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EPE CAMPUS



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# REVIVING NIGERIAN VALUES THROUGH EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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### Introduction

The process of inducting an individual into a society's culture, norms and values is a life-long endeavour but definitely of great importance to the individual's early years.

Values, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (2000) refer to "moral or professional standards of behaviour." It can also refer to 'principles.' Thus one could talk of cultural or family or social values. Culture, which is a term derived from the German word 'Kultur' (Civilization), has also been defined in various ways by scholars. Taylor (1871) in Folusho (2001) defines...culture as that complex whole, which embraces knowledge, belief, art, moral, laws, custom, and any other qualities, and habits that are identifiable with members of a given society. Adedipe (1985) separately observes that culture includes, "organized government, literature, art, music, drama, and everything else, which has evolved and taken shape in the environment, through processes of learning and teaching." This writer is therefore of the opinion that culture is that mirror through which a given society could be seen, identified and known. Through this mirror, the arts, customs, literature, social institutions and other intellectual expressions of the society could be seen, identified, known and appreciated. Values, too, are principles and standards of behaviour that a given society holds in high esteem.

It should be noted, however, that one cannot talk about culture without mentioning language. According to Wiredu (1998), culture transcends mere social forms, customary beliefs and practices of a people and these phenomena depend on the existence of a language, knowledge, communication, interaction and methods of transmitting knowledge to the young ones and generations unborn. It could be seen then that a very strong relationship exists between values, culture and language. Language, which is the principal means of communication through which social interaction is made possible, is indeed a cultural trait. Language, therefore, is an indispensable factor when the issue of reviving Nigerian values is being considered. Ditto for traditional practices in the name of culture.



# n Schools in the New Millennium

December 1996, Nigeria had been blessed with the following number of schools and students' population:

| S/N | Type                                          | Number of Schools | Student Population |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1   | Primary Schools                               | 48,424            | 16,761,591         |
| 2   | Secondary Schools                             | 47,104            | 4,448,991          |
| 3   | Technical Colleges                            | 118               | 54,571             |
| 4   | Colleges of Education                         | 62                | 89,247             |
| 5   | Polytechnics                                  | 45                | 140,953            |
| 6   | Colleges of Agriculture and Allied Discipline | 39                | 5,552              |
| 7   | Special technological institutions            | 3                 | 2,261              |
| 8   | Universities                                  | 36                | 236,261            |

Imogie, 2000:5

a number of private universities presently co-exist with the government universities. However, the present day Nigerian society in general is beset with problems. The purpose of education in Nigeria...as enshrined in the National Education (1998) can be summarized as that which is expected to create a society and good life to all citizens and to utilize all intellectual and moral man has developed and all other resources he is capable of developing in the the national objectives (Imogie, 2000). From indication, Nigerian society has shifted from "the cherished or image of life which every for itself and seeks to attain" (Sogolo, 1993).

other words, the present day Nigerian society has shifted from values, which of all cultural life" (Brunner *et al* 1937, in Ujomu, 2001) as materialism the order of the day. The society seems to have thrown overboard the more worthwhile values such as honesty, truth, selflessness, integrity, respect for authority, loyalty to the fatherland and self-discipline. Nigeria schools today,

from the primary to the tertiary institutions, are faced with enormous problems of examination malpractices, disregard for constituted authority and cultism. Other problems include sexual harassment, killings and maiming of innocent citizens/students, unrest and strikes. There are also the problems of under-funding and diversion of education funds to other sectors as well as non-recognition of the worth of teachers. This situation is rather unfortunate as, according to Reimer (1971) in Shoremi (1985), members of the present generation who expect that their children will benefit from school than they did, are doomed to disappointment.

## Lessons From Traditional Education

Before the advent of western or formal education in Nigeria, the various cultural groups or ethno-linguistic groups had their own systems of education that met the needs of the pre-colonial days. Fafunwa (1971) observed that though western education brought with it a new culture, which is dominated by science, there should be a satisfactory synthesis of the traditional and the western cultures. Fafunwa believes that non-western world should recognize science and technology as dominant cultural factor in the twentieth century while also recognizing the fact that they cannot completely abandon their traditional culture.

Other advocates of traditional education include Majasan (1967), Awoniyi (1975), Obanya (1981) and Shoremi (1985). These scholars including Fafunwa share the same opinion that the aim of education should be the production of an *'Omoluabi'* which is the goal of traditional education among the Yoruba people. According to Shoremi (1985), an *Omoluabi* is an epitome of good character in all its ramifications and among the Yoruba People. Good character is highly esteemed and valued. Writing further, Shoremi observes that:

*Good character not only includes honesty, morality, respect of customs, intelligence but also devotion to duty, courage and willingness to meaningfully contribute to the development of one's community (p. 109).*

While commenting on Majasan's philosophy of education, Obanya (1981) noted that his (Majasan) philosophy is based on the concept of an *Omoluabi* referring to a person who has been able to develop all his talents and who can fit properly into his social system. Hence, traditional education among the Yoruba people emphasizes "social responsibility, political participation, job orientation and spiritual and moral values" (Shoremi, 1985).

