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EVALUATION OF CHOICE BETWEEN USE OF WOODEN PEWS AND PLASTIC CHAIRS IN SELECTED CHURCHES IN OBIO-AKPOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the choice between wooden pews and plastic chairs in selected Churches in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State. Five wards were randomly selected from the 17 Political Wards in the study area. Two major towns were purposely selected from the wards and 10 churches consisting of 5 Orthodox Churches and 5 Pentecostal Churches were randomly selected from each town. Data were collected through the administration of well-structured questionnaires, oral interview and market survey. Data collected were analyzed using simple frequencies and percentages. The results showed that, 43% of Orthodox Churches are making use of wooden pews while 46% of Pentecostal churches make use of plastic chairs. Results also revealed that there is significant difference between the cost of production of one pew and its equivalent number of chairs while there is no significant difference between cost of production of one wooden pew and its equivalent number of banquet chairs. Sixty-four percent (64%) of the churches have not had a change of seat type while the remaining 36% have had a change of seat type. The results also revealed that 96% of respondents were comfortable with their various seat types (wooden pews and plastic chairs) and just 2% of both Orthodox and Pentecostal Church members were not comfortable with their seat types. Though there is significant difference in the cost of production of one wooden pew and its equivalent number of chairs, plastic chairs will overshoot the price of pews over time. Subsequently, there would be need for replacement of plastic chairs in Churches. Wooden pews should be used as permanent seat type in Churches. This will prevent regular replacement of seats thereby saving cost.

Keywords: Orthodox Churches, Pentecostal Churches, Wooden pews, Plastic chairs, Ergonomics.

INTRODUCTION

Equipping Churches with quality and contemporarily designed seating systems and equipment is a serious problem in Nigeria. Today seat can be used individually, as plastic chairs or sets, as wooden pews. There are many inconsistencies and the quality of furniture and equipment is rather low (e.g. dimensions, materials, etc.). All these problems may be partially a consequence of inadequate forest resource, the wood. Different denominations exist, each with distinct characteristics. The church is usually known to be divided into the space of functions (altar, pastors space, choir section, and

congregation space), each with an important role in the service of God. Though, the church has been classified as Orthodox and new generation ones, little is known about further classifying church based on seat type used. Around the world today, Pentecostal Churches use a wide variety of spaces, seats and buildings; wooden pews do not seem to be an essential part of the mix. These Pentecostal Churches are now opting for plastic chairs instead of using the traditional wooden pews for their seating arrangements. This seating option is typically more modern and come in a variety of different styles to choose from. Many Churches have even purchased and upholstered chairs to give

them a more desirable appearance. Growing at an unprecedented rate in countries as diverse as Nigeria and other countries in Africa, the Pentecostal movement is facing the challenge to provide seating to hundreds of thousands of additional believers every year. Now, increasingly, former wooden pew devotees are looking to other seating options as a more practical alternative to wooden pews. In today's times, much has changed in Church design and trends and this has affected the furniture industry. Most small scale wooden pews manufacturing companies are folding up or not operating at full capacity because today's Churches no longer patronize them.

Data on the factors that informed the use of Church seat type and shift from one to another previously and recently are not available. Information on the economic implications between wooden pews (WPs) and plastic chairs (PCs) is lacking in Nigeria. To date, no study has been reported on evaluating the choice between wooden pews and plastic chairs in Nigeria. Although the literature contains a number of studies regarding the pews, benches and chairs, there are almost no reports regarding the choice between wooden pews and plastic chairs in Churches. Available literature shows that work has been done on the History of Wooden pews in Churches, how it evolved from backless stones in the 13th century to wooden benches in the 14th century and became common in the 15th century (Viola and Barna 2008). Recently, several problems have been observed with the utilization of plastic seats. The problems observed with the utilization of plastic seat are of ergonomic importance. The hours spent sitting differ from Church to Church including the type of seat used may have ergonomic impacts on the members. For safety and health of members, there is need for research focusing on comparative of the ergonomic conditions and their impacts between pews and plastic chairs users. Despite the increasing number of studies in the past two decades, documenting the beneficial health-fostering effects of human-wood contact is unheard in Nigeria. This calls for evaluating the choice between wooden pews and plastic chairs in Churches. This is expected to reveal the reasons why the use of wooden pews are fading out and proffer solutions to bringing them back into Churches. It is expected to contribute in raising

awareness for informed and effective policy decision on compulsory wood products utilization and future forest plantations planning.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area

This research was carried out in Rivers State, Nigeria. Rivers State was created by decree 19 of 31st May 1967, during the administration of General Yakubu Gowon. Rivers State is situated between latitude 4°44' and 59.06" North and longitudes 6°49' and 39.58" East of Greenwich Meridian (Tamunoitekema, 2003). The state is located in the south-south region of Nigeria. Rivers State is bounded on the North by Imo State, on the south by the Atlantic Ocean, on the East by Asia and Akwa Ibom States and on the West by Bayelsa. Out of 23 LGA, 14 are in the upland area, 8 in the riverine and 1 is a combination of upland and riverine (Dosunmu, 2003). The state is made up of various ethnic groups, which include: Ekpeye, Ikwerre and Etche, Ibani, Opobo, Ogoni, Eleme, Obolo, Engenni, Kalabari and Okirika.

