

## INCULCATING ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT THROUGH INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE EDUCATION: THE IGBO EXAMPLE

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### **Abstract**

*It is generally acknowledged that there are more human resources in Nigeria than available employment. Thousands of graduates are added to the labour market yearly. It has also been recognized that the use of indigenous languages has helped most developed countries of the world to attain desirable development. The efficacy of using the language a learner is comfortable with, a language in which he can express his thought and translate his ideas into articulate sentences has been established by many scholars. Based on the above observations, this paper advocates the use and teaching of indigenous languages (Igbo) not only from primary and post-primary level but more importantly at the tertiary level- where there are untold number of undergraduates preparing to face the reality of life. The work collected five Igbo proverbs, interpreted and related them to the qualities of an entrepreneur. The result revealed that Igbo proverbs can be very effective in inculcating entrepreneurial spirit in the Igbo young minds. The study concludes that the use of Igbo proverbs embedded in the Igbo language should be used in inculcating entrepreneurial spirit in the Igbo youths.*

**Key words:** Inculcating, Entrepreneurial spirit, Indigenous language, education.

### **Introduction**

Education is a singular factor that brings about national development. The central goal of university education is to prepare one for productive employment. Such employment can be a paid one or a self-employed one. Aladekomo (2004) observes that Nigerian education system during the colonial period was geared towards serving the interest of the colonial masters in terms of man power for their effective administration of Nigerian colony and protectorates. In continuation Aladekomo notes that the policy at that period was aimed at producing Nigerians who read and write to enable them hold positions such as clerks and interpreters. These Nigerians had no professional skill to enable them stand on their own or even establish and manage their own ventures. Considering the growing number of graduates coming out from various institutions of learning into the labour market and the increasing unemployment rate, government is worried about the situation and need to take measures to remedy the situation. In answer to the above problem, the need for entrepreneurial education arose. Calls for reorientation among students and their teachers who believes in being employed rather than seeking self-employment after graduation have been made. It is expected that while students are in the university they should acquire the necessary skill and training to identify an exploitable opportunity for economic development.

This paper advocates the use of indigenous languages in inculcating entrepreneurial spirit in the young Igbo youths. The work supports starting entrepreneurial education as early as elementary school and progressing through all levels of education. The work is classified into five sections. Section one handles the introduction, the link between language and education is given utmost attention in the second section. In section three, and potentials of indigenous languages is highlighted. Section four looks at indigenous language (Igbo) as the best instrument for inculcating entrepreneurial spirit in the youths. The conclusion and recommendations took

the centre stage in section five. The paper adopts the methodologies of conceptual clarification, critical analysis and relative argumentation to achieve its goal.

### **Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

To inculcate is to teach by repeated instruction. It is to induce understanding in a person or persons. It involves the process of imparting knowledge to an individual with a view of creating permanent useful changes in the individual. Halliru (2016) is of the view that "The process of inculcating entrepreneurial spirit should start at the elementary school level through tertiary when they are still very young and curious. This involves prudence, skill, organizational acumen, effectiveness and proficiency in language". Entrepreneurial spirit entails having the attitude or qualities of an entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurship has become the important tool for economic development of a country (Faltin 2001). It is the way of self employment which is the alternative way to route out of poverty (Bogan and Darity 2007). In line with the foregoing, Thijssen and Vernooiji (2007) opine that "Entrepreneurship is to utilize the opportunity as well as the resources to receive socio-economic benefits".

Entrepreneurial Education has gained much importance worldwide. Through this, institutions have started new training and courses to influence students which enhances their economic life style and a source of economic development of the country. Entrepreneurial education helps in entrepreneurial intention to create profits from business and it also provides confidence to the entrepreneur (Ahmed et al 2010). Through entrepreneurial education, university students have ability to equip themselves with entrepreneurial intention which helps them to meet the challenges of market needs and satisfy those needs. Those who have higher entrepreneurial efficacy are more interested to engage themselves in entrepreneurship (Pihie 2009).

