

Nigerian Culture and Educational Empowerment in the 21st Century: A Quest for Sustainable Development.

¹Iroulo, Lynda Chinenye, ²Ayanlowo Oluwatosin and ³Bello, Alice Adejoke

^{1&2}*History & International Studies Department Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria*

³*Department of Educational Foundation, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria*

E-mail: lilylas4eva@yahoo.com; tinu4all2002@yahoo.co.uk; elsieade@gmail.com / +2348034015167

Abstract

Like most other social science concepts, the problem of identifying the term culture is evidently manifest in literatures. This is observed in the current pluralism of literature in culture, as being dominated by different schools of thoughts. However, most scholars would agree with a more inclusive definition of culture as the customs, beliefs, languages and social behaviours which comprise a society's total way of life. This study looks at these cultural components as relate to Western education. The study examines culture and education as two inseparable terms and the effects of formal education on acculturation. It establishes the relationship between culture and education, the seemingly threatening effects of Western education on Nigerian culture and the need for the sustainable and amiable coexistence of the two entities for sustainable development of mankind. This work further reappraises the future of African culture in a rapidly westernizing world. It also attempts to provide answers to the issue of western education in Africa with Nigeria as a case study, and ascertains whether formal education mars or mends the continuity of culture among the literate Nigerians. The study adopts a descriptive and systematic method of content analysis using secondary and primary data analysed through qualitative method. Generally, the study promotes the value of culture in education, and thus advocating for intentional collaborative relationship of both entities among Nigerians. This will lead to a desirable turn of events, portraying the importance acculturation in education; thereby contributing to the holistic education which was unconsciously lost to colonization by Africans.

Keywords: Culture, Education, Western Education, Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Africa which is the second largest continent in the world is famous for its rich culture and heritage. African culture is varied multifarious and this is as a result of its diverse population. This magnificent culture has flourished over time, having multiple languages, customs, traditions, festivals and rites which portray the uniqueness of its people. Although Euro-centric writers labelled

Africa a 'continent without civilization' as observed in the words of the great German philosopher, George Hegel:

It is manifest that want of self-control distinguishes the character of the Negroes. This condition is capable of no development or culture, and as we have seen them at this day, such have they always been. At this point we leave Africa, not even to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or history to exhibit; (Erim & Uya, 1984, p. 1)

Nevertheless, great empires rose with strong political institutions and developed economies from Africa with Nigerian arts and crafts like that of the NOK, Igbo-ukwu and Benin that became a symbol of Africa's heritage. Nigeria, a country well known as 'the Giant of Africa', is naturally endowed with over 250 ethnic groups, numerous belief systems/ traditions and dialects that made the nation one of the richest and famous African cultures. However, the durability of this culture began to be threatened with the coming of the European's cultures, most especially that of Western education. The informal traditional style of learning was replaced by the western method of schooling; English was introduced as a method of communication and learning, while the western mode of dressing slowly overthrew our enriched traditional costumes. This period further introduced the penetration of other Western ideals that tend to continuously deplete our enriched cultures. Nonetheless, it is worthy of note that Western Education brought with it, benefits that have undoubtedly contributed to the development of this nation till date. However, the contention is whether Western Education has translated to 'sustainable development' to Nigeria or has become a menace to a possible extinction of the Nigerian culture. Today, what we know as Nigerian culture has either being diluted or replaced by Western ideals. This can be observed in dressing, language, customs, traditions and even beliefs of most literate citizens. Who really is to blame, Nigerians or the formal Western Education?

The study tends to out forward what Nigerians have and stand to loose if its culture is allowed to go into oblivion. Also, it focuses on the social aspect of culture and the introduction of Western education and enlightenment into Nigeria through colonization which unfortunately most Nigerians have embraced to the extent of neglecting its own traditional education. Henceforth, Western ideals have slowly penetrated and taken over most of what is left of Nigerian culture.

Statement of the Problem

There is no doubt that Nigeria has one of the most outstanding and attractive cultures in the world. Its diverse population and ethnic groups makes it an impressive culture to explore. However, most of its customs is either being diluted or replaced; is colonialism to blame or have the people perceived the western culture more superior than that of Nigeria? Have Nigeria borrowed the western culture to the point of disregarding theirs?