Obio-Akpor is a LGA in the metropolis of Port Harcourt, one of the major centers of economic activities in Nigeria. The LGA covers 260km² and at the 2006 Census held a population of 464,789. Obio-Akpor LGA has its headquarters at Rumuodomaya. The original indigenous occupants of the area are the Ikwerre people.

Data Collection and Analysis

Obio-akpor LGA has 17 political wards from which 5 wards were randomly selected. From 5 wards selected, 2 major towns were purposely selected from each randomly selected ward. From each town, 10 churches were randomly selected consisting of 5 Orthodox Churches and 5 Pentecostal Churches. Data were collected through the administration of well-structured questionnaires, oral interview and market survey. This research was done using multiple stage sampling techniques. One questionnaire was administered each to 100 church heads making a total of 100 respondents.

Data Analysis

Results were presented with simple frequencies using tables and percentages.

RESULTS

Types of Pulpit used in churches

The various types of pulpit found in Churches in the study area are represented in the (Table 1). The study revealed that the type of pulpit mostly used

in Churches in the study is Glass pulpit with 61%, and wooden pulpit with 36%. Only 2% makes use of marble and cement pulpit while 1% makes use of plastic pulpit.

Table 1: Types pulpit found in Churches

Types of Pulpit	Orthodox churches		Pentecostal churches		Grand Total	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n=100)	Percentage (%)
Wooden	17	17.0	19.0	19.0	36	36.0
Plastic	1	1.0	-	-	1	1.0
Marble and cement	2	2.0	-	-	2	2.0
Glass	30	30.0	31	31.0	61	61.0

Types of Seat used in churches

The different seat types used in children section of the Churches in the study area is represented in the (Table 2). The finding showed that, 43% of Orthodox Churches use wooden pews while 46% of Pentecostal churches use plastic chairs for their adult session. The result also revealed that 33% of

Orthodox Churches use wooden pews in their children section while 27% of Orthodox Churches cannot afford wooden pews for the children, so they just use small plastic chairs. 46% of Pentecostal Churches just opt for plastic chairs for their children section as it is the order of seating in the main Church.

Table 2: Types of seat used in Adult and Children Session of the Churches

Seat Type	Orthodox Churches		Pentecostal Churches		Grand Total	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n=100)	Percentage (%)
Adult Session						
Wooden pews	43	43.0	-	-	43	43.0
Plastic chairs	3	3.0	46	46.0	49	49.0
Both	4	4.0	2	2.0	6	6.0
Banquet chairs	-	-	2	2.0	2	2.0
Children Session						
Wooden pews	33	33.0	4	4.0	37	37
Plastic chairs	27	27.0	46	46.0	63	63.0

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Factors influencing the use of seat types in churches

Factors that informed the use of Church Seat types and shift from one to another are presented in (Table 3, 4 and 3). According to the findings from church heads as shown in (Table 3), most Orthodox Churches (32%) started with wooden pews and have not had any change yet, 9% started with plastic chairs, other 9% started with benches before they both changed to wooden pews. For Pentecostal Churches, about 40% started with plastic chairs and haven't had any change of seat

type other than replacement of the plastic chairs that got bad. Also, 8% of Pentecostal Churches started with benches and 2% started with pews before changing to plastic chairs. Results from the findings in (Table 4) shows that 64% of both Orthodox and Pentecostal Churches had no change in seat types. About 36% had changes in seat types. Eighteen percent (18%) of Pentecostal Churches had changes from benches and wooden pews to plastic chairs, 18% of Orthodox Churches made changes from plastic chairs to wooden pews. The finding of the study indicated in (Table 5) that,

37% of Orthodox Churches do not have plans of replacing wooden pews, while 13% have plans of seat replacement to modified wooden pews with kneelers, headrests, cushions. The study also revealed that 37% of Pentecostal Churches have

plans of replacing plastic chairs with Banquet chairs, 13% of Pentecostal Churches do not have plans of replacing their present seat type (plastic chairs).

