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THE VALUE OF NIGERIAN CULTURE IN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

A lot of problems plague contemporary societies because virtues and values hitherto held in high esteem are being discarded in favour of foreign ones. The situation has given birth to a harvest of vices today that government and law enforcement agents seem not to know the solution to them. This paper therefore examined the value of Nigerian culture especially the Yoruba people and how the cherished values of yesteryears could be adopted to solve contemporary societal problems through education.

Introduction

Culture is a phenomenon that is better explained than defined. However, an attempt can be made towards arriving at a working definition. The concept, culture has been defined severally by various scholars and authors. It is a total way of people. Orji and

Anugo (2006) citing Iheanacho (1998) view culture as that complex whole which include knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Eke (1999) is also of the opinion that the material and economic base of society conditions and fashions the element of culture, including its science and technology, medicine, and music, and even the psychological make-up of a man in a particular historical epoch. Simply put, culture is the total way of life of a people in a given society and this total way of life include the food they eat, how they get and eat the food, their dressing, their belief about the existence of the world, how they rule themselves, the language they speak etc. These vary from society to society. This is why we talk of different culture by different societal groups. Culture could be material or non-material.

Material culture has to do with items made by the group. These are the things that a society needs to make in order to satisfy the needs of its people like houses (for shelter protection); tools needed for agriculture; weapons needed for hunting or defense against enemies attack, clothes and the work of art and craft. These include metal work, dying, painting, sculpture, carving, woodwork, leather work, jewellery, raffia work to mention a few.

Non-material culture has to do with the language and way of a people. Non-material cultures are things which could not be seen but are learnt and become part of the groups' way of life. Examples include, language of a people and the way it is spoken, their kinds of music, dances the stories they tell their children, the way they teach their children, the way in which they make and wear their clothes, the laws they make and the type of government they set etc. Of all these, language seems to be the most important non-material concept of our culture because language is needed to be able to talk or interact with others and to understand them.

We shall quickly explain the word value in the context of this discussion. This writer agrees with Noah (2003) who notes that values are the building blocks of society. Bolarin (2005) also notes that values are derived from a society's judgment/perception of virtue and vices and judgment of social behaviours that are acceptable in society. Like culture, values tend to vary from one

society to another. Values are no doubt acceptable principles of standard of a society.

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multilingual society with about 250 ethnic groups and over 400 languages. In spite of our multicultural nature, we still have certain common things that unite us. The dominant values which formed the core values upheld by a large section of the Nigerian society include;

- belief in God/Allah/deity
- detesting of laziness
- dignity of labour
- filial piety; respect for parents and elders generally
- hospitality
- integrity
- public spiritedness
- hard work
- respect for sanctity of life
- sharing and caring
- truthfulness and honesty
- strong pride and attachment to the family
- pride in the family name and the ideals associated with the family or group. (Bolarin 2005; 18 & 19).

All the listed values of Bolarin (2005) are enshrined in the ideas of Fafunwa (1995) in his exploration of the Seven Cardinal Goals of African traditional education which are identified as;

- development of the child's latent physical skills through competitive games, physical exercises swimming, etc.
- development of character-taught through codes of manner conventions, customs, morals, superstitions and laws of the society.
- respect for peers - taught in greetings, accompanied by physical gestures, helping elders to carry their luggage etc.
- intellectual training- local geography and history, hills and valleys, seasons songs/poetry, proverbs, riddles, tongue twisters, poetic verses, dirges, Yoruba, ofo, ogede & or incantations, recitations etc other chants like Rara etc; Ija numerals, games, scales/measurement etc.

- vocational training (agricultural, trades & crafts) and professions- People could be doctors, priests, witchdoctors, civil servants, village heads, chiefs, kings, tax-collectors, heralds, judges, councillors, police and messengers, shrine-keepers, drummers, blacksmith, hunters/soldiers etc
- community participation-construction of roads, bridges, building of town halls, volunteers to defend community in time of war or crisis.
- promotion of cultural heritage.
 - culture is caught and not taught
 - child observes, imitates and mimics actions of elders and siblings
 - he watches, naming ceremonies, religious services, marriage rituals, funeral obsequies, coronation of a chief or king and festivals.

In the view of this, Akinpelu (2005) reminds that there is need to discuss cultural values and such related topic seems to put average person off. He explains further that at educational gatherings, and in the classrooms, there are complaints about the decline in personal and public cultural values especially the moral decadence in terms of dressing, relegating indigenous languages, African food, music and many others. Some of these cultural values will now be discussed with a view to bringing out their relevance to educational development.

