



Entrepreneurship and Ethnic Group in Nigeria: Nupe Geographical and Cultural Perspectives

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Abstract

Culture was understood to influenced entrepreneurship behaviour of people (Clement 2017). Nigeria is made up of different ethnic groups ranging from majority, to sub-majority and minority groups. Nupe people belong to sub-majority group found in the North Central axis of the country. Till date, Hofstede's measures have served the field in understanding the relationship between cultural dimensions and entrepreneurship behaviour. This paper employs the six dimensions to explains the beliefs of Nupes, taking to account their geographical locations. Nupe societies believed in high power distance, femininity, high uncertainty avoidance and high indulgence. These dimensions have negative correlation which hinder their entrepreneurial behaviours. However, their long-term orientation and collectivism promote their engagement in entrepreneurship. Findings had revealed that their geographical location, particularly those residing close to the West, are changing their mindset because of the prevailing hardship in the locations. It was recommended that more orientation should be tailored to the locations to fostering economic activities of the domains.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Culture, Nupe, Nigeria

I. Introduction

Learning about different cultures allow us to gain valuable insights into different ethnic groups existing around the world. Culture is an entity peculiar to a particular ethnic group. There is remarkable link between culture and economic activities of ethnic groups in Nigeria (Clement 2017). Culture affects every activity in a society, including entrepreneurship. Culture does not exist in the real world but manifests in people's behaviour, beliefs, customs, norms and tradition. It connects us to each other, defines each ethnic group and made us feel sense of belonging. Nigeria is a country with

diverse ethnic groups across her six geopolitical zones. Nupe, otherwise called *Nupawa* and *Tapa* by Hausa and Yoruba ethnic groups, is a unique language founds in the mild and north central zone in Nigeria. Nupe tradition and culture speak heavily on entrepreneurial activities. This present study, seeks to add to the existing literature about Nupe and fundamentally addresses among others: who are Nupes? Where do they live? What is their unique culture? How does Nupe culture affect entrepreneurship? Hofstede's (1980) national value dimensions as well as cultural traits considered to be useful to entrepreneurship are discussed and finally, the conclusive part was drawn.

II. Culture

The customs, traditions, beliefs, norms and traits of a particular religious or ethnic group can be term culture. In other word, the peculiar characteristics, ways of life shared among people of particular geographical setting is refer to as culture. Raymond (1995), defines culture as to how ideas and meanings are expressed in ordinary behaviour of people, learning and art. He further documented that culture could be categorized into three, namely: social, ideal, and documentary. The first category "social" describes a specific form of life exhibited by the people of a given geographical location. The second category "ideal" refers to the values, work and lives while the last category emphasizes intellectual creation. Raymond further stressed that culture is not superior but rather ordinary. In the opinion of Hofstede (1996), culture was defined as those collective programming of the mind which differentiates the members of one ethnic group or category of people from others. Generally, Culture is behavioural pattern of human being, including language, ideas, institution, tools, techniques, art work, crafts, trades and ceremony which are all considered to be important aspects for the development of people's mind and their civilization. To clearly understand the presume influence of



culture on entrepreneurship, it is better to understudy the previous investigations on the subject matter. Some of these include but are not limited to:

- Shehnazet *al.* (2021), comparatively analysed the significant of national culture, as measured by Hofstede's six cultural values, on the entrepreneurial innovativeness (EI) of three Malaysian ethnic companies (Malaysian Chinese, Indian, and Malays). Based on their systematic investigation, 450 firms were sampled and analysed. They concluded that, amongst the national values postulated by Hofstede: indulgence, collectivism, and low power distance have significant influence on EI among the three studied entrepreneurs in Malaysia. They further observed that the three other cultural values showed differential impact on Malaysia's ethnic groups. EI among different ethnic groups generates significant theoretical and practical implications.
- Aykan & Ratan (2023) examined the effect of culture on productive entrepreneurship. They adopt the theory related to their finding and investigated the mediating role of trust. Base on the multiple data from thirty-seven nations, they concluded that individualism had positive effect while power distance and uncertainty avoidance had negative effect on productive entrepreneurship. Finally, they concluded that cultural dimension is sequentially mediated by particularized or generalized trust.
- In another study, Carten *et al* (2020) investigated the influence of culture on entrepreneurship through the domain of political, social and individual influences. They categorized the different cultural dimensions into Social, Political and Individual (PSI model). They used PSI-model to provide a coherent theoretical framework on which different cultural dimensions and their impact on entrepreneurship were analysed. Thus, they concluded on how specific cultural dimensions affect entrepreneurship.
- Further study on cultural effects on entrepreneurship was that conducted by Gerard and Shaker (2002). Substantive information was also gathered from their study on the positive influence of culture on entrepreneurship

