

**TRADITIONAL EDUCATION: A VIABLE OPTION FOR CURBING MORAL
DECADENCE AMONG YOUTH IN THE IKWERRE SOCIETIES OF NORTH
EASTERN NIGER DELTA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Amadi-Nche, Church-Hill, PhD

Crowther Graduate Theological Seminary

Abeokuta Ogun State

camadinche@gmail.com

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Abstract

The Ikwerre societies of North Eastern Niger Delta is threatened with an array of challenges. Paramount among the prevailing challenges is the issue of moral decadence among the youth in the locality which have resulted to an increase in societal vices such as armed robbery, assassination, kidnapping for ransom, illegal oil bunkering, cult clashes, destruction of lives and properties, displacement of people from their homes etc thus impinging on the socio-economic and infrastructural development of the area. Who is to be held accountable for the noxious attitudes of the youth? The government, parent, youth or society? How can the moral decay and societal menace occasioned by most youth in the area be curbed? This is the onus of this paper. The paper employs the descriptive and phenomenological methods and argues that traditional education which includes but not limited to physical training, character formation and promotion of cultural heritage is a viable option for curbing moral decadence among youth in the Ikwerre societies of North Eastern Niger Delta. The paper maintains that the potentials of the youth could be properly harnessed for a functional society which will then allow for sustainable development through traditional education. The paper recommends a revert to traditional education which promotes the cultures, traditions, values, customs and norms of the people. It also suggests that traditional education which were transmitted orally to descendants by voluntary observation of the elders' activities and full participation in any traditional societal functions be reintroduced in families for a better Ikwerre society.

Keywords: Curbing, Moral Decadence, Traditional Education, Sustainable Development,

Introduction

Over the past decades the Ikwerre societies of North Eastern Niger Delta and the Nigerian society at large have been experiencing myriads of unprecedented challenges. Paramount among the challenges is the upsurge in kidnapping for ransom, lynching, murder, cult clashes, decapitation and assassination. Other disturbing issues in the Ikwerre societies of North Eastern Niger Delta are immoral activities such as killing, shedding of blood on the earth (*Eli* which in the Ikwerre customs and tradition is a taboo), cultism, sexual abuse, armed robbery, illegal oil bunkering, destruction of lives and properties by most youth within the locality etc. The upsurge in these moral decadence and insanity masterminded by most youth in the area have not only retard the growth of the youth in all spheres of life; repelled most residents of the area from accessing their natal homes and other facilities inherent in the locality but have led to environmental degradation of the area and also impinged on the socio-economic and infrastructural development which the area would have benefitted as one of the host communities of multinational oil companies. This is in addition to the health hazards occasioned by the illegal refining of crude oil which have not only affected human beings but aquatic creatures. Who is to be held accountable for these venomous attitudes of the youth which have in all ramification defied the sanctity of human existence? While some school of thought attribute the rise in moral decadence among youth in the Ikwerre societies of North Eastern Niger Delta and by extension Nigerian society to the failure of successive government in fulfilling their cardinal responsibility to their electorate, that is providing the basic amenities needed for human survival and provision of employment to the teeming youth population etc, others attribute the ascent in moral decadence among youth as a result of parental negligence. Contrary to this views, some school of thought hold the youth and the influx of western education and technological advancement in the society accountable.

Against this background, the quest by academic experts has been; how the moral decay and societal menace occasioned by most youth in the Ikwerre societies of North Eastern Niger Delta and the Nigerian society generally can be curbed for sustainable development to thrive. This is to realize the United Nation (UN) sustainable development goals (SGDs) 2030. This quest is the burden of this paper. The paper employing the descriptive and phenomenological methods suggests traditional education as a viable option for curbing moral decadence among youth in the Ikwerre societies of North Eastern Niger Delta. The paper discusses the meaning of the term youth; moral decadence and explains what constitute the Ikwerre of North Eastern Niger Delta. Moreover, the paper clarifies the meaning of traditional education, stating the intentions and merits of traditional education. The paper sustains that the abilities of youth could be well harnessed for a functional peaceable society which will then enable for sustainable development through traditional education.

