

CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN IGBOLAND: A HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

Onyeka John Egwuonwu

Department of Religion and Human Relations

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

jo.egwuonwu@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

Entrepreneurship education is very important to the survival and progress of any given society and also essential to human development. People who are trained through entrepreneurship education acquire various skills which they use to make innovations and inventions that in turn transform the society. When the Christian missionaries arrived Igboland in the 19th century, they observed that Igbo people were entrepreneurs in nature. Hence, the missionaries through the introduction of entrepreneurship, technical and vocational education played vital role in human development of the people. This led to economic advancement and Western civilization of the Igbo. It is obvious that many works written about Christian missionary enterprise in Igbo territory without an in-depth study on how the missionaries through entrepreneurship education brought human development to Igbo people. This is the area this article intends to fill. The study makes use of secondary sources of data collection like unpublished project works, text books, mainline books, journals and book of readings. The study finds out that, the European Christian missionary bodies really made significant progress in human development of the indigenous people through entrepreneurship education.

Introduction

In Igboland, the intersection of Christian missionary endeavors, entrepreneurship education, and human development has forged a transformative narrative. Since the colonial times, Christian missionaries have been driven by a dual mandate of evangelization and education. This led to the establishment of schools and vocational training centers that not only disseminated Western knowledge but also instilled entrepreneurial values. Through missionary initiatives, entrepreneurship education became a vehicle for economic self-reliance and community development, fostering a vibrant ecosystem of small-scale enterprises and cooperative ventures. Many people who are trained through entrepreneurship education acquired various skills which they used to make innovations and inventions that transformed the society and took the society to greater heights. The philosophy of hard work and dignity of labour permeates the life of Igbo people. This makes Igbo people not to be neither idle nor lazy, rather to engage themselves in one decent occupation or the other in order to earn a living.

The Christian missionaries who came to Igbo land focused on human development in line with Christian ethics and principles. Also, they had another target which according Okpalike and Nwadiolor (2015), was to commiserate for wrongs which the slave trade had wrought upon them. This target was to be achieved through the Bible and the Plough missionary policy. The Bible and the Plough policy was orchestrated by Thomas Fowell Buxton of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Okpalike and Nwadiolor (2015) further report that Thomas Fowell Buxton believed that the Bible and the plough hypothesis would serve as both a civilization and Christianity. To actualize this plan, the European Christian missionaries took their time to study the socio-economic life of the indigenous people. They found out that although Igbo people were truly enterprising in nature however, the skills of indigenous people were more of manual labour and this singular means could not meet up with the high demand of commodity which was required. For instance, the indigenous people were involved in subsistent agriculture

which could not able to meet up the large demand of agricultural produce to serve the world market. The indigenous people did not produce much agricultural products and raw materials to sell to the world market in order to make huge revenue and improve their standard of living. Thus, the socio-economic life of the Igbo man was at a very low state. In affirmation to the above viewpoint, Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019) confirm that Onitsha in 1857 was a poor state. Poor socio-economic situation was not peculiar to Onitsha alone, Diara and Nche (2013) decry that the socio-economic conditions of Africa during the advent of the Christian missionaries were deplorable and piteous.

As the Christian missionaries observed this, they decided to integrate human development along with spreading of the gospel as proposed by Thomas Buxton. This was to improve the enterprising skills of the Igbo people through introduction of entrepreneurship, technical and vocational education in mission schools. For instance, the Onitsha Industrial Mission school established by Church Missionary Society, was to train and educate the indigenous people, arming them with entrepreneurship skills such as carpentry, sewing, brick-making and so forth. The aim was to put into their hands entrepreneurship skills which could enable them to take their position in the world as good and profitable citizens. Some indigenous people, who were taught entrepreneurship education and also took part in the practical training at various industrial mission schools were further employed to work in various industries like Royal Niger Company and so forth. Others established their own business ventures and such improved the socio-economic standard of living of the indigenous people.

Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019) state that this new economic system which entails free participation by all and sundry was the foundation for the free enterprising nature of the people of the new Igbo nation. According to Afigbo (1981), the impact of this development on Igbo society was quite far reaching. To sum it up, the Christian missionaries made efforts to improve human development of Igbo people as they repositioned the enterprising skills of Igbo people through entrepreneurship education. This led to economic advancement of Igbo economy over other ethnic groups and raised the standard of living of the indigenous people to better standard.

