RETHINKING AFRICAN TRADITIONAL EDUCATION VIS-AVIS INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY: A DECISION FOR SURVIVAL

AGAMA CHRISTIAN SUNDAY (PhD)[1];
OZOIGBO IKECHUKWU BONAVENTURE (PhD)[2];
OBIAGWU VICTOR OBINNA (PhD)[3];
JUDE A. ONUOHA (PhD)[4];
JOHN EZENWANKWO (PhD)[5]
1234 Philosophy Unit, Directorate of General Studies
Federal University of Technology, Owerri
Imo State, Nigeria

Abstract

The history of education in Africa reveals that African traditional educational system has been in existence ever before the arrival of western education. But through the intercultural influence of western style of education in Africa, the learning culture that had kept their pragmatic skills and meditative intellects continually is now withering away. The effects are highly anchored or hanged on seeking for the "white collar job" thus, keeping the millions of graduates on abject poverty. Graduates of western education as handed over to the Africans are grooming in dependence and incompetence since students are not trained to be producers, but at best, maintainers and consumers. This paper is of the view that as long as Africans cannot avoid the Western education because of its modernization, they should contextualize their educational system into the traditional or indigenous style of education. Contextualization will help to curtail the copycat mentality of keeping, borrowing or applying foreign system of education without enculturation. Hence, the African traditional mode of education which is geared towards skill acquisition and entrepreneurship shall be showcased to see the need why Africans should not be seeking knowledge just for knowledge sake but material and economic satisfaction and sustenance.

Keywords: Africa, education, traditional education, intercultural philosophy, western education, knowledge.

Introduction

Africa traditional education has been one among their major instruments used by the society to prevent, maintain and promote the social, political, religious and economic activities of the society. It has been in existence even before the European colony in Africa. The traditional (or indigenous) education intends initiating the citizens into a practical exercise which intends the norms and values of the society. It is part of their traditional inheritance that goes from one generation to the other. This method of education in African traditional society was confidentially built into almost all human activities to include, economic, social, political, religious, artistic and recreational life of the society. This in a sense entails that though education was not formal, (like gathering people together for schooling) but it was categorically combined with the traditional system. The traditional education was assimilated with the view of acquiring skills, social and cultural values and norms into its objectives and methods. It begins from childhood and continues to adulthood.

It is quite outstanding that this traditional education was not only pragmatic in nature but was also a process through which the life of the community could be stabilized. Its philosophy was basically productive and practicable. The theoretical aspect of it was very minor as its major concern was to bring up the young ones to the fullest responsibility of the community such that they would be contributing to the progress and

development of the society. Individual`s responsibility of the community starts from various families and gets to the community. The education given to individuals were more of training (apprenticeship) form of learning, whereby the individuals learned under the overseers or the masters. Practicality was the main guiding principle. Education in Africa was a means to an end, and not an end in itself. Education was basically an orientation for immediate induction into society and a way of taking care of oneself (personal responsibility). It was more of job exposure (orientation). There was a degree of pragmatism in African traditional system of education. Children and youths learnt by participation in functional activities like farming, fishing, cooking, ceremonies, rituals and other human activities. As a matter of fact, individuals acquire different kinds of knowledge, skills, norms, and moral behaviors that are cultured to the taste of humanity and for the prosperity of social order in the society. Accordingly, in Nigeria for instance:

---the Igbo believe that a legitimate social norm is "rational" not merely because it symbolically expresses meaning and information, but because of its mediation. The mediation here is just as it removes dispute and installs peace and unity among the people from the sphere of social reality. All domains of the Igbo socialization are governed by the simple closeness and understanding of inherent--- as a means of coping with reality, limiting the unlimited and determining the dimension of social order (Agama 2020, 25).