Objective of the Study

The purpose of the work is to examine the position of culture in Nigeria against the continuous spread of westernization. It also aims to:

- Examine the relationship between culture and education
- Underscore the factors responsible for the vast displacement of Nigerian culture
- Address the effects of westernization on Nigerian culture
- Highlight the importance acculturation and cultural identification.

Methodology

A qualitative evaluation was utilised for this work, the study adopted a historical descriptive and systematic method of content analysis. Data collection was gotten from primary and secondary sources. The primary source employed focus groups' discussions on the variables of study. This was intended to enhance information to be gathered from secondary sources. The secondary data relied on information from journals, published books, articles and other relevant works agencies on the topic. Finally, the work re-examines the stand of Nigerian culture in a vastly westernizing world. It addresses the need for educational empowerment to drive the importance of schooling with a blend of acculturation in order to avoid the possibility of the Nigerian culture from going into oblivion. In addition, it underscores the value of culture to the development of a nation. However, the study does not stand to discredit the worth of Western education in Nigeria and Africa at large, rather points out the implications of the amount of value placed on Western ideals and neglect of the African culture.

Conceptual Clarification

There are two main concepts which are significant to this area of study. These concepts embrace the work in question as they encompass both culture and education. There are different understandings to the term culture, part of the difficulty of the term stemmed from its multiple definitions. This section will

provide a detailed definition of these concepts with the hope of shedding more light to the issues of study. Like most other social science concepts, the problem of defining 'culture' is evidently manifest in the literatures. This is observed in the current pluralism of literature on culture, as being dominated by different schools of thoughts. It is worth quoting Edward Tylor's definition of culture which became the foundation one for anthropology. Tylor's defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". (cited Spencer-Oatey, 2012, p. 1). This author provides a more encompassing definition by stating that 'Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour.' (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). An American Sociologist, Charles A. Ellwood, while bringing out the many-sides of culture encapsulates it as:

'a collective name for all behaviour patterns socially acquired and socially transmitted by means of symbols; hence a name for distinctive achievements of human groups, including not only such items as language, tool making, industry, art, science, law, government, morals and religion, but also the material instruments or artefacts in which cultural achievements [sic] are embodied and by which intellectual cultural features are given practical effect, such as buildings, tools, machines, communication devices, art objects, etc....'

The essential part of culture is to be found in the patterns embodied in the social traditions of group, that is, in knowledge, ideas, beliefs, values, standards, and sentiments prevalent in the group. The overt part of culture is to be found in the actual behaviour of the group, usually in its usages, customs, and institutions.... The essential part of culture seems to be an appreciation of values with reference to life conditions. The purely behaviouristic definition of culture is, therefore inadequate. Complete definition must include the subjective and objective aspects of culture. Practically, the culture of the human group is summed up in its traditions and customs; but tradition, as the subjective side of culture is the essential core (Cited Arowolo, 2010:3). Irrespective of the lack of consensus on the definition of culture, scholars agree that culture is a way of life; it is socially created and made up of learned behaviours. Similarly culture is a continuous process and hence dynamic. There

has being an unending debate on the concept of culture. However, it is expedient to clarify that this study focuses on the social aspect of Nigerian culture. On the other hand, Webster defines *education* as the process of educating or teaching. *Educate* is further defined as "to develop the knowledge, skill, or character of..." Therefore, from the definition that it involves the process of developing the knowledge, skill and character of an individual. Like culture, education is also a concept still under debate. However, some scholars have strived to carve out a proper explanation of the term. For instance, Ayan Rand postulated that;

"The only purpose of education is to teach a student how to live his life-by developing his mind and equipping him to deal with reality. The training he needs is theoretical, i.e., conceptual. He has to be taught to think, to understand, to integrate, to prove. He has to be taught the essentials of the knowledge discovered in the past-and he has to be equipped to acquire further knowledge by his own effort."(cited Yero, 2012, p. 1)

Bill Beattie also declared that "The aim of education should be to teach us rather how to think, than what to think—rather to improve our minds, so as to enable us to think for ourselves, than to load the memory with the thoughts of other men." (cited Yero, 2012, p. 1). In corroboration with Bill's concept of education, Omeonu, Tayo and Oyinloye (2002, p.16) citing White (1952), defined education from Christian perspective as 'the harmonious development of the mental, physical and the spiritual powers of individual learner. Judging from this definition, education is beyond the ability to read and write, it extends further into being able to harness other areas of life in addition to ability to think or mentally reflect on issues of life.

