

THE IGBO TRADITIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION: RELEVANCE FOR EFFECTIVE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract- This paper presents a discussion on the role of the Igbo traditional philosophy of education towards the development of the traditional society, community and nation at large. It argues that empowered with the numerous unwritten indigenous doctrines and traditional norms embedded within the bellies of different Igbo values and local community norms, citizens could be effectively guided aright in their daily conducts and activities both within and outside their various communities. It is the understanding of this brief paper that exposes the subsequent acquaintance with the unwritten ethical conducts abundantly found within the local traditions and cultures of the Igbos that is capable of motivating its populations to adapt themselves into positive and development-based attitudinal conducts, devoid of all forms of corrupt practices which seem to militate against effective national development of the country. Therefore, this paper upholds that supporting the citizens with the relevant tools requires to improve their knowledge of the numerous local values, and traditional norms could assist the Igbos build a more cohesive society, with the effect that the resilience to contribute to community and national development could be constantly ignited among the citizens. Method of data analysis was purely qualitative, a fact that is necessitated by historiographical concept of this discussion, which is an indication that library, journal articles and newspaper publications supplied the academic incentives needed for the effective analysis of this paper.

Keywords: Education, igbo, national development, relevance, traditional philosophy

Introduction

Igboland, located in the SouthEast areas of Nigeria is counted as the country's third largest ethnic group. The area is owned by a group of people known as the Igbos, who speak Igbo language as their ancestral medium of communication, and occupy a geographical space generally known as Igboland. This concurs with the widely acclaimed opinion among authors and researchers that the term – 'the Igbo', could be deployed in three significant contexts. That is the geographical territory known as Igboland, the indigenous language of the people, which is known as Igbo language, as well as the owner-users of the language, who are known as the Igbos. The implication is that Nigeria is a conglomeration of ethnic communities, which

have been estimated at about 490, woven together by the colonial British government which ruled the country between 1861 and 1960, when political independence was eventually granted (Nkokelonye, 2015; Iwunna, 2011; Uchendu, 1965).

Igboland shares geographical borders with several other Nigerian states of the federation. For instance, in the western axis which is located across the great River Niger, the Igbos have Benin and Warri people in the present-day Edo State as their neighbours. On the eastern frontiers of Igboland, they share borders with the Ijaw, and Ogoni on the southern territories of the land. Similarly, from the northern frontiers of Igboland, the Igbos have the Igala and Tiv in the present day Kogi State as their neighbours. Meanwhile, they also share geographical borders with the Yako and Ibibio on her eastern borders. Undaunted by the natural separation created by the River Niger, the Igbos on both sides of the geographical separation still count themselves as one, in the traditional spirit of “anyi bu ofu” (we are one), without minding the natural division exacerbated by the river (Iwunna, 2011; Uchendu, 1965).

Against these backgrounds however, it is important to appreciate the fact that the Igbos are great lovers of development. All over Igboland, different communities, in collaboration with their wealthy and illustrious sons and daughters join hands together to support various development projects, which are geared towards raising the infrastructural and human capacity radars of their own communities. In several communities, wealthy community members go the extra miles in investing on projects which lift the face of their communities, empower their teeming youth and unemployed, provide free education to young school-goers, create opportunities for wealth creation among kiths and kins, sponsor their members on overseas training programmes, establish schools and skills acquisitions centres, as well as build factories and industries which provide employment opportunities to millions of the youth and other unemployed community members. In the ‘spirit of Igboness’, it is their understanding that assisting a fellow community member put food on his table, earn his or her own money, and equip him or her with the relevant skills needed to make a meaningful living, not only removes hunger, but also discourages them from making themselves easy recruits into terrorist groups, criminal gangs, attitudes of violence, and other forms of indecent attitudes which attempt to cripple Nigeria’s

development as a 21st century nation in the present times(Azom & Okoli, 2016; Onuoha, 2016; Okeleke, 2012).