Fafunwa (1995) identifies seven cardinal goals of traditional African education which are stated as follows:



to develop the child's latent physical skills  
 to develop character  
 to inculcate respect for elders and those in position of authority  
 to acquire vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour.  
 to develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs.  
 To understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large (pp. 6,7).

While Fafunwa (1971) further advocates for functional literacy for the young and for, the people must acquire skills of literacy (reading and writing), numeracy (calculation of figures), civil sophistication and scientific thought, he also believes that much the present Nigerian educational system can learn from the traditional pal system.

A detailed study of the seven cardinal goals of traditional education identified by (1995) which time and space would not permit in this paper reveals that the child is blessed with a very rich and dynamic cultural environment. The African is not just taught to be linguistically and grammatically competent in his indigenous language; he is also exposed to customs, conventions, laws of society, code of manners through proverbs, folktales, myths, direct instruction, and poetry to develop character. Parents also went the extra mile to test the child's level of honesty, truthfulness, and courage.

Among the Yoruba people, an erring child is rebuked and labelled as either 'lacking home-training' or 'akoogba' (he who failed to benefit from the home-oven to him.) Individuals who were social misfits were avoided like a plague in the community. This could be further explained by a saying among the people of Ibadan, (the largest city in West Africa) that:

*Ibadan to ba gbe ewure loja ki se omo ti wa amo*

*Ibadan to ba ko peteasi ni omo ti wa.*

*The Ibadan child who steals goat in the market does not belong to us.*

*At the one who labours to build a storey building is our child.*

It should be noted that in the traditional setting, there was no idle hand. Every individual was trained to be skillful in one vocation or the other; hence there was no unemployment or retrenchment that bred social miscreants and misfits as witnessed in the modern system.

To make education to serve the contemporary Nigerian society better, it is a necessity to go back to the past and integrate the traditional system of education into the framework of the present system of education. Educational administrators, educators,

curriculum theorists and others who are involved in educational planning and execution have a lot of lessons to learn from the traditional system of education. Such lessons according to Shoremi (1985) will lead to re-definition of the purpose of education to make it more relevant to the needs of individuals and the society at large.

Nigeria has indeed borrowed from other cultures and other systems of education, but why these borrowed ideas are not working should be critically looked into. A river that dissociates itself from its fountain or origin will surely dry-out, so says a Yoruba adage. The past must be revisited; the indigenous culture must be revamped, adapted and shaped to suit the scientific age in order to attain the lofty heights of modern civilization.

### Role of Nigerian Languages

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural entity of over 400 groups. These groups exist with their own languages. These languages serve as instruments for expressing their systems of thought. Thoughts here refer to the various human activities about the family, religions, economy, politics, welfare, education, legal system to mention just a few. Thoughts are culturally determined and as earlier indicated, language itself is a cultural trait and it is the more effective medium for expressing human thoughts.

While it is essential for Nigerian children to learn foreign languages like English, French, German, Arabic, etc. for international relations and religious purposes, it is equally important for every Nigerian child to be highly proficient in his or her mother tongue. Indigenization of instruction in schools at all levels will lead to advancement in science and technology. No investment is too much to pursue this idea.

There are still some custodians of indigenous histories who through their great feat of memory can still narrate traditional stories and myths with high intelligence, with elegance of imagery and richly refined expression. According to Ojo (1971), the vocabulary of a language reflects both the physical and the social environment as well as demonstrates man's awareness of and interaction with his geographical environment. Nigerian languages are rich in proverbs and riddles. Such proverbs are characterized by brevity and elegance, which are two main distinguishing elements of a proverb.

The material endowment of the Nigerian is a fund of invaluable information for the modern scientist. For instance, in health care services, recent times have witnessed a great revival in the patronage of traditional medicine. Where the western medical practices fail, native medicines have been found to be effective and potent. In some instances, the use of language is demonstrated in traditional-medicine preparation right from the plucking of leaves and herbs to the final stage in order to make such medicines potent.



The role of Nigerian languages today in promoting economic activities through advertisement in the print and electronic media cannot be overlooked. The politicians today are not unaware of the role of indigenous languages in political campaigns and rallies. For these reasons, the study of indigenous languages in Nigeria should be vigorously pursued by the government.