With the careful study of both concepts, it is worthy to conclude that both terms are like two sides to a coin. The concepts are intertwined as they both have to do with learning. In earlier times, culture was considered education, as the processing of transmitting customs and traditions to the young and simply living their lives in various societies was considered learning till education was formally replaced in the 'form of schooling'. This ancient form of learning assisted in creating human societies and sustaining culture over time. Education in the form of culture was first threatened by schooling and since then, most societies have debated the effectiveness of schooling (Obanya, 2005). In the case of Africa (Nigeria), European penetration did not just cost the continent its sovereignty but its original form of cultural education.

African Culture versus Western Ideals

As earlier stated, the first contact with Europeans was made with the coming of European missionaries and merchants. This led to the introduction of western education and schooling with western ideals. European education was introduced into Nigeria in the 1840s; thenceforth, schooling in English language gradually took roots in Nigeria. Long before Europeans arrival, education was already in existence in the region. The young ones were taught about their culture, social activities, survival skills and works. The process through which these were achieved was done informally. This implies that the Nigerians had a form of education before having contact with the Europeans and their type of education.

Unfortunately and partly due to Nigeria's lack of an unified tongue, English language has remained the nation's common language (lingua franca) and the sole mode of communication in the educational system. This however was a need for enabling acquisition of formal education take place. Unfortunately, in the process of attaining great heights in education and meeting the expectations of the Western educational system, most literate Nigerians started losing their local languages in the name of new knowledge acquisition. In contrast to pre-colonial times when children were trained with their mother tongue, particularly their dialect; most children of the 21st century grow up speaking English with little or no ability to speak their own language. In other cases, one can find individuals who are capable of speaking the central Yoruba, Hausa or Igbo but lack the ability to speak the ethnic dialects. The situation has deteriorated so much that most youths cannot speak their native language as much as they speak English. Another very unfortunate situation is that many Nigerian youths are neither able to speak any of the two languages fluently due to inability to link up both the foreign and native languages up to each other for better understanding and retention. It is rather trendy to speak the American or British style of English rather than grasp the local language. There is no doubt that nations that have retained their mother tongue as the lingua franca and probably English or French as a second language (like most countries in Asia) have advanced more educationally compared to those that have retained the borrowed languages.

Phillipson points out that the imposition of the English language was used by colonizers as a tool for communication in their bid to foster the economic sustenance of the metropolis. He further argues that the languages imposed 'new mental structures' on learners. These mental structures are probably the ideologies used to justify the western cultures and impose them on others.(Jeffrey, 2012, p.1). Regrettably, Africa has continued to embrace these

western ideas and have also borrowed more while neglecting their own language culture. Presently, the need to promote technological development through the teaching of an international language such as English overshadows an arguably more basic need to transmit indigenous cultures (Jeffrey, 2012, p. 2). At this rate, as Skutabb-Kangas has rightly noted, "only 10 percent of the approximately 6800 languages left in the world will exist in 100 years (Ibid 2012, p.3).

With the vast increase of western ideals in Nigeria, the identity of her people is at risk of extinction. In pre-colonial African societies, the people show a major concern with historical matters as the past is of crucial relevance to their very existence. In other words, a sense of history and tradition has always been part of the African way of life. In pre-colonial Nigeria, it was required and common for an individual to have the ability to recite the names of his ancestors for upwards of five generations, recounting where each lived and died, with wars he may have fought, coupled with the land he may have acquired, and the number of women he got married to and their historical background.(put note). To be precise, it was relevant for the youths to have a grasp of the origin and history of their clan and then a thing of pride and self-fulfilment for every community member to have good knowledge of his or her origin. The present common phenomenon is that most youths can hardly tell much about their origin with the tendency of having zero attachment to their towns and villages of origin. Most individuals have grown up in urban centers so much that they cannot recognise their paternal or maternal homes and villages. To worsen this situation cultural depletion, many are even ignorant of the Nigeria history and their respective ethnic groups.

