

AFRICAN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract

This study addresses this issue of modern education and its destruction of unique, indigenous cultures and individual's identities. In essence, it examines the issues (definitions) of wealth and poverty, in other words, knowledge and ignorance. Furthermore, it reveals the effects of trying to institute a global education system or central learning authority, which can ultimately demolish traditional sustainable (agricultural and ecological) knowledge, in the breakup of extended families and communities, and in the devaluation of ancient spiritual traditions. Finally, the study promotes a deeper dialogue between cultures, suggesting that there is no single way to learn. No two human beings are alike because they develop under different circumstances, learning, and education.

Keywords: African, Indigenous, Education, Nigeria, Culture

Introduction

Indigenous education specifically focuses on teaching indigenous knowledge, methods, and content within formal or non-formal educational systems. The recognition and use of indigenous education method can be a response to the erosion and loss of indigenous knowledge through the process of colonialism, globalization, and modernity (May & Aikman, 2003). Indigenous communities should be able to reclaim and revalue their languages and traditions, and in so doing, improve the educational success of indigenous students, thus ensuring their survival as a culture (May & Aikman, 2003).

Increasingly, there has been a global shift towards recognizing and understanding indigenous models of education as a viable and legitimate form of education. Indigenous way of learning, instructing, teaching, and training have been viewed by many postmodern scholars as important for ensuring that students and teachers, whether indigenous or non-indigenous, are able to benefit from education in a culturally sensitive manner that draws upon, utilizes, promotes, and enhances awareness of indigenous traditions, beyond the standard Western curriculum of reading, writing, and arithmetic (Merriam et al. (2007).

A growing body of scientific literature has described indigenous ways of learning, in different cultures. Learning in indigenous communities is a process that involves all members in the community. The learning styles that children use in their indigenous schooling are the same ones that occur in their community context. These indigenous learning styles often include: observation, imitation, use of narrative/storytelling, collaboration, and cooperation as seen among Igbo-African communities. This is a hands-on approach that emphasizes direct experience and learning through inclusion (Merriam et al. (2007). The child feels that she is a vital member of the community, and she is encouraged to participate in a meaningful way by community members. Children often effectively learn skills through this system, without being taught explicitly or in a formal manner.

This differs from Western learning styles, which tend to include methods such as explicit instruction in which a figure of authority directs the learner's attention, and testing/quizzing. Creating an educational environment for indigenous children that is consistent with upbringing, rather than an education that follows a traditionally Western format, allows for a child to retain knowledge more easily, because they are learning in a way that was encouraged from infancy within their family and community (Ezeife, 2002).

Traditional Western methods of education generally disregard the importance of indigenous cultures and environmental contribution, which results in lack of relevance for students of aboriginal backgrounds. Modern schools have a tendency to teach skills stripped of context which has a detrimental impact on indigenous students because they thrive off educational environments in which their cultures and languages are respected and infused in learning (Munroe, B et al., 2007, p.318). Various aspects of indigenous cultures need to be considered when discussing indigenous learning, such as content (how culture is portrayed in text and through language), social culture/interactions (relation between class

interactions within indigenous communities), and cognitive culture (differences in worldview, spiritual understandings, practical knowledge, etc.) (Munroe, B et al., 2007, p.318).

This study addresses this issue of modern education and its destruction of unique, indigenous cultures and individual's identities. In essence, it examines the issues (definitions) of wealth and poverty, in other words, knowledge and ignorance. Furthermore, it reveals the effects of trying to institute a global education system or central learning authority, which can ultimately demolish traditional sustainable (agricultural and ecological) knowledge, in the breakup of extended families and communities, and in the devaluation of ancient spiritual traditions. Finally, the study promotes a deeper dialogue between cultures, suggesting that there is no single way to learn. No two human beings are alike because they develop under different circumstances, learning, and education.

What is African Indigenous Education?

African indigenous education was a lifelong process of learning whereby a person progressed through predetermined stages of life of graduation from cradle to grave (Cameroon & Dodd, 1970). This implies that indigenous education was continuous throughout lifetime from childhood to old-age.