This is why African traditional education is characterized as comprehensive and all embracing. Traditional education is not limited to physical (practical) form of education but intertwined with moral education. Thus, African traditional education covers every aspect of human development. It aimed at developing the totality of man and making him an upright member of the society. These were the distinguishing factors between the education of the old African society and the contemporary pattern of education. Fafunwa (1991, 16) has it that, "Education in old Africa was not rigidly compartmentalized as the contemporary system today. Educators are beginning to talk about universities without walls, schools without classes, and subjects without grades". It is becoming a reverse to the old African system of education but with much difference since it is no longer assimilating the pragmatic disposition of education. The purpose, methods and contents of the traditional education were all knitted. They were not divided into separate sections like the Western system of education

However, since the Western system of education has dominated the African traditional education, and it is no longer yielding to the objective goals of education in Africa, this paper is in the view that there should be an intercultural philosophical principle in the present African system of education. It is important that Africans fittingly engage with, and expand their knowledge and understanding through educational system that involves conceptual and life-practice resources.

Philosophy and Goals of Education

In education industry, philosophers have always engaged, contended, contemplated and influenced the general systems and cultures of education. The education industries here involve the educational ideologies, management, goals, leadership, theories of knowledge, curricular, processes of learning and so on. Different schools of philosophical thoughts have made a lot of impact on education.

The Socratic or dialectic method in education has proved that there is no particular way of attaining truth and no single person has a monopoly of knowledge, an illusion to participative decision-making process. Knowledge acquisition is vice versa. This philosophy behind education has made Aristotle to emphasize that education is for rational being and rational society. For him, once education is neglected, the society suffers. He believed that education played a major role in cultivating the human mind and civic excellence while making a distinction between liberal and vocational education. The modern education today still lives by his recommendation that "we become just by performing just acts, temperate by performing temperate ones, brave by performing brave ones", ethically correct guidance for educators` and parents (Palmer, 2007). Palmer placed this deductively from the idea of education in Plato. Parents and educators should be the philosopher-kings (The Allegory of the Cave) which according to Plato are the highest receiving of the most education. They act as guardians for the society and care for the less privileged, the younger ones, and most importantly, the illiterates(the prisoners in Plato`s ideology).

Pertinent to note that even in humanism, there was a discovery, a belief in human potential and abilities. Whereas, scholasticism emphasized theology, medicine and law, humanism desired to widen the educational spectrum. Humanism brought with education "the ability to express oneself and factual knowledge as goal" and aims at having "a sound mind in a sound body, with the intellectual in harmony with the spiritual" (Freire, 1996). Although, humanism seemed to be condemned because of lack of psycho-spiritual components as regards to the intellectual capabilities of man. But then the dialectical modernization syndrome in education industry that resulted to critical theory became even more deplorable because it contributed the impotency of man in the collective existential bargain. This is exactly what happened between African traditional education and Western education. The Western colonies adopted the critical theories over the traditional education, influencing and dominating the old African system of education with their imposed system of government. Through this their critical theory, Africa was deprived of their freedom, autonomy, choice and self-fulfillment in their own style of education. It is very sincere that when man lacks the choice which are the necessary characteristics of human nature, it will endanger him to a state of "commodification, standardization and massification" (Freire, 2003) which in turn reduces man to a mere automation. Education without choice, freedom, dignity and ethical professionalism has no productive value. When individuals acquire the rightful education, the security of government and the entire society is ensured and sustained.

In the era of enlightenment, philosophers and men alike advocated for changes in pursuit for educational goals. "It was a period when liberation of the human mind was the order of the day including freedom from the religious bigotry and alienation" (Okafor, 2013, 104). The importance of education was for the sake of the society where education becomes the highest goal through which all things being useful. Emphasis on education was what could become a person through education. The exponents of the enlightenment period were so concerned about the holistic nature of education bearing in mind that no part of education could be greater than the other and that the happiness of man should go beyond the utility.

Rousseau postulated the best form of education to have come through nature with which there should be no coercion in the course of this natural involvement. This for him would reduce any imposition and monopoly of knowledge from the educator. Thus, it would give room for the development of autonomy and freedom as an attribute of humanity.

