SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF UNDEREMPLOYMENT AMONG THE THREE MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper examined underemployment among Ebira, Igala and Okun ethnic groups of Kogi State Nigeria. The study employed liberal feminism to explain the phenomenon because the theory is a political philosophy that encourages the development of freedom, particularly in the political and economic spheres. The study adopts both qualitative and quantitative research design. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to recruit 804 respondents for the Study. In addition, purposive sampling technique was used to get 12 in-depth interviewees among senior citizens who witnessed colonial period, and12 Focus Group Discussants (FGDs) among youths (18-40 years) and old people (61-75years) who have knowledge on the changing economic socialisation among the three major ethnic groups. Questionnaires, in-depth interview guide and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide were used to collect data from the field. Majority of the respondents, the interviewees and the discussants revealed that underemployment is prevalent in Kogi State, the root cause is economic production unskilling of the changing economic socialisation/education during colonialism and present post-colonialism, the underemployment has negative consequences which include problem families, delinquencies, poor spousal relationships, child labour, single parenting, divorce, role failure, ridicules, depression, alcoholism, drug addiction, poor care for the aged, social unrest, insecurity and insurgency, etc. The research recommended that Kogi State Government in collaboration with the Federal Government should set-up an effective curriculum review agency for the modification of economic education/socialisation from the education/socialisation into labour services skills to the education/socialisation into endogenous economic production skills.

Key Words: *Underemployment, Economic-Socialisation, Economic-Production-Unskilling,*
Labour-Services-Skills and economic-production-upskilling
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1. Introduction

Society is a social system. Meaning each society is made up of parts. Educational institution is one of the parts. Its function is to service the other parts of the society. It renders economic or occupational socialisation, political socialisation, family orientation or socialisation, and so on. It socialises the members of the society into economic roles, political roles, family roles, legal roles, military roles, religious roles etc. In the traditional pre-colonial Ebira, Igala and Okun societies, the educational institutions socialise the members into economic production. This is known as economic production skilling. It is the development of skills, both hard/technical and soft, that enhance an individual's ability to contribute to economic production. It refers to acquiring knowledge and abilities related to the production of specific good or acquiring knowledge and abilities related to services, as well as general skills like problem-solving, communication, adaptability, teamwork, leadership, work ethic, time management, creativity, interpersonal skills and attention to details (Mohammed 2023). Economic or occupational socialization can be understood from McEvoy, MacPhail, & Heikinaro-Johansson (2015) as professional development. It refers to the process through which individuals in a profession or occupation are integrated into the norms, values, and practices of their occupational roles. Scott and Marshall (2015) put occupational socialization as the learning of attitudes and behaviours necessary to recognized and sustainable competence within a context of employment. These include skills acquired through training, informal work norms, and peer-group values and relationships.

Mohammed (2023) further maintains that in the pre-colonial time, the economic as well as the educational institutions were fused into the family institution, therefore, socialisation into occupational roles was done in the household and it was gender socialisation into economic productions. Nowadays, occupational socialisation is highly done outside household by school and it is highly gender socialisation into labour services skills and selling of labour services.The changing-educational systems, that started among the Ebira, Igala and Okun ethnic groups during colonialism, unskilled the peoples in the production of goods and reskilled them into labour services. This change from gender based productive economy of the pre-colonial period to gender based labour economy in the colonial and post-colonial times across the three societies manufactured underemployment and poverty among the peoples. In view of these, theresearcher’s mind wonders, what exactly,is economic production unskilling among the three major ethnic groups in Kogi State? How prevalent is the economic production unskilling among them? Which factor(s) are responsible for the economic production unskilling among the three major ethnic

groups? What is/are the aftereffect(s) of the economic production unskilling among the three ethnic groups? Being a social problem, it becomes necessary to curb itpossibly by finding answers to these questions.Thus, the study aims to undo the effects of economic production unskilling among the three ethnic groups. Specifically, the study examineseconomic production unskilling among the three major ethnic groups in Kogi State, Nigeria; it also ascertains the proportion of economic production unskilled members of the three major ethnic groups in comparison to the skilled members; it identifies the factors responsible for the economic production unskilling among the three major ethnic groups; and finally, it determines the consequences of the economic production unskilling among the three major ethnic groups

2. Literature Review

This section two is a review of literature on economic production unskilling. The section also contain theoretical framework to the study.