Westernization has eliminated the community responsibility which African societies possessed. Culturally it was the duty of every community member to ensure that every child imbibes the necessary knowledge they need to survive and contribute to the advancement of the society. Unfortunately the ideology of individualism and nuclear family has completely wiped these communal off (Arowolo,2010). Furthermore, the customs and traditions of the various regions in Nigeria are either gradually going into oblivion or being diluted with Western ideas. In the times past, it was customary for a child to greet elders by kneeling, bending or prostrating depending on the ethnic group one belongs to. Such cultural greeting positions depict respect and gratitude from the younger members to the older ones among Nigerians. Unfortunately, such respectful acts are replaced with less respectful characterised of the Western culture among the upcoming generation of the 21st century. These behaviours indicate

lack respect for age and values which are highly revered in Africa and the young ones can decide when to greet and not to greet (Arowolo, 2010).

Similarly Africans are widely known for their disciplinary means of training children in order to mould them into responsible citizens. Today, Nigerians (Africa) embrace the western form of discipline which is 'individualism' ideology that allows a person to find his own way by making his own decisions irrespective of its effects on his or her family name or members. Formal education in pre-colonial era acted as the launch of western penetration and the zeal to reach educational heights partly plays a role towards its sustenance and continuity today. It is evident that, Nigerians have moved to different countries in the Western world to gain various degrees and by so doing imbibe their culture and unconsciously neglect Nigerian traditions. Moral decadence is at its high point as waves of western ideas from the media, internet, and other forms of technology hit Nigeria; these can be observed in fashion, sexuality, food, relationships and entertainment. The western culture has been borrowed to the point that the original Nigerian culture is threatened. Marital and burial rites, child bearing and rearing, proverbs, local laws are just a few of the values held sacrosanct in Nigeria. Most youths of this period have little or no knowledge of what these issues entail. With the vast penetration of western ideals and the willingness of the Nigerian people to embrace all western standards; it is unlikely that the current 21st century generation will be able to acquire, pass on and sustain the Nigerian heritage.

Nevertheless, it will be totally unfair to label all forms of western ideas an 'obstacle' to the development of Nigerian culture. Culture as earlier stated is dynamic and cannot exist in a vacuum. Societies will always interact one way or the other and in turn learn and exchange ideas. To that extent, westernization should be given credit where it's due. Firstly, the western religion served as a means of eliminating some negative African traditions like the killing of twins and other inhumane sacrifices. Secondly, the advancement in technology has fast-tracked progress in many parts of Nigeria, and by so doing affected the political, economic and social aspects of the nation. Thirdly, formal education has increased the level of literacy of Nigerians and in turn, drawn attention to unresolved issues which this new knowledge has and will continue to solve. The positive impact of westernization cannot be overemphasized. However, this work is out to pinpoint the negligence of African culture while increased value is placed on western ideals by most Nigerians. Hence, there is the need to consciously address this unnoticeable behaviour of eroding our cultural heritage

with the acts of westernization which was basically meant to fortify and showcase the beauty our cultural values other nations rather than depleting it.

Culture and Its Benefits

Culture defines a group of people; thus it is synonymous to identity. Therefore, it is expedient that every nation's culture is preserved and sustained. In the case of Nigeria, a great deal incorporated into local culture. The sustainable development of the Nigerian culture has a crucial role to play in the advancement of the nation. This section highlights the benefits of culture (specifically social aspect) to the advancement of a nation.

Sense of Unity: In a heterogeneous nation like Nigeria, it would be easy to believe that various traditions will hinder rather than foster peace. Nonetheless, inter-group relations can foster peaceful relations when encouraged. In the process, the societies will realise that in as much as there are differences in various traditions, there are also some similarities in cultures which can foster unity. In addition, a community properly dipped in culture will have a better chance of mitigating intra-ethnic conflicts. Sense of unity also has the tendency of knitting extended families together than encouraging individualism.

Identity: The history of the culture of a group of people is basically their identity. Irrespective of the fact that history is an embodiment of knowledge, it is extremely is beneficial to a nation's existence. The researchers of this work believe that any nation ignorant of its history is dead. History brings to realization the step by step process of the economic, social and political developments of a society. In order for a nation to survive, it must have adequate knowledge of its history.

Development: Cultural factors affect the political and economic aspects of the nation. When the culture of a society is adequately considered, it will in turn lead to development. Development occurs when initiatives are adopted with sufficient recourse to traditional and indigenous cultural capitals which ultimately determine policy outcomes (Akanle, 2012). A state which puts into consideration its indigenous groups will have a greater chance of advancing.

Language: According to Jeffery, bi and multilingualism has advantages over monolingualism in matters of applied intellect, memory and learning capacities (Jeffery, 2012). Hence, multilingualism which is a feature of most African societies is beneficial to educational improvement. A nation with its mother

tongue as the lingua franca has a higher capacity for development than others with foreign languages.

Specific Challenges Facing the African Culture in the 21st Century

The African culture is under threat with waves of penetration from the west, however there are specific observable factors which pose as serious risks to the extinction of the African culture in the 21st century. The risk factors of concern in the study are socially oriented and are hereby identified as follow:

Language: the possibility of language extinction is one of the major challenges facing Africa in the 21st century. Africans have borrowed the English language to the extent of gradually doing away with theirs. Today, various individuals strive to speak like the British with little or no ability to speak their own tongue. This widespread ambition to speak and grasp the language of the west is slowly leading to an era of language extinction where youths will only have knowledge of the English language. Friere calls this cultural invasion, a situation in which:

"...the invaders penetrate the control context of another group and, ignoring the potential of the latter,...impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression" (Jeffrey, 2012, p. 1).

Social Relations: As earlier mentioned, western ideals encouraged the idea of individualism whereby people no longer communalise and believe they have the right to lead their lives as they please without intervention. This is common in western world countries whereby youths are allowed to decide their future at the age of 18 and may decide to sustain relations with their families or not. In pre-colonial Nigeria, every member of an extended family has a part to play in child rearing but traditional African values are breaking down very rapidly, asserted Arowolo, (2010).

Urbanization: The misconception of some western ideas by most Nigerians has led to the abandonment of rural areas for urban centres. Westernization introduced white-colour jobs and such trends have resulted to the neglect of traditional industries like agriculture, arts and crafts, tie and dye. Youths will rather move to the developed urban centres than settle for the local industries. Urbanization has also led to a large displacement of a large segment of the society; individuals travel abroad in search of greener pastures and in turn assimilate foreign cultures and in turn, transmit such traditions to their children.

Sexuality: the concept of sexuality has changed completely; the desire to be like the west has robbed Africa of its conservatism. Issues that were never heard of in the past have become cases for debate. The level of moral decadence mostly among youths of the 21st century raises concern. The negative images and trends aired through the media have been borrowed and imbibed into various aspects of the society (Arowolo, 2010).

African Industrialization: Social associations were in existence in pre-colonial Nigeria in order to foster economic development, examples of these were the guild and apprenticeship systems in mid-west and western parts of Nigeria. Individuals who joined such associations were trained to specialize in any area of interest such as weaving, arts and crafts, tie and dye, blacksmithing and soap making. Presently, the vast spread/preference of western goods have shifted attention away from African traditional industries. Products made in Nigeria are labelled substandard goods while those from western nations are high demand by Nigerians. This attitude undoubtedly diminishes Nigerian economic growth and discourages local entrepreneurship.

As measure of affirming or refuting the above stated observations in lieu of Nigerian culture as relate formal education empowerment with quest for the nation's sustainable development, the researchers of this work organised a focus group discussion with the representatives of 2014 summer school 'Philosophy of education'.