III. Entrepreneurship

As a blanket term related to establishment and running of business, there remains lack of consensus on the precise definition of

entrepreneurship. As a discipline that drives the growth and diversification of the economy, entrepreneurship remains widely-acceptable concept the world as ever seen. It could be understood on two different prepositions: firstly, necessity entrepreneurship – in which individuals are compelled to the practice of entrepreneurship as a result of the surrounding circumstances (mostly unfavourable economic conditions) and Opportunity entrepreneurship – in which there is willingness to engage in the practice of entrepreneurship regardless of the prevailing circumstances. Putting this in mind and recognition of several literature positions, we define entrepreneurship as the process of spotting opportunity, harnessing all necessary resources for the establishment and running of business with a view of satisfying customers' wants and making profit.

IV. Nupe Ethnic Group

Nupe is a well-known ethnic group in Nigeria principally located in the middle belt region of the country, precisely, Niger, Kwara, Kogi and FCT. They are predominantly found in the historical and ancient headquarter of the Nupe people called Bida, Niger state. Subsequently, Nupe people are majorly located in Lafiagi, Kutigi, Agaie, Lapai, Shonga, Tsaragi, Mokwa, Badegi, Lokoja, Egan, to mention but a few. From the territorial groups, the most significant of Nupe division include Beni, Zam, Batache (Bataci), and Kede or Kyedye (Abdullahi 2015). Other categories of Nupe people are farmers who engaged in the cultivation of major cereal crops such as guinea corn, rice, millet, sorghum etc. The Nupe encompasses various subgroups of people that all speak related languages. The Nupe trace their origins back to *Tsoede* an Igala prince from Idah during the 15th century (Katcha, 1979). The Nupe state was established as a result of conquest by various intervention. Nupe people were influenced by the neighbouring peoples' culture including those of Benin and the Ife people. There are various claims to the origin of the Nupe people. These claims were based on either similarity in the name or cordial relationship with other ethnic groups or both. The claim that Nupe originated from Egypt was based on believe that Nupe as a great ethnic group must originated from superior location like Nubia. This is a clear misreading of Hausa city chronicles by the then colonial historians. Popularly believe on the Nupe origin was that attributed to Igala kingdom, wherein, Nupe origin was traced to *Tsoede* who fled the court of Idah town in present Kogi State and established a loose confederation of towns along river Niger in the late 15th century. It was learnt that the Attah of Igala usually sends one



of his sons “*Tsoede*” for the collection of tributes from Nupe people who were under the rulership of Attah of Igala and to whom they paid annual tributes. History has it that during one of his visits, he met one Nupe girl named *Nku* at Nupeko town where he eventually settled down. All these claims were considered monumental mistake by the earlier historians (Professor Leo and Nabel) that mistook prehistoric Nupe kingdom of Tako, also called AtaGara, for Igala kingdom (Ndagi A. 2021). According to him, Nupe people originated within the terrain of Nupe people called KinNupe. These were traced to the three distinct and ancient ethnicities of the Eba, the Eda and the Esa. Today, Eba are called the Gwagba, the Eda are recognized as the Nda, while the Esa are known as the Yisa. The Nupe people call themselves as Nupeci and while other ethnic group or languages refer to their language as Nupe. Their neighbouring ethnic groups, such as the Hausa, Gbari, Birnin Gwari, Yoruba, and Kakanda, identify them by other names: Nufawa, Abawa, Anupeyi or Anufawhei, Tapa, and Anupecwayi.