Conceptual Framework

Concept of Human Development

Human development according to Mpumlwana (1997), is the process by which members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations. In the words of Alawode (2016), the reason for development through mission is that, after the kingdom of God had been established in people's hearts, it must clearly be to bring about the economic improvement as well as the social and political transformation of a community. Therefore, human development has to be about improving the quality of the life of an ordinary people in their local communities.

Human development is defined by Dasgupta (2020) as an expansion of human capabilities, a widening of choices, an enhancement of freedom, and a fulfillment of human rights. According to Bishkek (2023) human development is about the freedom people can enjoy; what they are free to choose and to be. It is concept of development that goes beyond economic growth and regards people's lives as its central focus. Todaro and Smith (quoted by Chukwu, 2011) enunciate that human development is a process of improving the quality of the lives of the citizens through a combination of factors. The factors may include:

a. Raising the citizens living standards through incomes and consumption levels of food, medical services, education and so forth, through economic processes.

b. Creation of conditions favourable to the growth of the peoples self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions that engender human dignity and respect.

c. Increasing the people's freedom by enlarging the range of their choice variables through an increase in variety of consumer goods and services.

Rodney (1981) defines human development as an implying increased skill, discipline, responsibility and material well-being. In the opinion of Nmah and Nwadiolor (2012):

The concept of human development denotes creating conditions conducive to the growth of people's self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions which promote human dignity and respect. It implies increasing people's access to better life (improve welfare) and the freedom to choose by enlarging the range of choice available. It is the process of improving the quality of all human lives. The aspects of such improvement include raising people's living level such as income, consumption, education, spirituality, medical services, security among others through relevant economic growth processes (p. 53).

In the context of research, human development is about enhancing people's capabilities, enlarging their range of choices, expanding their freedom and promoting human rights for all citizens.

Concept of Entrepreneurship Education

The conception of entrepreneurship education has been examined by various scholars and given various interpretations. Inegbenebor (2005) asserts that entrepreneurship education is a problem solving approach to students' empowerment that is capable of leading them to gain the skills which requires them to plan, start, run and grow a business that focuses on innovation and development of new products and services. According to Gautam and Singh (2015), entrepreneurship education can be defined as the process of professional application of knowledge, attitude, skills and competencies. Gautam and Singh (2015) further state that entrepreneurship education is more than teaching students how to become independent business owners, it is about creating and nurturing a learning environment that promotes entrepreneurial traits and behaviours, such as becoming creative and an independent thinker, risk taking, assuming responsibility, and valuing diversity. Akpan (2021) opines that entrepreneurship education can be achieved by equipping youths with skills and competencies in vocational and technical education. Such education should be a veritable tool for securing employment and emancipation of people through the provision and acquiring of necessary knowledge and skills to make lives more flourishing.

On the benefit of entrepreneurship education, Arogundade (2011) argues that entrepreneurship education will equip the students with the skills to be self-reliant and task the government and other education stakeholders who should make sure that educational programme at all levels of education are made relevant in order to provide the youths and graduates the needed entrepreneurial skills. According to Paul (2005), the objectives of entrepreneurship education include to:

- (1) Offer functional education to youth to make self-employed and self-reliant.
- (2) Provide youth graduates with adequate training to them creative and innovative in identifying novel business opportunities and establish a career in small and medium scale businesses.
- (3). Reduce high rate of poverty and rural-urban migration.
- (4) Create employment and serve as a catalyst for economic growth and development among others.

Entrepreneurship education in this research follows a direct approach, competences and entrepreneurial intentions towards starting a business as a career option

Theoretical Framework

Psycho-Social Theory of Entrepreneurship Education

Psycho-social theory was developed by Erik Erickson in 1980. The term psycho-social theory of entrepreneurship was coined in this research to portray that entrepreneurship process starts from birth to adulthood hence, it is a lifelong process as human beings keep on learning every day. According to Ngwoke, Aneke and Oraelosi (2019), Erickson elaborates this fact by presenting eight stages through which an individual passes on the course of developing appropriate psychosocial skills. The stages and the skills that must be developed in sequence as follows; birth to one year - basic trust ► one year to three years – autonomy ► three to six years - initiative ► six to twelve years – integrity ► 12 to 18 years - ego identity ► 20s to early 40s – intimacy ► 40s to 60s – generativity ► 60 and the end of life – integrity. Moreover, Erik Erickson’s psycho-social theory also presented in sequence and across the stages above eight anti-psychosocial skills that can be developed from adverse early childhood experiences as follows; basic mistrust and ► despair. It is apparent from Erickson’s theory that entrepreneurial mindset is developed and not made. Hack (2019) observes that it is all about dispelling the myths about entrepreneurial mindset, and one of which is that entrepreneurs are not born but driven to it.