Mushi (2009) defines African indigenous education as a process of passing among the tribal members and from one generation to another the inherited knowledge, skills, cultural traditions, norms and values of the people. This does not in any way suggest that indigenous learning, goals, content, structure and methods have not been or cannot be enriched by outside influences.

In any case, traditional African indigenous education was community oriented, geared to solving the problems of the community. The instructional activities were, therefore, directed towards the social life and general need of the community, so as to prepare the learners to fit into their community; and, as Kenyeta (1961) rightly observed, it was taught in relation to a concrete situation. It put emphasis on practical learning and the young adult learned by watching, participating and executing what they learnt. The skills like carving, masonry, clay working, cloth making, building and construction, cooking, and home management were insisted among the children in the community. These were some of the skills opened to all, as they consisted of the basic skills, knowledge and attitudes that enabled individuals to live and function effectively in the society.

The question of learning by doing is very important. The best way to learn sewing is to sew; the best way to learn farming is to farm; the best way to learn cooking is to cook; the best way to learn how to teach is to teach and so on (Nyerere, 1975, in Mushi, 2009). Moreover, it was not separated from other spheres of community activity. This implies that it was the whole life of the community and it had no special time of a day or life when it took place. Instead, it took place in the entire span of life. It can therefore be viewed as a life-long process in which an individual acquired skills, knowledge and values from womb to tomb. Mushi (2009), comments that in this case education was essentially part of life and not separated from the societal culture. Again, it was functional. The knowledge, skills and values that were imparted were relevant to the socio-economic activities of an individual. The learners learned the skills that were for immediate and long term activities. It had no paper word-testing and certificates but learners graduated ceremoniously. There were basically no formal exams at the end of a specific level of training, but a learner was considered a graduate when he or she was able to practice what he or she had learnt throughout the period of training. This is unlike the modern education system that issues even first class certificates to people who know little or nothing in their study areas.

Paradigm of Western Education Model

The fact is that there has been a modern-day global shift towards recognizing the importance of indigenous education. At the same time, there is the rapid spread of Western education models throughout the world. Starting from the time when the colonial warlords forced themselves into Africa up until today, there is a strong, and one might say blind, belief that a Western education or schooling is the only way to provide a “better life” for indigenous children (Doige, 2003). Throughout history, indigenous people have experienced, and continue to experience many negative interactions with Western society, which has led to the oppression and marginalization of indigenous people (Doige, 2003)

Carol Black writes, “One of the most profound changes that occur when modern schooling is introduced into traditional societies around the world is a radical shift in the locus of power and control over learning from children, families, and communities to more centralized systems of authority (Black, 2012). Black continues by explaining that in many non-modernized societies, children learn in a variety of ways, including free play or interaction with multiple children,

immersion in nature, and directly helping adults with work and communal activities (Black, 2012). They learn by experience, experimentation, trial and error, by independent observation of nature and human behavior, and through voluntary community sharing of information, story, song, and ritual (Black, 2012). More importantly, local elders and traditional knowledge systems are autonomous in comparison to a strict Western education model. Yet adults have some control over children's 'moment-to-moment movements and choices (Black, 2012). According to Black, once learning is institutionalized, both the freedom of the individual and her respect for the elder's wisdom are ruined:

Family and community are sidelined...The teacher has control over the child, the school district has control over the teacher, the state has control over the district, and increasingly, systems of national standards and funding create national control over states (Black, 2012).

When indigenous knowledge is seen as inferior to standard school curriculum, an emphasis is placed on an individual's success in a broader consumer culture instead of on an ability to survive in his or her own environment. Hence Black concludes with a comment, "We assume that this central authority, because it is associated with something that seems like an unequivocal goal - 'education' - must itself be fundamentally good, a sort of benevolent dictatorship of the intellect (Black, 2012). From a western perspective, centralized control over learning is natural and consistent with the principles of freedom and democracy, and yet, it is this same centralized system or method of discipline that does not take into account the individual, which in the end stamps out local culture.