A. Nupe Language

Just like Igbira (Ebir people), Gbagyi (Gbari people), Gada and Kakanda, Nupe people speak a language of the Nupoid group in the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo. In terms of structure and vocabulary, Nupe language is closely related to Gbari and Kakanda. Nupe central and Nupe Tako are the two different dialects of Nupe people. Based on the geographical settlement of Nupe people, particularly in the west and north central, their intonation varies. Nupe settlers of Bida speak pure dialect of Nupe language except in the recent time that they used part of Hausa vocabulary in exchange of words. Noticeable observations are peculiar to Nupes in Lafiagi, Pategi, Tsaragi, Shonga and Bacita, whose intonation are related to those of Yorubas. Similarly, Lokoja, Muye, and Budan settlers have diverse intonation as compared to their counterparts in other states. Obviously, Lapai Nupe settlers have their tonal expression close to that of Kakanda. However, common definition and understanding exist when the central Nupe tone is used. From other view, the use of Nupe in its spoken term is pure but due to long time interconnectivity between Nupes and neighbouring languages (says Hausa and Yoruba), there is integration of certain words into lifestyle and cultural heritage of Nupe people.

B. Nupe Population and Demography

With the recent census across the country, Nupe people were estimated to the tune of nine million residing on over 8000 square miles of lowland in the then Niger Basin. They are presently scattered over several states in mid-central and northern Nigeria, but principally live in Niger State. Substantive population were also found in Kwara, precisely Lafiagi, Shonga, Tsaragi, Bacita, Gbugbu and minorly represented in Kogi State – Egan, Civilization into Nupe land had brought movement of Nupe people to the core North and West where sizeable number exist as a result of their cooperation. The Nupe live in large towns or cities known as *Ezi* and also in a smaller village called *Tunga* or *Kangi*. They live in clusters of compounds forming a ward. Village chief is the main authority (called Etsu or Ndazhitsu) and assisted by the village elders and traditional title holders.

C. Nupe Traditions, Art and Culture

The Nupe people were earlier known for their rich tradition and heritage. Many practices have changed following the movement of Usman Danfodio to the Nupe land in 19th century although they still preserve and hold some of their peculiar culture. Similar to those of Igala tradition, Nupes were symbolically known by their tribal marks which are usually stabbed in styles, natively called Guta-Guta or Kpingi(Three-Three or singly flat mark). This is to identify with their prestigious family or means of protection. They are also accustomed to adornment of jewellery but this is fading out in some Nupe locations. Patternable styles on wooden surface are peculiar attributes of Nupe people. These are carved out on hoes, cutlasses, sticks, wood mixers, stools, tables and other creative art work. *Burtu* is a known wood mask used by hunter for catching bird in thousands. Traditionally, music singers are called *Ningba*. Notable Nupe singers include: Hajia Fatima Nnalolo, Hajia Hauwa Kulu Lafiagi, Alhaji Ndaasebe, Ndako Kutigi etc. Primarily, Nupe peoples are farmers, major crops cultivated include millet, guinea-corn, yams, rice, and groundnuts. There are also quite a few fishermen in the Nupe villages on the coast, particularly, those residing in the riverine area. Marriage ceremony is done in both party’s families and in some instances, in the entire community. Polygynous marriages are common in Nupe land. Traditionally, the children are raised by their parents, grandparents, and older siblings. Children are to respect their parents and as well as share, cooperate, avoid quarrels amongst themselves.



V. Institutional Economic Theory: Nupe Perspective

In understanding the evolutionary process in the Nupe kingdom, the role of Institutional Economic Theory (IET) was perused. Culture is an informal setting and influences the degree of entrepreneurship. Two lines of theoretical interpretation about how culture affect entrepreneurship was postulated by Zhao *et al.* (2012). In the first consideration, culture was presumed to have direct materialization on the peoples' behaviour which by extension, influences the business startup. Evidence from the historical lane, Nupe culture is unique, flexible and easily acquired. Their sensation to farming and trading support the entrepreneurial behaviour of individual. The second line of the theory considered culture as an informal institution which serves as prerequisite to formal institution (North, 2015). Just like other ethnic groups, early child learning in Nupe ethnic group started from the family. Many acquired business skills right from home. The free establishment of business, free movement to market, support government policies encourage every member of Nupe society to establish and manage business of their choices.

