



The Relevance of Indigenous Education to National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract: *The African continent has experienced much discrimination and degradation in the international community. To the early Europeans, Africa was a dark continent; hence the mindset that nothing good could come out of it. However, this world view has been proved to be untrue as Africa and Africans have always towered high in various fields of human endeavour. So much has been said by scholars in respect of relevance of African worldview in the quest for national development. This paper posits that the indigenous African education is a factor in development, which however has not been given serious attention in scholarship. One main area of focus of indigenous education is inculcation of morality and it is provable that there is a link between morality and development. Thus, underdevelopment could be blamed on neglect of African cultural values, which indigenous education promotes. This is not to say that there are no attendant problems in doing things in African ways. The paper shall cover the following key components; introduction, concept of indigenous African education, its relevance to the inculcation of morality and dignity of labour, implications for national development, challenges of modernity, recommendations and conclusion.*

Keywords: *Indigenous Education, National Development, African Culture, Morality, Nigeria.*

INTRODUCTION

Before the advent of western civilisation, the various indigenous communities in Africa had been established in various in different aspects of human endeavour. Thus, we can talk in terms of African culture, value system, family structure, religion, philosophy, morality, entrepreneurship, education among others. The way each of these was expressed brought out the uniqueness of Africa as a continent.

Though the ability to read and write, which is generally understood as literacy is a product of western civilization, through the propagation of Islam and Christianity, the relevance of indigenous education had always been cherished as a major attribute of the continent (Adekunle 2004:205). It should be noted that Africa is not alien to the international community and the academia. Consequently, there are several researches on the continent and the people. In this piece, the relevance of indigenous African education to national development was interrogated, with emphasis on Nigeria. Fafunwa's 1982: 14, concept of functionalism served as framework while data were collected through a content analysis of academic materials on the subject with inferences drawn from past experiences and present day occurrences. The state of development in present day Nigeria is attributable to collapse of moral values, which are inculcated through indigenous education. The sad reality has engendered bad leadership and problematic followership.

Concept of Indigenous African Education

As against western education, indigenous African education can be defined as the traditional process of acquiring skills, knowledge and values. This is what is referred to as informal education. Every society in the world has its unique ways of transmitting cultural heritage from one generation to another. Broadly speaking in Africa, an educated man is a warrior, a hunter, a noble man and man of character. Thus,

those who were knowledgeable in their vocation and societal ethics, and were repositories of their cultures were adjudged to be educated. (Lawal 2005: 127).

There are two distinctive differences between western and indigenous forms of education. The first is concerned with curriculum, which is the hallmark of the former. From the pre-primary to tertiary level, there are curricula for subjects and disciplines, which instructors follow in order to ensure efficiency. However, in the indigenous education system, there is no written curriculum (Dada 2009:44). The reason is that reading and writing do not fall into the system. The second difference is duration of learning. In western education, there is specific duration for each segment and in most cases, a limit to the number of years one can spend on a programme; especially at the tertiary level and whosoever does not meet the requirement will be withdrawn from the programme. This is not the case in indigenous education, where there is no time limit as at every stage of life, no matter one's age, learning continues and terminates at death.

Indigenous education is transmitted both directly and indirectly. Direct method involves a process of child training in the family, where the child spends his or her early life. Apart from instructing the child, those who learn trades – apprentices are given direct instruction by their masters. Also, a group of people or an entire community may be involved in impartation of knowledge. This is premised on the fact that the traditional Africa is governed by the spirit of oneness, we-feeling, live-and-let-live, fraternity and concern for others. In indirect approach, the child and the learner imitate an adult and a master respectively. The inculcation of moral values for instance, goes beyond parents and elders telling young people to imbibe good acts and abstain from bad deeds, they are expected to live by good examples, which could have impact on them. Invariably, they are models for those who see them as such and follow their steps. There is also unconscious absorption of moral lessons and good manners by the learner through proverbs, stories and legends, which were usually told in the evening during the pre-literate time to ridicule faults and praise qualities, which the child was made to appreciate and exhibit (Afolabi, 1999:9-12).

What can be inferred from the foregoing is that everything an individual knows is not acquired directly. Some are learnt unconsciously while some are known out of one's inquisitiveness, which is product of the person's rationality. (Lawal and Familusi, 2012: 81).

Objectives of Indigenous Education

Indigenous education should be seen as a means to an end and not an end in itself. While some have dismissed its importance, indigenous education has been proven to be relevant in conservation and transmission of culture, tradition and experiences from one generation to the next (Awoniyi 1980: 1-4). Therefore, there are some specific objectives, which it aims at achieving. There are discussed as follows.