Significant in Dewey is that education should be pragmatic while experience plays an important role psychologically and sociologically as interdependent factors. As a result, knowledge acquisition becomes a transaction between the knower and the environment taking a practical means. The means of solving a problem and the emphasis on experiment as projected by Dewey can be developed into a habit that is exchangeable to a disposition of situations in today`s type of education (Curren, 2003; Palmer 2007). In his book, "My Pedagogic Creed", Dewey (1897), placed individual as an organic union that are more of interdependent and interexistedness.

Going by the above philosophies argued for the goals of education historically proves that man lives in a state of flux due to the nature of his experiences and environment especially in the education industry. Consequently, their thoughts and impacts on the issues of education, educational goals, change, sustainability, motivation, freedom, autonomy, self-reflection, critical consciousness, ethics, praxis, decision-making process, participating classroom management, learning process, curriculum-content, ethical leadership, diversity, civic responsibilities, core values, etc. remain indubitable (Okafor 2013, 107). Accordingly, the problem calls for rethinking or a critical sensitivity on the contemporary pattern of education in Africa. The old African style of education has embraced the core values of education including responsibility, reflection, pragmatism and many more. These are the common problems facing education in today`s Africa. Educators and the learners are no longer interested in the core values of education but on the certificate production.

Education in Africa was not individualistic neither was it customized to a particular set of goal. It was pertinent to human development that is substantial to the progress of the society. It was aimed at building up people`s lives for their individual responsibility and the society. Education should therefore reflect the essential life-needs of man and for the common good of the society. It should focus on the widest range of pragmatism that is consistent with the pursuit of equal opportunity and societal development. An education that is appropriate to the essentials of good living, equal access and equal opportunities to enhance their capabilities should be the target.

As education is the key to the success of both individuals and the society, the philosophical foundation of that education remains indispensable as it will continue to guide the students in decision making. In this way, one`s philosophy of education could be part of educational dimensions that would arouse an atmospheric condition of developing the psychology, intellectuality, physical and social value of mankind in African society. This would also create a future world whereby education can constructively thrive and in which people can as well have a self-discovery, self-construction, self-employed, and self-actualization in life. Having known that education is life changing, is an ideal to have academic freedom and autonomy (no imposition of a particular educational culture like western education in Africa) for the sake of realization of mental ideas into practice. It is pertinent to note that within the sphere of one`s philosophy of education, academic freedom is necessary for quality productivity in educational and scientific world. It is important to secure and protect such integrity in order to be responsible as individual and to the larger community. Education entails responsibilities and as such, the industries must accept the responsibilities that are inherent in it and should basically operate pragmatically.

However, drawing our attention once more to the above educational philosophies will reveal the fact that in the course of understanding the goals and needs of education, each epoch contradicted each other. Yet, the philosophical thoughts have unavoidably contributed positively to the development of modern education globally. But while it is so, Africa is still lagging behind with the objective goals and the standardization in the education industry. This simple fact has compelled to look at education in Africa more vertically with a widened range of inter cultural philosophy in education. This will help to have education that is constructive, contextually based on our tradition and culture and emphatically analytical and practical, with all the components equally no more than the other; and an education that emphasizes equal opportunity regardless of gender, culture and ethnicity.

African Traditional Style of Education

Generally, education for humanity is as old as man himself. The only thing is that people of different kinds have various styles and changes in their experience of education. The African continent experienced its own style of training and learning before the developmental changes brought in by the colonial masters. Consequently, there was no school with structures containing teachers and students in old African traditional style of education. The family units served as an important structure of provision and acquisition of knowledge. The existence of education within the family unit and lack of documentation for verification and updating the acquired knowledge and skills attributed to its limitations and incapacitation of advancement. Though, knowledge, skills and attitudes were still conveyed from generation to generation.