VI. Cultural Dimension and Nupe Entrepreneurial Behaviours

The essence of entrepreneurship is the introduction of positive change rooted from the opportunity spotting to the establishment and running of the business. In the context of entrepreneurship, the role of cultural values cannot be undermined. This, significantly, shape individual's attitude, behaviour and decision toward business setting (Schwartz, 2006). There are rich and diverse literature on interplay between culture and entrepreneurship. Culture is a way of life of people in a specific geographical area who shared common values and beliefs. Hofstede (1980) defines culture as the collective programming of the mind differentiating members of a group or category of people from others, where the "category" implies nations and regions within or between nations, ethnic groups, religions, occupations or organizations. In another view, Pinillos and Reyes (2011) define it as the system of values for a specific group, which brings about development of certain personality traits, and motivates individuals toward a behaviour that may not be common in other societies. As these authors suggest, most Nupe peoples are not aware of how culture influences

their values, attitudes, ideas and norms, and as such, they abide to a dominant culture. Some of the Nupe cultural values include: respect, honesty, caring for others, taken responsibilities and many more. These values promote mutual understanding among the peers and the elders. Values extend to standards made in the society. Hofstede (1980) documents some national cultural dimensions to include power distance, individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, long/short time orientation and indulgence.

Power Distance: any culture that gives preference to the people of authority is considered a high-power distance culture. This is the extent to which the less privileged accept the unequal distribution of power as part of their values (Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Thus, with high respect and honour given to the elders and indeed community heads in the Nupe kingdom signalled that Nupe people believe in power distance and their communities can be termed High Power Distance Communities. With their beliefs, young and youth accord exceptional regards to the senior and superior individual. Lower class people in the Nupe communities felt entrepreneurship is a profession associated with high class category which hinder creation of businesses. Empirically, Mitchell *et al.* (2000) suggests that a high-power distance has a negative effect on business creation processes. However, the recent civilization of Nupes with neighbouring ethnic groups (Igala, Yoruba and Hausa) had reduced much belief in power distance and spring up entrepreneurial activities amongst the youths, young and olds irrespective of classes.

Masculinity/Femininity: this reveals the interpersonal relationship, bonds, or interactions among the people in a particular setting. Masculinity is the extent to which people attached more value to money in assertive manner. Contrarily, the reflection of quality life and nurturing of good behaviours among the citizens is termed femininity. Various forms of relationship ranging from family to friend and associations are considered here. Any society that emphasizes accomplishment of task and personal success is named masculine culture (Tsegaye *et al.*, 2019). The cultural beliefs in Nupe community right from the family centred on femininity because members of the household have passion to enrich their predefined value for quality rather than money. Just like the saying goes in Nupe language "Ezade ganwo"- people are more important than money. This lack of masculinity affects Nupe people's engagement in the entrepreneurial journey. Yenyurt and Townsend (2003) concluded that people of masculine society



give more value to material success, wealth, and many items of comfort and superiority. Therefore, innovative activities are peculiar to masculine societies as against feminine societies.

Individualism/Collectivism:

Individualism is the degree to which people prefer to act independently in a society. Conversely, collectivism emphasizes the degree to which people adopt group work. Collectivism reflects the strong force binding members of a group to act as one (Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018). Throughout the Nupe settlements, the practice of individualism was frowned at, believing that, a tree cannot make a forest. Sequel to that, most of the businesses in the Nupe societies are owned by families who shared common goal and values. To portray the desires for collectivism, there is an adage which says “*Eloo wengo zaniyan*”, meaning, doing it alone is not beautiful. Taylor & Wilson (2012) asserted to the positive impacts of collectivism on entrepreneurship. The collective up bringing both in nuclear and extended families in Nupe societies, had imbibed spirit of togetherness to every Nupe individual, hence, zeal for collective creation and innovation.

