

Communicative and Identity Functions of Personal Names among the Bekwarra People of Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examines how personal names communicate cultural, ancestral and personal identity of the Bekwarra people of Cross River State, Nigeria. The study focuses on communicative and identity functions of personal names among the Bekwarra people of Cross River State. The study adopted survey research using semi-structured interview, focus group discussion and personal observation as instruments. A total of 34 participants were interviewed, including traditional rulers and community leaders, while the focus group discussion comprised two group of seven participants each, that made up of community and youth leaders. The theoretical framework adopted for the study was the socio-onomastics theory, which explores the relationship among names, culture and society. The study used purposive sampling method as the sampling technique; this was to enable the researcher meet those with experience in naming practices and family heads. Findings reveal that personal names in Bekwarra communicate meanings and identify a person's place of birth, family lineage, history, expectations, the circumstances surrounding one's birth, and demonstration of thanksgiving. In order to preserve the Bekwarra tradition and culture through personal names, the study recommends that Bekwarra naming practices that communicate meanings and identify individuals should be maintained among the people for cultural identity and belonging.

Keywords: Communicative functions, identity functions, personal names, Bekwarra, culture, society.

1. Introduction

In the African society, personal names are mostly linked to individual's family genealogy, culture, language, occupation, and place. They are also linkages between the physical and spiritual beings, and as well serve as a means of passing information to others (Wappa & Wada, 2019). Among the Bekwarra people of northern Cross River State onomastic tradition, personal names are essential to the ways in which people are given an identity, values and social relations in their community of practice. Among the people, names are not given and taken arbitrarily; they follow established patterns, revealing circumstances surrounding the family and birth of the child. Names are labels used to identify and describe people, roads, buildings, play grounds, businesses with trademarks, and other objects and facilities (Wakumelo et al., 2016). They are the identities and labels with which individuals are recognised in the society. Anyanwu (2023) argues that naming is an important ceremony and every society has a unique way of accomplishing the process. The naming practices among the Bekwarra people are part of the wider African onomastic system where names do much more than just labeling individuals to transmitting cultural meanings, identification of individuals, and mediate interpersonal relationships among the people.

In our contemporary society, it is compulsory to register a birth of a child and to get a birth certificate with the bestowed names and this allows the child to become a part of a community as an individual and enjoy all social welfare provisions in the society (Aksholakova, 2014). According to Ifesieh (2018), naming is the culmination of man's ingenious efforts to substantivise conceptualisations, actions, events and existence in dynamic cognitive models. Hence, this provides recognition and identification for the newborn in the society, where they will be known as members. Personal names historicise events, socialize people, spiritualise events and influence people psychologically (Ifesieh 2018). Therefore, possessing a name is a universal practice and the usual phrases under which it is found in everyday speech are "proper name", "personal name", "legal name" or "birth name". Full name consists of a first name, known in Western cultures as first, personal name or baptismal name; and a name, known as a last name or family name that indicates membership of a family, tribe or clan. Hence, for legal and administrative purposes, the full name offers the right to social identification and recognitions. Names are seen and received as cultural products that can represent the individual in all contexts, including family, social groups and the ethnic segment to which they belong as origin (Dumitraşcu, 2020).

A name also gives other information about an individual, apart from being a unique label and identification. According to Cheang (2020), many names do tell the gender of their owners. However, Onah and Gudaku (2023) are of the view that naming is a phenomenon that is universal though it is also remarkably particularistic. It is particularistic in the sense that the style and pattern of the naming practice vary across human societies. In Africa, personal names play a significant role in virtually all aspects of human life. Among the African people, it is conceived that the name an individual bears can exert enormous influence on his/her general lifestyle and life prospects. In Bekwarra society, majority of the indigenous names are not gender sensitive. Rather, they are drawn from circumstances surrounding the birth of the child or the family situations. Names across various societies can be culture-specific. For example, names such as *Adah-Oshi*, *Aweremi*, *Ashikem*, *Eniemia* and *Ekangkem* are specific to the Bekwarra people.