2.1Economic Production Unskilling

Burns (2025) conceptualizes unskilling as the quiet erosion of skills that occurs when we get too comfortable, relying on yesterday's knowledge to solve tomorrow's problems. Mohammed (2023) puts economic production unskilling as the quiet erosion of skills in production of goods in a society.The author narrates that this occurs during colonialism among the Ebira, Igala and Okun ethnic groups. It was when productions gave way for labour services; younger generation lost interest and skills in agriculture, iron and wood technology, clay works and textile. Textile gave way for tailoring, a labour services to the producers of the tailoring-machines. The male and the female gender crafts trades began to disappear. Unlettered or Illiterate women became coaster entrepreneur, educated women search for jobs. Large entrepreneurships known with the men and the women of the three ethnic groups began to fade away. On this ground, the study defines economic production unskilling as the loss of skills in production in an economy.

2.2 Proportion of Economic Production Unskilled people around the World

Gottlieb, Poschke and Tueting(2024) observe that the size of firms and the skill composition of workforce are two characteristics that differentiate high-income and low-income countries. Firms are larger and workers have more skills in higher-income countries whereas firms are small and workers have low skills in low-income countries. Similar to this observation, an ILO report in 2018describes small firms and workers with low skills to be characteristics of informal economic sector. The ILO report (2018) shows that 2 billion people work informally worldwide, most of them in

emerging and developing countries. In Africa, 85.8 per cent of employment is informal. The proportion is 68.2 per cent in Asia and the Pacific, 68.6 per cent in the Arab States, 40.0 per cent in the Americas and 25.1 per cent in Europe and Central Asia.Another ILO report in 2015, shows that the high incidence of informality is a challenge for the realization of decent work for all and sustainable and inclusive development.Unrealization of decent work in other word is known as underemployment. Bell and Blanchflower(2018) refer to underemployment as when a person is working but his/her job doesn't fully utilize his/her skills, experience, or education, or when a person is working part-time when he/she would prefer full-time employment. In another dimension, (Robert 2025) describes underemployment as a situation in which individuals are forced to work in low-paying or low-skill jobs. Based on this literature, it is safe to hypothesise that there is high proportion of economic production unskills people in developing, post-colonial societies.

2.3Factors Responsible for Economic Production Unskilling

Two report's authors, Florence Bonnet and Vicky Leung, in ILO report in 2018 stress that the level of education is a key factor affecting the level of informality. People who have completed secondary and tertiary education are less likely to be in informal employment compared to workers who have either no education or completed primary education. In affirmation, Gottlieb, Poschke and Tueting (2024) finds that in high-income countries, the share of workers with at least a secondary school degree is about 86 percent in large firms and about 79 percent in small firms. In low-income countries, the share of workers with at least a high school degree is about 50 percent in large firms and about 22 percent in small firms. Thus people with low level of education have low level of skills. Naankiel, et al, (2016) however, diverge a little from level of education to contents of education as the cause of unskilling or low skills. It maintains that the change in occupational socialisation from socialisation into production skills to socialisation into labour services skills during colonialism is the cause of high number of economic production unskilled and low skilled members of developing countries.These literature point out some of the factors that manufactured economic unskilling in developing countries, but failed to dig out the core reason for economic production unskilling in the developing postcolonial societies.

