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REVIEW ARTICLE

THE INTEGRATION OF TRADITIONAL EDUCATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AFRICAN CHILD

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ABSTRACT

The Role Of Traditional Education in the Development of the African Child is a paper that is intended to highlight the importance of restructuring the style and type of education used in the socialisation of the African Child at the early stages of his/her life in other for the child to imbibe the socio-cultural values of his/her society alongside the western type education. In my findings and research in personal identity crises, it is noted that when an individual does not properly assimilate a particular culture where he/she finds himself/herself. Such an individual does not come out well rounded. The paper has highlighted those forms of traditional types of education that should be integrated with the western type education and why.

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INTRODUCTION

What is Education

Education is the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge. Another way of looking at education is that it is the acquisition of knowledge and the mastering of skills to be intellectually at home in the world of physical nature (Ayisi Eric 1980). Man lives in an intelligible world and therefore should know something about the earth he inhabits Sidney Hook conceives education *as the enlightenment of a person about his everyday experience*. He holds that an individual should have knowledge not merely because of its fascinations but because the fate of nations and the vocations of men depend upon the use of these knowledge (Christopher Peacocke 2001). Every man should be required to become intelligently aware of how the society in which he lives functions. The African society places a great deal of emphasis on communal values, individualistic values and moral values. The quest for knowing which is peculiar to all human race is also a distinctive traditional African quest. The ancient Greek in their quest for education explored beyond their shores to the shores of Africa for other forms of knowledge. Unlike the western definition of education which involves a defined system of imparting a developed system of curriculum. The African traditional education was informal compared to the western form of

education. The traditional education entailed more of values and the imparting of wisdom, than sciences, mathematics and geometry (Ibid. 274).

Education is the art of helping human beings or human persons of all ages to grow or develop to fuller maturity of body, mind and spirit and to live well in the world in which they are placed. It has also been defined or described as the orderly influence of the mature mind on the immature mind, through the systematic development and discipline of all the powers of the individual, namely; physical, social, intellectual, moral aesthetic and spiritual, according to them right or proper order, so that he may fulfill legitimate purpose on earth and attain eternal salvation (UCCA 1974). All these definitions of modern education have direct relevance to the Yoruba concept of 'eko', because the aim of education in Yoruba is to discipline all the faculties of the Individual to bring out the best human qualities in the child and to help the individual at different stages, to become a useful member. The traditional African education first started off from the family, each individual child is initiated so to say, to the norms of the society or tribe in which his ancestors descended from. For the Africans, to be educated is to be knowledgeable and wise about, the culture, religion, moral values, crafts and politics of the society.

What is Traditional African Education?

The African Society places a great deal of emphasis on communal values, individualistic values and moral values. The

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mode of knowing which is peculiar to human race is not peculiar to Africa alone. The ancient Greek people in their quest for knowing explored beyond the shores of their nations all the way down to Africa. The traditional education [take the Igbo's for instance] was informal compared to what we have come to know to be the western form of education or post modern Africa mode of education. The traditional Africa education entailed more of values than the scene and geometry for instance if the traditional Africa education is to be compared to modern forms of education, it will have more affiliation to the humanities, aesthetics, arts and ethics. The traditional Africa education first starts off from the family, each individual child is initiated so to say, to the norms of the society or tribe in which his ancestors descended from. It is more or less the first stage of formal and practical education one is exposed to. The members of the family are expected to nurture a child into becoming a respectable adult in the society. The child is thought the different types of taboos, the religion and norms of his indigenous society; relatives are often expected to play very important role in the formative life of such a child. The child is also exposed to trade, craft and special skills of his family lineage, say for instance, if it is a family of hunters or herbalist by the time the child who is usually a male child undergoes the rite of passage where he will be fully ushered into the trade or skills of the family. The women folk of the family also play their own role. They take the newly born female child under their wing. She is educated on the taboos of the land but more emphasis is placed on good home keeping and management and the skills of pleasing a man, though it is not the only form of education. Both male and female children are sometimes educated side by side.

In traditional Africa society, knowledge is highly valued for its practical results and implications for life. There is indeed a maxim that says: *the freedom that comes from ignorance enslaves one who entertains it*. This means that knowledge is freedom or that true freedom comes from knowledge (Christopher Peacocke 2001). The traditional Africa Education places great emphasis on the cultural norms, ancestorship, kinship, brotherhood, family, religion, wisdom and communal living of the people. Most often it plays the role of institutions as well as forms of education. The curriculum for traditional education is numerous and one starts from infancy throughout the period of his adulthood. In Africa (Igbo) when a child is born, he/she is first identified as a member of a family and the community by being named. It is from that moment that the educating and socialization of the child begins. Most often the women in the family sing songs to the child as the child matures he/she begins to join other children in listening to folktales at times some of the children are sent off to their relatives or grandparents to teach and instill moral values and disciplines, politics, arts, aesthetic and crafts are also thought to the child. The most vital aid or instrument of child education in the traditional African society is the language of the child's particular community.