Due to the influence of Western culture, Christianity and the affinities with other tribes, most parents have preferred to bestow their children those borrowed names instead of Bekwarra personal names which communicate important messages in their local culture. To this end, most parents give these foreign names arbitrarily to their children without knowing the meaning. This study seeks to determine the communicative functions of names and the range of communicative functions performed by them in Bekwarra personal names.

2. Communicative functions of personal names

In our society, personal names have a unique way of giving information about the bearers. Personal names are regarded or used as powerful symbols for communication (Wappa & Wada, 2019). Communication becomes meaningful when the right instrument is used and the right language, either through speaking, writing or para-linguistics, such as, sign language. Other than simply being a label, names do tell a lot more information and bear the mission in portraying a person's image (Cheang, 2020). In Africa, personal names are communicative devices that tell stories about historic events, familial conflicts, and the

struggle with supernatural powers which are central to the notions of personhood and self-definition (Mensah et al., 2020). Importantly in Africa, personal names have been identified as prominent sites to reflect on and interpret emotions, where a name can stand for its bearer and synecdochally epitomises the essence of their being (Mensah et al., 2020). Egbunu (2016) clarifies that naming is a very important tool used among various African cultures to convey certain messages, either to an individual, family members or a community for a particular reason.

Apart from the socio-cultural and spiritual importance of names as aspects of people's culture and language, as well as the transmission of traditional and cultural heritage and identity, names have a distinctive grammar, reflecting the grammatical structure of the respective languages (Omachonu & Ejeba, 2023). Naming connotes celebration of life at birth and the future (Omachonu & Ejeba, 2023). It is one of the most significant rites of passage through life; it announces the birth of the new-born, introduces the individual to the extended family and the larger community, and confers on the child a name which is to be borne throughout life. Sometimes, the people's worldview and value systems are expressed in the names that individuals bear or are given within the community (Omachonu & Ejeba, 2023). This is to say that personal names serve as the veritable channels for communication, dissemination of information, transmission of religious, traditional, and cultural heritage of the bearers of these names.

Onah and Gudaku (2023) clarify that naming a person appear to be simple; yet it is a complex process with deep meaning and implication. The functions of names often times communicate the circumstances surrounding the child's birth, the parent's perception of the child, their ideology of parenting, the expectation of both the parents and the extended family members on the role the child is to play in the family, the community, as well as the society. The type of names that are given to a new-born child is often determined by the circumstances into which that child was born, namely the situation or condition of the parents, events surrounding the birth, historical and cultural reality of the time of pregnancy or birth of the name-bearer (Mbarachi and Igwenyi, 2018; Balogun and Fasanu, 2019).

Olatunji et al. (2015) observe that a name serves as the socio-cultural expression and elucidation of self-concept. In this regard, naming is a universal culture, and the processes of naming and names common vary across cultures. Names are not only given as a means of identification, but also instill ethical standards and social values in an indirect way on the bearers. Personal names do not only serve a legal purpose, but also convey social, cultural and spiritual meaning for the family and its community. Therefore, names are sometimes given as an expression of a people's view about the world argues that some names are peculiar to certain families and they help to communicate and identify the place of origin of their bearers. Therefore, persons answering these names can easily be traced to a particular community or the family they belong (Okon, 2017; Godson & Igodo, 2020; Ndiribe, 2025).

2.1 Personal names as identity markers

Personal names are very important in the identification of an individual in a given community. Personal naming practices of any community reveal its social and cultural type of life (Wappa & Wada, 2019). Personal names are expected to serve as identifiers to an entity, and so be able to single out many similar types, especially those that are closely associated with what it signifies. Personal names are symbolic resources that can reflect ideological and social systems of some societies (Mensah et al., 2020). This implies that personal names are attached with values and very significant in every culture. The absence of a name of a child means the absence of an identity and information about the individual (Aksholakova, 2014). To buttress this point, Anyanwu (2023) argues that names play a significant role in human societies, serving as a fundamental aspect of identity and culture. In African culture, personal names play a significant role in language and culture, reflecting the beliefs, traditions, and values of a community. Names are generally considered as identities or labels as well as the history of the people that are expressed in different ways such as the events or circumstances surrounding such tagging, labeling or identifying (Wappa & Wada, 2019), that is why Okon (2017) believes that different culture has different conventions for personal names. However, Perianova (2015) opines that because of a bestowed name people may be identified as members of a certain social and ethnic group or generation. Therefore, names influence people's lives in many ways, determine by the way people communicate and the way they want to be recognised and the way they are recognised in the society.