2.4 Consequences of the Economic Production Unskilling

Naankiel et al (2016) attribute the major cause of underemployment in developing countries to historical economic production unskilling. The study challenges British industrial economic policies in Igala land and other parts of developing countries as the engine of economic production unskilling. Through the buying of cotton and the need to pay taxes, natives began to abandon their crafts and today among the Igalas,

the number of women involved in weaving on local loom and men dyeing on vats have become so infinitesimal. Modern textile training plants established in different eight locations in Nigeria by the colonial administrators were with difficult conditions and challenges. The end results were loss of traditional skills and means of income, poor unproductive modern skills and underemployment.Oshewowlo (2018) states that between 1945 and 1960, there was an increase in the numbers of young men and women who were engaged in formal education and were thus kept back for long periods in schools and colleges, and by the time they were through with their courses, they had lost traditional economic production skills.The long run result is low insufficient income. Gavrilova (2021) describes crude oil discovery, the boom and the bust in Nigeria as key aspects of economic production unskilling. The study narrated that Nigeria abandoned its independence plane for import substitution policy duly to oil discovery,however, the oil boom became shut lived and the total reliance on the oil made the oil bust to be characterised by slows down production, rising unemployment and underemployment, declining consumer spending, and falling assets prices. In fact, underemployment according to Hirschfeld (2025) is a problem as it is significantly characterised by poverty since the pay is usually insufficient to meet basic needs. ILO (2022) shows that underemployment and its resultant poverty is problem particularly in developing countries. This paper therefore analyses and defines underemployment as the situation in which individuals' occupations generate under income. Underemployment refers to being engaged in occupation that generates insufficient income to meet basic needs or maintain a standard of living. Income from underemployment is below what is considered necessary for a household to thrive. It is inadequate to cover essential expenses such as food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, schooling, utilities.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

Liberal feminist theory is the tool used to explain economic production unskilling in this study. The ideas of liberal feminism are rooted in liberalism. The key ideas of liberalism include system modification for the achievement of individual freedom, democracy, equal opportunities and equal rights (Guy-Evans 2023). Among the exponents of liberal feminism is Ann Oakley. She posits that changing social system locked women in occupations which are often underpaid compared to jobs which are typically male dominated such as in science, law and medicine. The change from traditional economic production within the family to factory system locks masses (both men and women) in labour services jobs. The changing economic system is not fashioned to benefit any of the gender and it is most harmful to the women. To control this harm, there is need for system modification (Haralambos and Holborn, 2013:111-112). Oakley (1974)'s positions explains underemployment in Kogi State: Like

changing economic system that established factory production and alienation of workers in Europe, changing native economic system during colonialism establishes economic production unskilling among the natives.The changing economic system was the gradual erosion of native economic productions and the skills and the indoctrination of labour services and the skills through the introduction of formal western imperialist oriented education and the curriculum.The changing economic system is not fashioned to benefit the natives because the changing economic system locks majority of the natives in underemployment and the resultant poverty. Modification of the philosophy, goal, objectives, structure, funding and administration of the education to enhance indigenous economic production will control underemployment and the resultant poverty in the three societies under study.

3. Methodology

The research is a cross-sectional study. Data was collected from the study population-sample at one point in time. The study adopts both primary and secondary types of data. Quantitative primary data were sourced through questionnaires from 804 selected men and women of the three major ethnic groups of Kogi State. To collect the qualitative primary data, 12 in-depth interviews were conducted with those who witnessed colonial period among the three ethnic groups with the aid of in-depth interview guide. In addition, 12 FGDs were conducted among the youths (18-40 years) and old people (61-75years) who have knowledge on the changing economic socialisation among the three major ethnic groups using FGD guide. The primary data was collected from six Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Kogi State, Nigeria. To collect the secondary data, Archival records on the economic production of men and women during the pre-colonial Igala, Ebira and Okun were sourced from Weise (2013) using a pro-forma. The data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

4. Result and Discussions

4.1 Economic Production Unskilling among the Three Major Ethnic Groups in Kogi State

The three economies were productive ones with socialisation into economic productions as purely the economic education during the pre-colonial time.