Table 3: Types of Seat used in Churches before Change to other Seat Types

Seat types	Orthodox churches		Pentecostal churches		Grand Total	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n=100)	Percentage (%)
Benches	9	9.0	8	8.0	17	17.0
Wooden pews	32	32.0	2	2.0	34	34.0
Plastic chairs	9	9.0	40	40.0	49	49.0

Table 4: Reasons for Change to other Types of Seats

Change	Orthodox Churches		Pentecostal Churches		Grand Total		
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Did not change Seats		32	32.0	32	32.0	64	64.0
Changed from WPs to PCs		5	5.0	8	8.0	13	13.0
Change from PCs to WPs		10	10.0	-	-	10	10.0
Changed from Benches to PCs		-	-	10	10.0	10	10.0
Changed from Benches to WPs		3	3.0	-	-	3	3.0

Key: WPs – Wooden Pews; PCs – Plastic Chairs

Table 5: Desire to replace seat types by churches

Desire to replace seat	Orthodox Churches		Pentecostal Churches		Grand total	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n=100)	Percentage (%)
No	37	37.0	13	13.0	50	50.0
Yes	13	13.0	37	37.0	50	50.0

Table 6: The comfort status of the members of the various churches

Comfort status members	Wooden Pews		Plastic chairs		Grand total	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n=100)	Percentage (%)
Not comfortable	2	2.0	2	2.0	4	4.0
Comfortable	48	48.0	48	48.0	96	96.0

DISCUSSIONS

Findings from the study showed that wooden pulpit is mostly used in both Orthodox and Pentecostal Churches in the study area, irrespective

of their denominations. Anglican Church, a denomination of Orthodox Church makes use of marble and cement pulpit. The use of glass pulpit could be because of fashion and style; most

Churches are very concerned with the interior look and therefore try to use latest equipment as a means of beautifying the Church.

The use of wooden pews in Orthodox Churches and plastic chairs in Pentecostal Churches in the study area confirms similar findings made by Viola and Barna (2008), that Orthodox churches have an ideal seat type which is wooden pews. The result also agrees with findings by Cranmer (2017), that Pentecostal Churches make use of plastic chairs. It also agrees with the finding made by Ademolekun, (2012) that as time went by, with proliferations of Churches in Nigeria, introduction of plastic chairs became a common seating system in most of the Churches. The increase in population of church members, especially in Pentecostal Churches has made it difficult for them to meet the demand of wooden pews so as to accommodate all members, this makes them just opt for plastic chairs. Orthodox Churches in Obio Akpor LGA use wooden pews for adults and children. Orthodox churches use wooden pews because of their organizational structure. Proper arrangements are made before the commencement of a new Parish or Church and they are never in a hurry. These probably could be the reason why most Orthodox Churches starts with wooden pews regardless of the production cost. Most Pentecostal Churches just opt for plastic chairs as it is the order of seating in the main Church, to avoid excessive cost. According to church heads in Pentecostal Churches,

Pentecostal Churches had changed from benches and wooden pews to plastic chair for the motive of improvement and modernization, comfort, easy arrangement and probably because the ownership of land is rented. Orthodox Churches in the study have made changes from plastic chairs to wooden pews giving reasons that plastic chairs breaks easily and cannot be properly disposed. This finding supports the finding made by Knoblauch (2009), that plastic is unlikely to degrade quickly. Based on the findings from oral interview, the initial plan of some Churches was to use wooden pews, but due to high cost of production, they started with plastic chairs and later replaced them with wooden pews.

Orthodox Churches in Obio LGA do not have plans of replacing wooden pews. This is mainly to enhance the comfort of members of the Church.

This finding agrees with similar findings of J.D Power and Associates (2012) that seat owners clearly are looking for more features and comfort from their seats.

Orthodox and Pentecostal Church members are comfortable with wooden pews and plastic chairs depending on the church denomination. This finding agrees with similar findings of J.D Power and Associates (2012), that a seat can be said to be comfortable if it has a headrests, backrest and the normal height to avoid dangling feet. This implies that the members rest their backs and heads and their feet also well balanced making the seat types thus comfortable for seating. Findings from market survey revealed that modifications are now done on wooden pews to have cushions, head and back rests, kneelers and feet rests to enhance comfort. Church seat types might be uncomfortable to some members, because of their weight or body size. Members with smaller body sizes and weights will always be comfortable with their Church seat types. Most members of Orthodox churches are already used to wooden pews because it has been their Church seat from origin.

Wooden pews were mostly produced on request and are not readily available for sale. This is so because, before production of wooden pews, measurements of the Church are done first to make them fit in. This probably makes wooden pews seem unavailable.

CONCLUSION

Orthodox Churches use wooden pews while Pentecostal Churches use plastic chairs in their adult and children sections. Glass pulpits were mostly used by both Orthodox and Pentecostal Churches because it is beautiful and attractive. The price of plastic chairs surpassed the cost of wooden pews because of the replacement of bad or broken plastic chairs. Plastic furniture lacks longevity and it has a tendency to break or fall apart very easily within a short period of time with its replacement cost. Modernization, advancement, improvement, and easy arrangement are the reasons for changes from one seat type to another. That Orthodox and Pentecostal Churches are comfortable with their seat types.

Recommendations

- i. Wooden pews should be used as permanent seat type in Churches. This will prevent

- regular replacement of seats thereby saving cost.
- ii. Modifications should be made on wooden pews to have kneelers, head rests and cushions to enhance comfort of members.

Some furniture makers should specialize in wooden pews production as this will create more awareness and encourage the use of wooden pews in Churches.

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