Omachonu and Ejeba (2023) believe that situations, times and circumstances of birth, events, day and place of birth, culture, environment, history, belief system, kinship, reincarnation, expectations, physical appearance serve as sources of the names people give to their children. Therefore, the practice of naming and bearing of personal names among the people preserve both their individual and collective identity as a people. To support this argument, Onah and Gudaku (2023) establish that naming is an essential and universal process, which people use to identify what surrounds them as a way of communication around the world. This implies that everything around us has to be identified by giving it a suitable name to enable us to distinguish between these things for proper recognition and identification.

In agreement with Aboh et al. (2024), who argue that names and naming practices can provide insights into how some cultures construct reality, Fubara-Manuel et al. (2026) make the case that personal names function as social texts that encode the expectations, power relations, and worldview of the people. This suggests that name determines what is expected of the child in the family and the society at large. Ndiribe (2025) argues that personal names are bestowed based on what transpired or what the name-giver experienced prior to the birth of the child. The implication is that personal names serve as a vehicle to reply the critics or make statements of facts about what really happened in one's life before a child is welcomed. Personal names are names with which individuals are identified and recognised within the society. Most often, these names are bestowed based on the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child. Personal names hold unique meanings, reflecting the values, beliefs, and history of the communities that bear them. They are cultural and universal to all societies and serve as individuals' identities, and symbolise

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them individually and in different ways. This implies that without personal names, an individual cannot be identified or recognised in his family and community at large. Therefore, personal names are model of identities and recognition in a given society (Wappa and Wada, 2019; Anyanwu, 2023).

2.3 Name and naming system in the African society

A name is the most significant aspect of human existence. It is, to the humans, like a pillar that holds a building or bridge. A name is an insignia that communicates one's identity and relationships with both the physical and spiritual worlds; it is a communicator and signifier. It signifies who a person is to himself, to others and the society, and defines the individual in his multidimensional relationships he/she has established. In Africa, personal names are creative cultural symbols that represent experiences, conflicts or situations with deep historical resonances. Names are a body of knowledge that reflect a wide gamut of African culture: language, history, philosophy, spirituality and worldview. Interestingly, personal names of individuals are very important in the process of proper identification of the bearers. Naming is an important ceremony and every society has a unique way of accomplishing the process (Mensah et al., 2020; Onah and Gudaku, 2023; Anyanwu, 2023).

Udechukwu and Nnyigide (2016) argue that a man's name is not like a mantle, which merely hangs on him and which one perchance safely twitch and pull, but a perfectly, fitting garment, which, like the skin, has grown over him; at which one cannot rake and scrape without injuring the man himself. This suggests that one's name is golden and when tampered with wrongly, it will break. Giving a name to a person is not only meant to identify the person, but it also speaks of the personality and destiny of the person bearing the name (Omachonu & Ejeba, 2023). The general consensus is that African names are pregnant with deep meanings that have social significance and express the worldview of the people. Apart from their historical, socio-cultural and spiritual importance, personal names in the African naming systems often exhibit characteristics that show them as a special class of words with a unique reference. They are culture-specific and they identify the individual bearing the name as a trademark of honour and recognition (Egbunu, 2016; Omachonu & Ejeba, 2023).