The education system of the colonial masters reinforces Western cultures, prior knowledge and learning experiences which leads to the marginalization and oppression of various other cultures (Munroe, et al, 2013). By teaching students primarily through European perspectives, this results in non-European students believing that they cannot learn through their cultures or that their cultures have not contributed to the knowledge of societies. The act of decolonization would greatly benefit indigenous students of Africa and other marginalized students because it involves the deconstruction of engagement with the values, belief and habits of Europeans (Munroe, et al, 2013)

Indigenous African Methods of Learning

Indigenous education involves: oral tradition (such as listening, watching, imitating), group work, apprenticeship, and cultural context. Additional, knowledge to indigenous people is sacred, centers on the idea that each student constructs knowledge individually and is *rooted in experience and culture* (Cameroon & Dodd, 1970). Learning is believed to be life-long and involves a unique sense of self identity and passion, as well as focuses on the importance of community survival and contributions to life and community sustainability. The indigenous way of learning occurs when diverse perspectives are interconnected through spiritual, holistic, experiential, and transformative methods. The optimal learning environment for indigenous students incorporates the land (and traditional skills); indigenous languages, traditions, cultures, people (self, family, elders, and community), and spirituality (Cameroon & Dodd, 1970).

Active participation: In many indigenous communities of Africa, children often begin to learn through their eagerness to be active participants in their communities. Through this, children feel incorporated as valued members when given the opportunity to contribute to everyday social and cultural activities. For example, in Igbo traditional villages, great importance is placed on engaging in mature activities to help children learn how to participate and contribute appropriately. Children here are likely to demonstrate that they want to be productive members of the community because they have been parts of a social, collaborative culture that views everyday work as something that everyone can partake and help in.

A main model of learning is to incorporate children in various activities where they are expected to be active contributors. The different forms of activities can vary from momentary interaction to broad societal foundations and how those complement their community's traditions. In many African societies, girls as young as four can work alongside their mothers when washing clothes in the river - rather than being given verbal instructions, they observe keenly, imitate to the best of their ability, and understand that their inclusion is crucial to the community. Rather than being separated and directed away from mature the work, the indigenous heritage children are expected to observe and pitch in.

Assessment: In many indigenous African communities, children rely on assessment to master a task. Assessment can include the evaluation of oneself, as well as evaluation from external influences, like parents, family members, or community members. Assessment involves feedback given to learners from their

support; this can be through acceptance, appreciation or correction. This can be through acceptance, appreciation or correction. The purpose of assessment is to assist the learner as they actively participate in their activity. While contributing in the activity, children are constantly evaluating their learning progress based on the feedback of their support. With this feedback, children modify their behavior in mastering their task.

Classroom structure: The structure of indigenous African classrooms that reflect the organization of indigenous communities eliminates the distinction between the classes. Effective classroom modeled off on the social structure of indigenous communities are typically focused on group or cooperative learning that provide an inclusive environment (Ezeife, 2002).

A key factor for successful indigenous education practices is the *student-teacher* relationship. Classrooms are socially constructed in a way that the teacher shares the control of the classroom with the students. Rather than taking an authoritative role, the teacher is viewed as a co-learner to the students, and they maintain a balance between personal warmth and demand for academic achievement (Ezeife, 2002). Classrooms in indigenous communities that incorporate indigenous ways of learning utilize open-ended questioning, inductive/analytical reasoning, and student participation, in group setting.

Spirituality: indigenous students make meaning of what they learn through spirituality (Doige, 2003). Spirituality in learning involves students making connections between morals, values and intellect rather than simply acquiring knowledge (Doige, 2003). Knowledge to indigenous people is personal and involves emotions, culture, traditional skills, nature, etc. For this reason, indigenous students need time to make connections in class, and often benefit from a safe and respectful environment that encourages discussions among students.

Pedagogical Approaches to Indigenous Education

The following are some pedagogical approaches aimed at empowering indigenous students and indigenous communities through education that does not rely on Western culture.

