

THE RELEVANCE OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN EDUCATION OF THE YOUTHS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL IN OYI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ANANMBRA STATE

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Abstract

The study examined the importance of African traditional religion on education of the youths in secondary school in Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State. The study is set out to determine the role which African traditional religion can play in moulding the character of the youths in secondary schools. It is also set out to find out whether African traditional religion has anything to offer in education system in the area under study. Having done that, the study proffered some suggestions on what the contemporary youths can learn from African traditional religion in order to improve their moral life in the school and in larger society. The scope of the study is embedded in the title, which is, the relevance of African traditional religion on education of the youths in secondary school in Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State. The study utilized exploratory approach using descriptive survey. The study was carried out in Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State. Oyi L.G.A comprises of Awkuzu, Nkwelle-Ezunaka, Umunya, Ogbunike and Nteje. Population of the study covered seven thousand, four hundred and eighty-one (7,481) students as well as two hundred and four (204) teachers from eleven (11) public secondary schools in Oyi L.G.A. in both junior and senior sections. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents. A total number of 318 students, 5 principals, 5 counselors, 22 form teachers were selected for the study. Oyi L.G.A has eleven (11) public secondary schools. All the 11 secondary schools constituting 100% were involved in the study. The entire population used for this study was 350. Four research questions were raised to guide the study. Data was collected using structured questionnaire which contained twenty (20) item statements. The data was analyzed through the process of editing, organizing and summarizing. In analyzing the data mean scores of the respondents in relation to the questionnaire as well as four point likert rating scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1) were used to determine the relevance of ATR in education of the youths. Only mean scores of 2.5 and above were accepted, while those below 2.5 were rejected.

Key Words: African Traditional Religion (ATR), Youth, Moral, Education

Introduction

In contemporary society, perhaps due to break through in science and technology, evil thrive more than good. This is a visible departure from the past, when, in traditional society, during the golden age of Africa, people upheld moral tenets; respect for the elder and human life was among the core values cherished by traditional man and woman. Then, youths enjoyed informal education; they were taught social, cultural and moral *ethos* among other things. And these values manifested in their conducts. As a dynamic structure, with time society began to gain civilization; things began to change; these values began to change. Today, in spite of the advent of western/formal education the conduct and lives of the contemporary youths appear not to be in tandem with what was obtained in traditional era.

Unlike traditional era when informal education was *en vogue* what obtained today in schools are disrespect for the elders among whom are the teachers, stealing, cheating during examinations, dishonesty, homosexuality, lesbianism, cultic activities, laziness, idleness, arrogant conduct, insult, bold attitude, insubordination, prostitution among others. These bad habits were abhorred in traditional society.

All these are obtained today due to obvious reasons. The value of African traditional religion is neglected and relegated to the background. Indeed this relegation and neglect of the value of African traditional religion in the education of the youths of the contemporary age has caused a lot of damage in their life-style. Lackadaisical attitude being observed in the youths of today is a typical example of the damage.

This study, therefore, is basically to x-ray the role which African traditional religion can play in the education of the contemporary youths in secondary schools. Though the study is carried out in Oyi Local Government of Anambra State, the conclusion to be made by and large affects other areas since what obtains in Oyi is not different or far from what obtains in other areas.

The Meaning of African Traditional Religion

African traditional religion is an indigenous religion that is handed down from generation to generation, upheld and practiced by Africans. It is a heritage from the past but as that which connects the past with the present and the present with the future. African traditional religion is not a 'fossil' religion as misconstrued by the European missionaries and their western counterparts. It is a religion that is practiced by the living men and women (Hornby, 2000). African traditional religion is not in any way influenced by

Christianity or Islam; it is principally traditional in nature. In Africa there are many tribes and each tribe has its own 'traditional religion'. The major characteristics of African traditional religion is that it has no founder; its record is largely based on oral traditions, folk-tales, customs, idioms, proverbs, festivals, names, legends, myths, symbols, songs, dances, liturgies and shrines among others. All these imply that African traditional religion has no formal, written documentary records. Hence it is described as traditional religion, that is, a religion which is passed down orally from generation to generation of the world.