Development of Intellectual and Physical skills

Through indigenous method of learning the child's intellectual and physical skills are developed. Despite the fact that ability to read and write is not an indication of traditional literacy, there are many mentally tasking things an individual is expected to learn. These are acquired through observation, imitation and participation. The trainers demonstrate to the learners what they want them to put into practice and they are made to be acquainted with things in the environment. There are things that must be mastered by the trainee, which can only be achieved by someone who is intellectually sound. For example among the Yoruba, becoming an *Ifa* priest or experts in some trades requires high level intellectualism, which has nothing to do with reading or writing. This buttresses Adekunle's 2004: 205, submission that memorization is one of the effective vehicles of learning and indeed the bedrock of the teaching methodology in Yoruba religion and education. The way some people recite the *Ifa* corpus and *Oriki* - family panegyric will leave nobody in doubt that they are intellectually endowed via indigenous education method. On physical skills, the child watches the adults the way they do things such as jumping, dancing, climbing and wrestling. The acquisition of these skills is a profound way of making the child especially the male physically strong. African parents are always proud of children who excel in both physical and intellectual skills.

Inculcation of Respect for Elders and Leaders

In traditional Africa, much respect is accorded elders and people in positions of authority. Elders deserve due respect because age goes with experience while leaders are to be respected because they are God's representatives in their own right. These entities are unarguably custodians of customs and traditions for this reason they are held in high esteem. There are different ways elders are shown respect in Africa, which may vary from one culture to another. For example among the Yoruba, the young person kneels or prostrates to greet while in Hausa culture, he or she bows. What is of utmost importance is the respect that is shown. Another way is the need for young person to assist an elder whenever he or she is carrying anything. Also, the child does not have any right to contribute when elders are discussing except he or she is invited. The belief is that whoever wants to grow old must respect old people. Confirming this Sofola states that:

Every child in his socialization is taught to respect the person of the aged, and old age itself. He is constantly reminded that for moral reasons if he is going to be old one day, as everyone hopes he will, he should not molest any old person now for the sake of Nemesis, the God of vengeance. Hence the saying "he who aspires to be old should not take the old man's walking stick from him" (Sofola 1978:78).

The unquantifiable experience of elders impelled Yoruba proverbs like: *Bi omode ba l'aso bi agba, kole ni akisa bi agba* (If a child proves to be as wise as an elder, he/she cannot not have experience like an elder) *Ogbon ologbon kii je ka pe agba ni were* (Applying other people's wisdom denies one of calling an elder a lunatic). There are also some Igbo proverbs to support this: *Ihe okenye noduru ala hu, nwata agah ahu ya origoro osisi ukwu orji* (What an elder sees sitting will be difficult for the young one to see even if he climbs an Iroko tree). *Nwata bulie nna ya enu, akpaamnu ya ayochie ya anya* (If a child lifts his father, his scrotum will blindfold him). Moreover, those in position of authority irrespective of age must not be disregarded. This is the reason the Yoruba *Oba* (king), who is younger than many of his subjects, is worshipped by all and sundry. It should be noted that while the young ones respect parents and elders, they also expect good disposition from the elderly. Lawal buttresses this position as follows:

The child will want to be recognised, taken care of and be appreciated by the adults. The child will want adults to see his /her role in the society as being complementary to that of adults since both are expected to contribute their quota to the development of the society (Lawal 2005:129).

Obidi similarly opines that adults must not be found wanting in terms of good character. Therefore, it can be said that they are also learners and partners in character development. As noted before, learning in traditional Africa has no duration. He therefore, unequivocally remarks that in the past:

It was not enough for the adults to give instruction to the rising generation, they themselves were supposed to be models of good behaviour. Their good examples of, say, honesty, sincerity and hard work could and did have a far-reaching effects on children. Parents and elders therefore endeavoured to live an exemplary life and to demonstrate in their daily lives the values which their society cherished (Obidi 2005:131).