Conceptual Clarification

Meaning of Youth

The term youth is difficult to define. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines a youth as one who is young. It is especially the phase before a child becomes an adult. This may mean a period between age fifteen and twenty-five years, and it also includes young adults from twenty-five to thirty years (Della, S. 2008). The United Nations Organization (UNO) defines youth as those persons who fall between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Danfulani, D. D. and Ayo, A. (2012) remark that the specific age range that constitutes youth varies from one culture or society to the other. Thus, the western definition does not align with non-western definition. They maintain that in the traditional African societies, youth includes younger ages up to 35. In the Nigerian context, the term youth may include young people whose age fall between 15 and 35 years. The youthful stage is a period when critical decisions that will affect the entire personality of a human being are made. It is the time of opportunities, demands, and foundation for future strength, aspiration, ambitions and character. Pope John Paul II, according to Ezech, D. (2007) asserts that youth is the age of hope, of promise, of enthusiasm, of plans and ideal. It could also be an age of regrets. Youth are reservoirs of talents, potentials, skills and strength for society's sustainability, development, productivity and posterity. Danfulani and Atowoju (2012) states that enthusiasm, energy and physical strength are significant qualities of youth; however, for these natural endowments to be harnessed, they must be steered in the right course. This is achievable when the youth have been properly trained on the right culture, manner and customs. This is the essence of traditional education which is the focus of this paper.

Moral Decadence

Every human society and institutions have set rules and standards expected of the inhabitants of such society and institutions for their smooth running. When the rules and standards are kept the society and institutions enjoys peace, security, tranquillity, socio-economic and infrastructural developmental explosion. However, when there are weirdness and violation of the rules and standards of the society and institutions, there is bound to be chaos, anarchy, hostility etc. In view of this postulation, most human institutions and society seek to instil the right values, virtues, ideas, beliefs, customs and norms to their younger generation in order to maintain orderliness in the society and institutions.

Against this stand point, moral decadence is the inability to maintain sound ethics in the society. Njoku, N.C. quoting Muraino and Ugwumba (2016) asserts that moral decadence is the process of behaving in a way that shows low moral standards. It means gross

reduction in the moral values in a particular society. She remarks that moral decadence suggest a fall in the moral standard of the society, a collapse in upholding societal values, beliefs, norms and ethical standard. This explanation describes the situation in the Ikwerre societies of North Eastern Niger Delta as activities such as killing, shedding of blood on the earth, illegal oil bunkering, armed robbery etc which are inimical to human existence and were once detested and abhorred in the traditional society prior to this decade are now been hallowed and popularized in the area by the youth.

The Ikwerre People

The Ikwerre people of North Eastern Niger Delta is one of the main ethnic groups which constitute the present day Rivers State located in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. The geographical location called Ikwerre falls within four Local Government Areas of Rivers State namely: Port Harcourt, Emohua, Obio/Akpor and Ikwerre Local Government Areas. Wotogbe-Weneka, W.O. (2011) remarks that linguistically, Ikwerre is divided into four sub-groups namely REO, ESILA, ISHIMBAN AND OPA. The Ikwerre is naturally blessed with vast expanse of land for agricultural purposes and numerous streams and creeks for fishing. The vast expanse of land enables the cultivation of cassava, yam, maize, plantain etc. Remarkably, the Port Harcourt area of the Ikwerre land is the domain of multinational oil companies and oil wells. This is in addition to pipeline locations and oil wells flow stations in Emohua, Obio/Akpor and Ikwerre Local Government Areas. Religiously, the Ikwerre people believe in the existence of the supreme being-*chiokike*. They are mostly Christians with insignificant Muslims and traditional worshippers. Socio-culturally, the society is predominantly patriarchal with the man, brother or uncle as the sole head of the family.

Traditional Education

P.N. Asuquo (2002) citing Fafunwa submits that traditional education is the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives; it is the process of transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth and for disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both. Traditional Education could be formal or informal. Formal education involves the act of reading and writing while informal education is the indirect education of children by observation, imitation and participation. Informal education was the kind of education employed in the traditional African society before the advent of Islam and Christianity. This form of education was pragmatic having its objectives ranging from acclimatization, incorporation, chastisement, training, orientation, to transmission and conservation of culture.