Culturally relevant pedagogy: Culturally relevant pedagogy involves curriculum tailored to the cultural needs of students and participants involved. Culture is at the core of this pedagogy and teachers and educators aim for all students to achieve academic success, develop cultural competence and develop

critical consciousness to challenge the current social structures of inequality that affect indigenous communities in particular (Lim, 2019). Culturally relevant pedagogy also extends to culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogy which actively works to challenge power relations and colonization by reclaiming, through education, what has been displaced by colonization and recognizing the important of community engagement in such efforts (McCarty, 2014).

Critical indigenous pedagogy: This focuses on resisting colonization and oppression through education practices that privilege indigenous knowledge and promote indigenous sovereignty. Beyond schooling and instruction, critical indigenous pedagogy is rooted in thinking critically about social injustices and challenging those through education systems that empower youth and teachers to create social change (Garcia, 2013). The goal of educators and teachers under this pedagogy is to guide students in developing critical consciousness by creating a space for self-reflection and dialogue as opposed to mere instruction (Garcia, 2013) This form of pedagogy empowers indigenous youths to take charge and responsibility to transform their own communities. Under critical indigenous pedagogy, schools are considered sacred landscapes since they offer a sacred space for growth and engagement (Garcia, 2013) Western-style schooling is limited in engaging indigenous knowledge and languages but schools that embrace critical indigenous pedagogy recognize indigenous knowledge and epistemologies which is why indigenous schools should be considered sacred landscapes (Garcia, 2013)

Lad-based pedagogy: This recognizes colonization as dispossession and thus aims to achieve decolonization through education practices that connect indigenous people to their native land and the social relations that arise from those lands (Garcia, 2013). Land-based pedagogy encourages indigenous people to center love for the land and each other as the core of education in order to contest oppression and colonialism that is aimed at deterring indigenous people from their land (Garcia, 2013).

Community-based pedagogy/education: This is central to the revival of indigenous cultures and diverse languages. This form of pedagogy allows community members to participate and influence the learning environment in local schools (May, 1999). Community-based education, according to May, embraces the ideas of Paolo Freire who called for individuals to “become active participants in shaping their own education” (May, 1999).

May (1999) identifies the main effects of instilling community-based pedagogy in schools as including the following:

- Parent involvement in decision making encourages children to become closer to their teachers.
- Indigenous parents themselves gain confidence and positively impact their children's learning.
- Teacher-parent collaboration eliminates stereotypes non-indigenous teachers may have about indigenous people.
- Communities collectively gain self-respect and achieve political influence as they take responsibility for their schools.

The school environment under a community-based education system requires communication and collaboration between the school and the community. The community must share leadership with the schools and must be involved in decision-making, planning, and implementation (May, 1999). Children learn through the guidance rather than determinants of their teachers or elders and are taught skills of active participation. Out of community-based education arises 'community-based participatory research' that facilitates co-learning and co-partnership between researchers and community members to promote community capacity building (May, 1999). This approach to research builds strength and empowers community members.

Culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogy: McCarty and Lee (2014) express that national sovereignty must include education sovereignty (McCarty, 2004, p.122). The authors report that this pedagogical system is necessary in education based on, first, it reduces asymmetrical power relations and the goal of transforming legacies of colonization; second, it helps to reclaim and revitalize what has been displaced by colonization; and third, it highlight the need for community-based accountability (McCarty, 2004, p.122). This approach emphasizes that teaching language is culturally sustaining and revitalizing; which creates a sense of belonging and strengthens cultural identities, pride, and knowledge. The goal is to heal forced linguistic wounds and convey important cultural and linguistic knowledge that connects to the school's curriculum and pedagogy (McCarty, 2004, p.122). Balancing academic, linguistic, and cultural interests is based on accountability to indigenous communities. As a matter of fact, linguistic teaching is a fight for what McCarty called plurilingual and pluricultural educations (McCarty, 2004, p.122). Educators can, therefore, attempt to balance federal and state requirements with local communities and indigenous nations.

Language as an Instrument of Indigenous Knowledge

Researchers have brought up the importance of language revitalization efforts to preserve native culture. Native language is seen as path to preserving native heritage such as knowledge of medicine, religion, cultural practices and traditions, music, art, human relationships and child-rearing practices, as well as indigenous ways of knowing about the sciences, history, astronomy, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology (Garcia, 2013). From our point of view, the traditional language is a sacred gift, the symbol of one's identity, the embodiment of one's culture and traditions, and a means for expressing inner thoughts and feelings. Finally, it has been suggested that it is especially important to recognize native languages in school settings because this leads to teachers recognizing the people, which leads to self-esteem and academic success for the students (Garcia, 2013).