According to Mbarachi and Igwenyi (2018), naming is a cultural construct of identifying a person through the employment of the cultural strategies in the given society and its realisation through language. Naming is one of the practices that emphasises the mutual relationship that exists between language and culture, wherein culture embodies language, while language expresses culture. Names often carry deep cultural meanings and provide a window into the rich tapestry of human societies (Anyanwu, 2023). That is to say naming is a powerful vehicle used for promoting identification of one's past and trying to locate oneself within the wider networks of memory. Wappa and Wada (2019) are of the view that names are chosen carefully with special consideration to the traditional meaning of the names being emphasised. This shows that the ideological realities of the society are reflected in their naming practices; it identifies a person, legitimises a decision as well as reflects the power of the spoken words. The onomastic tradition among many African

societies is similar. Many African people adopt patronymic rules in naming their children. That is, children are invariably named after parents or ancestors. A child may be bestowed the name of an ancestor or that of a friend or it may be named according to the peculiar circumstances surrounding its birth (Okon 2017). Among the Bekwarra people, names are not just bestowed on the new-born babies; it is bestowed based on circumstances, situations surrounding the birth of the child, occurrences, family naming system, remarkable events, history, expectations as well as belief and perception of the parents about the new-born.

3. Theoretical framework

The analysis undertaken in this study is driven socio-onomastics theory. Socio-onomastics defines the intersection between sociolinguistics and onomastics, illuminating how names and naming constitute the meeting point for sociolinguistics and onomastics (Dautey, 2025 as cited in Fubara-Manuel et al., 2026). Socio-onomastics is the sociolinguistic study of personal names within social and cultural contexts. It examines how names are used by focusing on identity and social functions of naming practices in societies. The theory takes into account the social, cultural, and situational domains in which names are used, and this applies to all kinds of names – names of places, personal names and commercial names (Oduola & Omolara, 2025). In Ainiala and Ostman (2017) as cited in Aboh et al. (2022), socio-onomastics theory takes into account the social, cultural, and situational domains in which names are given and used. This also takes into cognisance the influence of religion on names, why names change, and the effect of gender stereotypes on naming practices. The theory is an investigation into the origins of forms and proper names, especially names of people and places (Laia et al., 2025).

Socio-onomastics view names as socially conditioned and functionally significant elements of the linguistic system, closely connected with issues of identity, social stratification, and cultural dynamics (Abdurazzoqova, 2026). It aims to understand not only the origins and meanings of names, but also their cultural, social, and historical contexts. Socio-onomastics is concerned with how names are used, interpreted and valued in particular social contexts. Its central tenets emphasise that names are not neutral linguistic labels, but social acts that reflect cultural norms, ideological positions, identity negotiations and broader sociohistorical processes (Svongoro et al., 2026). Socio-onomastics is also concerned with variation, particularly how names differ across social groups or situations. A key principle of socio-onomastics is that the meaning and function of a name cannot be understood outside the situational, cultural and communal environments in which it is produced and used.

Socio-onomastics theory, therefore, offers a new approach to the study of names and naming by capturing the socially constitutive nuances of meaning people ascribe to names, and the larger sociological questions arising from name use, name variants, name-change and innovation, name contact and namesake (Mensah, 2025). Contributing to this, Uwen and Ekpang (2022) assert that socio-onomastics offer new insights into names, naming, naming systems and the varieties related to their etymology senses. In their application of socio-onomastics to the study of Igbo-Pentecostal *Chi* personal names, Igwenyi et al (2026) detail how socio-onomastics enables understanding of personal names in relation to the

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sociocultural and situational contexts of their usage. This theory is relevant to this study because it has the capacity of offering insights into the motivation for the assignment and use of personal names among the Bekwarra people.

4. Methodology

The study adopts the qualitative survey research method, using semi-structured interview, focus group discussion and participant observation as instruments of data collection. The semi-structured interview enabled the researcher to ask participants open-ended questions that were in line with their communicative understanding of Bekwarra naming systems. Focus group discussion allowed participants to have deep conversation about naming and how they perform communicative functions in their various families. As a Bekwarra native speaker who is also conversant with the people's onomastic tradition, I equally deployed participant observation in gathering data. The research design explored how personal names among the Bekwarra people of Cross River State perform communicative and identity functions at the individual, family and community levels. The population of this study strictly comprised traditional leaders, community leaders, and youth leaders from Bekwarra who are family heads.