Uncertainty Avoidance: this is the extent by which people tends to alleviate negative occurrence by relying heavily on social norms, traditions and rituals (Watts *et al.*, 2020). Avoidance of uncertainty may pose serious setback to entrepreneurship, whose elements, involves risk and uncertainty. Seeking of order, formalized procedures and adherent to law are some of the elements associated with society with high uncertainty avoidance. Most Nupe communities are characterize by high uncertainty avoidance and thus believing in taking calculated risk, formalized procedures, keeping meticulous records and exhibited strong resistance to change. Any Culture characterized by high uncertainty avoidance tends to exhibits lower levels of entrepreneurial activity due to its preference for certainty (Miller, 2012). Although, recent observations showed that some communities in Nupe land are now welcoming changes through their engagement in small businesses that bring about community development.

Long/Short Term Orientation: as name implied, the extent to which people are oriented toward the future by encouraging savings and respect for the constituted authorities is termed long term orientation. In contrast, short term orientation is concerns with the present without cognisance of what future might tell. Entrepreneurial journey is future oriented. Conversely, Nupe ethnic group focuses on virtues that are related to the past, hence they have respect for the tradition. Throughout the country, Nupe people are known for their beads making, leather work, mat work, brass trays, and fine clothes. These were realized as a result of their traditional orientation from family, friends and relatives.

Indulgence: this is the last cultural factor affecting entrepreneurial behaviours as documented by Hofstede (1980). This is the society that allows gratification of basic natural human needs related to enjoying life and having fun. Indulgent culture will tend to focuses on individual happiness. In other word, leisure time is considered essential with high degree of freedom (Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018). This dimension of culture reveals the extent to which people have control over their impulses that are closely related with their personal achievement. Conversely, Nupe people are known for their traditional discipline learnt from the onset. They accommodate leisure period only for relaxation and learning of community history, ethics and norms and support personal success. These restrictions on certain activities hinder the development of entrepreneurship in Nupe culture. Individuals are not encouraged in the Nupe land to do what they like even after been married – which paves some degree of independence in some cultures. However, geographical location of some Nupe land, particularly those sharing boundaries with Yorubas, had influenced their behaviour leading to certain degree of freedom. In summary, the cultural dimensions and Nupe cultural beliefs are represented in figure 1 which depicts their effects on entrepreneurship as either negative or positive influence.

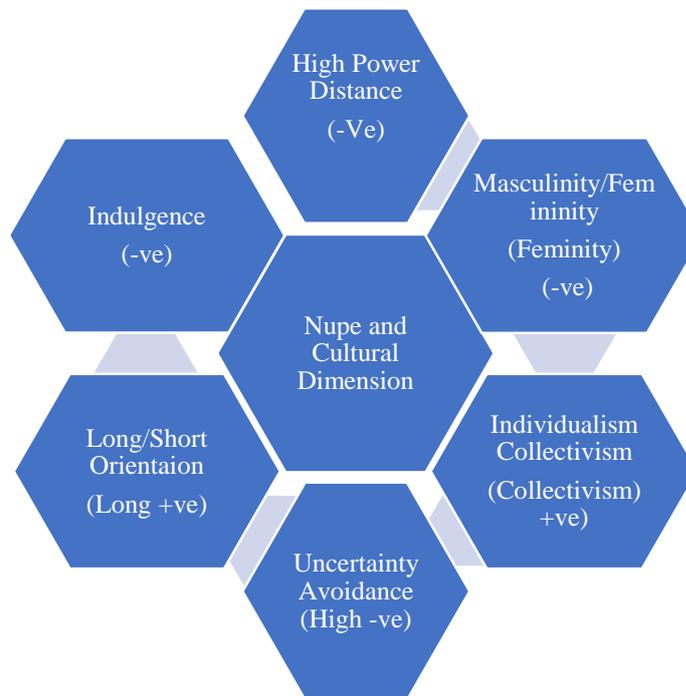


Figure 1: Cultural Dimensions and Nupe Culture

Conclusion

Culture remains a strong bond binding people of particular ethnic group together. From the onset, Nupe people engaged in farming and trading. Those living around the riverine areas are basically fishermen. However, their cultural beliefs, when considering the six Hofstede's measures of cultural dimensions were two-third negatively correlated. Although, other measures like self-employment and corporate entrepreneurship could be employed. We had noted influence of settlement in some locations to enhanced their entrepreneurial behaviours. Thus, it is high time to embrace this field for economic growth of any ethnic group across the world.

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