Use of Indigenous Language

As earlier indicated, language is the most important of non-material culture, because it is through the medium of language that the culture of a people is explained, transmitted and preserved. A foreign language can't explain a people's culture adequately. For instance, in Ogu language, 'gbeto dagbe', medagbe, onuyoneto and in Yoruba language, 'omoluwabi' gives cultural meanings how important the person is. In other word, indigenous language depicts the culture of every given society and as well as the survival of the cultural heritage. Therefore, the idea of prohibiting the use of an indigenous or mother tongue of an individual is tantamount to killing his language and invariably, his culture. In view of this, Bello explains thus:

our attitude today is largely influenced by the perception and viewpoints cultivated as a result of slavery as well as colonial and post colonial education. As a result of this, we tend not to appreciate ourselves or our culture and therefore disregard or under value the potential contributions this heritage can make to our contemporary development efforts. We thus tend not to believe and have confidence in ourselves, our endemic capabilities and potentials (p.12).

It has been proved empirically (research findings) that the best language to educate a man living in his linguistic environment is the mother tongue (mt) or the language of the immediate community (lic). (UNESCO, 1953; Fafunwa, 1982).

Still on the use of language, it is a pity to observe that many adults do not even know how to state intelligibly the witty sayings of the elders (proverbs and idioms) to show the beauty of our indigenous language. Their utterances are bedeviled with miscues which show that they have been alienated *from their cultural milieu*. How will such people express and integrate themselves and their siblings into the Nigerian culture.

Dressing

In the traditional Nigerian setting, we value morals. Human body is seen to be sacred. Exposing any secret part of the body is degrading, abnormal and an aberration. Such act devalues our culture. Provocative attires that lead to sexual harassment should not be found among the *Omoluwabis*.

Greetings

Nigerian culture values respect for elders, and constitute authorities. Greeting is one of the ways by which respect for elders is demonstrated. On greetings, the Yoruba child is taught early that the younger must greet the older person first and this must be accompanied by physical gestures. (E.g. A boy must prostrate while a girl must kneel down while greeting). Different greetings for different parts of the day, and other situations are learnt early enough. Hence the saying "*kekere ni a n pa ekan iroko*" (A stitch in time saves nine)

As part of respect for elders, parents, etc is the fact that a child does not call his parents, aunts, uncles, chiefs, and other elders

ny name. This is also attested to by the honorific use of language among the Yoruba people. Some even bow when conversing with elders on phones. The young boy must carry a load for an elder and a girl must serve an elderly person on her knees. Other ways of a young child showing respect to the elderly ones are:

- A child should not intrude into the conversation of elders as a mark of respect for them. He can only make contribution if invited to do so.
- A child would normally get up from a seat for an elder who had no seat in a gathering or a bus. He must not abuse nor be rude to the elder nor must he refuse to run errands.

Indeed, honour and due respect to old age is the duty of every Yoruba child (Idowu, 1982:165). The elders on their part are expected to afford the young care and protection and not count them as of no consequence.

Honesty

Honesty, truthfulness, sincerity, fidelity are some other basic norms the Nigerian children are expected to imbibe. In buying and selling, you do not have to see the seller. Wares are *displayed with the amount per unit of such products*. The buyer collects the goods and places the money there. The fear of thieves or robbers does not arise as everyone believes in the repercussion for infraction. Idowu (1982) observes that the truthful and upright have the unfailing support of the divinities while lying and falsehood are considered damnable. Indeed, Yoruba ethics forbids stealing.

Hardwork

Among the Yoruba people as well as other Nigerians, hard work is cherished. In the olden days, unemployment is never known. Every child at a certain age must be introduced to one traditional occupation or the other. The moment he is found to be skillful in a chosen or given vocation, he is allowed to be independent. Hence the saying:

B'mode ba to o loko

Se la a fi n un loko

(when a child is old enough to own a hoe we give him a hoe).

We value dignity of labour. Hard work and honesty go hand in hand. Stealing, selfishness, covenant-breaking, falsehood and hypocrisy were not condoned. To show that the Yoruba people detested the act of stealing a singer composed thus;

Ki ni n fole se laye ti mo wa 2ce

Laye ti mo wa kaka ki n jale

Kaka ki n jale, ma kuku deru

Ki ni n o fole se laye ti mo wa

(What have I to do with stealing 2ce

In this world of mine, rather than steal

I rather become a slave/servant

What have I to do with stealing)- Anonymous

Chastity

The Yoruba people as well as other tribes in Nigerian attach great importance to chastity and regards pre-marital sex a taboo. Nigerian children were not allowed to mention the names of sex or reproductive organs or talk about them in the presence of adults. Parents normally kept their eyes on both boys and girls to ensure they maintained chastity before marriage. In those days, broken homes hardly existed. Chastity, prior to, after marriage command commendation. Campaign against HIV/AIDS could be refocused in favour of our rich cultural heritage instead of relying on widespread use of condom which in a way promotes promiscuity apart from offending our religious values. According to Idowu (1982), chastity before marriage and in married life is one of the components of good character among the Yoruba people. Explaining further, Idowu notes that a man who seduces another man's wife will not only pay a heavy penalty, he will in addition face grievous consequences. Among the Yoruba people other components of good character identified by Idowu (1992:157-166) and which are considered to be enriching to contemporary educational system include:

- Hospitality especially to strangers to as one can never tell when one might be in need of hospitality oneself.
- Selflessness is widely approved. Selfish person is held in contempt and regarded as not deserving any help in time of difficulty.
- The Yoruba people believe in kindness involving generosity, as the one who is kind will have the unfailing blessing of Olodumare. This is exemplified in the saying:

Oore loore wo to
 lle oloore ki wo tan
 Ti o-sika ki 'wo ku
 Kindness begets kindness

...
 The house of the kind does not break down completely.
 That of the wicked does not break down incompletely. (Idowu, 1982:159).

- Wickedness should be roundly condemned because the law of retributive justice is inevitable not only on the unjust but upon his offspring. Hence, "Eni ti o ba gbin ebu ika, ori omo re ni yi o hu le" (He who sows the seed of wickedness, it is on his children head that it will grow) - (Idowu, 1982:160).
- Covenant breaker is considered worthless and accursed.
- Hypocrisy is considered unmanly and reprobable.
- Giving protection to woman as the weaker sex is a must for men. It is considered mean and immoral to outrage a defenseless woman.

Methods of Transmitting Nigerian Culture

The following are the methods of transmitting Nigerian Culture according to Obidi (1990):

- (a) Watching and imitating the behaviour pattern of the parents and other adult at home (Awokose). Parents and other adults are always enjoined to conduct themselves with a high degree of decorum and integrity (model of good behaviour) so the children could copy good and acceptable behaviour from them. The saying:
 - (i) "Esin iwaju ni teyin woo sare"
 [A horse follows the example of the one before it in a race-literally]. It actually means that the adult is a model for the child to follow either in good or bad behaviour).
 - (ii) "Owu ti iya ba gbon lomo o ran"
 [literally-the cotton mother prepares is what the child will use to wear)-the child will copy the good or bad behaviours of the mother.

(b) Direct Instruction (Ilana Ifiyeni)

This is a situation where elderly ones teach children what to do or correct them if they went wrong. A child might be taught the act of prostrating while greeting if he fails to do it properly. Experiences of others serve as beneficial instructional media in teaching morals and strategies toward success in life.

(c) Lessons from witty sayings and folktales

Children absorb unconsciously from proverbs, folktales, idioms and riddles. Such folktales otherwise known as moonlight stories are usually narrated by adults and were ended with moral lessons which taught children the rewards for doing the right or the wrong. The story of a wicked man and his house-boy who planned a cherry fruit that springs up and mysteriously yielded ripe fruit in a day which the man climbed in order to pluck some fruits but started sprouting higher and higher at the house-boys charming song is a typical example of a story that exposes the evil of wickedness.

(d) Use of Prohibition (Eewo)

Certain things were prohibited among the Yoruba people as it is common to most Nigerian societies and so children were cautioned against doing those things. For example, in teaching hygiene, the Yoruba people forbid anyone from urinating in a mortar and add that the mother of an erring child would die. Though the mother will not die, but no child however stubborn would urinate in a mortar after hearing this. Also, the Ogu people forbid a mother eating a food a male child urinate into. They belief that, if eventually the mother eats the food it may lead to impotence on the part of the male child but the essence is to teach hygiene.

(e) Temptation Method

This method was used in inculcating moral lessons in the child from age of six years and above. It was an effective method of checking stealing. A mother could fry some piece of fish or meat and keep it within the reach of the child after a careful count. A child who has a weak resistance to stealing

falls into the temptation and is reported to the father who beats him so much that he would vow never to steal again. Older children who exhibit recalcitrant attitude to the extent of being too difficult for the father to control were usually exposed to public flogging and ridicule.