Participants for this study were carefully selected through purposive sampling method based on their willingness to participate in the study, their deep knowledge and experience of Bekwarra naming practices and by extension leaders in their families and communities. A sample size of 34 participants, comprising 24 male and 10 females was purposively drawn from the population as interviewees, and two focus group discussion sessions of seven participants each was conducted. The decision for this selection was informed by the fact that names among the Bekwarra people can be bestowed on a child by either of the parents, grandparents or the elderly in the family based on negotiations. The ages of participants in this study were between 30-85 years who had participated in name-giving in their families.

A total of 85 names was collected during field work exercise. However, 53 names were selected and analysed to guide against repetition due to their similarities in meaning. Data were collected using a phone recorder and a notebook. They were translated from Bekwarra to English. The study was anchored on the socio-onomastics theory which helped to drive the analysis. The theory examines how names are used by focusing on identity and social functions of naming practices in societies. Accordingly, explanation and thematic analysis were used to analyse the data obtained from participants.

Ethical considerations, particularly regarding informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly upheld throughout the period of the data collection. Before conducting the focus group discussion (FGD) and in-depth interview, participants were notified in advance to allow for adequate scheduling and preparation.

5. Communicative and identity functions of Bekwarra personal names

Bekwarra personal names communicate important information concerning the bearers of these names and identify them within the family and the society. Name is very key and

important in every human existence. It is important to note that without name, one does not exist, have an identity or known. These Bekwarra personal names in its uniqueness have a connection to the cultural values of the people, belief systems and appreciation or thanksgiving within the Bekwarra people. These personal names carry important messages/information that reflect the hope of parents over their children, either as a thanksgiving or appreciation to God for what He (God) has done for them or about to do in their lives or the family. Personal names communicate vital information about the bearers or the family in general. Without a name, one cannot be identified within the family, community and the larger society. According to one of the participant's accounts, Adah, a 65-year-old man explained, "we don't just give names to our children, but we give names that align with situations and circumstances at hand to pass a message to whoever wants to know." His position clearly stated how and why names are bestowed on children in a family.

Importantly, Bekwarra personal names express expectations, blessings, praises, victory, admonition, successes, thanksgiving, and the desires of parents about their children. However, there are cases where Bekwarra names are chosen as a result of experiences the family or the parents had in the past – different encounters, circumstances surrounding the family, the birth of the new-born as well as signifying previous happenings and events. These names most times are very unique and significant to the bearers of these names, as well as their families. For example, Odey, a 63-year-old father of three who bestowed *Adah-Akangkem* on his son, explained:

I named my son *Adah-Akangkem* (the Lord spoke for me) because my wife and I got married for six years without a child, so we became a laughing stock among some members of my family who kept pushing that I should end the marriage, but I stood my grounds that God gives, when my wife eventually became pregnant and gave birth to our male child, we gave him the name.

The above account is an illustration of how personal names communicate essential information that express expectations and insights into the name-giver.

Wars can determine the name bestowed on a child. Names such as *Ukpang* (lion) and *Uchee* (war), *Gowon* (male children born during the Nigeria Civil War) are instances of war-informed personal names among the people. Bekwarra personal names serve as an individual's badge that cannot be taken away from the owner of the name. Other Bekwarra personal names carry historical significance, reflecting important events. Such names are *Ogbudu* (plentiful), *Anemaa* (has he seen) and *Eniemia* (the right people are no more). Data show that although some Bekwarra personal names do not have Bekwarra origin or meanings, they are peculiar to certain Bekwarra families and community. Some of these names include *Agbaragba*, *Omang*, *Otumahana*, *Ebagu*, *Ohana*, *Uwiah*, *Obega*, *Okpuka*, *Achoda*, *Ntamu*, *Opie*, *Otafu*, *Otumokpo*, *Ochubewo*, *Ishieje* and *Okabo*.