Entrepreneurship development refers to the process of enhancing entrepreneurial skills and knowledge through structured training and institution building programmes (Olushola 2009). Developing entrepreneurship is a means of providing employment and a powerful means of fighting poverty in the country. expatiating further, Alu (2007) emphasizes that for Nigeria to be transformed economically, it should create appropriate human resource space through education. This entails having an ideal educational environment for producing individuals with the mindset of self-reliance, creativity and high productivity in order to cope with the 21st century world of work. A low rate of entrepreneurship culture and skill in any society may be a consequence of the low economic growth which also reflects higher levels of unemployment (Audretsch 1995). Abdullahi (2009) believes that the psychological attribute needed by an entrepreneur could be culturally and experientially acquired.

Indigenous languages are the tribal, native or local languages spoken. The languages would be from a linguistically distinct community that has been settled in the area for many generations. Research results have shown that all developed and developing countries make use of their indigenous languages for development.

Education unlocks a society's potentials. The energies and talents of the society is the greatest resource that is needed for national transformation. Education broadens opportunities and builds capabilities to determine the kind of future any nation wants to have.

It is generally acknowledged that language is central to the entire notion of education and without language education is hardly possible (Obanya 1999:19). Language plays a crucial role

in mental development (since) it is the interaction of language and situation in a social context ... which gives the child the capacity to organise his mental activities.

Prah (2003) is emphatic that only learners' home language should be used as a medium of instruction, with other languages being subjects only. He suggests that education should be conducted in the home languages of the people.

It is language that gives our thinking form, sequence and coherence and it is by means of language that we give substance to our thought. We may think of language as a clothing of thought but it is more suitable to think of it as the picture of thought in the way that melody is the embodiment of the sound of music. Thus, we think in language and effective thinking is not possible unless linguistic competence is adequate enough to realise and express ideas.

### **Potentials of Indigenous Language**

There are about 500 indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria. Research has shown that any language is capable of being developed to the highest levels of science and technology provided its owners have a patriotic will to do so (Tarugarira 2009). When Indigenous languages are used as research results have shown, many scholars have contended that it is capable of enhancing cognitive understanding and removing pedagogical barriers in learning. Some of these researches include:

1. The Native American Language Research
2. The University of Bradford Research.
3. The Ife six year primary project and
4. The Swahili Research.

Mazrui & Mazrui (2002) opine that no nation can develop without the use of its native language(s). Also Daura (2014) points out "Experiences from Philippines, Mexico, Wales, Canada, Russia, Yugoslavia and Japan have however shown that indigenous languages are fit for all rung and levels of education as effective media of instruction.

In the words of Emenajo (1996), "The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around is best done and realised in the language in which the students are most familiar". Toeing the line of Emenajo, Ezikeojiakx (2007:114) observes that people think more productively in their indigenous languages and posits that, "A Scientific impetus or technology acquired in a learners indigenous language becomes second nature to the person". He reiterates that Nigeria and indeed Africa can only achieve mass scientific literacy needed for her technological and scientific development through the medium of indigenous languages. In order to enable a child to develop curiosity, manipulative ability, industry, mechanical comprehension etc. more easily, Fafunwa (1975) argues that the mother tongue remains the most natural way to learn.

### **Inculcating Entrepreneurial Spirit through Igbo Language.**

Among the Igbo people of Nigeria, as Aboyade (1976:2-4) points out, every able bodied person is normally employed in gainful economic role and in pursuit of maximum self-fulfillment. In addition, idleness and deliberate underutilization of manpower are ruled out by the social values of the people. The Igbo man is very gregarious, dynamic, republican, self-enthused, aggressive, hardworking egoistic, self-opinionated, daring, honest....because of his individualistic nature, he moves out on his own without support from anybody to make it in life. He deprives himself of any form of comfort to achieve his aim in the most honest way ranging from performance of menial jobs, rendering common services to people which others may

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consider as mean jobs. He makes his money to enable him establish his own business...(Okoyeagu 2007).