Similarly, Erickson (1980) believes that development of basic psycho-social skills has a pattern. To him, a child who develops basic trust in people and his surroundings early in life will most likely develop autonomy which will also help the child to take initiatives, become a person of integrity and one who has ego identity. These attributes which are developed early in life under normal circumstances are critical for developing entrepreneurial mindset. A child that developed autonomy and initiative at the appropriate stage for instance will ordinarily not doubt his or her potentials and will not find it difficult, believing in himself and others. Such a person will not find it difficult in learning skills involved in any business enterprise. Moreover, Ngwoke, Aneke and Oraelosi (2019) enunciates that such a person will not hesitate in exploring the possibility of turning obstacles into opportunities which successful entrepreneurs are known for.

Application of Psycho-Social Theory of Entrepreneurship Education to Human Development

The Psycho-Social Theory of Entrepreneurship Education, which emphasizes the psychological and social factors influencing entrepreneurial behavior, significantly shaped the approach missionaries took in introducing entrepreneurship education in Igboland. This theory underscores that entrepreneurial success is not solely dependent on economic resources but is also deeply rooted in individual attitudes, beliefs, and social environments. Missionaries recognized that addressing the psychological aspects of entrepreneurship—such as self-efficacy, motivation, and risk tolerance—was crucial for fostering a culture of entrepreneurship in Igboland. They understood that many individuals in this region had the potential for entrepreneurial success but lacked the necessary mindset and confidence to pursue business opportunities. By focusing on building self-belief and resilience, missionaries aimed to empower local communities to view entrepreneurship as a viable and desirable path.

Social factors were equally important. The missionaries implemented educational programs that not only provided practical skills but also integrated social support systems. They encouraged community involvement and support networks to create an environment conducive

to entrepreneurial ventures. For instance, by fostering collaborative learning and peer support among local entrepreneurs, missionaries helped to build a community that shared knowledge, resources, and encouragement. Furthermore, the missionaries' approach included integrating traditional values and practices with modern entrepreneurial concepts. They respected local customs while introducing new ideas, ensuring that the educational programs were culturally relevant and more likely to be embraced by the Igbo people. In essence, the Psycho-Social Theory guided the missionaries to develop a holistic entrepreneurship education program that addressed both the psychological readiness and social context necessary for entrepreneurial success. Their efforts not only equipped individuals with practical skills but also fostered a supportive environment, contributing to the growth of entrepreneurship in Igboland and enhancing the region's economic development.

Brief History of Christianity in Igbo Territory

The bid to fulfill the Great Commission as commanded by Jesus Christ, a group of European Christians decided to evangelize West Africa of which Igbo territory is inclusive. According to Okpalike and Nwadiakor (2015), Church Missionary Society accompanied a British expedition in 1841 for the exploration of the banks of the Niger with the aim to establish Christianity and legitimate trade along the Niger. The first Igbo town that the expedition landed was Aboh, J.F. Schon, a German linguist and the leader of the C.M.S. team that accompanied the expedition was Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a Yoruba ex-slave and Simon Jonas, a liberated slave from Sierra Leone of Igbo parentage who were able to forge a personal link with the King of Aboh, Obi Ossai with Simon Jonas acting as an interpreter. Here the missionaries succeeded in preaching the gospel message to the king and his people. They left and returned again in 1857 and chose Onitsha as a missionary headquarters.