The Role of Language in the Development of the Child

There are philosophers who hold that ordinary languages, the language of everybody discourse is perfectly suitable for philosophical purposes and that the It is inherent in the

expressive theory that it is language above all else which determines a people's distinctive cultural identity. That is for the linguistivist, one is only introduced to a certain community or form of life by means of language learning. The thesis of African cultural essentialists is that certain ideologies of domination are embedded in European language. This view should be understood to the extent that there are certain psychological relationship between language and meaning. According to Christopher Peacocke, for a language to be involved in the explanation of certain realities, it must be psychologically real for the user. Therefore, the lack of inclusion of 'Mother Tongue' as part of the language for the educating of the African child has created a gap in 'meaning and understanding' take the Nigerian experience. For the Bolekaja critics, this socio political nature of language explains why most African nations which have adopted the European language have not been able to break loose from the grasp of neo-colonialism and imperialism. Because of this, present day African nation comprise peoples speaking different languages and this immediately raises the question of which group, which language, within a national society initiates and controls the means and media for representing a people to itself. The social contradiction which agitates for African independence generated-that is, employing the colonial languages and their ideological underpinning to assert the right to self determination- could be eliminated by adopting African languages, which are of more significance to the people, in domesticating developmental initiatives into the idioms and customs of the people. The thought patterns of human beings are in their native language. Modern people have lost insight of the meaning of words which the traditional man fully recognized, I shall not delve here into the positivists views of language which have done more harm than good to man's knowledge of reality and communication. The traditional man was alive to metaphysically and supra personal values of language which the positivists deny. For the traditional man, language possesses divine power, namely, the power of control of integration and creativity. Just as language organizes, classifies, formulates and symbolizes our perceptions and cognition, it also organizes our institutions. In this aspect, language is the principle of creativity and destruction. The study of language would show how people live hence interpret reality as well as evaluate their institutions.

Yoruba traditional education in the development of the child

During the past few decades, a great deal has been written about the Yoruba people of West Africa who have been described as the largest cultural aggregation in West Africa with a history of political unity and a common historical tradition. Like is found in most African societies the Yoruba are very profound in the ideas on various subjects. They have a great deal to say on destiny, wisdom, pride, life, justice, truth, kindness, friendship and many others even though it is doubtful whether they have the Ancient Greeks, attempted to define them³. These abstract ideas are contained in the traditional songs, proverbs, *ifa*, *ijala* incantation bits which are now being collected and amplified by modern Yoruba writers and philosophers. The Yoruba have a great regard for education, they regard it as the corner-stone of life's success, since there is hardly any aspects of their life which is not influenced by it

(SABC 2008). The Yoruba word for education is *Eko* and it is very comprehensive in its scope, it covers politics, religion, training in Agriculture and handicraft, etiquette, character formation and many others. Good education enhances the chances of a man to be accepted into a position of leadership because a rich man without education may be by-passed in favour of a poor but educated man in the choice of a leader. Money or wealth does not count in such circumstances as the Yoruba say '*owo fun ni, ko to enia*'. What is important is character which is a by-product of education. Odunayo, a well known Yoruba writer explains *that just as food sustains life, so education is the child's heritage to the Yoruba, wisdom is the same thing as or at least the result of education, and stupidity the lack of education*. For example, a clever boy is praised for his wisdom, which is attributed to the education or training given to him at home. So also, a dull or stupid boy is ridiculed and his stupidity and dull behaviour is attributed to lack of adequate education.

The importance of traditional education to the african society

There is the suggestion that the aim of education is to help each individual to lead the fullest life he is capable of living. In traditional African societies, the connotation between education and wisdom is very clear. To be educated, is to be wise. In Yoruba, as in modern societies, the need for arises from the problems of maintaining and directing the continuity of society (ODU 1966-1967). Even though nature provides for biological continuity by means of reproduction, each society still has to find the means of orderly transmission of social experience if each generation would not start socially from the scratch and this need is common to all societies. It is believed that the legitimate purpose on earth is to fit every individual into the society while eternal salvation includes dying honourably and being burned side by side with departed kinsmen. Although there is a great deal of similarity in the aims of education in both the Yoruba and the European communities, there are obvious differences, unlike the European societies, where the home, the school, the church and the community as a whole play an important role in the work of education, the Yoruba rely mainly on the home and the community. This community is not as un-controlled as is often thought. Children come under its influence sometimes as early as the age of eight when they are subjected to an organized influence firstly from their immediate senior and later from the age group. European Education is largely conceived with the handing down to the next generation of a system of knowledge which is designed to solve the problem of adult life. In the Yoruba society of pre-European era as in many other African societies, success and welfare had very little to do with the knowledge of a person accumulated and difficulties were not solved by the application of science. In other words, what a man knows is less, far less important than what he does. There was no need for the essentially formal education of the European type with fixed hours of instructions. Nor could anyone imagine or understand the idea of education for its own sake, Yoruba traditional education was definitely utilitarian, designed as it was to make the Individual useful to himself and to his community at large. It was a rather difficult society in the sense that members must either be fit to carry out their duties