Education in the old African societies was basically through oral communication. Knowledge, skills and attitudes that served as important educational vehicles for the members of the community were shared orally. For instance, oral literature which comprises myths, fables, legends, folktales, proverbs, etc. was administered through oral communication. Correspondingly, Smith (1940, 64-83) described the uses of folktales as educative devices in traditional African societies. While Marah (2006, 18) has it that:

Stories are used to amuse and express feelings, but to also teach ideal forms of behavior and morality. Children learned by listening to their elders, imitating and 'emulating' them. These stories are usually handed down from one generation to the next; their main concern was to induct the youths into the moral, philosophical and cultural values of the community.

Worthy of note is that culture, skills and attitudes are commonly shared with newly found members who came as a result of birth, marriage, and those who were conquered in a war and integrated into the community. Knowledge of the environment like taboos was also used as a conservative strategy for educating the new members of the community. Through this method, new members got educated about the values, cultures, strategies and skills.

Moreover, there was no clear distinction between educational activities and socialization. Education takes place as people mixed together with other various activities. "The knowledge, skills and attitudes as well as social norms, morals and values peculiar to a given group were learned by the children, which meant that

transfer of information which translates into learning took place" (Mosweunyane 2013, 52). In other words, it was also a kind of education as argued by Rodney (1972, 261), acquired by children "from the examples and behaviors of elders in the society". The younger ones are being educated on the methods of farming; social etiquettes and other activities that ensure the smooth running of the social life that unite them together. The boys, for instance, observe and copy their father`s craft and learn practical skills in accordance with their physical and mental capacities. While on the part of the girls, their knowledge acquisition is centered on the roles each sex is expected and socialized to play for the reminder of their adult lives (Kenyatta 1965, 95-124).

Among all other methods, practicality was the mastery key for teaching and learning in the African traditional education. According to Block (1973, 30-36), the traditional method of teaching used is what Westerners today would call 'Mastery Learning'. It is the most common style of learning. It is believed in Africa that pragmatism in education makes the youngsters to develop fully into acceptable adults in the society.

Western Education in Africa

The Western education in Africa was not actually advantageous neither was it completely deleterious. In the first place, it has its potential of improvement that are yet to be exhausted even in the next future world. It has assisted in developing the African primitive standard of life. Different technological development and other objects of modern infrastructure have made it attainable for more comfortable life. Technology through Western education brought about the transformation of Africa more especially on the aspect of technology. The present technical know-how of Africa was extensively influenced by the system of Western education. At least, the establishments of induced technical courses like Engineering, Architecture, and some other ones that have lifted Nigeria, for instance, in search for huge developmental progress that will enable them to meet up with the rate at which the currently moving forward in the Western world. The modernity of road and bridge construction, houses, and other infrastructures in Nigeria today are some of the practical technical instances. Similarly, the constant increase and the popularity of using the computer in Nigeria nowadays have made educational activities easier in schools as well as sustaining a high level of technological relationship with the rest of the world. In sum, Western education in one way or another has contributed immensely to the advancement of education in Nigeria and other counterpart countries in Africa. It has made Africa to adequately compete with other intellectuals worldwide in different fields of learning.

Irrespective of the above development and the fact that Africa today cannot be compared to pre-colonial era, Africa is still lagging behind in so many areas educationally. This is because of the philosophical background deep rooted in the inception of the Western education in Africa. This philosophy has contributed in Africa`s backwardness in education. It is the same reason why the level of development in all aspect is still one sided. The above technological developments discussed are still dependent on the uppermost hands of the Westerners. No wonder, African countries for decades are still addressed as the third world countries. The philosophical foundation of Western education in Africa (especially in Nigeria) was basically to speak, read and write good English. This made them to lose their key language in education and converted the colonial (i.e. the English language) to become useful for teaching and learning in Africa. Thus, the qualification for securing a job was (and till date) on the paper qualification. This emphasis on paper qualification resulted on the encouragement of cheating and insecurity both in the school system and the society at large. This is simply because certificate is considered both as the means and the end of education or knowledge acquisition. It was not established on the notion of pragmatism that is, mastering and acquiring skills that would make the citizens to be involved in contributing and proffering of practical and technical solutions to the arising problems through science and technology. No wonder Okpilike (2012, 29) asserted that "the type of education that was introduced to the continent of Africa by the missionaries was designed to aid the acceptance of the Christian faith by converting those who come within the four walls of the mission house". He attributed this particular reason as why education in Africa could not serve and meet the needs of the people. Instead, the schools have continued to pursue those objectives set out by the colonial masters and thus making most countries in Africa to depend on foreign assistance for growth, many years after their independence. This is how the Europeans according to Buzan and Little (2000) took position in the whole continents and stamped upon them a system of territorial boundaries, trading economics and colonial administration. Their conquest in Africa was almost out of agreement". And each of the above strategies adopted by the white men formed the

