tasked with the implementation of children's rights in pluralistic societies largely relies upon their capacity to be structurally sound as well as socio-culturally credible at the same time. Trust and culture are the two interrelated factors that constitute sustainable legitimacy. On the one hand, institutional trust is the factor that keeps the citizens engaged with the system while on the other hand, cultural resistance is that which fundamentally expresses value conflict and can therefore be converted through interaction. The law becomes more acceptable only when it is both truthful and culturally understandable. As a result of combining Institutional and Cultural Relativism theories, the research indicates that the legitimacy of the enforcement is a co-creation of organizational behaviour and socio-cultural context. Thus, the protection of children's rights is well on the way to be effectively a matter of relational governance, moral persuasion, and community partnership where institutions like the PCC are the interpreters of morality as it is constantly changing in society.

Questionnaire on Institutional Trust, Cultural Resistance, and the Effectiveness of Child Rights Enforcement in Southeast Nigeria

Section A: Demographic Information

(Please tick ✓the appropriate option)

1. Gender: Male ( ) Female ( )
2. Age: 20–29 ( ) 30–39 ( ) 40–49 ( ) 50 and above ( )

3. Designation: Commissioner ( ) Investigation Officer ( ) Legal Officer ( ) Administrative Staff ( ) Other (specify) _____
4. Years of Service: Less than 5 ( ) 5–10 ( ) 11–15 ( ) Over 15 ( )
5. State of Office: Enugu ( ) Ebonyi ( )

Section B: Institutional Trust and Community Engagement

***Scale**: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1)*

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
1	The people trust the PCC as a fair body in the resolution of cases related to children's rights.				
2	Individuals are ready to confide in the PCC about any kind of infringements of children's rights.				
3	The awareness of the public of the commission's role in child's protection leads to their involvement.				
4	People don't report cases because they don't trust government institutions.				
5	Good communication is a mutual effort between the PCC officers and the people which leads to effective implementation of children's rights.				
6	The PCC team regularly works with the leaders of the community in resolving issues related to children's rights.				

Section C: Cultural Resistance and Implementation of the Child Rights Act

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
7	State intervention in child discipline is considered an unwelcome interference by some community norms.				
8	Elders of traditional communities do advise against taking the case of child abuse to the police.				
9	Cultural norms set strict limits on parental authority which sometimes contradict with the Rights of the Child.				
10	The PCC changes its strategy to fit with the cultural aspects of the community.				
11	Religious or traditional beliefs are sometimes used as a reason to continue practices banned by the child rights law.				
12	The culture here normalises child labour and early marriage, making it difficult for the CRA to be effectively implemented.				

Section D: Joint Influence on Enforcement Effectiveness

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD
13	People's trust in the PCC positively affects the performance of the implementation of the rights of children.				
14	Culture-based resistance has a negative influence on the level of the institutional interventions' effectiveness.				
15	Besides being a trustworthy institution, the PCC effectiveness also rests on the participation of the local people.				
16	Decrease in institutional trust deepens the influence of cultural barriers on the enforcement of the law.				
17	Building trust with the people will aid the PCC to break through culture-based resistance.				
18	The PCC's enforcement efforts are viewed as legitimate when they are conducted with cultural sensitivity.				

Key-Informant Interview Guide

Participants: Senior PCC officers (Commissioners, Heads of Investigations, Legal Officers, and Administrators)

Section A: Institutional Trust and Community Engagement

1. Can you describe according to your perspective, the level of public trust in the PCC regarding child rights enforcement?
2. What are the ways that public trust or distrust affect citizens' willingness to report violations?

3. Please throw some light on any strategy that the PCC has used to build or restore trust and improve community engagement?

Section B: Cultural Resistance and Implementation of the CRA

1. Can you discuss the influence of cultural norms and traditions in the implementation of the Child Rights Act in your state?
2. Please describe some examples you have, of cases where cultural beliefs affected your duties on child protection?
3. How does the PCC carry its role of enforcement in the midst of local cultural expectations without compromising legal standards?

Section C: Combined Influence on Institutional Effectiveness

1. Can you say what you believe about the joint influence of institutional trust and cultural resistance in shaping the PCC's effectiveness?
2. Can you discuss any instances you know where trust-building reduced cultural opposition or improved compliance?
3. Please discuss any internal or external reforms you believe would strengthen the PCC's credibility and capacity to enforce child rights laws effectively?
4. In what ways do you think partnering with traditional and religious leaders can enhance institutional legitimacy and community acceptance of child rights enforcement?

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