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The Bekwarra onomastics indicate that there are names borrowed from neighbouring communities like Yala, Yache (both in northern Cross River State) and Idoma in Benue State because of their closeness with Bekwarra people. These names are either pure Yala, Yache or Idoma, but given to Bekwarra children. Examples include *Ohioro, Ene, Ochuole, Eneyi, Ediwe, Ogbeche, Achikpo, Idoko, Omaji, Imani, Ujor, Wordu, Onyeje* and *Omaga*. Ogar, a 68-year-old businessman and farmer, who named his son *Idoko* (a name not originally Bekwarra) recounted that he has a friend from Idoma, Benue State, a very gentle and nice man, and owing to their cordial relationship he decided to name his son after his Idoma friend to cement their relationship.

5.1 Bekwarra names that demonstrate gratitude

Table 1 below are names that express name-givers' gratitude. These categories of Bekwarra names are bestowed on children by their parents to show appreciation for God's ingenuity in their lives and family.

Table 1: Names that express thanksgiving

Names	Gloss	Names	Gloss
<i>Adah-Oshi</i>	Thank you, Lord	<i>Inung</i>	
Goodness			
<i>Inyie</i>	Riches	<i>Okannate</i>	Costly
<i>Adah-Afu</i>	the Lord surpasses	<i>Uhe</i>	Favour
<i>Ukwun-Atabuchi</i>	God's blessing	<i>Uke-Atabuchi</i>	God's
Gift			
<i>Ukwun</i>	Blessing/Peace	<i>Adah-Anyiukpe</i>	the
Lord is supreme			
<i>Adah-Akangkem</i>	the Lord spoke for me	<i>Uke</i>	Gift

From this participant's account, *Adah-Anyiukpe* (The Lord is supreme) communicates the supremacy of God in their family. Ofuga, a 55-year-old mother of four, narrated her ordeal when she was barely four months pregnant. She explained that sickness struck and they thought of terminating the pregnancy to save her life due to the protracted illness. However, after series of medical examinations and medications, the doctors were able to manage her until she gave birth. The participant named the child *Adah-Anyiukpe* (The Lord is supreme). Also, one of the participants, Eburu, a 35-year-old Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps Officer who named his child *Inung* (Goodness) explained that he was motivated to name his son *Inung* (Goodness) because of a reciprocated favour. He elaborated,

I met this Hausa man one day when we traveled from the north to the southern part of Nigeria on the same vehicle, so he asks for direction, and I assisted him until he got to where he was going. The man collected my phone number and we became friends. After about two years, he called me one afternoon and asked me to send my credentials. Today I am working with the

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Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) courtesy of that act of kindness. It was within that period that I got this job that my wife gave birth to our child, so I named my son *Inung* (Goodness).

These Bekwarra personal names are layered with acts of gratitude; they are the name-givers' acts of appreciation to God or the society.

5.2 Names that express the love of God and humanity

Table 2 below shows Bekwarra personal names that signify God's love for humanity. This regime of names is God-centred. As Igwenyi et al (2026) aver, "religion-based names highlight an ideological linguistic construction that connects devotees to their Christian faith, reconstructs their spiritual perspectives and expresses gratitude to God as their anchor" (p. 12). These names are codified with name-givers' expression of God's love.

Table 2: Names that express the love of God

Names	Gloss	Names	Gloss
<i>Anyi</i>	It is beyond our power	<i>Iyi</i>	Mine
<i>Adah-Aweremi</i> one I love	The Lord remembered me	<i>Anyinmi</i>	The
<i>Ekangkem</i>	They spoke for me	<i>Ebenyin</i>	Love
<i>Ekpenehe</i>	Let's embrace each other	<i>Unung</i>	Beauty

Eneje, a 52-year-old man who named his daughter *Ekangkem* (They spoke for me), explained that a man forcefully took over his late father's land because he was a powerful figure in the community. However, the matter got to the village council, and the council spoke in the name-giver's favour. As a result of this justice, he named the daughter *Ekangkem* (They spoke for me) as a reminder of the justice he received. Also, another participant, Agnes, a 51-year-old businesswoman who named her child *Adah-Aweremi* (The Lord remembered me), recounted that it got to a time in her life that she felt God had abandoned her and her family. She went further to explain that her business collapsed, her farm crops could not yield at that period, so life became difficult for them. That she and the husband barely took care of the family needs. Fortunately, her brother in-law who was in the United Kingdom came home and established another lucrative business for her. She explained that this necessitated her to bestow *Adah-Aweremi* (The Lord remembered me) on her son.