Asuquo (2002) remarks that traditional education is clearly the initial form of education which originated from age old societal practices of the indigenous people. This form of education was need-oriented, enduring, all-embracing, pragmatic, functional and apprenticeship based. It is designed to assist individual to learn accepted norms, values, traditions, practices and cultures of his community as well as obtain behaviour patterns, abilities and skills required for preparing citizens for effective and efficient living in the community. The role of traditional education was dynamic and crucial for the smooth integration of young children into societal affairs. Through traditional education an individual is made to learn from experiences which he/she comes across constantly in course of interaction with the social and physical environment. An individual is privileged to learn about truth, patience, modesty, courtesy, industriousness, sacrifice, patriotism, home economics, environment sanitation, household chores etc for self-sustenance (Apenda A.Z. and Ayam E.A. 2011).

Basic intentions of Traditional Education

Promotion of African cultural heritage was one of the basic intentions of traditional education. In the traditional education of children, the task to teach children the correct manner and societally accepted ethics depends to a large extent on the women. As educators, women educate their young ones in the richness and diversity of the community cultures, customs, traditions, moral and general etiquette of the society. Through this method of traditional education children were taught the basic tenets of the community, and core societal values. Ekeopara and Bassey (2002) remarks that traditional education was employed to teach and prepare the young on how to live in conformity with the traditional norms, values and customs of their community. Education in the traditional society was not achieved through written form but was communicated orally from one generation to another. These, the elders, parent and siblings did by making their young watch, observe and imitate their actions. For instance, Africans who were specialist in using roots and herbs in curing ailments transmitted such knowledge to their progeny through participation and observation of the elder's daily activities by the young. In addition, in the African society the children are made to participate in naming ceremonies, religious festival, marriage rite, and funeral ritual of their communities and other festivals like chieftaincy coronation, annual yam festival and annual dance. By these actions the children would not escape the cultural practices of their environment. In other words, education in the African traditional society was achieved through observation and active participation.

Character formation is another objective of traditional education. To achieve this, the parent; siblings and other members of the family participate in teaching the African child the right manner of doing things. African children through traditional education are taught the importance of honesty, humility, moral uprightness to one's parent and outsider. Often times in the traditional society punishment are administered to the child when the right conduct are not put forward, this serves as means of correction (Fafunwa A.B.1974). Amolo Hope (2011) asserts that in the African traditional society children were under the authority of their parents whose responsibility it was to give them necessary education through strict obedience that was often enforced by physical punishment. Therefore, any child who did an honourable deed was a source of blessing and joy to his parents' while a child who was a failure was a source of disgrace and agony to his parents. Children, when very young, remained with their mothers, who took after both boys and girls until they reach a given age. In other to actualize the purpose of bringing up morally sound children, strict rules to be compiled with on how to dress, speak, eat, walk and sit especially for the girls were made (Okoro, K.N. 2010). Wotogbe-Weneka (2011) agreeing to this view assert that to ensure that the training of young ones is achieved children are sent to live in the homes of elderly women, relations/friends who are well known for their impeccable character and integrity for months and sometimes years for mentorship. The purpose of this act is to inculcate the moral integrity of such personalities on the young ones.

Similarly, through traditional education the African children were taught respect for elders or those who are in authority. Respect is demonstrated in the way the children communicate with the elders. The first way of showing respect an African child is taught in the traditional society is how to greet. For instance, in the Yoruba culture when a child sees an elderly man or woman as a male child he is required to prostrate while as a female she is expected to knell as a sign a respect. It is expected that the African child depending on the culture learns the traditional mode of greeting the elders both in the morning, afternoon and evening. This greeting method is expected of the African child when he is in contact with elders or seniors. The African child is to know the greeting for various situations like dancing, fishing, farming, sitting etc and replicate same in the daily activities (Fafunwa 1974). Traditional education availed the Africans the opportunity to learn skills, trade and technologies relevant to the demands of their society through a multifaceted internship systems fixed on family and peer group institutions. This is a means to eschew being societal threat. Traditional education enabled the African children acquire vocational skills that benefit them as individual and the community as a whole. The African children acquired skills through traditional education in agriculture like farming, fishing and veterinary science (animal care and animal rearing). Other includes

skills in trade and craftsmanship like weaving, hunting, carving, painting, drumming, dancing, singing, boat making, smiting (Iron, Silver, Gold) sculpturing, decorating, carpentry, building and leather working etc are also learnt (Fafunwa 1974). This skill acquisition profited the child, his immediate family and community thereby reducing the rate of crime in the society.