Character Development

Good character is a cardinal attribute of African philosophy and worldview. To the African, character is the very stuff that makes someone's life a joy because it is pleasing to God. Man's wellbeing here on earth depends on his good character and his place in the hereafter is determined by God according to the individual's character. This is the reason good character must be the dominant feature of a human being. Of course, character is believed to distinguish a man from animal (Sofola 1978: 120) In view of this, those

who have character deficiency face social ostracism (Familusi 2009: 102). Therefore character formation is a major objective of indigenous education. According to Fajana 1978 quoted in Obidi 2005: 230, the aim of traditional education in Nigeria was to discipline all the faculties of the individual and to help him or her to be useful in the society. Africans cherish character as beauty, hence, the saying *Iwa l'ewa* (Character is beauty) *Iwa rere l'eso eniyan* (Good character is adornment). The Igbo believe that: *Nwanyi nwee ezigbo omume, di ya agaghi aju nri yaa* (If a woman is polite, her husband does not refuse her food). A child's character is moulded by his or her immediate social environment, through the home and the society. The child is expected to imbibe the virtues of honesty, respect, dutifulness, loyalty, sexual purity, obedience, among others and when he or she misbehaves, appropriate steps will be taken in terms of correction, sanction or punishment (Obidi, 2005: 127-128). In the same vein, good deeds are rewarded. The child is trained through the use of labour, which goes with sense of dedication, perseverance, tenacity of purpose, industry and commitment. Associated with this is the imposition of taboos to guide conduct. Taboos prohibit certain acts and breaking them may carry some degree of punishment. Given this, the child will not want to do anything that will bring a spell on him or her. Also, there are many proverbs or folktales that centre on inculcation of morality, which children learn from their parents or elders in the community. Apart from parents and elders, the age group equally played significant role in the moral education as it regulated the behaviour of members and made them conform to its norms. Older age groups mentored and guided the younger ones. The entire community was also involved in the child's upbringing through customary rites and festivals. It can be said that the moral upbringing of children in traditional Nigerian society was a collective effort of all adult members of any given community (Obidi 2005: 131).

Acquisition of Vocational Training and Development of Healthy Attitude towards Honest Labour

The spirit of self-reliance is characteristic of Africa. Therefore, people are trained to be gainfully employed by learning specific vocations, and engage in such in the spirit of honesty. This has been the reason indolence or laziness is detested. Indigenous training is carried out through apprenticeship, which usually lasts period of years. At the expiration, the learner becomes self employed and he/she would also be required to train others. An apprentice who serves the master diligently will be well trained in the trade. Some people may train directly under their parents while some may choose to send their children to their friends or neutral persons so as to ensure seriousness on the part of the learner. Traditional vocations include farming, hunting, carving, hair plaiting, painting, barbing, drumming, soap making, weaving, mat making and laundry. Some trades are gender based; hence it is very unlikely to have female blacksmiths or palm wine tappers, while it was not possible to have male hair dressers in those days. However, the demand of modern day reality has deemphasised gender specification of some of them.

The sense of self-reliance driven by vocational training is complimented by honest attitude towards honest labour. Therefore, people were trained to be skilful, knowledgeable and honest. Getting rich quick was not a focus as good name was cherished above wealth. Besides, each of the vocations has specific principles guiding it in terms of taboos and other ethical observances.

The aforementioned objectives are the core of indigenous African education. Their centrality to national development cannot be overlooked; this shall be discussed in the next section of this paper.

Indigenous Education and National Development in the Nigerian Context

Development, which can be defined as a process involving reorganisation and reorientation of entire economic and social system; and the process of improving the quality of human life (Ogunkola and Egwaikhide, 2001:28-29), is becoming a mirage in Nigeria as the country is witnessing an unprecedented backwardness in the education, economic, political, health and other sectors. Consequently, poverty, unemployment, underemployment and infrastructure decay continue unabated (Familusi 2017:18-19). Expectedly, life expectancy is low while avoidable deaths are very common. Much more has been said about this and several solutions have been proffered. However, they were non-effective because the imperative of morality, which is a focus of indigenous education was ignored. Omeregbe is of the view that

the most important aspect of the development of any country is the development of human personality, that is the moral development of the citizens that constitute the country. He emphatically says that:

The most important aspect of in the development of the human person is his moral development. Moral maturity is a mark of human development, and is the most important aspect of national development. Indeed, it is a *conditio-sine-qua-non* for national development. For we cannot talk of the development of a country if its citizens are morally underdeveloped and immature. The moral development of its citizens must precede other aspects of development otherwise the process of development would be obstructed by the immorality of the citizens (Omoregbe 1998:147).

For example in the political sector, morality has been thrown to the wind and Machiavellianism has become the guiding principles. Many a people believe that there is no link between morality and politics. It follows that; power must be attained and retained at all cost. Consequently, the electoral process is fraudulent as politicians engage in voting buying and collude with election umpires to falsify result. The result of politics without integrity is that accountability has been thrown out of it. Therefore, the government is made up of national treasury looters, who are into politics for self-enrichment by draining the national treasury with trepidation of conscience (Omoregbe 1998:132).