synopsis of philosophic foundation embedded in the current educational system in Africa. Consequently, instead of the graduates to become job creators as they were before the Western education, they are made to become job seekers. The value of education has become ousted since unemployment has taken over the system. In fact, Ukeje (1970) described this system of education in Nigeria as the system that has at its best produced students as Nigeria in blood but English in opinion, in moral and in intellect. The pragmatic aspect of education seems to be zero since they are more of maintainers and consumers other than producers.

Interculturalization of Western and African Traditional System of Education

Having seen that Africans cannot avoid Western education because of its modernization, there should be a synthetic resolution of both - a positive blend of the both philosophies which can only be absorbed where possible. Nigerian situation for instance, reveals that there is need for pragmatism in education. Nigerian system of education lacks almost every practical application. Hence, it is important that such education should be abandoned and goes for the type that is more praxis-oriented. Nigerian system of education appears more theoretical than practical. Greater numbers of students graduate from schools without being engaged in any job. It is quite understandable that government cannot provide jobs for all who finish from schools. And this is one of the major reasons why there should be pragmatism in education - a system of education that will ensure self-employment to all graduates. This was basically the system of African traditional education. Though, it was too local and cannot measure up with the current development globally, but their philosophical background was excellent. It has been in their system that before one comes of age (adulthood or responsible man or woman) s/he must have been engaged in one form of job or the other. No wonder, Rousseau (1994, 80) maintained that:

People like men [and women are] amenable only when they are young; in old age, they become incorrigible. Once [bad habits] and costumes are established and prejudiced ingrained, it is a dangerous and futile enterprise to try to reform them; the people cannot bear to have the diseases treated, even in order to destroy it, like those stupid and fearful patients who tremble at the sight of a physician.

Traditionally, African people start from childhood in receiving their education or training. Children grow up to adults with an attached experience and or skillful job. They don't seek for job such that without which they remain jobless or unemployed.

The philosophical foundation of education in Nigeria does not feature in pragmatism. Pragmatism has the philosophy of practicality (usefulness of knowledge). Nigerian education system should develop such philosophical background by making sure that there is a provision of infrastructures for the application of acquired knowledge. It is so worrisome that students of Engineering graduates from school without the practical knowledge of the course. This makes it appear more meaningful to be apprentice than a student. Most often, students are being established without proper infrastructures for practical performance. For instance, Nigeria has schools of petroleum engineering and yet they have no functional refineries where the students can apply their knowledge.

Education in Africa should be contextualized on the old principle of African traditional education. While the Western education is ongoing, its philosophy should be put into African context. Contextualization would help Africa to curb the copycat mentality of investing their educational system on the ability to read, write and speak good grammar. Contextualization in this sense should be a kind of looking inward the situation of Africa and applying the principle of education as it was established in the old African society. It was an indispensable tool that was not only designed to assist in meeting the society's social, political, moral, cultural, and economic aspirations but would also impact on the individual skills, knowledge, dexterity, character, and desirable values that would foster the societal development and self- actualization. When the above formation is put in place, the present day Africa would be more opportune to create sense of order and discipline among the citizens and youths. The problem associated with current intellectuals is "education of no character". Education of the old African background will help students to develop values which make for good citizenship, inculcation of morals like tolerance, honesty, dedication, selflessness, hardworking and personal integrity. Just as it was, the emphasis on education was not on certificate but on the job well-done

and character formation. Therefore, today`s education should also train students to be responsible in the society. Hence, the alarming rate of violence will be abridged to the barest minimum in Africa.