Mediums for transmitting Traditional Education

The means of inculcating traditional education into children in the traditional society was through folklores, proverbs, stories and songs. Folklores are traditions and stories which are so cherished and believed by local Africans because it is used to pass morals from generation to generation. This was often done by an elder gathering the children in the cool of the evening within the compound for stories with moral instructions (Lawrence-Hart G. 2017). As rightly observed, another medium was through proverbs, stories and songs. Proverbs, stories and songs taught to the children at home by their mothers, parents and siblings contained simple but clean messages and moral teaching. The stories and songs were composed to instil societal norms on the children. Through this medium of traditional education, children were taught the importance of chastity, uprightness, kindness, love of one's neighbour, respect for life, moderation, solidarity, respect for the truth and willingness to work and strive for good, respect for authority, senses of goodness, tolerance, sense of honesty and humility (Nmah P.E 2003). Songs were composed to woo children when they portrayed negative altitudes, the songs composed were sung openly before the child's peers to the humiliation of the child. The essence of such songs and actions were to deter the child from perpetuating such acts again. Wotogbe-Weneka (2011) adds that through the songs the young ones are indirectly taught to refrain from acts that would attract blame or condemnation and their accompanying sanctions punishment.

Moral Decadence in Ikwerre Societies and Traditional Education

As previously observed, the upsurge in moral decadence in the Ikwerre societies have left the societies underdeveloped for a number of decades even though being host to multinational oil companies such as Shell, Agip, Texaco etc which would have brought about socio-economic and infrastructural development of the area. Social vices such as kidnapping (expatriates and close relative), for ransom, cult clashes, decapitations, bloodshed, illegal oil bunkering, lack of respect for elders and constituted authorities, destruction of lives and properties etc which are known taboos of the land still persist in most of the Ikwerre societies. O.P.C Wariboko and C.R. Isichei (2019), asserts that Rivers State is currently experiencing an avalanche of intra/inter community clashes, inter-cult

clashes, politically motivated killings, constant abductions and killing, violent confrontations arising from land dispute and murder for no known reasons. They opine that instances abound in such killings in almost every part of the state in unpredictable scales. For instance, from January 2019 to August 2019, incidences of shooting and killings in Choba, Aluu, Emohua, Ahoada axis number above hundred. Similar incidents occurred in other parts of the state like Ogoni, Andoni, Omoku, Etche, Okrika etc. This spate of killings was also witnessed in Elele, Omudioga, Omerelu, Obelle, Ibaa, Egbeda in 2018 to part of 2020 as a result of cult clashes between the Icelanders and Greenlanders which led to the death of young promising youths. By implication, the crescendo in the level of crime and its activities within the Ikwerre societies have led to massive death of youths, repelled investors and denied the people and the land of the dividends of a democratic system of government. This have also reduced the level of socio-economic and infrastructural development the Ikwerre societies would have attained based on the human and natural resources endowed in the area. However, with the advent of local vigilante group initiated by communities in the Ikwerre societies such as OSPAC etc some crime rate such as cultism, broad day light robbery, kidnapping for ransom have been halt though the issue of illegal oil bunkering and other social vices is taking a different dimension.

While the Rivers State government is now out to stem the tide in the illegal refining of crude oil in the area purportedly masterminded by the youth which have inadvertently destroyed the aquatic habitats, causing environment hazards and constituting a source of menace to the health of the people by causing sooths and also combat the existence of social vices through the instrumentality of security agencies, it is important to state that traditional education with its basic intentions and approaches is a viable option for curbing the high level of moral decadence in the Ikwerre societies. Traditional education enables the transmission of right values, virtues, morals etc from one generation to another and also promotes the culture, norms, traditions and experiences of the people from generation to another. Thus, through this approach curbing moral decadence is well articulated and defined. By this approach the youth are made to know by active participation and participant observation societally accepted norms, conduct, principles of life etc, and the societally condemned roles. Also, by employing the mediums of folklores, proverbs, stories and songs which are traditional mediums of educating the young ones, good conducts are publicly applauded and appreciated while wrong manners, indiscipline and conduct are strongly condemned publicly to avoid a recurrence by another youth. Moreover, through this approach, the need for the preservation and sanctity of life and natural habitat could be appreciated. It is imperative to state that traditional education was the back bone of the African societies prior to the advent of western and Islamic education.

However, this all-inclusive system of teaching and training the young minds have been relegated to the background and sullenly abandoned for the later. This account for the woes in the land.