Table 1: Economic Production and the Skilling in the Pre-Colonial Economies of the Igala, Ebira and Okun

Ethnic Groups

Production		Economic Education											
		Education was fused into parental and community or extended-family gender and unisex roles.				Education was fused into parental and community or extended-family gender and unisex roles.				Education was fused into parental and community or extended-family gender and unisex roles.			
		Igala				Ebira				Okun			
		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Agriculture	Arable farming	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100	0	0
	Aquaculture, hunting game	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100	0	0
	Vegetable farming	0	0	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100
	Food processing	0	0	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100
Crafts (Tools, utensils & ornaments)	Iron technology, wood carving, leather work	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100	0	0
	Pottery, beads making	0	0	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100
Textile	Cotton farming, loom carving, tie and dye fabrics	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100	0	0
	Cotton spinning & weaving, fabric sales	0	0	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100
Trading	Male crafts	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100	0	0
	Female crafts, farm produce	0	0	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100

Table 1 shows the economic production and the socialisation into the economic production among the three major ethnic groups under study during the pre-colonial time. Teaching and learning generally was majorly done along gender line. Economic education was purely economic production skilling. In agricultural production, male children learn from male parents, arable farming skills and the production of crop food, fishing skills and the production of aquatic food, game hunting skills and the

catching of wild animals for food. Female children learn from female parents, skills in vegetable farming and food processing and the productions. The gender principle applies to craft production and the skilling, textile production and the skilling, trade and the skilling. A discussant (among old women ages 61-75years FGD in Adumu, Ugwuoda Ward, Idah LGA) states that teaching were majorly practical. The education contents were drawn from economic institutional roles. The contents were not written but there was curriculum and scheme of work. The major teaching methods were modeling and instruction. Male parents taught male children how to produce hoes, cutlasses, hair liners, barbecue metal racks and skewers, swords, arrows, knives, pliers, ornaments, utensils, gongs, bells, metal for religious or spiritual nailing purposes, hand and leg cuffs, guns & the powder, wooden stool, mortar and the pestle, canoe, palm-oil-processing container, weaving loom, shoes and bags made of leather and so on. Female parents taught female children how to produce fabrics, clay pots, soap, salt, processed food stuffs etc. Archival data sourced from Okene and Suberu 2013; Weise 2013 and Naankiel 2016, and IDI data corroborate with the survey findings and the FGD findings.Further findings from all the forms of data collected show that during the colonial period, schools took major part in the economic socialization across the Igala, Ebira and Okun societies. The curriculum and the scheme of work however were not drawn from the natives' economic institution.

4.2 The Proportion of Economic Production Unskilled Members of the three Societies

Table 2: The Proportion of Economic Production Unskilled Members of the three Societies

Production		Proportion of Economic Production Unskilled Members											
		Igala				Ebira				Okun			
		High among the educated males and low among those with low levels of education		High among the educated Females and low among those with low levels of education		High among the educated males and low among those with low levels of education		High among the educated Females and low among those with low levels of education		High among the educated males and low among those with low levels of education		High among the educated Females and low among those with low levels of education	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Agriculture	Arable farming	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100	0	0
	Aquaculture, hunting game	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100	0	0
	Vegetable farming	0	0	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100
	Food processing	0	0	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100
Crafts (Tools, utensils & ornaments)	Iron technology, wood carving, leather work	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100	0	0
	Pottery, beads making	0	0	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100
Textile	Cotton farming, loom carving, tie and dye fabrics	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100	0	0
	Cotton spinning & weaving, fabric sales	0	0	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100
Trading	Male crafts	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100	0	0
	Female crafts, farm produce	0	0	268	100	0	0	266	100	0	0	256	100

Table 2 shows the proportion of economic production unskilled members of the three major ethnic groups in comparison to the skilled members. The total number of the respondents indicated there is High level of traditionally economic production unskill among the educated males and females and low among those with low levels of formal education. The qualitative data corroborate with the survey findings. Probing questions dish out more findings which indicate that today, Traditional Iron technology, wood carving, leather work, pottery, beads making, native crafts sales are fast disappearing. Cotton farming, loom carving, tie and dye fabrics, cotton spinning and weaving, native fabric sales are on the verge of extinction.