It should be noted that children left without training were called *Abiiko* (birthed with no home training) while those who failed to respond to parental training were called *Akoogba* (Trained but refused to held to the training). The blame of the former goes to the parents while for the latter, the child is blamed for being recalcitrant. Both categories of children are disciplined outside in the wider society.

Erosion of societal values

Within the last decades, those values so cherished among Nigerian societies started getting eroded and most Nigerians have generally embraced a new culture, a new way of life and a new world view (Aderinwale, 2003 cited in Bolarin, 2005). Today, the following vices have almost completely taken cherished values:

- cheating in all its ramification
- escapism
- brigand conduct
- disregard for rules and regulations
- disregard for constituted authority
- excessive pursuit of material acquisition
- money worship
- corruption
- smuggling
- drug trafficking and abuse
- oil bunkering
- cultism
- ethnic wars and
- incurable greed

It is recognized that culture is not static but dynamic. Akinjogbin (2002) believes that certain items that are no longer useful at a particular culture can be discarded in favour of new items that would suit the circumstances of the time. For instance, the act of

child marriage is gradually giving way to modern views. More girls are being enrolled in schools today in the northern part of the country.

Culture and Educational Development

For development process to be meaningful and actionable in any society, it must respect the people's worldview. The people's worldview is intertwined with their cultural heritage. Culture is the fertile ground for development. According to Olurode and Olusanya (2005), social policies on education, health and unemployment reveal a lack of touch or references to our cultural heritage. In view of the policy maker for example, education is narrowly perceived as that which is to be gained in the four walls of a school. It is equated with a diploma and good academy performance. There often appears to be continuity between the formal and the informal learning environment. No appreciable reinforcement is aimed at. The reference to goodly conduct is tangential. There is even a fundamental defect in our educational system in that it has virtually no bearing with our socio-economic and political structure. Our educational system rather than preparing our children and youth for farming simultaneously with the requirements of the modern day technological development orientates them away from farming indeed it inculcates them a hatred for social existence on the farm. The suggestion that a secondary school graduate goes back to the farm would be regarded as a curse. This reflects the perception of farming as an ordeal. Of course, the income-gap between the farmer and a public sector graduate employee is wide. Thus after graduation, the products of the school system queue up for years in expectation of employment opportunities that has since dried up. The education system is neither of benefit to the recipients nor to the society as well. Society, in fact, may become poorer.

The school calendar does not allow our children to be around to assist on the farm during peak farming season. Our school curriculum may as well go for that of any country in Europe; it is patent irrelevant is demonstrated by the unceasing production of graduates that could neither help themselves nor their society. Research output by scholars is not in harmony with the present character of the society.

Recommendations and Conclusion

With all the vices listed above and considering the negative effect they have on Nigerian society, solutions are hereby recommended:

- (i) While culture is not static but dynamics, changes that would affect the lives of Nigerians negatively should be discouraged.
- (ii) Compliance with societal rules should be taught in schools especially from the lower levels of our educational systems.
- (iii) Religious education, coupled with moral instruction which promotes virtues such as love, respect and honesty and laws like "thou shall not kill" which cut across religious can be taught.
- (iv) Incorporation of traditional vocations into the curricula at all levels of education will help to reduce unemployment in the country as more people will be job creators and not job seekers.
- (v) Teachers are to be exemplary in their conduct and behaviour as they serve as role models for their pupils or students.
- (vi) It must be realized that children acquire bad character through unguided and dangerous exposure to obscene pictures, films and literatures. They equally interact with morally weak children in the home, school and in the larger society. Some morally bankrupt adult also exercise powerful and corrupting influence on the younger ones. Hence, moral education should be the responsibility of the home, school, religious bodies and other stakeholders in the education industry.
- (vii) Teaching and learning of indigenous languages should be effectively implemented in schools as enriched in the *National Policy on Education (1997) revised in 1981, 1998 and 2004*.

In conclusion, some aspect of our indigenous culture may be unacceptable to day, but identifiable good aspects should be inculcated in Nigerian children. The inculcation requires the active and all sustained co-operation of all stakeholders in the upbringing of the young ones. Vigorous and persistence of moral values and

rules of behaviour in the younger generation will in no doubt help in reviving the Nigerian culture.

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