NdiIgbo have customs and traditions which are well entrenched in their culture. Values which are part of the culture are very much treasured by the Igbo. In the past, the Igbo made sure that values which they hold highly were not misplaced or neglected. However, the war years impacted negatively on their cherished values. As Obienyem in Okolo and Okolie (2008:50 ) rightly observes, the Igbo people are superbly intelligent and capable of innovative thoughts and endowed with imaginative and aesthetic sense. In his words, 'the Igbos are massively endowed individuals capable of a wide variety of endeavours". Obienyem emphasizes that "this is the Igbo we were until after the war, when our antagonists broke into our ranks and introduced all manner of devious ideas that now produce another model of Igbo- Igbo that easily sells out; that lacks the natural Igbo confidence and integrity; that no longer wants to work hard to achieve dreams, that is not proud of being Igbo. He concludes that in this mode, the Igbo race faces extinction in the nearest future.

Long before the colonial era, Igbo land thrived with agricultural, fishing, pastoral and hunting communities that produced enough food for their local requirements as well as some surplus for inter-regional trade (Afigbo 1981:4). They practiced gainful agriculture to sustain their apparently dense population and engaged in trade, craft and industries. The coming of the European widened the Igbo horizon and increased the people's volume of trade and agricultural output. But it brought with it some economic and sociocultural disorientation which the Igbo are yet to recover from (Ijeoma 2002:52).

Inculcating entrepreneurial spirit in the young Igbo generation will help tap into their unrealized talents. It will force the students to think outside the box, to fail and to persist - experiences that would inspire them to become creative, inventive and innovative. The current trend of mass production of job seekers would be curtailed if the academia instills in young minds a sense of self-discovery, experimental learning and self-determination to develop innovativeness to become entrepreneurs (Jawahar 2010). Expatiating further, Jawahar says a shift in education centres from being places for job seekers to places of job creators needs special emphasis.

Igbo language as one of the indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria has all it takes to instill entrepreneurial spirit in the teeming young Igbo generation. In addition to using Igbo as the medium of instruction, the paper suggests some aspects of the language that could be used to inculcate entrepreneurial spirit in the section that follows.

**The Use of Igbo Oral Tradition in Inculcating Entrepreneurial Spirit**

From origin, Igbo people possess most of the characteristics of an entrepreneur mentioned earlier in this work. These entrepreneurial traits have almost been lost as a result of the effects of the colonial rule. Having seen the adverse effect of abandoning our true nature to embracing the colonial masters' attitude to life. One can deduce that the only wise option left to redress the present state of the nation's economy especially as it affects the Igbo people is to go back to certain aspects of the Igbo culture that were relegated to the background. There are certain Igbo oral tradition that can be studied in schools which can enable one to be self-reliant and independent of the jobs provided by the public sector (Ugbor 2016).

The Igbo culture is replete with traditional beliefs which are embedded in the native folklore, proverbs and popular legends. Through these oral literature, the Igbo race had preserved

their cherished values until the colonial era. In the present study, only proverbs will be interpreted to show that they could be used to inculcate entrepreneurial spirit.

Proverbs are often said to represent a people's philosophy. As Crystal (1997:53) rightly pointed out, In every culture, there are nuggets of popular wisdom, expressed in the form of succinct sayings. These are usually referred to as proverbs... Proverbs belong to the category of Igbo oral tradition; and the foundation of Igbo life, its culture and its world view hinges on its oral tradition. As an aspect of Igbo oral tradition therefore, proverbs are encapsulated wisdom used in everyday speech as well as in teaching. Onwudiwe (2006:153) concurring with Obiechina (1975) stresses that proverbs are short witty sayings that are a rich source of imagery and expression on which more elaborate forms can draw. Obiechina maintains that;

"proverbs are the kernels that contain the wisdom of traditional people.

They are philosophical and moral expositions shrunk to a few words and they form a mnemonic device in societies in which everything worth knowing and relevant to day-to-day life has to be committed to memory".

The Igbo proverbs relevant to this study include the following:

1. *Aka aja aja na-ebute onu mmanu mmanu.* (Soiled hands lead to oily mouth)
2. *Nku onye kpara n'okochi ka o na-anyanwu n'udu mmiri.* (the fire wood gathered during dry season will be used during rainy season)
3. *Onye kwe, Chi ya ekwe.* (If one believes, ones God will also believe)
4. *A ruo n'anwu, e rie na ndo.* (If one works under the sun, one will eat under a shade)
5. *Ngana kpuchie ute, aguu ekpughee ya.* (If laziness covers itself with a math, hunger will open it).