Interculturalization of both the traditional African and Western system of education (where positive) will curtail the issue of grooming students on dependence and incompetence. It will help to improve the spirit of creativity among the students. It would bring about the discovery of hidden potentials and its application for individuals` survival and societal developments instead of waiting for white cola jobs as well as relapsing the developmental status of the nation. Having an intercultural philosophy of both will not only make the students to see the need for the appropriate element of their consciousness formation, but will educate and train them to be useful to themselves and the society at large. Through this, they have to be productive and self-reliant. This will go a long way to tackle the problem of idleness, blames on the government`s inability of job creation, stealing, kidnapping, killings and other source of crime especially among the youths.

Conclusion

This paper has elucidated vastly the benefits associated with African traditional education and the Western education. From all indication, it can be seen that just "one or the other" philosophical approach to the students and the realist education are needed in African society. Hence, like the Hegelian dialectic- the resolution of thesis and antithesis to a higher level of reality which is synthesis should be employed and affected. The synthesis of the two philosophical foundation should be such that the modernized type of education in Africa remains the same while the ugly part of the traditional education get lost and the pragmatic method of it be integrated into the adopted Western education. It is obvious that the kind of educational system that would serve the African political, social, religious, legal, and economic needs should be peculiar to their experience and employment status. Consequently, this paper calls for inter cultural philosophical foundation of education (in Africa) that would go further than the scope of the current formal education. The education that would not only be consistent in bringing food to the table of individuals, but should be holistic including facts, skills, physical discipline etc for the benefit and development of the society at large.

References:

Agama, C.S. (2020). Symbolism and Social Order among the Igbo. Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion. Vol. 9. No. 2. https://dx. Dio.org/w. 4314/ft.v9i2.2

Block, J.H. (1973). "Teaching, Teachers and Mastery Learning". Today`s education 11-12: 30-36.

Buzan, B and Little, R. (2000). International Systems in World History. Oxford University Press.

Curren, R. (2003). A Companion to the Philosophy of Education. MA: Black Well Publishing.

Dewey, J. (1897). My Pedagogic Creed. School Journal Vol. 54.pp. 70-80.

Fafunwa, B. (1991). History of Education in Nigeria. Ibadan: NPS. Pub.

Freire, P. (1996). Dedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage. New York: Continuum.

Friere, P. (2003). Education for Critical Consciousness. New York: Continuum. Kenyatta, J. (1965). Facing Mount Kenya. New York: Vintage Books.

Marah, J.K. (2006). The Virtues and Challenges of Traditional African Education. The journal of Pan-African studies. Vol. 1. No. 4.

Mosweunyane, D. (2003). The African Educational Evaluation: Traditional Training To Formal Education. High Education Studies. Vol. 3. No.4.

Okafor, G.C. (2013). Education for Empowerment an Integral Leadership Dimension. Nigeria: Victojo Production Services.

Okpilike, F.M.E. (2012). Western Education and the Neglect of African Cultural   Values in Nigerian School System. Journal of Education and Practice. Vol. 3. No. 14.

Palmer, D. (2007). Does the Center Hold? : An Introduction to western Philosophy. Blacklick, OH: McGraw-Hill Professional Publishing.

Rodney, W. (1972). The Social Contract. Trans. Christopher Belts. New York: Oxford University Press.

Smith, E.W. (1940). "The Function of Folktales". Journal of African Royal Society. Vol. xxxix, No. C: 64-83.

Ukeje, B.O. (1979). Foundation of Education. Benin City: Ethiope Publication Company.