In the light of the above, Awolalu (2007) stated that "traditional religion is the religion that has been handed down from generation to generation by the forebears of the present generation of Africans". Idowu (1973) describes the religion as "the traditional religion of the African people before the coming of Islam and Christianity". However, the missionaries of the two religions succeeded in converting some Africans to the new religions.

Furthermore, African traditional religion is more restricted in its localization and is usually confined to one pattern of life. It is non-proselytizing, that is, it is not a missionary religion; in other words, it does not go out in search of converts, rather adherents of the religion are being converted by missionaries of other religions (Okeke, 2018).

It is worthy to note that the above description of African traditional religion does not mean that it has no history. No, because religion exists in two main clauses: historical and non-historical religions. We should not make the mistake of understanding them as religion that has history and religion that has no history. Historical religion may be considered as that religion which has written documentary records. Whereas non-historical religion or religions are those without written documentary records. Examples of historical religion include Christianity, Judaism and Islam, whereas African traditional religion is an example of non-historical religion. The actual difference is that the historical records of African traditional religion are passed to generations from one hand to another since it has no formal written records.

The Importance of Studying African Traditional Religion in Secondary School

The African traditional religion was condemned by the early European schools, missionaries, travelers and investigators. It was unfortunate that these early Europeans had no patient to understudy the religion of the people, hence they described the religion with derogatory names such as idolatry,

paganism, animism, native, totemism, heathenism, savage, primitive, among others. The educated African elites who were products of the schools established by the Christian missionaries in particular and the converts in general did not see anything good in African traditional religion. It is interesting to note that African traditional religion is being studied in many higher institutions in Africa and beyond the shores of Africa since the early 20th century, so that it may not be totally neglected in African history and culture. However, the study is facing many challenges. The terms “African traditional religion”, “indigenous religion” are the common terms used interchangeably for the religion. In describing the religion, Ekwunife (2005) stated that African traditional religion is,

Institutionalized beliefs and practices of indigenous religion of Africans which are rooted in the past African religious culture, transmitted to the present by successive African forebears mainly through oral tradition, sacred specialists and persons, sacred space and objects and religious work of art, a religion which is slowly but constantly updated by each generation in the light of new experience through the dialectical process of continuity and discontinuity.

African traditional religion is a revealed religion, though it has no founder. This means that it has no historical founder like Christianity, which was founded by Jesus Christ, Islam by Mohammed, and Buddhism by Buddha. African traditional religion came into existence like any other religion as a result of human experience of the mysteries of nature and the universe. Jemiriye (2004) stated that,

The study of African traditional religion is very exciting, fascinating, but sadly uncared for and very much unrewarded even by the Africans, who, very often, out of sheer ignorance, misinformation or naivety have not bothered to know it's worth or importance.

A book or work on introduction to African traditional religion is therefore an integral foundational requirement for any African, especially for youths in secondary schools. This study will acquaint them with the knowledge of the African socio-cultural root and African religious experience. African experiences are usually simple and meaningless for their foreign observers. This explains why the study of African traditional religion suffered serious setback at the initial attempt by scholars to make it a unit of study. It must

also be noted that the impact of Christianity especially with its emphasis on enormous damage to African traditional religion and rightful recognition of African religious experience has contributed immensely to the many difficulties in the study of African traditional religion, yet it is important that the religion is studied in the lower level of academic study for many reasons:

1. It will help Africans to reconstruct their past in order to understand the present and to effectively plan for the future political, social, religious and economic sphere of life.
2. It will help to make known the African world-view to the outside world and to enlighten the world on the rich cultural heritage of the African people. Little wonder that many higher institutions in Africa and even Europe have included the study of African traditional religion in their curriculum.
3. It will help to project the distinctive personality of the African and this will help in the search for self-assertion and self determination.
4. To make comparison with other religions to show that all religions share some basic elements such as beliefs, norms and rites.
5. To correct the notions, impressions and misunderstanding of African traditional religion by some foreign investigators and armchair researchers who used wrong terminologies to describe or qualify the religion.
6. To find out the benefits of African traditional religion in character formation.
7. To let the world know that to the African, the spiritual world is so real, invisible to moral sight (Ajuyi, 2000).