For indigenous learners and instructors, the inclusion of native languages into schools often enhances educational effectiveness by providing an education that adheres to an indigenous person's own inherent perspectives, experiences, language, and customs, thereby making easier for children to transition into the realm of adulthood (Enyi, 2001, p.18). For non-indigenous students and teachers, such an education often has the effect of raising awareness of individual and collective traditions surrounding indigenous communities and peoples, thereby promoting greater respect for and appreciation of various cultural realities (Enyi, 2001, p.18). In terms of educational content, the inclusion of indigenous knowledge within curricula, instructional materials, and textbooks, has largely the same effect on preparing students for the greater world as other educational systems, such as the Western model.

There is value in including indigenous knowledge and education in the public school system. Students of all backgrounds can benefit from being exposed to indigenous education, as it can contribute to reducing racism in the classroom and increase the sense of community in a diverse group of students (Wilson, 2001). There are a number of sensitive issues about what can be taught (and by whom) that require responsible consideration by non-indigenous teachers who appreciate the importance of interjecting indigenous perspectives into standard mainstream schools. Concerns about misappropriation of indigenous ways of knowing without recognizing the plight of indigenous peoples are legitimate. Since most educators may be non-indigenous, and because indigenous perspectives may offer solutions for current and future social problems, it is important to refer to indigenous educators and agencies to develop curriculum

and teaching strategies while at the same time encouraging activism on behalf of indigenous peoples.

Incorporating indigenous ways of learning into educational practices has potential to benefit both indigenous and non-indigenous learners. The skills needed in modern curriculum include: collaboration, creativity, innovation, problem-solving, inquiry, multicultural literacy, etc (Wilson, 2001). Indigenous ways of learning incorporate all these skills through experiential and holistic methods. Additionally, indigenous education styles align with the above skills through involving teachers and students as co-constructors of education, and by valuing the interconnectedness of content and context.

Child Development of the Indigenous People of Africa

Styles of children's learning across various indigenous communities in Africa have been practiced for centuries prior to colonization and persist today. Despite extensive anthropological research, efforts made towards studying children's learning and development in indigenous communities of Africa as its own discipline within developmental psychology, has remained rudimentary. However, studies that have been conducted reveal several larger thematic commonalities, which create a paradigm of children's learning that is fundamentally consistent across differing cultural communities (Guillermo, 2010).

Ways of Learning

- **Learning by Observing**

A common learning process in Indigenous African communities is characterized as learning by observing and pitching-in to everyday family and community activities (Rogoff, 2014). Learning through observation and pitching-in integrate children into their community activities and encourage their participation, so that they become eager to take initiative to collaborate with their community among different tasks independently (Rogoff, 2014) The overarching concept of learning by observing and pitching-in can be broken down into smaller theoretical subdivisions which interact and are not mutually exclusive: for one, these communities encourage incorporation of children into ongoing familial and community endeavors. Treating children as legitimate participants who are expected to contribute based on their integration as active contributors towards mature processes and activities within their respective communities.

These endeavors are approached collaboratively as a group (Rogoff, 2014). This allows for flexible leadership and fluid coordination with one another to successfully facilitate such activities. With a relatively neutral platform for everyone to be actively engaged, an environment is promoted where learning to blend differing ideas, agenda and pace is necessary and thus, encouraged. This flexible organization also promotes mixed-age socialization while working, such as storytelling and jokes, from which these children build morals and connections. In this way, tasks become anticipated social endeavors, rather than chores (Rogoff, 2014).

In most indigenous African communities, communication and learning occurs when all participants view a shared reference to encourage familiarity with the task. Moreover, it incorporates usage of both verbal and nonverbal communication. When explanations are provided, it is coupled with the activity so that it can be a means of further understanding or easier execution of the ongoing/anticipated activity at hand. In addition, narratives and dramatization are often used as a tool to guide learning and development because it helps contextualize information and ideas in the form of remembered or hypothetical scenarios (Rogoff, 2014).