The first of the proverbs *Aka aja aja na-ebute onu mmanu mmanu* literally means "Soiled hands lead to oily mouth", but the actual meaning is that "hard-work leads to success". This implies that for one to be sure of food on one's table, one must be ready to work hard. The idea in this proverbs shows that farming is one of the major occupation of Igbo people. When one goes to farm, ones hands are expected to be soiled as a result of working in the farm, but during harvest, one will have surplus food to eat.

The second proverb *Nku onye kpara n'okochi ka o na-anyanwu n'udu mmiri.* (the fire wood gathered during dry season will be used during rainy season) actually means that there will be no enjoyment without prior investment. Relating this to the spirit of an entrepreneur - An entrepreneur sees an opportunity and is willing to take risk with the objective of making profit in the near future. The process of gathering sticks is not always easy. It takes patience and determination. In the Igbo view, any one that is courageous and determined will eventually enjoy the fruits of one's labour.

The third proverb- *Onye kwe chi ya ekwe* (If one believes, ones God will also believe) actually means that "where there is a will there will always be a way". This implies that life is full of challenges and oppositions, if one sees the challenges as insurmountable it will remain so but if one sees beyond the challenges, then destiny will smile on one. This agrees with Halliru's (2016) view that entrepreneurship revolves around ability to identify an opportunity where most others are unable to do same. This in his words requires one that is not at risk-averse because there is possibility of failure. This proverb teaches the quality of seeing possibilities in impossibility.

The fourth proverb - *A ruo n'anwu e rie na ndo* (If one works under the sun, one will eat under a shade) actually implies that striving in life exposes one to uncomfortable experiences but the outcome or the reward of such strenuous labour will make one to forget the painful

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experiences. The lesson from this proverb is in line with view of an entrepreneur as an enterprising individual who builds capital through risk and from initiative.

The fifth proverb - *Ngana kpuchie ute aguu ekpughere ya* (If laziness covers itself with a mat, hunger will open it) reveals the Igbo view of a lazy man. It actually means "no food for a lazy man." Covering oneself with a mat connotes dodging ones responsibility. Hunger here is personified to reveal that if one fails to work willingly that powers beyond ones control will make him work by force.

The above Igbo proverbs speak volumes of the Igbo world view. They reveal that Igbo people are naturally hardworking, industrious and independent. They frown at layabouts who have no genuine means of livelihood. This nature of the Igbo man has been negatively affected by the colonial rule could still be revived in the Igbo young minds. It is believed that the use of Igbo proverbs as an aspect of Igbo language will be effective in the inculcation of entrepreneurial attitude.

This paper has analysed a few Igbo proverbs and the result shows that they are aspect of the Igbo language that could be employed to inculcate entrepreneurial spirit in the youths of Igbo origin.

### **Conclusion/ Recommendation**

There is an urgent need to inculcate the spirit of entrepreneurship in the Igbo youths. This is important considering the present state of the economy. Life is full of challenges and so one must expect challenges in every right step one takes. These challenges will always be there but there is need to re-echo the fact that the onus is on one to face the challenges or to keep waiting for "manna from heaven".

Through the teaching of Igbo philosophy of life and values embedded in the Igbo language; the values and attributes that historically made the Igbo tick will be reawakened. The attributes of hard work, industry, enterprise, intellectual pursuit, integrity and so on (Okolo and Okorie 2008). There is need to implant the spirit of hard work and creativity in the thought process thereby changing the mindset of the youths. The following recommendations are therefore given for the effective inculcation of entrepreneurial spirit.

1. Students of Igbo origin should be exposed to Igbo philosophy of life and values.
2. Igbo traditional literature should be included in the school curriculum from nursery schools to tertiary institutions.
3. Igbo children should be indoctrinated in the proverbs and other aspects of the language that encourage hard work, self-reliance and perseverance.

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