The Need for African Traditional Religion on the Education of the Youth

Moral and religious life of the contemporary youth has dropped, and has reached such an alarming proportion that every household is concerned about it. With such countless number of crimes haunting the Nigerian society, people have begun to ask questions to find out the causes of the increase in the acts of immorality and criminality bedeviling the contemporary society. Most adults feel that their youthful days were better than today. Some people attribute these causes to home upbringing of children. They argue that in various homes there is lack of effective control of children especially with the advent of modern science and technology. Government especially the political class is obviously guilty as the lives of the leaders do not portray any good image which they youths can emulate. In the school, moral and religious education is given very scarcity attention in practice; moral life is being

neglected and relegated to the background. This neglect to morality in the educational system has led to a betrayal instead of the good morals in the lives of the youths. Paying lip services to morality in the individual and cooperate lives is working the country to destruction and unless the trend is reversed, we shall continue to harvest crime in the society.

However, the researcher strongly believe that most of these socio-moral problems can be solved through programmes and sustained socio-moral actions, education, re-education and re-direction of the youths, through the introduction of African traditional religion in secondary schools. There is no doubt that the ethical norms embedded in African traditional religion will help to shape the character of the youths. In this regard, Grinniel (2010) says that "as dangerous as ignorance is, it is not as dangerous as knowledge without character; nothing else in education without character may result in a dreadful capacity for crime and general destructiveness".

At this juncture, the study will analyze the data collected from the respondents to find out whether the study of African traditional religion is relevant in education of the youths in secondary schools.

Data Collection and Analysis

For data collection, the researcher obtained permission of the principals of the selected schools authorizing him to collect data from their respective schools in Oyi Local Government Area. With this therefore, he established a rapport with the respective schools. Previously the researcher made use of a pilot study to estimate the reliability of the instrument. In order to ensure reliability of the instrument in this study, the following steps were followed by the researcher using the test and re-test method:

1. A few students, specifically 30 students were selected from three schools in Idemili North Local Government Area.
2. The instrument was administered to the students.
3. The questions were scored immediately.
4. The same group of students were administered with the same instrument after three weeks.
5. The responses were analyzed.
6. Finally, the answers gathered were compared with the ones gathered the previous three weeks.

After comparing the results the researcher observed that the responses were consistent. One month after the pilot study the researcher went to the eleven (11) secondary schools in Oyi Local Government Area to administer the

questionnaires to the respondents sampled for the study. The data was to find out whether African traditional religion is relevant in education of the youths in secondary schools. 350 questionnaires were distributed and 100% was returned. This is possible because the researcher employed the assistance of the form teachers and class prefects in each school. And on the spot collection approach was adopted by the assistance.

Table 1:1 A Breakdown of Public Secondary Schools in Oyi L.G.A

S/N	Type of School	No of School	Targeted Population of Study
1.	Boys School	1	221
2.	Females School	2	1,591
3.	Mixed/Co-educational Schools	8	5,669
	Total	11	7,481

Source: Ministry of Education, Oyi Local Government Area Headquarters, Nteje

Table 1:2 Sample Size Distribution of the Respondents

S/N	Category of School	Total of Public Schools in Oyi L.G.A	No of Secondary Schools Sampled	No of Students Sampled	No of Teachers/ Counselors Sampled	No of Principals Sampled
1.	Boys Sec. School	1	1	30	3	1
2.	Female Sec. Schools	2	1	40	5	2
3.	Mixed/Co-educational	8	3	248	19	2
	Total	11	5	318	27	5

Population of students for this study was selected from both junior and senior sections; all in the eleven (11) public secondary schools in Oyi L.G.A. