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CHAPTER SIX

TRADITIONAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Aims, Content, Methodology and Processes

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OBJECTIVES OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter will address the following issues;

- The meaning and aims of traditional education in Nigeria.
- Content and methodology of traditional education.
- Processes of traditional education and values it inculcates.
- Traditional Education practice in Nigeria.
- Relevance of Traditional Education to present formal system of education.

INTRODUCTION:

Traditional or indigenous education refers to the system of education that prevailed in most of the societies before the advent of the western or formal type of education. Education is universal. All societies have it. Without education, the culture will die. This is because education is the vehicle or means by which culture is transmitted from one generation to another in any society.

Infact what differs from society to society is not education, but the type of education, purpose of education, and the peculiarity or nature of the society education seeks to serve.

Every society whether literate or non-literate has its own unique ways of training its own youths. This unique way refers to its system of education, which may be formal or informal depending on the level of development of the society in question.

Thus, the unique or discrete ways through which many societies in Africa educated their young ones and perpetuated their culture before the introduction of western education is called indigenous or traditional education.

It operated without elaborate school building, classroom and other modern facilities now available in the formal school system.

Infact, most of what happened in education in pre-literate societies were basically informal, indigenous or traditional in nature. And education in most societies elsewhere in the world including Africa followed similar patterns initially before the advent of western or modern education.

In traditional education, functionalism or utility was the main guiding principle. Education was regarded as a means to an end and not an end in itself. In other words, education was useful only to the extent it helped the individuals to be useful and productive members of their respective societies.

Education in this respect, was basically for initiation into the society and preparation for adulthood. The traditional education generally emphasized social responsibility, job orientation, political participation, spiritual and moral values.

Aims or Goals of Traditional Education

The aims, methods and content of traditional education were intricately interwoven. That is, they were not separated into specific area as is the case with) Western system of education.

Thus, the objectives of traditional education in Nigeria were many. According to Fafunwa (1974:20) in his *Magnum Opus* "History of Education in Nigeria" the seven cardinal aims of African traditional education are as follows:-

1. The development of the child's talent and physical skills
2. The development of character.
3. Inculcating respect for elders and those in position of authority.
4. The development of intellectual skills.
5. The acquisition of specific vocational training and the development of healthy attitude towards labour.
6. The development of the sense of belonging and the encouragement of active participation in family and community affairs.
7. Understanding as well as appreciating and promoting the cultural heritage of the community at large.

The characteristics of traditional education in Africa have equally been discussed by Abdou (1968:15) in his famous work entitled *Education in Africa*. They are as follows:-

1. The great importance attached to it (education) and its collective and social nature.

2. Its intimate tie with social life both in a material and spiritual sense.
3. Its multivalent character, both in terms of its goal and the means employed.
4. Its gradual and progressive achievements, in conformity with successive stages of physical, emotional and mental development of the child.

In essence, traditional education was characteristically integral in experience, nature, scope and very functional in purpose. In this respect, traditional system of education was functional since the aims and contents were relevant to the needs of the society. Unemployment was rare since education prepared the young ones adequately for effective citizenship.

Ultimately, each social institution in the traditional society had a role to play in producing "honest, respectful, skilled, co-operative individuals who could conform to the social order of the day".

The Content or Curriculum of Traditional Education

Traditional education was very practical in nature or orientation. Contents, aims, and methods were interwoven relevantly. The subject and experiences included the following:-

1. Participation at ceremonies and rituals.
2. Imitation, recitation and demonstration.
3. Farming, fishing, weaving, carving, cooking, knitting, etc.
4. Recreational subjects were wrestling, dancing, drumming, display and racing.
5. Intellectual training included - local history, legends, local geography, plants and animals, poetry, reasoning, riddles, proverbs, story telling etc.

Homes, shrines and specialized professions served as schools where apprenticeship was done for a specified period of time. The homes (e.g. families), taught their members character development and manners.

The curriculum helped the children and adolescents to know their immediate environment through the learning of the geography and history of their country. They equally had adequate knowledge of local hills, valleys, rivers and plants. Specifically, they mastered the seasons and knew when to expect rain, drought; when to plant, hunt, fish and harvest.

Secret cults served the purposes of higher institutions of learning. There, African or traditional philosophy, science, religion and the secrets of power were taught and mastered.

Functional values inculcated by Indigenous or Traditional Education

Character training and human development are areas where traditional education laid much emphasis. Children were made to develop the following qualities:-

1. **Kindness:** run errands and be useful and serviceable to others (especially the sick, the aged and helpless) and the entire society according to their age and ability. Failure to do this resulted in the denial of some rights and privileges. Laziness was abhorred because the society considered lazy people as potential rogues.

2. **Generosity** - people were made to share with others what they had in form of giving gifts to children, youths and the aged or needy.

3. **Diligence** - hardwork was a cardinal principle of the society and every youth was expected to imbibe this virtue (diligence).

4. **Manliness** - youths were trained to face hardships to enable them overcome dangerous situations like war, drought or famine. This virtue was promoted through activities like wrestling, masquerades, fighting and competitions.

5. **Respect** - this was very important especially for elders and adult members of the society. Age accorded status to members of the indigenous society and as such age was respected. Children were expected to be very respectful. Women showed respect, loyalty to their husbands. People regarded one another as brothers and sisters. Elders and seniors were not addressed by their respective names. Every individual was expected to be responsible and respectful. Everyone learnt his/her duty in the compound. However, as people grew they belonged to their right social strata and age grades in order to perform communal functions like cleaning of streams, night watch, etc.

6. **Uprightness** - traditional education taught and promoted uprightness in terms of good manners, honesty, morals and credit worthiness. Destruction of life through murder, assassination and abortion was strictly forbidden. Greediness of all types were highly discouraged. Truth, confidence and good will were inculcated, commended and rewarded.

7. **Ability to keep secrets** - children were trained and taught how to keep secrets considered very important to the society especially in times of war and emergency.

8. **Aesthetic appreciation** - members of the society were trained to maintain a certain degree of cleanliness - washing of face in the morning, taking bath at the appropriate time etc., were encouraged. Girls decorated their heads and body with native balms and perfumes. Men had all kinds of physical exercises and games to develop their muscles.

Generally, many avenues were used to achieve the above values. Specifically, children were made to observe, imitate and mimic the actions of their elders and siblings. They attended religious ceremonies, weddings, funerals, coronation of kings, and annual yam festivals. Infact, the task of achieving these values was shared by the entire society. Members of the extended family, close and distant relations helped in inculcating good manners, conventions, customs, morals and laws of the society.

Traditional Education Practice in Nigeria

The practice of these values in Nigeria has been confirmed by many distinguished Nigerian and African educators. Majasan (1967) in his study, identified, character training and religious education as the major content of Yoruba education. According to him the responsibility of building up good character in the child is not left to the parents alone. Distant relations, peer groups and other members of the community were expected to contribute. Fadipe (1970) confirmed Majasan's assertions when he declared that the education of the young Yoruba in the codes of manners, conventions, laws of his society etc. is achieved through various members of his family household, his extended family, usually located in the same compound, in kindred or neighbourhood.

In some parts of Northern Nigeria, the development of ethical character took many forms. Healthy rivalry among peers was encouraged by parents right from the early age. This could be in form of wrestling or performance of complex tasks. In such competitions, fair play was encouraged and both winners and losers were congratulated as sportsmen.

In otherwords, the idea of this healthy competition is not solely to win or lose but to take part.

In his study of indigenous education, Lieber (1971) commented on the education among the Efik and Ibibio. According to him, there were many taboos about incest and adultery, while stealing was considered a very serious crime or offence. He noted that amongst the Igbo people, adolescents

were taught to avoid heterosexual activities, to shun acts of immodesty, aggressive behaviour and to refrain from divulging secrets.

Fafunwa (1974) in his own contribution, declared that parents would want their children to be upright, honest, kind and helpful to others. To this end, parents would spare no pains to instill in their children these qualities. He further said that "parents would prefer to remain childless than to have children that will bring dishonour to the family". There are as such hundreds of proverbs and folklores on moral behaviour and the consequences of bad conducts.