In the spirit of community development therefore, and most especially when it is counted as a programme or project which could elevate the developmental rankings of one's own homeland, wealthy sons and daughters take a lot of pride in investing their hard earned resources, in their efforts to assist their community members stand on their own two feet – literally speaking. They invest aggressively in diverse areas of professional skills and intellectual abilities which lift their members out of poverty, thereby equipping them with the ability to earn their own livelihood instead of relying solely on continued inflow of the generosity of friends and neighbours. Propelled by the Igbo spirit of “ibu anyi ndanda” (strength in unity in diversity), therefore, investment in diverse areas of community development easily capture the attention of wealthy persons all over the land. Motivated by the hunger to write their names in the print of time and embolden their contributions to rural community development projects, wealthy citizens always choose to channel their resources towards improving the quality of life and living among their own kiths and kins. It is fervent commitment to community development projects that makes Igboland stand out in the present times as one ethnic group in Nigeria where indigenes never engage in street begging or rely strongly on the generosity of friends and family members for daily survival (Danbatta, 2017; Nzeadibe, 2015; Njoku, 2005).

Thus, among the Igbos, it is common knowledge that the numerous unwritten traditional values and cultures operate as the unwritten ethical codes of conduct which dictates and influences the conducts and attitudes of the average Igbo person wherever he or she finds himself or herself within the global space. Celebrated and revered as the people's indigenous constitution, it is the embodiment of these local traditional milieus that shape the people's behavioural patterns, direct their moral conducts and influence their relationships with one another, their sense of justice and fair play, as well as dictate their ability to function effectively within their own communities and elsewhere.

It is against this background that Igbo families and communities spend ample periods of time and start early enough to educate their kiths and kins on the principles of engaging in peaceful resolutions at all times, benefits associated with

honesty and sincerity, gains of hard work, values of hard work and commitment to duty, opportunities for empowerment and wealth creation, directions to living a responsible life, moral values that must be sustained in communities, as well as attitudes that must be discouraged among community members. The Igbo, being one of Nigeria's estimated 490 unique ethno-linguistic nations stands out as one ethnic community where religious fundamentalism and terrorism-based indoctrinations have no basis. As predominantly Christian by religion, Igboland is a region where citizens are often guided by the doctrines of their religious faith, most especially when it comes to the issues of forgiveness, revenge, and denial of legitimate rights. Among them therefore, the provisions of their numerous indigenous values are usually allowed to operate freely alongside with the Christian biblical injunctions and traditional norms guiding communities. Thus, issues of conflicts between Christianity and various traditional norms and cultures rarely arise in Igbo communities. Where they arise however, workable solutions are usually promptly worked out in an attempt to make peace reign (Iwunna, 2009; Njoku, 2005; Uchendu, 1965; Ekechi, 1996; Kalu, 1996).

Thus, it can be concluded at this stage that the people of Igboland are synonymous with their cultures and traditions. None can exist without the other. This is an indication of the symbiotic relationship which exists between the populations and their indigenous values which clearly position the Igbo people as a unique ethnographic entity in Nigeria. This explains a case of inseparability existing between the people and their indigenous values. As a matter of fact, the Igbos literally and proudly wear their cultures, traditions and indigenous values on their own shoulders, and deploy them as guides whenever there is the need. It is against this understanding therefore that the numerous indigenous values of the Igbo are saddled with playing the roles of national development agents in the 21st century. Motivated by this development therefore, the pressure to deal with this subject received prominence.

Developmental Roles of Igbo Traditional Philosophy

This segment is discussed under the following headlines:

Inculcation of Entrepreneurship Values

A popular Igbo adage says that “aka ajaja na-ebute onu mmanu mmanu” (there is joy in the dignity of labour). In effect, the essence is to inculcate into the younger generations the cultures of hard work and entrepreneurship. The implication is that among the Igbos, attitudes of hard work, entrepreneurship and commitment to the acquisition of skills is encouraged. Families encourage their members to learn various skills, acquire wider knowledge, become economically relevant, and separate themselves from all forms of lousiness and indulgence in all their ramifications. With the aid of thought-provoking proverbs such as the above, Igbo families instil in their members, and extended family relations strong attitudes of hard work and entrepreneurship. These are motivated by the need to encourage and support younger generations of various families to engage their times and talents in various professional skills which could enable them turn into employers of labour, job creators, and instruments of wealth creation (Obro, 2021; Danbatta, 2017).