Apart from the problem of unemployment, many young people these days are in a hurry to get rich at all cost, for which reason they engage in all sort of things. Thus, there are cases of internet fraud, money ritual, armed robbery, prostitution and kidnapping. Youths and fairly old people alike want to relocate to Europe and America through any means. This is the reason; many are trapped and imprisoned there. It is not strange to see a twenty five year old man marrying a sixty year old woman because he needs visa to a foreign country in search of green pasture. Many artisans no longer believe in honesty while only a few are into apprenticeship. The result is obvious; the society is no longer safe for people to live.

Corruption, a major cause of underdevelopment and economic recession in Nigeria can be explained in terms of moral failure (Familusi 2018a 149-150). There is hardly any sector that is immune from the corruption, which is caused by monetization of political posts, poverty, and comatose control system. Obviously, no society can develop in the atmosphere of corruption as the case is Nigeria. This is supported by Familusi 2015 51-52, who says that “corruption... is as old as mankind. It manifests at every facet and level of human existence. Corruption is unarguably a social malady; hence war has always been waged against it. In spite of this, it remains unabated thereby constituting an albatross to development.”

Our argument so far in this section is that, from all indications, development has been elusive in Nigeria because the moral fabric is defective. However, we see a situation of hope through indigenous education, which has been neglected.

Some of the principles of indigenous education earlier discussed if properly channelled would contribute immensely to growth and development of Nigeria. Successive administrations had employed several methods towards repairing the ailing structure of the country through programmes such as ethical revolution, War against Indiscipline (WAI) War against Indiscipline and corruption (WAIC), National Rebirth, Rebranding Nigeria Project and Transformation Agenda but all to no avail. The Change Mantra of the present government has also not achieved anything because of the neglect of the place of moral rectitude. This is supported by Ekanola 2020: 38 who laments that since independence, Nigeria had evolved several developmental plans, strategies and structural adjustment programmes to facilitate social development, but sadly there was decline in the standard of living in an increasing proportion of the population. Familusi 2018b: 1, describes all the failed attempts as emotional rhetoric and superficial sloganeering. Therefore, with moral consciousness on the part of every Nigerian, unethical conducts that are responsible for the present state of development shall be minimized. In other words, if family and societal values are revived, there will be corresponding development. One can imagine how developed, a Nigeria that is corruption, kidnapping, terrorism, internet fraud and armed robbery free, will be. The position of Omoregbe on the import of human development through ethical orientation as a precursor to

national development, noted before is without ambiguity. This is what is required in the 21st Century Nigeria. One should note that western education that is not complemented with morality is a thrash and such harmful to those who acquire it and the society in which they live. The view of Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the benefit of the arts sciences to mankind presented in the following quote:

Since learned men began to appear among us, good men have disappeared. Rousseau meant that that the education of those “learned men” was not imbued with morality. Consequently, their education was not beneficial to mankind since it could not fulfil its purpose of catering for the needs of human nature. Men with high standard of education but very low standard of morality, those men who are “intellectual giants” but at the same time “moral dwarfs “are dangerous to the society (Omoregbe: 1998:151).

What can be deduced from this thesis is that men and women of low character are obstacles to national development. Therefore any country that is serious about development must not trivialise morality among its citizens.

Moreover, unemployment is an indication of underdevelopment. The rate is alarming because the number of graduates is increasing almost at geometric progression. Therefore, white collar jobs are no longer available. Apart from graduates, there are those who neither go to school nor learn any trade, hence, many youths who are supposed to be part of the labour force are dependants. Without any doubt, acquisition of vocational skills, which is one of the aims of indigenous education will make many people not only to be gainfully employed, but they will as well become employer of labour. Africans believe in dignity of labour and that no job is dirty. This is why the Yoruba people often say that *ise ni'se nje, eni ja'le lo b'omo je* (Every from of work is prestigious in its right, a person who steals, defiles humanhood). According to the Igbo, it is laziness that brings despair and hardship- *O bu umengwu na-eweta nkuda mmuo na ihe isi ike*. Our point of argument is that indigenous education is an agent of job creation and it could greatly rescue the nation from the web of joblessness, which has severely escalated poverty in the country. It is pertinent to stress that entrepreneurship is part of African worldview. Hence there were both male and female entrepreneurs in the traditional society. On this Alade 2012:164 notes that:

Wherever one turns to in traditional African societies, the spirit of independence, self-reliance and the dignity of labour pervaded such environments. The spirit can now be resuscitated in underdeveloped Africa that entrepreneurial activities could then be used to build and rebuild the social and economic environments. This becomes imperative in this era of joblessness when graduates of many years standing are roaming the street in search of jobs that are not available.