Similarly, the infiltration of western culture into the African soil somewhat disqualified the African culture. The African culture and religion was seen as inferior while the western culture and religion was highly esteemed. Thus, the Africans desired to be identified with the western culture in order to be valued and accepted into the society. As a result of this, local names were replaced with foreign names, local music, songs and dance which had intrinsic values (commending right behaviours and condemning wrong acts) were replaced with exotic music, songs and dance. Additionally, the indigenous languages of the people were relegated to the background and the westerns language was rightly accepted. The acceptance of this foreign culture into the African soil affected the entirety of the African enclave.

Consequently, virtues such as honesty, humility, perseverance, hard work, sanctity of live, corporation and harmonious existence were relegated to the background. This however may have provoked the high level of moral decadence such as killings, lying, impersonation, decapitation, lynching among others as experienced in the Nigerian society generally and the Ikwerre societies in particular. Interestingly, with the kind of exposure received in traditional education, the people never cared about white collar jobs because they were fully equipped to carry out trade and other lucrative activities that met their daily needs. Nevertheless, the neglect of traditional education occasioned the myriads of armed robbery, illegal oil refining for survival purposes, inability of most girl children to perform household responsibilities such as cooking, sweeping, laundry etc, in their matrimonial homes. This is the reason for calling for a revert to traditional education for a holistic training and teaching of the youth in order to curb influences of moral decadence in the Ikwerre societies of North Eastern Niger Delta.

Recommendations

The paper recommends that in order to curb moral decadence in the Ikwerre societies of North Eastern Niger Delta for sustainable development

1. Traditional education with its basic intentions and mediums of transmissions should be encouraged in the Ikwerre societies in order to promote harmonious living and co-existence among the people. Traditional rulers and the third tier of government which is closer to the people should as a matter of urgency promote the traditional culture and norms of the society and also reprimand those who drag

the cultural values, norms and societally accepted etiquette to the mud. This is to forestall the occurrence of such nastic actions.

2. Traditional and community leaders as a matter of fact should be encouraged and involved in resuscitating and enthroning our once cherished traditional value systems for use to facilitate the promotion, restoration and preservation of decency, discipline, self-control, sanity, respect for elders and constituted authorities.
3. The traditional local language of the Ikwerre societies should be emphasized by parents, siblings, relations and also taught at the early stage of the youth development at home, schools and church to enable the lessons on African religions, norms and knowledge to penetrate the minds of the youth effectively. It is believed that the language of the people has a role to play in preserving the cultural heritage and enabling cultural development of the any society.
4. Government at all levels should as a matter of urgency incorporate aspect of traditional education into school curriculum particularly those that have to do with the attainment of skills for self-reliance of the citizens.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to outline the importance of traditional education in the Ikwerre societies of North Eastern Niger Delta for sustainable development of the area. The paper also revealed the effects of neglecting traditional education to foreign culture. The paper observes that prior to the advent of western and Islamic education into the traditional African society, the traditional African society had their own means of transmitting the culture, norms and tradition of the people from one generation to another. This was done through traditional education. Traditional education was an all-round education of the young ones. Traditional education was career oriented and was aimed at forming the young ones for self-dependence. In this system of education, there was no special classroom where learning took place. As rightly observed, education took place where the learner found themselves from the home by their parents, members of the larger family, peer group etc. This was aimed at integrating good morals virtues such as humility, honesty, respect, truthfulness, principle of fair hearing and sharing etc, to the members of society. Accordingly, with this system of education there was a decline in crime rate, unemployment and other social vices because the youth were gainfully employed with craft and other trades.

Similarly, with this form of education, there was no room for idleness, slothfulness or destruction of lives and properties rather everyone in the society strived to be responsible citizens in the society. In addition, moral decadence was not an issue of concern because

there was no avenue for such. However, with the displacement of traditional education and enthronement of Western culture and education, the issue of moral decadence and several calamities were introduced into the Ikwerre societies particularly and Nigeria system generally. This paper therefore calls for a pragmatic approach to rehabilitating and recovering the Ikwerre societies of North Eastern Niger Delta from moral decay for sustainable development through traditional education. By this approach, the spirit of togetherness, love, care, harmony etc, which are inherent in the traditional ethos of the traditional values of the people could be properly transmitted to the younger generation for sustainable development of the Ikwerre societies.

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