Okafor (2014) records that the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) also known as the Spiritans arrived Igbo land in 1885. Okpalike and Nwadiakor (2015) opine that in 1847, Church of Scotland Mission arrived in Calabar and started missionary work there. After the 1901-1902 Aro expedition, CMS was able to reach Arochuku. Ogonnaya (2014) narrates that, Primitive Methodist Mission (PMM) led by Reverend William Christie moved from Oron and first made a start at Arriam (Erriam) and later Ndioro in Ikwuano LGA Umuahia, but failed to get a footing there. Anyika (1997) opines that relief came his way when the Bende District Officer, Major W.A.E. Cockburn who placed a high premium on Christian missionary enterprise, invited him. He was convinced that Bende people would be friendly and quite disposed to the Whiteman. Reverend Christie had a hostile reception at Uzuakoli. According to Ogbu (1986), Christie was impressed with Uzuakoli and its avenues and the planned quarters of the various trading groups from Abiriba, Arochuku, the Delta areas, Awka and Onitsha. It was during the era of Reverend Dodds, that PMM took her complete foothold in Igbo land. It was from these missionary bodies that the Gospel spread to other parts of Igbo territory.

Role of Christian Missionary Entrepreneurship Education in Human development

The role of Christian missionary entrepreneurship education in human development of Igbo race was through enhancing and repositioning the entrepreneurial skills of Igbo people. However, this was mainly done through proper implementation and execution of the Bible and the Plough missionary policy which aimed at civilization and Christianization. Claude-François and Poullart des Places (cited by Okafor, 2014) states that civilization is impossible without the faith. Therefore, it is the task of the missionary to work towards it, not just concentrating on morality, but also on the intellectual and physical side, that is to say, instruction in agriculture and the crafts.

Implementation of Entrepreneurship, Industrial and Vocational Education in Human Development of Igbo People

The Christian missionaries considered education as a means of integrally developing human beings (Okafor, 2014). To this end, Okafor (2014) reports that the missionaries also established trades and schools at an early stage of their missionary enterprise. The trade schools in particular became very attractive to young men who came to learn various skills necessary to succeed in various trades. They also introduced entrepreneurship and technical subjects in the trade schools and this was for the indigenous people to advance in their technical and entrepreneurial skills. According to Basden (1996) in the Igboland, the missionaries founded the first school of carpentry in the between the 80s and 90s. In this regard, the C.M.S. set up an Onitsha Industrial Mission (O.I.M.) 1900-1903 to train and educate young and capable Igbo Christian youths in various traders, carpentry, sewing, brick-making and tailors. Entrepreneurship, vocational and industrial education introduced by the missionaries in trades, schools was worthwhile.

According to Ezeokeke (2018):

Complementing the education in literacy was the vocational training given to the more matured boys and girls in the workshops and training centers. Father Lutz set up workshops and training centers to cater for the well-being of all. In Christian villages and within agricultural settlements established by the missionaries in Igboland, there existed alongside the homes, some workshops where carpentry, masonry, shoemaking, tailoring, horticulture and other forms of housekeeping and services could be taught. The workshops and the vocational centers were aimed at providing the boys with some skills which would give them an independent livelihood after qualifying as workmen and to provide for the sustenance of various inmates of the mission especially those in the orphanage (p.51).

In support of the above viewpoint, Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019) opine that the aim was to put into their hands a handicraft which enables them to take their position in the world as good and profitable citizens. Some Igbo young men underwent O.I.M's training and came out as carpenters, tailors and sawyers. Thus, the ministry of the O.I.M not only demonstrated the dignity of working with one's hands but also opened the eyes of the not-well educated to the possibility of using their hands and becoming self-reliant and successful Christian citizens (Egwuonwu and Mgbemena, 2019).

As these converted indigenous people exhibited their various improved skills of mastery in carpentry, masonry, tailoring and other related business skills more and more indigenous people were attracted and they willingly joined in the mission trade schools and training centers located in order to either acquire new skills or improve on their already learnt skills to be able to fit into the new economic system. From the above viewpoints, it could be said that the acquisition of entrepreneurship skills was more possible through the attendance in mission schools where entrepreneurship and vocational education was theoretical and practically taught to students. Along with Christian ethics and Scriptural principles of business dealings which include; dignity of labour, diligence, discipline, patience, honesty, transparency, accountability, proper management of time and resources.

Implementation of Mechanized Agriculture and Modern Commerce

Initially, the indigenous people were involved in subsistence agriculture with their local farm tools. Subsistence farming yielded low farm output and could not meet up with the demands for agricultural products in Europe owing to the emergence of Industrial Revolution. The

missionaries through entrepreneurship education trained their new converts on the technical skills required to handle and use the modern farm equipment.