4.3 Factors Responsible for the Economic Production Unskilling among the Three Major Ethnic Groups

Table 3: Gender of Respondents, Ethnic Background & their Views on Factors Responsible for Economic production Unskilling among the Three Ethnic

Gender of the Respondents	Factors Responsible for Economic Production Unskilling												Total		
	Foreign influence			Changing population demographics			Formal Education			All of the above					
	Igala	Ebira	Okun	Igala	Ebira	Okun	Igala	Ebira	Okun	Igala	Ebira	Okun	Igala	Ebira	Okun
Male	4(1.5%)	8(3.0%)	1(0.4%)	3(1.1%)	6(2.3%)	2(0.8%)	5(1.9%)	2(0.8%)	9(3.5%)	122(45.5%)	116(43.6%)	110(43.0%)	134(50.0%)	132(49.6%)	122(47.7%)
Female	3(1.1%)	6(2.3%)	13(5.1%)	1(0.4%)	8(3.0%)	10(3.9%)	6(2.2%)	6(2.3%)	9(3.5%)	124(46.3%)	114(42.9%)	102(39.8%)	134(50.0%)	134(50.4%)	134(52.3%)
Total	7(2.6%)	14(5.3%)	14(5.5%)	4(1.5%)	14(5.3%)	12(4.7%)	11(4.1%)	8(3.0%)	18(7.0%)	246(91.8%)	230(86.5%)	212(82.8%)	268(100.0%)	266(100.0%)	256(100.0%)

Groups

Table 3 shows majority respondents across the three ethnic groups indicating three (3) factors influence economic production unskilling among the natives. The factors include foreign influence, changing population demographics and formal education. Foreign influence means exposure to modern media, modern government,

sophisticated technologies and urbanization. In other words, exposure to external values introduces change in economic ideologies from producer to labourer and from self-employment to employee in the three societies under study. Labour services as a form of occupation is more prevalent among those with high levels of foreign values and low with those with low levels of foreign values. Government influences roles allocation in the society through education policy including education contents. Many members of the three societies get acquainted to labour services education content taught to them and perform them as their economic roles in the societies. In this way, colonial education curriculum unskilled many Igala, Ebira and Okun peoples in economic production. This was also inherited into post-colonial education curriculum. A discussant (among male residents of Road by Postal Agency Obuburu, Idanuhua Ward, Adavi LGA, FGD ages 20-40) states: "The introduction of formal education suppresses the teaching of indigenous productive skills andeducation contents partly throughthe ideological control in which men and women were made to believe that white men have solution to many or all problems especially health problems. The natives were made to believe they do not possess the brain to come up with sophisticated technologies".

4.4 Consequences of Economic Production Unskilling among the Three Ethnic Groups

Survey, IDI and FGD Findings show that the negative impacts of the changing education and changing economy on the three ethnic groups outweigh positive impacts for the natives. Employment for many individuals in the changing economy is an underemployment as the income is an under income that is insufficient to cater for basic needs. The under income generates too many poor families, problem families, delinquencies, poor spousal relationships, poor socialization of children into economic roles, role-overload, diseases, loss of traditional skills and knowledge, single parenting, divorce, role conflict, role strain, role failure, depression. An in depth interviewee (An old man born during the 2nd World War) in Emere, Ankpa I Ward, Ankpa LGA says: "Food, clothing, shelter, schooling, healthcare, are expensive and at the same time many people especially male parents' economic statuses are poor. Many occupations do not generate sufficient income". A discussant among male residents (ages 61-75) of road by Ali's Compound in Okengwe, Obehira/Eba Ward, Okene LGA states that the loss of traditional skills and knowledge is pain as the new modern skills and knowledge acquired is a way of draining wealth away from our economy. The discussant made example with grinding machine, he says women no longer use mill stone and the owner of grinding machine generate money using them for commercial grinding, but it is actually the producer of the machine that make wealth. In an exclamation, he questions! "How has the society improved with such

skills as photography, tailoring, road side mechanic works and vulcanizing, commercial/office/private transportation skills (road, rail, water and air transport), and many modern skills acquired".