Based on these factors, it is claimed among authors and researchers that among the estimated 490 ethno-linguistic nations which are embedded within the umbrella known as Nigeria, the Igbos constitute one major ethnic group which has none of its members operating as beggars anywhere in the country and beyond. It is against this background therefore that the Igbos could be found in all corners and crannies of the globe where they operate as wealth and job creators, thereby contributing their might in reducing the harsh unemployment and economic complications affecting global citizens in different parts of the globe. Thus, it is not out of place to find the Igbos operating as engineers, pharmacists, medical entrepreneurs, architects, horticulturists, farmers, agro-industry operators, house construction technicians, electricians, plumbers, motor drivers, auto technicians, computer operators, graphic designers, creative artists, paint manufacturers, design artists, comedians, actors, goods manufacturers, teachers, academic professionals, school proprietors, products marketers, film producers, and factory owners, among several others. Thus, numerous Igbo traditional values equivocally encourage hard work and entrepreneurship, and discourage all forms of indolence, inability to acquire skills, as well as undue reliance on the generosity of family members which rather diminish the dignity and integrity of the unfortunate recipients. Generally, Igbo families reject and refuse all forms of quick and unexplainable wealth accrued

by any of their kits and kins (Iwunna, 2011; Iwunna, Okoro, Deshi & Dioka, 2022 Danbatta, 2017; Nkokelonye, 2005).

Honesty and Sincerity

The inculcation of the traditional values of honesty and sincerity is another arm of the Igbo traditional norms which dictate and influence the activities and thoughts of the people. As adherents of these ancient values, families, parents, uncles, communities, religious groups, as well as community heads often engage their members in the execution of activities and projects which promote both values. On regular basis, they provide their members with traditional education lessons which equip their members with the innate capacity to be honest and absolutely sincere in their daily dealings and activities with fellow men and women. Often, such training programs could be sunk with the aid of local proverbs which deal with the core of both critical subjects. For instance, proverbs often used to drive both lessons home include the following: “onye ndidi na-eri azu ukpo” (a patient dog eats the fattest bone). The great lesson here is that patience pays, while quick and unfounded wealth leads to doom and disaster (Iwunna, & Okoro, 2017; Ogbalu, 1965).

At other times, the Igbos engage their members in community projects which require strict accountability and honesty. Tested and trusted with such activities, affected members who proved their worth in the sight of their fellow members were often rewarded and elevated to the ranks of traditional title holders within their communities. Because their honesty, accountability and sincerity have been tested and confirmed by the entire community, such members attract the respect and recognition of the entire land. Towards ensuring the sustenance of both virtues among Igbo communities, local proverbs such as the following are often deployed to deliver lessons home adequately: “a na-eji anya ama oka kara aka” (a good wine knows no bush). In practical terms, the quality of one’s life activities influences the societal perceptions of one’s personality in the eyes of community members. Another traditional proverb which could be deployed to train citizens is: “nwata kwochaa aka o soro ogaranya rie nri” (Honesty in life always comes with priceless rewards). Moral lesson conveyed by this proverb includes the fact that honesty elevates a person to greater heights. An honest person is always trusted and respected in the eyes of community members. Honesty is a virtue which deserves to be

emulated. Honesty and sincerity are crucial for survival in the community (Iwunna, & Okoro, 2017; Ogbalu, 1974; Ogbalu, 1965).

In the face of these developmental virtues, it may be important to point out a few factors. There is no aspect of Nigeria's Federal Constitution that supports or encourages dishonesty, cheating, economic fraud, or corruption in any way or manner. As a matter of fact, these core Igbo values occupy key positions in the nation's philosophy of education, all with the intentions of supporting the country's teeming children and youth to imbibe these rare virtues of honesty and sincerity in their daily lives. Against this background therefore, Nigeria's curricula of education encourages the inculcation of both virtues into the nation's children, starting from their tender years. It is therefore crucial that citizens and school attendees are encouraged to embrace and imbibe these virtues in order that arrant corruption could be ripped out of the land, most especially among the political elite (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014).

Inculcation of Core National Values

Nigeria is a 21st century nation created by the colonial-era British government. As a member of the global community, the need to arm her citizens with those values which promote peace and unity, tolerance and accommodation of the other, hard work and commitment to genuine national development, as well as the erection of bridges of oneness among the diverse ethnic groups embedded under the large umbrella known as Nigeria was emphasized in bold letters. Putting the above into context therefore, the nation's curricula of education at all levels incorporated the numerous educational values which could continue to promote national unity, sustain peaceful co-existence, and pose positive impacts on the promotion of effective national development. These were largely emphasized all through the nation's curricula of education published in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014).