The above Bekwarra personal names are the acknowledgement of God's love by name-givers, exemplified in the marvelous deeds and love of God for his family.

5.3 Names that express achievement

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Data indicate certain personal names are used to detail name-givers' life strength and the achievements of the family over certain things or over time.

Table 3: *Names that describe achievements*

Names	Gloss	Names	Gloss
<i>Ushie</i>	King	<i>Achu</i>	
Famous			
<i>Ukpang</i>	Lion	<i>Ashimia</i>	He has
done it all			
<i>Anemaa</i>	Has he seen	<i>Ukan-Atabuchi</i>	God's
power			
<i>Adah-Anyie</i>	the Lord knows	<i>Abo-Adah</i>	the
Lord's hand			

From the account of Ekpa, a 51-year-old man, who explained that bestowing *Adah-Anyie* (the Lord knows) to his child was as a result of the encounter he had with his elder brother over their late father's property. He explained that when the elder brother denied him of the share of the inheritance, some family members asked him to fight for his right, but as a Christian he refused to heed to their advice and let everything go. He explained that it was at that point that he named his last child *Adah-Anyie* (the Lord knows) to console himself. Another participant, Agba, a 67-year-old retired teacher who named his son *Anemaa* (Has he seen) explained the reason for naming the child *Anemaa*. He explained that he did not get married until the age of 48 years, so people thought he was impotent. And when he gave birth to his first child, he gave him that name to send a message to people. He concluded that he has four children to the glory of God, and those people are hiding their faces now in shame. Accordingly, there are some Bekwarra personal names that express achievements or victory therefore, parents choose these categories of names for their children to showcase their feelings. These are signs of excitement by the parents of the new born babies for the victory or achievement recorded so far in the family or the society. These categories of names are not just given but come as a result of what has happened in the past.

5.4 Bekwarra Names that are Associated with Praise of God and Humanity

Data demonstrate that some Bekwarra personal names are bestowed on children by their parents as a sign of praising God for His benevolence in their family. This is exemplified in Table 4 below.

Table 4: *Names that express one's Happiness*

Names	Gloss	Names	Gloss
<i>Mapia-Adah</i>	I praise the Lord	<i>Iripia</i>	Glory
<i>Ushang</i>	Prayer	<i>Ukpana</i>	Gold

According to Eneyi, a 45-year trader who named the daughter *Iripia* (Glory), she explained that she gave the daughter the name as a way of praising God for a favour they received

from God. She disclosed that when she was pregnant, countless favours came her way, so, that motivated her to give glory to God. Another participant, Lucy, a 73-year-old retired school principal who named her child *Mapia-Adah* (I praise the Lord) explained that her labour took her three days, so on the fourth day when arrangements were concluded for a caesarean section, she prayed fervently. And as God would have it, immediately she was moved to the theatre for the surgery, God came through for her she gave birth. To praise God for His intervention, she named her daughter *Mapia-Adah* (I praise the Lord).

Importantly, there are some Bekwarra personal names that name-givers assign to their children as a sign or demonstration of praises to God and humanity for what He has done or is doing in their lives and family. These categories of names parents hold it dear to their hearts because of some wonderful experiences. Bekwarra personal names that fall within these categories serve as an upliftment of souls and happiness when parents hear their children being called by these names.

5.5 Historical and circumstantial names

Some names in the Bekwarra onomastic tradition emanate from the circumstances that surround the birth of a child. Such category of names bears the memories of the name-giver as well historicises the community's lived experience. Table 5 below exemplifies these names.