The summary of the discussion reflects the following:

45% of the students do communicate with their family members and as well can identify household items in their local language; 33% desire dressing in traditional wears and the same number of participants indicated the ability to greet elders in a customary way. Also 13% of the group visited their home town for the past two years and same number of the group were ready to live in a suburban community while only 6.67% of the group had interest in retiring to their home time at old age. As regard sexuality, all the group members agreed with African culture that premarital sex is immoral, however only 46% of them are not involved in premarital sex. Finally 93.3% of the group members ascertained that their responses to various point of discussion had basically been influence by their exposure to westernization through formal education. Judging from the responses of this group, it is glaring that wrong perception of the objective of formal has really robbed Nigerians of their cultural value. However this result is not an indication that western education is bad or geared

at depleting African of its rich culture, rather is it a case of using good gifts in the wrong way by the receiver.

Conclusion

Irrespective of the fact that colonization began the spread of westernization and western ideas have become a major factor responsible for the threat to African culture. It will be unfair to condemn the act of being formally educated. Formal education is the bedrock of every national development (TMR, 2009), hence any nation rejecting such gift or mishandling plays with its own development. Rejection or refuting formal education will not do any country any good, rather the issue of Nigerian culture and educational empowerment demands strategizing and balancing of the national heritage with acquisition of formal education. Africa is a continent blessed with a rich heritage though it tends to be struggling with the mentality of inferiority that kind of make its people cherish other nations' values at the expense of its our rich heritage. Hence, ideas are borrowed and fused into their culture with the belief that the west dictates the standards.

This study proposes that the first step towards the redemption and sustainable development of the African culture will be a thorough sensitization of its people with the idea of wholistic education that could help balance the true objectives of formal education with the appreciation of the nation's cultural heritage. This will not be an easy task since the continent has constantly been influenced by foreign contacts. However, the following options should be considered in the process of protecting the African culture from oblivion. To start with, African countries with a common mother tongue should strive to apply their language in day to day activities while the English language can be applied to trans-national relations. Parents should also endeavour to form the habit of communicating with their children in local languages. Likewise, local languages should be integrated into schools' syllabus as core courses. This will improve communication and foster wholistic development. Warn advises that speakers of threatened languages should be assisted by linguists to distinguish between their use of dominant language such as English, for making a living in an environment dominated economically by speakers of dominant languages' and their use of their indigenous languages which he describes as:

"/...a precious symbol of their ethnic identity and gives them a feeling of belonging to a special community, of which they should be proud, and last but not the least, give them the advantages of a secret language not intelligible to speakers of dominant languages whom they have reason to distrust" (Jeffrey, 2012, p.1).

The importance of schooling cannot be overemphasized but attention should be called to the value of the African culture. In as much as youths attend schools to gain formal education, the learning of cultures should be incorporated into the curriculum in order to make the learning process worthwhile. A nation thrives when there is equal consideration of both culture and formal education. Therefore this work does not discredit the value of formal education but the relevance of proper application of culture and education in the present generation. Parents should be encouraged to pass on their history, customs and traditions to the present generation and at a point in a child's life, he should be made to have a good knowledge of his lineage upwards of five generations. The African traditional industries should be re-introduced and developed. Youths, who are willing to thread on that path should be encouraged to learn the craft. Such local innovations should be incorporated into school curriculum so that students will not only acquire formal education but leave with African inspired skills. As with the case of Nigeria, individuals or scholars well-grounded in their various cultures should meet to discuss other means of sustaining the Nigerian culture and incorporating it in the nation's policies. Africans should learn from nations (especially those in Asia) that have achieved some level of development by protecting their culture against westernization. It is high time for the nations in Africa to come together and initiate strategies of maintaining and promoting the image of the African continent which will in turn foster development.

Conclusively, it is crucial to emphasize again that this study does not condemn totally all western ideas or the roles it has played in the African continent development; it rather addresses the notion of superiority placed on western culture and the negligence of the African heritage by Africans themselves. Africa has been a victim of colonialism and cultural domination but has continued to wrongly adopt and misuse western culture till the 21st century. This remains one of the factors responsible for the underdevelopment of the continent. One again it's worth noting that culture does not exist in a vacuum. Hence, ideas will always grow and flow uninterrupted; that does not mean that Africa should loose sight of its own values. This paper calls for a collective response right from the grassroots and proposes that the issue in question should not be ignored for the sustainable development of the African culture.

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