Taiwo (1968) quoted in Fafunwa (1974) commented on Yoruba education and argued that the people developed a system of counting and used a variety of human experience to promote practice and dexterity in enumeration. He further argued that the Yoruba child is introduced to early counting by means of concrete objects e.g. cowrie and currency counting. It is his contention too, that the Yoruba have names for any number however large.

It is also important to note that the indigenous education has a number of games that required skills of manipulation. For instance the Ayo game involved "addition" "multiplication" and "deduction".

Relevance of some aspects of Traditional Education to Current Education Practice in Nigeria

In view of the numerous flaws in the formal system of education in Nigeria, it is necessary to consider ways of integrating some aspects of indigenous education into the contemporary educational system. One obvious problem with education in Nigeria is the quest for mere knowledge and certificates. Education is much more than this. Traditional Education was very relevant to indigenous culture because it addressed the fundamental issue of relevance and utility. Thus, traditional education in terms of aims, content and methodology was integrated with the needs, aspirations and problems of the traditional society. In short, it was functional because, it enabled its products to fit into their respective environment and in the process became functional citizens.

To what extent can we say this for the present formal system of education in Nigeria? Indeed, it is important to reiterate that the introduction

of the 6-3-3-4 system especially the emphasis on vocational and science education in schools derived largely from the failure of the old system of education to solve societal problems. In fact, the formal western education has had to contend with many problems because our curriculum planners though (and perhaps erroneously) that there was no way the indigenous educational system could complement it. The trend of development in our education in recent times shows that this attitude was indeed a big mistake.

African traditional education had some salient features which can be borrowed, strengthened, and integrated into the present formal system. After all, Nigerians had their culture before the advent of western civilization.

One fundamental aspect of indigenous education is the apprenticeship system which combines theory and practice. This system should be strengthened in the present 6-3-3-4 system of education. Furthermore, people who obtain practical skills and knowledge outside the formal school system should be encouraged.

Secondly, is the fact that unemployment was not part of indigenous education. This is because the products were prepared bearing in mind the needs of the society. Thus, they not only possessed the relevant skill but were given the opportunity to put them into practice. In the same way, the formal system of education in Nigeria should be geared to recognise and encourage diversity of talents, skills and aptitudes.

Thirdly, communalism or collective effort remained a unique characteristic of traditional education. The training of the child in different aspects of life involved virtually every other person. The whole community acted as teachers and in turn supported the efforts of teachers. This is however lacking in contemporary formal education. Individualism rather than collectivism has become the trend and this has seriously threatened the complete education of the child. Teachers are now overburdened with both school work and primary moral teaching of the child which ought to have been taken care of at home.

Lastly, traditional education emphasized moral values which were seen as the core values of the society. The child was not considered as "educated" person if he or she lacked the essential moral will, strength and character. Thus, values like honesty, diligence, co-operation etc., were encountered

and promoted by traditional education through different agencies like home, peer group, age-grade, etc. However, the story is different today. The standard of morality has drastically fallen in spite of all the advances in human development through education. The reason for this development may not be unconnected with the emphasis on cognitive or intellectual education to the detriment of the Affective and Psychomotor. This has made education to become one-sided thereby defeating its fundamental aim which is to produce an individual who is intellectually, morally and physically equipped to contribute to the development of his society.

Conclusion

This chapter examined traditional education in Nigeria. Attention was focused on aims, content and methodology because it is believed that these aspects are needed to direct, guide and mould the character of the individual in line with the needs of his society. Furthermore, the dynamics of traditional education revealed that this system of education could be useful in the present circumstances if some of its features are properly harnessed and integrated into our modern educational system. Education is only measured as being functional if it is able to address the needs of the very society it seeks to serve. Traditional Education was functional and relevant to the peculiar problems and needs of the indigenous society. Its usefulness was based on the flexibility of its aims and adaptability of its contents, methodology and process to the changing needs and problems of the traditional society.

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