Among several others, this policy recognizes the fact that education plays a prominent role in all issues of national development. It appreciates the position of education as the key instrument which navigates the light required by citizens to be able to contribute their might towards the development of the Nigerian nation, most especially as it provides the relevant platforms required by citizens to promote peace

and unity, and enhances opportunities of skills acquisition among nationals. Against this background therefore, the Igbo ethnic region as a core part of Nigeria continues to equip its citizens, most especially the younger generations of school-goers with the various traditional education they require in order to contribute meaningfully to effective national development, thrive in peace with fellow Nigerians, erect bridges of unity among peoples of the nation's diverse ethno-linguistic units, promote cultural and religious tolerance, contribute effectively towards elimination of unemployment by ensuring continued skills acquisition and human capacity development among citizens, as well as support all positive initiatives that are needed to promote the good image of the country in the eyes of the international community (Danbatta, 2017; Iwunna, & Okoro, 2017; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014).

Against this background therefore, it is without doubt that the doctrines of the various religions in Nigeria do their best to promote and inculcate both core values into their followers. The positive implication is that there is no religion or cultural practice within Nigeria and elsewhere that promotes violence and other unhealthy behaviours among their followers. For instance, the Christian religion plays prominent role in instilling the country's core national values among Christians. As strong followers of this noble religion, the people of Igboland ensure that the doctrines of Christianity are translated to the letter, by adhering strictly to the promotion of peace and unity, love of fellow citizens, accommodation and tolerance of one another, as well as resist possible attempts to engage in the crippling activities of tribalism and ethnicism (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014; Arinze, 1982).

However, it is important to appreciate the fact that the Igbos are majorly Christians, while the largest percentage belongs to the Catholic faith. As Christians and a people who pay maximum attention to their indigenous cultures and traditional values, families, parents, and communities go the extra miles in inculcating relevant national and indigenous values into their members. These include love, peace, unity, friendship, togetherness, accommodation, respect for life, respect for accepted cultures and value systems, and respect for the dignity and integrity of one another, among several others. Against this understanding therefore, one can only begin to appreciate the connectivity between the local traditional and cultural values of the Igbo nation and those of Nigeria at large. The implication is that when it comes to

the question of respect for national values, the Igbos are strong advocates of these virtues. This leads to the Igbo proverb: Ala adighi mma bu uru ndi Nze (Peace does not thrive in an atmosphere of rancour). The key lesson here is that peace and tranquillity are the essential ingredients required for growth and development (Iroegbu, 2000; Arinze, 1982; Ogbalu, 1965; Achebe, 1958).

Training for Leadership Positions for Life

Through various tradition-based lessons too, Igbo parents, families, community leaders, religious heads, and traditional authorities train and equip their members with relevant skills required for future leadership positions both in the community and beyond. The understanding is that at the traditional levels of the Igbo society, citizens most especially the upcoming generations are supported with several life-long traditional educational training programmes which are intended to guide them as they gradually mature into adulthood. Some of such trainings include exposure to calculation skills, education on greeting modes and their peculiar languages, respect for elders, respect for constituted authority, exposure to the traditional values of the land, training on the benefits and ethics of hard work, providing unhindered access to professional skills, participation in community development activities, assignment of roles in decision making processes, and exposure to various agricultural practices, among several others (Enebe, 2018; Iwunna & Okoro, 2017; Achebe, 1958).

Through various participatory functions, practical exposure to critical family and community matters, engagement in assorted skills training activities, as well as recruitment into leadership positions, the young learn from the old, even as the old share knowledge and ideas with the young too. It is in the light of these developments that Igbo children and adults get acquainted with the numerous traditional practices which clearly define the Igboness of the Igbos and distinguish them from the other ethnic nations embedded within the massive geographical estate known as Nigeria. Thus, through the auspices of indigenous traditional education, upcoming generations of the Igbos get acquainted with various Igbo traditional music, dance styles, traditional festivals and times, local ceremonies, marriage rites, traditional wrestling competitions, market days of the week, forms of arts, patterns of arts creation, myths and symbols, traditional medicine and related herbs, and

conflicts resolutions technics, among several others. Towards making these projects feasible, different types of proverbs are usually deployed, which include the following: *onye fee eze, eze erute ya aka* (Good behaviours usually attract positive commendations and handsome rewards. The fundamental lesson here is that good conducts provide the basic foundations for higher elevations in life (Enebe, 2018; Onwuliri, 2014; Achebe, 1958).