- **Storytelling**

The development of children's understanding of the world and their community is reflected in the numerous storytelling practices within indigenous communities. Stories are often employed in order to pass on moral and cultural lessons throughout generations of indigenous peoples, and are rarely used as a unidirectional transference of knowledge. Rather, narratives and dramatizations contextualize information and children are encouraged to participate and observe storytelling rituals in order to take part in the knowledge exchange between elder and child (Guillermo, 2010).

In such cultures, community members have nearly as much agency as the child's parents in the child's learning. Parents (and other community members) instill indirect support to activities, encouraging autonomy and self-responsibility. Learning and everyday endeavors are not mutually exclusive. Because the children are incrementally eased into taking a bigger part in the community, processes, tasks, and activities are adequately completed with no compromise to quality. Hence, the community is not weary of task risks simply due to the presence and involvement of children. Parents are not the only source that children learn from. In Igbo community, a young boy does not necessarily learn

the flute from his mother or father but by observing his brother, who, perhaps, learned by observing his father. These traditions continuously are being passed through generations.

- **Assessment**

The process of assessment includes appraisal of both the learner's progress towards mastery, and the success of support being given to the learner. Assessment occurs during a task so that it can strengthen the overall contribution being made. Then, feedback is given of the final product or effort to contribute, where it is either accepted and appreciated by others, or corrected to make future endeavors more productive. Thus, the evaluation process is ongoing and coexists with the task itself, rather than occurring after task is completed....26....

- **Goal of Learning**

The goal of learning is about the transformation of participation in which other important skills and information are acquired in the process (that is, responsibility, consideration, observation, etc). Learning fosters integration within the community and activates the development of socialization skills. Learning also promotes the aggregation of knowledge of cultural practices and spirituality.

Another crucial component of child development deals with the initiative and self-induced motivation of the learners (or children) themselves. Their eagerness to contribute, ability to execute roles, and search for a sense of belonging help mold them into valued members of both their families and communities alike (Paradise, 1994). The value placed on "shared work" or help emphasizes how learning and even motivation is related to the way the children participate and contribute to their family and community. One of the motivational factors that contribute to indigenous children's learning stems from "inherent motivation" where the child feels a sense of accomplishment or contentment in helping their family or community because the contribution emphasizes their roles and value in their community (Paradise, 1994).

Indigenous children take pride in their contributions to the community. When they contribute to their household, children are able to see the value and importance of their work as it helps maintain their family's wellbeing. The children are motivated to observe and learn because they are aware they are making an important contribution to the family or community; they feel pride and a sense of self-worth as they help provide for their younger siblings, family

and community (Paradise, 1994). Through such inherent motivation, children are expected to learn community practices in order to become valuable contributors in the community.

In addition, an authentic or natural setting could be considered just as important in children's learning as a teacher. This is because indigenous children learn many of their skills from observing their surroundings and participating in activities with their peers and other members of the community (Paradise, 1994). Motivation to learn is a product of the learner's inclusion into the major activities and prioritized goals of the community (Paradise, 1994). The child feels that she is part of the community and actively tries to contribute and learn without structured formal instruction.

Philosophical Basis for African Indigenous Education

African indigenous education did not develop in a vacuum, it had its own philosophical bases on which it was built. Having looked at some of the main characteristics of African indigenous education, let us examine its philosophical bases. The following should be considered as philosophical bases for African indigenous education as well established in Mushi (2009, pp.32-39).

Preparedness/Preparationism: The role of teaching and learning was to equip the children with the skills appropriate in preparation to their various roles in society. This can sometimes be gender sensitive. In most African traditional societies girls were taught how to become good mothers and how to handle and support their husband after marriage, and boys were prepared to become good fathers, warriors, farmers, and heads of male dominated occupations.