Table 5: Historical and circumstantial names

Names	Gloss	Names	Gloss
<i>Eshidenang</i> Powerful	What should we do	<i>Odobì</i>	
<i>Ibuburu</i> bad	It happened by surprise	<i>Abenmire</i>	It is not
<i>Ache</i> didn't agree	Race (on the run)	<i>Ebangne</i>	They
<i>Afanabere</i> remember	He didn't meet them	<i>Ewere</i>	Let's
<i>Ebeshi</i> outran me	We have done it partly	<i>Abugbem</i>	He
<i>Edem</i> are no more	let them tell me	<i>Eniemia</i>	People
<i>Alammi</i> have finished	she lured me	<i>Omia</i>	You
<i>Abutunghe</i>	He ran away from him/her		
<i>Ashiwere</i>	It has happened as a reminder		
<i>Ashinetiang</i>	It has happened for purpose of history.		

Inah, a 56-year-old transporter who named his son *Afanabere* (He did not meet them), explained the rationale behind the name. He narrated that his first-two children died, so

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when he gave birth to the third child, he named him *Afanabere* (He did not meet them). This means that the third child could not see his siblings since they both died before he was born.

Specifically, history and circumstances surrounding one's birth or journey in life cannot be taken lightly or forgotten in a hurry. Thus, Bekwarra personal names in this category are very germane to parents and the name bearers. These personal names communicate important information either about the history or circumstances surrounding the process of pregnancy, birth or what has happened generally to parents or the family. In some cases, these names are given to children by their parents as a testament to the activities in their family cycle or the community as a whole.

5.6 Names that express a family's expectations

Table 6 below shows names that express one's expectation from God. This regime of names is bestowed on children by their parents based on their belief that God has everything in life. Within the socio-onomastic capital in which names are assigned based on lived experiences, these names become anvils through which dependence on God is articulated.

Table 6: Names that express expectations

Names	Gloss	Names	Gloss
<i>Eyuonada</i>	We hear from the lord	<i>Ujim-Adah</i>	the
Lord's mind			
<i>Ifa-Atabuchire</i>	Nothing is impossible with God.		

Ogbaji, a 60-year-old farmer who named his child *Eyuonada* (We hear from the Lord), explained that something motivated him to give the child the name. He noted that when he was building his house, it got to a point that he never believed he would finish the project. His business crumbled, and since it was a mud house and the rains were coming, he lost the hope of completing the building project. He further explained that he became tired of the situation and he told his wife that *Eyuonada* (We hear from the Lord, was going to be the name of the unborn child. However, he eventually finished the project.

In human existence, expectations about what is to come are very significant. Hence, Bekwarra personal names that falls within this category cannot be taken for granted. Consequentially, all human beings have expected or are expecting from either God or human beings. Bekwarra personal names given in this direction functions as name-givers' explication of their faith in God that He will complete for them that they have started, and for those that He will do in the future.

Data indicate that these names are bestowed to express name-givers' happiness, joy, expectation and appreciation to God. This confirms Omachonu and Ejeba's (2023) view that situations, times and circumstances of birth, events, day and place of birth, culture, environment, history, belief system, kinship, reincarnation, expectations, physical appearance serve as sources of the names people bestow on their children. Paralleling this

view, Ndiribe (2025) advances the idea that personal names are given based on what transpired or what the name-giver experienced prior to the birth of the child. This is in conformity with the socio-onomastics theory which takes into account the social, cultural, and situational domains in which names are used, and which applies to all kinds of names – names of places, personal names and commercial names.

6. Conclusion

Personal names in every culture are very significant to the name-bearers, the parents, family members as well as the larger society. These are names given to the bearers by name-givers. Bekwarra personal names are identity markers by which the name-bearers are known and recognised by. Hence, personal names in Bekwarra traditional practice account for why certain names are assigned to certain bearers. Personal names communicate and give information about what the parents of the child are expecting or want to see manifest in their lives namely, happiness, peace of mind and/or as well as a reminder of previous events. It pleases them whenever they hear the name of the child being called. All in all, the study surmises that personal names among the Bekwarra people of Cross River State, Nigeria, communicate and identify the people of their place of origin, and ancestral lineage of the bearers of these names within the society they live. In view of the foregoing, the study recommends that parents should give their children Bekwarra personal names that communicate important information, identify with their culture and belief system for cultural conservation. Also, Bekwarra parents should give their children names that will always reflect their expectations and desires.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes on Contributor

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