However, a major problem is the attitude of contemporary youths to hard work, which is a stumbling block to development as it is consistently experienced in Nigeria.

Effect of Western Civilization on Indigenous Education

As relevant as indigenous education is to development, it has suffered a devastating blow owing to western civilization. Hence, the objectives are not achieved as projected. The inculcation of respect for elders and those in positions of authority is fast becoming old fashioned. Therefore, wisdom of elders that are crucial to development are no longer sought and applied. Young people today, believe the wisdom of elders has become outdated. That is why things are not working as expected. The rot in the political sector could be blamed on the emergence of neophytes as leaders. The traditional institution is also affected as mundane things are now criteria for choosing a ruler in some cases. It was recently reported that a monarch beat up another monarch (<https://thenationonlineng.net>). That can only happen in a society that has lost the sense of tradition.

There is also a threat to morality in the contemporary time. The virtues of honesty, respect, dutifulness, loyalty, sexual purity, obedience among others, which youths used to imbibe in the past have virtually disappeared. Of course, it is no longer possible to scold anybody, anyhow when he or she misbehaves, because that would amount to violation of their rights. How can a society develop when the youths who will be leaders tomorrow are not morally sound?

Much has been said about unemployment as a serious problem in Nigeria and a major reason for underdevelopment; whereas, vocational training is an antidote to this problem via self-employment and entrepreneurship. The question is how many Nigerian youth are into trades like bricklaying, carpenter, painting, smithing and farming? These crafts are now simply detested and avoided because of western education. Many of the youths are ignorant of the fact that being educated does not prevent one from engaging in vocational skills. In fact, educated people will do them better.

The place of language in development is profound. In traditional Africa, the use of mother tongue was a cardinal attribute. However, things have changed and many Nigerian parents now want their children to speak the English Language at the neglect of their indigenous languages. A major implication of this is that many of those who teach the growing up English are half-educated. Such people grow up to understand, speak and write bad English thereby affecting western education, which they meant to promote. It is satirical that as Nigerians abandon their languages, foreigners embrace them. This development led to the establishment of the Yoruba Language Centre in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. This centre has trained many scholars from America, who now speak and write the language with ease.

The negative aspect of indigenous education must not be ignored in this paper. As elders are meant to be respected, many of them used to lord it over the young ones with impunity. In the past, elders were always right. Traditionally, they must not be accused of telling lies even if they did. Also a child who felt cheated would not have the courage to complain because of the fear of 'parental curses', which are believed to be potent. There is a Yoruba aphorism that the benefit accruing from being an elder is to take advantage over the young ones. All these were in the past as the child now has rights and consequently, he/she can no longer be maltreated. Child rights as contained in the General Assembly resolution 1386 (XIV) of 1959 are now being seriously advocated in Nigeria (Ayantayo 2011:11). This is a positive impact of western civilization on African indigenous education and a good development in the light of human value, however, it must not be abuse otherwise, some cultural values will be eroded.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The import of indigenous education in relation to development is the main thrust of this piece. In spite of some obvious misgiving, its relevance in the 21st Century society is undeniable. On this ground, the following recommendations are made.

There is a need to revive the waning cultural values so as instil the sense of rectitude in people most especially the young ones, many of whom no longer cherish living a moral life. It can be said that things were much better in traditional society than now in terms of character, peace and decorum (Famulusi 2009:109).

Civilization coupled with globalization was identified as a threat to impact of indigenous education. This is not to say that western civilization entirely lacks merit. It is therefore recommended that the beneficial and harmful aspects should be imbibed and rejected respectively.

The Ministry of Education at the federal and state levels must work towards integrating indigenous education into school curricula from pre-primary to tertiary levels, and such subjects and courses must be made compulsory for every student. Although moral instruction and civic education are taught in many schools, the impact is yet to be seen in the society. The reason is that most education curricula in contemporary Africa are structured along western culture and worldview, which do not regard core traditional African value. It is quite ironical that the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, that confers degrees on candidates who are worthy in character and learning does not have a compulsory course on ethics not

to talk of recognising the imperative of indigenous education. The opinion of Dada is apposite. He remarks that:

For education to enhance development in Africa it must be rooted on the traditional values, which create indigenous awareness. It is only within the context of this awareness that a society can face its own values analytically and relate to other cultural values critically...The value of transfer of Western educational and technological models into Africa can be accounted for on the basis that indigenous cultural values were not taken into cognizance (Dada 2009 :44).

From the foregoing, one can see the values inherent in indigenous education and their imperative in terms of national development. If the recommendations made are applied, the Nigeria will experience sanity and development shall no longer be obscure in the country.

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