Functionalism: This was another philosophical base in which the knowledge, skills and attitudes imparted were relevant to the socio-economic activities of an individual. And as such education was for utility value, not for knowing sake as we sometimes find in today's education. Education in traditional African society was provided for immediate induction into real life in the society. Learners learnt by observing, imitating and initiation ceremonies. Mushi has this to say on it:

Indigenous Africa education was functional, the knowledge, skills and values that were imparted were relevant to the socio-economic activities of the individual...this was evident in the fields of agriculture, building, fishing, iron smelting,

canoe making, dancing or child rearing (1999, p.36).

Communism: In African traditional society, learners learned/acquired a common spirit to work and life, and that the means of production were owned communally. The education was also an integral part of culture and history. For example, child upbringing was a whole community's role. If for instance a child misbehaved in the absence of his/her parents any adult member of the community was responsible to correct him/her on spot. That implies that even children belonged to the society.

Holisticism/multiple learning: In this philosophical base, a learner was required to acquire multiple skills. He is either not allowed to specialize in specific occupation, or a very little room for specialization did exist. When a learner learnt about a certain skill, say farming, he was obliged to learn all other skills related to farming such as how to prepare farms, hoeing, food preservation, diseases and pest control and so on. He may also learn other skills like hunting, house building, cookery, and principles required for the wellbeing of an individual and the community. The learner learned multiple skills and mastered the all.

Perennialism: This philosophical base ensures that the traditional communities in Africa use education as a necessary tool for preserving the status quo of the society. based on this fact, it did not allow the progressive influence of liberalism on the mind of young people and so it was viewed as conservative in nature. Learners were viewed as passive recipients and could hardly contribute anything to the learning process. Mushi says on this that, "Criticism about what were taught was discouraged and knowledge was not to be questioned. Questions seeking clarification on aspects not clearly understood were encouraged (2009, p.39).

Strengths and Limitations of African Indigenous Education

According to Enyi (2001), African indigenous education displayed the following strengths to its recipients and the society at large.

Every member of the community was employed. Children learnt the skills that prepared them to immediately utilize their physical environment for self-employment. The skills acquired by watching and imitating the elders were immediately put into practical use. And thus, the students became productive and useful members in the society. Again, it was successful in maintain the socio-

economic and cultural structures of the society. The learners were taught among other things, to preserve their own culture and to get rid of unnecessary external influences. Also the skills like masonry, carpentry, clay working, carving, cloth making, building and construction, were taught in the view of maintaining the socio-economic and cultural heritage of the society. Moreover, the learners/recipients acquire communal attitudes rather than individual. From communalism philosophical base point of view, students were taught to respect the properties of the whole society, and they used their acquired knowledge for service of the society.

Despite its strengths, African indigenous education did not go without limitations. Below are some of the limitations that befell African indigenous education as noted by Mushi (2009).

It was confined to a particular society and covered that aspect considered being of immediate relevance to them and it did not go beyond the borders of the society. Worse enough the elders who were teachers hardly entertained any challenge or criticism. Expressing this fact, Mushi writes that, "Traditional education had a specific body of knowledge to be learnt which never changed, and which concentrated only on the transmission of cultural heritage, that is of traditions, values, and norms among the members of the tribe from childhood to adulthood..." (Mushi, 2009). In addition, the accumulated knowledge and skills could not be preserved in writing. Hence, it lacked proper method of storing and preserving knowledge and relied on the memories of the elders. Because it was not documented, it was difficult to spread from one place to another. Mushi says, "It was not easy to describe, compare, and estimate distance, volume, weight, and size of different objects because figures or letters were unknown to traditional African societies" (Mushi, 2009). Furthermore, intellectual training occupied a very small place in traditional African education. This means that greater emphasis was placed on the 'concrete' rather than the 'abstract.' It ignored other cognitive abilities like analysis. So sometimes, everything happening be it good or bad was attributed to God's will. Again, learning was lineal; the young people were taught by elders who had experiences in societal life. The young people were not given much chance as they were considered to have no experiences that would help them contribute in the learning process; they were required to listen and internalize what they were taught by elders. That limited their creative and innovative mental development, thus leading to slow development of traditional society.