In the words of Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019):

The missionaries concern for the development of agricultural skill of the Igbo people exemplified by including rural science as a subject on the primary school curriculum is an indication of their concern to uplift the people from primitive subsistence and ignorant scratching of their soil to higher and more enlightened ways of using it (p. 8).

They also introduced exotic crops cocoa, cotton, and palm tree, rubber among other cash crops which have high economic value in the European and American markets. Mechanized agriculture was to improve productivity, increase the supply of agricultural products, raw materials and to enhance maximum profit making for the indigenous people. Coupled with the introduction of modern commerce, the economic state of Igboland blossomed. Alagoa (1999) observes that this new economic system which entails free participation by all and sundry was the foundation for the free enterprising nature of the people of the new Igbo nation. The indigenous people keyed into it and there was significant progress in the socio-economic life of the host community as it led to a change of the economic status of Igbo people and hence enhanced human development.

Establishment of Industries for Employment

The missionaries having trained many indigenous people through entrepreneurship education in mission trade schools on various skills, convinced officials of the colonial government and wealthy European and American Merchants of the industrialists to establish manufacturing industries in Igbo land. To this end, industries began to be built in major cities of Igbo territory such as Onitsha, Owerri, Aba among others. Bosah (1988) accounts that such establishments included those of the Royal Niger Company, John Holt and company, John Walkden, G. W. Christian, Thomas Welsh, the Bank of British West Africa and the Colonial Bank. In due course, as a result of these companies there was much rush by many young Igbo people to access entrepreneurship education that availed them the opportunity to learn one skill or the other offered in mission trades schools. This was to enable them gain employment in those companies. These industries employed indigenous people who have acquired advanced entrepreneurship skills taught in mission schools. Those who did not gain employment began to establish their own business ventures having acquired the required entrepreneurial skills needed in the business world.

Thus, no one was left out as youth were engaged in one decent business venture or the other as a result of the introduction of entrepreneurship education in Igboland. It is quite interesting to note that, while the indigenous people were attending mission trades schools to acquire new skills or to improve on already acquired skills through entrepreneurship education, at the same time, they were being converted into the Christian faith. Hence, the Bible and the Plough policy was fully taking its course among the indigenous people with the introduction of entrepreneurship education.

Conclusion

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, missionaries in Igboland recognized the potential for entrepreneurship to drive economic development and improve living standards. They implemented education programs that went beyond traditional religious teachings, focusing on practical skills and business acumen. This approach aimed to empower individuals with the knowledge and confidence to start and manage their own businesses. The missionaries introduced various forms of vocational training, including agriculture, crafts, and trade skills.

By providing hands-on education and resources, they helped local communities develop new skills and increase their productivity. This practical training not only enhanced individual livelihoods but also contributed to broader economic growth in the region.

Moreover, the missionaries integrated their entrepreneurial education with social support systems. They fostered community networks and collaborative learning, creating an environment where knowledge and resources were shared. This support helped individuals overcome challenges and build successful enterprises. Through their efforts, missionaries facilitated significant improvements in the socio-economic life of the Igbo people. They contributed to the development of local industries, promoted self-reliance, and improved living standards. Their work laid the foundation for sustainable economic progress in Igboland, demonstrating the impact of combining entrepreneurship education with community development.

Recommendations

- a. The church should partner with community or traditional rulers in order to integrate indigenous knowledge systems and cultural values into educational curricula to ensure that entrepreneurship education respects and reflects the unique heritage of the Igbo people.
- b. There is need to encourage missionary organizations in order to prioritize initiatives that promote sustainable development practices. This includes incorporating environmental stewardship and sustainable business models into entrepreneurship education, fostering responsible entrepreneurship that considers the long-term well-being of both communities and the environment.
- c. The government should establish scholarships, community-based schools, and adult education programs to ensure that individuals of all ages and backgrounds have the opportunity to acquire entrepreneurial skills and knowledge.
- d. The Church should engage her youth in mentorship programs and networking opportunities that connect aspiring entrepreneurs with experienced mentors, business leaders, and potential collaborators. These mentorship relationships can provide valuable guidance, support, and access to networks that are essential for entrepreneurial success and personal development.
- e. The Church should partner with the government in order to provide training, funding, and technical assistance to individuals and organizations seeking to establish social enterprises that contribute to community empowerment, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development goals in Igboland.

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