or they were regarded as worthless. Whatever one may think about the nature and aims of Yoruba traditional education, one interesting thing about it is that it can easily be evaluated mainly by its results. One of the most important ways in which good education is manifested is in the behaviour of the child in observing what may be called Yoruba etiquette *ayeni* (ODU 1966-1967). among the Yoruba's, it is a sign of ill-breeding or lack of education to meet and pass-by anyone without exchanging greetings no matter whether the person is of a different tribe or religion.

In traditional African Society, education is solely seen as a means of preparing a child for the task ahead of him not for the immediate or the enrichment of an individual's skill but the preservation of moral norms and culture of the people. It is often expected that each generation of the people practice, preserve and pass on the ways of life of the people to the next generations to come. Therefore educating a child for the African is very vital and important. It is through an education that the girl child is expected to be fully initiated into the accepted ways of running a home and submitting to her husband. Good education manifests itself in hard work. Apart from etiquette, there are duties which an educated or properly trained child owes to the parents. Those who fail in such duties are looked upon with disfavor and are considered untrained. When a man is properly educated, the Yoruba's believe that it should reflect in his character. Character training therefore is regarded as the most important aspect of Yoruba education. The Yoruba society of pre European era did provide adequate training for individuals for their life career. It seems clear that there are two main methods of education- the first is *Awoko* that is, learning by imitation and the other method is *ifiye* by which a child is actually instructed directly. The role of traditional African education cannot be over emphasized; its results are quite tremendous. It builds character formation and prepares the African Child to meet the numerous challenges of adult life. It is so structured that it impacts borders on every sphere of life take for instance, community development, marriage stability, strong brotherhood as opposed to the western individualism, promotion and preservation of culture, social order take the Igbo kinship and Umunna traditional system for instance.

Comparative analysis of infussing traditional, western and post modern education

Many educators in Nigeria today are concerned with the relevance of the traditional primary school curriculum to the needs, interests and environment of the child. Some are of the view that the curriculum should be drastically modified to meet the needs of the African Child. In primary Education today, most schools in Nigeria do not teach indigenous language, moral instructions, traditional religious studies, culture and African literature. The curriculum is so designed that the African child at the end of his education losses the sense of being African. The theorists of personhood (personal identity) have always held that the cultural values, norms and language of a particular or group of individuals are what give them a sense of identity. The broad aim of an integrated primary school curriculum is to help the child develop his natural abilities by creating the necessary environment that will

stimulate, challenge and promote him socially, physically, intellectually and emotionally in the art of learning and doing. It is the job of the school to create the ideal situation for the child to discover things for himself and about himself. The main goal of primary education is to develop the whole child through a variety of activities unlike the western education that primarily prepares a child for carrier and socio-economic activities. The traditional African education sets out to build every aspect of a child's life till adult hood to be better prepared to fit into his cultural society.

Conclusion

The primary education in the African context is faced with numerous problems, many of which are unknown to European and American schools. The western curriculum being used in schools within Africa does not reflect the African way of life. It has been so tailored that the aim of education in the continent is often unclear. Many see it as an end in itself, as the majority of the children are denied the opportunity for further education due to inability of government to finance their education beyond a certain level. Consequently thousands of school leavers look for employment in urban areas, where there are fewer job opportunities than applicants. The aim of education is to help each individual to lead the fullest life his capable of living. This is why some say education is a process of nourishing. The educational curriculum should be so adopted to reflect the African, socio political, economic, cultural, religious and communal way of living as well as the western oriented type of formal education. But the government must have to put up the social structures and institutions that will compliment and strengthen this educational system.

Although there is a great deal of similarity in the aims of education in both the Yoruba and the European communities, there are obvious differences. Unlike the European societies, in Africa, the home, the school, the church and the community as a whole play an important role in the socialization and the educating of the child what this does is that the child is not only literate but well rounded when these types and forms of education are properly integrated. According to Nelson Mandela, '*Education is the most wonderful weapon one can use to conquer*', a well structured education for a better equipped individual.

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