In traditional society some members were prevented from eating certain types of food such as eggs, fruits, chicken, fish, milk, etc. In those societies if the forefathers did not eat such types of foods it was generalized that even the subsequent generations should not eat. Some beliefs were attached to such foods, for example, if eggs were eaten by expectant mothers, it was believed that she would give birth to a bald-headed child. This was a misconception since it was not realistically true. Also in some traditional societies, women were seen as the source of labor; they did not own means of production neither did they take part in decision making, but men heavily exploited their labor. Even in learning segregation took place as women were isolated from men and were supposed to learn skills related to home management, midwifery, healthcare, weaving and farming. On the other hand, men attended to those skills considered irrelevant to women; these include masonry, building, fishery, etc. (Mushi, 2009).

Challenges and Recommendations

The major challenge is the fact that contemporary indigenous education is confronted with the need for integrating indigenous methods into traditional modes of schooling and, at the same time, incorporating indigenous knowledge into formal Western education. Forms of indigenous knowledge including weaving, hunting, carpentry and the use of medicinal plants, are passed on from adult to child throughout the year – both in the home and in the workplace – in contrast to structured hours and a classroom setting. However, increasing modernity is a challenge to such modes of instruction. There is, therefore the need to incorporate indigenous knowledge into formal Western education.

Notwithstanding the above observation and other limitations mentioned earlier, there is no doubt that indigenous education is relevant to the modern education today. Enyi (2001) has remarked that African indigenous education is the bases for the foundation of education for self-reliance in modern education. During the establishment of education for self-reliance in 1967, Nyerere recalled how the traditional education was relevant to the community life, especially learning by doing, and included it in modern education (Nyerere, 1975). Students' participation in learning is highly encouraged by modern educators.

Furthermore, it prepared its recipients for life duties in their societies, which is precisely what modern education is striving to achieve. It prepares the learners to enter the world of work. African indigenous education has also greatly influence the need for development of more appropriate problem solving educational curriculum and the promotion of life-long education. Some aspects

of African indigenous education have continued to feature in policy and practice of education.

Basically, African indigenous education managed to provide education to all members of the community. With the coming of Western education, however, African indigenous education was seen inadequate to contribute to the demands of modern time and the needs for new skills. The isolationism of African indigenous knowledge was broken up as societies were now introduced into a larger world of modern knowledge and technology. We therefore recommend that African indigenous education should be made to go beyond the borders of the society through the efforts of governments and other stakeholders. Students should be allowed to apply critical thinking and be able to own their own knowledge. The curriculum should also extend beyond the borders of cultural heritage to embrace a wider scope relevant for the demands of modern world. The indigenous knowledge should be documented and preserved in writing so as to enhance widespread of knowledge as well as encourage intellectual evaluation. Also, equal emphasis should be given to both theory and practice, for practice without theory is dead.

Conclusion

Education is viewed as an important tool to improve the situation of a people by pursuing economic, social and cultural development; it provides the people with individual empowerment and self-determination (May, 2003). Education is also a means for employment; it is a way for socially marginalized people to raise themselves out of poverty. However, some education systems and curricula lack knowledge about indigenous people's ways of learning, thereby causing an educational gap for them – as is evident in poor school performance and low literacy rates. Some schools teach indigenous children to be “socialized” and to be an asset to Western society by rejecting the indigenous knowledge and assimilating whatever that is Western. Schooling has been explicitly and implicitly a site of rejection of indigenous knowledge and language. It has been used as a means of assimilating indigenous peoples into a Western society and identity and social practices – which is an indirect form of colonialism.

This study addressed this issue of modern education and its destruction of unique, indigenous cultures and individual's identities. In essence, it examined the issues of in other words, knowledge and ignorance and how they translate to wealth and poverty respectively. Furthermore, it revealed the effects of trying to institute a global education system or central learning authority, which can

ultimately demolish traditional sustainable (agricultural and ecological) knowledge, in the breakup of extended families and communities, and in the devaluation of ancient spiritual traditions. Finally, the study attempted to promote a deeper dialogue between cultures, suggesting that there is no single way to learn. No two human beings are alike because they develop under different circumstances, learning, and education.

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