Resistance against Immoral Cultures and Practices

Igbo traditions and cultures are repugnant to all forms of foreign encroachment and foreign influences on the indigenous values of the people. Widely seen as “the firewood with which they cook their own food”, it is the conglomeration of the locally accepted norms and practices that distinguish the Igbos from the rest of the world, and clearly separate them from the multiplicity of ethnic nationalities knitted together by the imperial era government of Britain. However, the diversity of cultures and values which have found their way into the country, most especially in the recent times, attempt to explain the need for the Igbos to adhere strictly to the reservation of their indigenous traditions and avoid all attempts to dilute their revered local values (Iwunna, Okoro, Deshi, & Dioka, 2022; Enebe, 2018; Iwunna, 2011). Whichever be the case, it can be asserted with every sense of certainty that there is no aspect of Igbo traditions and cultures that condones or accommodates any forms of immorality. There is no part of Igboland where attitudes and behavioural patterns conceived as inimical in the sight of God and ancestors of the land are tolerated and celebrated, irrespective of whatever shape or coloration it may take. Thus, among the list includes immoral conducts such as lesbianism (*mmeko nwanyi na nwanyi*), homosexuality (*mmeko nwoko na nwoko*), murder (*igbu ochu*), rape (*igba nwanyi n’ike*), kidnapping (*i toro mmadu*), sale of human persons (*i re mmadu*), poisoning of persons (*igbu mmadu*), dishonesty (*ekwughi ezi okwu*), and stealing (*i zu oshi*), among several others. Despite the heavy penalties and cultural sanctions which some unfortunate perpetrators of these forbidden practices are confronted with in their communities, there have been evidences of persons who have been caught up by the unwritten codes of conduct guiding the activities of different communities. Perpetrators have also been compelled to face the wrath of the gods and commensurate punitive punishments in recompense. This leads

Obiwulu (2018) to the conviction that in human societies, ethical and moral codes of conduct are made to protect, promote and foster what is good and regarded as valuable.

Thus, in the context of these developments, it leaves no one in doubt that Western civilization and internet addiction have contributed immensely in spreading negative vices among the youths and school goers in Nigeria. At that, some minute number of persons of Igbo extraction has gotten themselves involved in some of these immoral activities which are considered unhealthy to local cultures and traditional value systems of Igbo communities. The bottom line remains that so far as the Igbo traditional value systems renounce and reject such trends, all confirmed perpetrators are usually prosecuted at the vicinity of the community's ancestral meeting halls where appropriate punishments are meted out as a deterrent to some others who may wish to flout the unwritten ethical laws of the land. Thus, among the Igbo proverbs such as "onye aruru ala lie onwe ya, otu aka ya esee n'elu" (Evil can never hide itself for eternity) are often deployed to admonish members from engaging in activities which could dent the good image of their families and local communities (Ogbalu, 1965).

Conclusion

It is important to conclude this work on a brief note. Cultures and traditional values define who a particular people are, what they value and celebrate, how they conduct their lives, the conglomeration of indigenous values they celebrate, the language they speak, the practices they refuse to accommodate and the historical narratives behind their continued existence as a distinct group of people. With these in context therefore, it only needs to be appreciated that the Igbo attach great importance to the cultural values that hold them together as a distinct nation in the midst of Nigeria's multi-ethnic diversities. Considered as the country's third largest ethno-linguistic nation, it can be asserted with all certainty that there is no aspect of the Igbo cultures and traditions which project and promote violence, lousiness and laziness, immoral ineptitude, acts of corruption and its numerous vices, and any form of behavioural patterns which are considered inimical in the sight of God and the unseen ancestors of the land. It is against this background therefore that families and different communities of Igboland go the extra mile to ensure that their citizens

adhere strictly to the unwritten codes of conduct laid down by the ancestors, and avoid being polluted by the intoxications of the 21st century electronic age, irrespective the benefits such engagements may pretend to offer.

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