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The focus of the study is to undo the effects of economic production unskilling among the Igala, Ebira and Okun ethnic groups. The study therefore examines economic production unskilling among the people. The findings show that economic production unskilling is the gradual suppression of the natives' productive economy and the replacement with Western imperialist oriented labour economy through the introduction of formal education among the younger natives by the colonialists. As the older generation of the natives passes away, the native productive economy withers away. The change from productive economy to labour economy results to underemployment, poverty, problem families, delinquencies, poor spousal relationships, poor socialization of children in economic roles, role-overload, diseases, loss of traditional skills and knowledge, unproductive modern skills and knowledge, single parenting, divorce, role conflict, role strain, role failure, depression. The findings corroborate with previous studies. Naankiel et al., (2016) for example found that British economic policiesin Igala land generally results to production unskilling. The same study observes that the major cause of underemployment in developing countries is historical economic production unskilling. Liberal feminism explains the phenomenon, Ann Oakley's position that changing economic system established factory production and alienation of workers in Europe, depicts the changing native economic system during colonialism that establishes economic production unskilling among the natives. Liberal feminists posit that the changing economic system in Europe was not fashioned to benefit any of the gender. So also the changing Igala, Ebira and Okun economic systems were not fashioned to benefit the natives because the changing economic system locks majority of the natives in underemployment and the resultant poverty. And modification of the education system to enhance indigenous economic production will control underemployment, the resultant poverty and the other negative consequences in the three societies under study.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Having discussed the findings, the study makes conclusion and recommendation in this section.

5.1 Conclusion

This study establishes that change in Igala, Ebira and Okun education and economic systems unskilled majority of the peoples in economic production and reskilled them

in labour services. The changing economy and changing economic education drain wealth away to the manufacturers of products the natives consume. The wealth drain changing economic system invented underemployment, underincome, poverty, poor health etc. among the three ethnic groups. To control these harms the changing education system must be reviewed. Kogi State formal education system must be modified.

5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

i. Kogi State Education Board should develop and implement primary and secondary school curricula that would accommodate teaching of improved/modernised traditional technical skills, encouragement of vocations, good morals, unity and good governance. National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), National Universities Commission (NUC), and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) are not left out. The curricula should include smithing/metal-work (blacksmith prototypes), wood carving, electromagnetic wiring and so on. Instead of the importation of ferryboat, our traditional/local wood carvers and smiths can be employed to teach traditional male gender role of wood carving into canoe plus prototype engine to both sexes to begin the production of Nigerian made water transport vehicle.
ii. Kogi State Government should establish community skill acquisition and vocational centres, to come up with community professions like in the pre-colonial time.
iii. Kogi State Government should also establish farmers' cooperative organisations and partner with the farmers' cooperatives to provide amenities for all farmers and rural dwellers. Enjoying such amenities as Farmers' Primary Health Centres, Rural/Farmers Households Electricity Company and so on would encourage farming among youths
iv. The traditional subsistence farming as subsidiary to commercial occupations among all men should be revalued and put into practice.
v. Kogi State Government should reward good morals; innovation and invention. This is to encourage vocations, technical skills acquisition and role taking.
vi. Every home should be giving opportunity to own garden where they can plant vegetables.As such, Kogi State Ministry of Housing should give housing opportunities to every citizen whether rural or urban. Farmers can pay from their farming output within some stipulated years, even traders and so on.
vii. There are many spring in Kogi State, therefore, the Kogi State Water Board should be levied to channel spring water into both urban and rural homes.

Each home connected to the spring water should pre-pay some token monthly as a source of revenue to the Kogi State Government.

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