#### Traditional Legal System

The legal system is based on what is generally accepted by the people. Conflicts are resolved on the basis of truth rather than the technicalities of the law. However, truth is sometimes established through divine consultation and appeal is made through the ancestors of a particular divinity. In the traditional setting, cases are judged according to the pieces of evidence and facts brought before the institutions at the various levels (interpersonal, family, village or national). For knotty cases, the final judgment is left for the divinities or *Oloдумаре* (the Almighty). For fear of such penalties that would attend anti-social behaviours, culprits chose to confess their crimes rather than swear before divinities. Today, people could swear or affirm the truth of their cases of witnesses according to the injunctions of their faith (Christianity, Islamic or Traditional). In spite of the proliferation of religious institutions in Nigeria, crimes abound. The major reason is not far-fetched. In most of our schools, religious instruction that states, 'remove religion from man, and you will make a devil of him,' is not adequately transmitted.

While this writer believes that the Nigerian child should be opportunely to receive instruction in his religion and practise this according to the dictates of his conscience, it is still expedient that he is exposed to traditional folktales, myths, and other genres of the traditional folktales which are repository of sound moral lessons like respect for elders, honesty, hard work, etc. All of these are couched in the proper and adequate use of language.

#### Nigerian Values in other Institutions

Nigeria values unity in diversity. This takes its root from the family level where a nuclear family cannot but accommodate members of the extended family. Among the Yoruba people, it is believed that *adaje lo ma a da ku* (he who eats alone dies alone). In Nigeria, tribes and tongues are numerous but in brotherhood and oneness Nigerians are united. The policy of learning one other Nigerian language apart from one's mother tongue or local language is aimed at enhancing national integration (NPE, 1998). In the traditional marriage institution, divorce and remarriage are abhorred; chastity was and is valued. Good character is an essential virtue for the woman to enjoy her stay in her matrimonial home. The one who has lost her good character will go from one husband to another. The wife that possessed good character would endure hard times with her husband and resist all temptations to betray or leave her husband. These are values that

Nigerian children should be exposed to in schools through literary studies in Nigerian languages. The Nigerian child is blessed with a rich literary environment. Nigerian Children should be exposed to traditional myths, legends, folktales and poetic chants that promote good virtues and human relations. Good name is valued in the traditional society. 'A good name is better than silver and gold.' A child who brings the family name or honour into disrepute is regarded as a bastard. Valour is also honoured as musicians sing the praises of those who have excelled in their various fields of specialization while laziness is detested.

The saying that '*Enta bi ire ki i rin 'ru*' (No decent person keeps late night) is an indication that traditional Nigerian society detests revelry. Revels include prostitutes, drunkards, drug addicts, robbers and criminals that carry their nefarious activities in the cover of the night. Modesty in dressing is another value that is identifiable with the Nigerian traditional culture. The nudity show on our campuses and streets today would never happen in the past. No sane individual would go out in jumpers and revealing garments to provoke members of the opposite sex. Some ladies in the contemporary Nigerian society do not see anything good in their natural complexion and hair. They are not proud of their colour like Aggrey of old. Surprisingly, some white women like the kinky nature of the African woman's hair. It is pertinent to note that many Nigerians started developing interest in the traditional 'adire' clothing when it became known that the whites like using them. Educating the Nigerian child in his indigenous languages will make him to have more positive attitude towards his traditional practices.

#### Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined Nigerian traditional values and how these can be promoted in the contemporary Nigerian society. This is against the background that the invasion of foreign cultures have eroded our values. Authorities in the schools right from the nursery-primary to the tertiary must promote Nigerian values beginning from the functional use of the indigenous languages. Literature in Nigerian languages should be enriched to incorporate the cultural, family and societal values.

The home, religious teachers/leaders, the mass electrical/print media, the law enforcement agents as well as non-government organizations, have various roles to play in ensuring that traditional Nigerian values are revived and promoted. And, this they can do only with the use of appropriate and technical language from which the young ones can learn.

The contemporary Nigerian society must also be educated on the need to be critical and rational in accepting the way of life or practices that are foreign to us. Educational planners and curriculum developers should incorporate modern science and technology into the school programmes in such a way that these will not be



destructive to valuable traditional practices.

Subjects in the humanities should be promoted so that Nigerian children could be taught to be humane, tolerant and accommodating in their dealings with their fellow human beings. Today, nations are rising against nations, ethnic rivalry rage on with the use of sophisticated weapons, which the modern science and technology have offered. Many studies will expose the young people to local and foreign cultures. It will expose new ways of tolerating and relating peacefully with others in the society and how not to let science and technology to the detriment of humanity.

ences

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