Chapter 13
Changing the Traditional Education of Igbo Females: The Role of Religion in Colonial Education

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, education has been defined by different people, according to their perceptual values. Education has also been perceived by many scholars as an abstract term. In the Nigerian pre colonial era, in Igbo-Nigerian Culture, people consulted and worshiped multiple deities or entities. This belief system (higher power) is often referred to as Oracle; for answers or consultations in difficult areas such as in higher education towards achieving their goals and objectives. Some cultures in Igbo land presently, maintain this practice of education. Often in life, people pursue and attain education in many ways. Hence, many adopted whatever notion the culture they were born into teaches about life’s processes. This is true especially in disciplines such as education and language. Ultimately, the outcome of culture and education as well as the part female gender plays are inevitable in the long run and is the focus of discussion in this chapter.
INTRODUCTION

In order to obtain a deep, first-hand account of the transition of the education of Igbo females from the pre-colonial to the Colonial Era one must employ qualitative methodology that will provide personal, in-depth data (Why Qualitative Research Works, n.d.). The author was able to interview two elder Igbos, (Mazi Igbokwe Raymond and Maria Onyejelubechi) during numerous informal sessions that span more than 10 years. The author-initiated sessions were often to generate “knowledge” intended for personal edification rather than professional or scholarly research data. With the inception of this study, those sessions took on new meaning and purpose. Data gathered from those personal interviews are not generalizable to be representative of a population that is studied, but does give an in-depth examination of the topic of Igbo female education prior to the arrival of colonization and during the colonization of Nigeria. Therefore, much of the information related to the pre-colonial education of Igbo females is obtained from persons who experienced both forms of education or who had family members who did so.

Education is vital to any culture or society, and what defines “being educated” varies greatly from one society to another. Long before the British arrived in Nigeria and began imposing colonial education on the various ethnic groups that comprise the nation: Igbo, Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Efik and others, each group had its own system of education. Knowledge deemed most important to the wellbeing of each group came to be taught specifically. Often, education in these ethnic groups differed for males and females, not unlike the manner in which western nations historically determined what was a suitable education for their males and females. In this chapter the traditional education of Igbo females is presented in detail with a corresponding explanation of how and why certain knowledge passed on to females was valued by Igbo culture.

Mutations of those cultural values are explored and discussed within the context of how such change is manifested among Igbo females today. While change is almost always inevitable, the British colonization of Nigeria expedited the process and supplanted what would have been a natural evolution of Igbo culture. The author will share insights into pre-colonial education among Igbo females, noting the purposes and benefits to both the individual female and the community. The chapter will continue with a picture of colonial education that was deeply influenced by Christian values and note the impact of that education on Igbo culture. A presentation of the current social conditions of Igbos both in Nigeria and among the Igbo Diaspora strongly suggest that the advent of the colonization and the impositions of Christian based colonial education have had an enduring impact. It is the aim of this chapter to examine this phenomenon relying on a series of personal communications with elder members of the Igbo community.
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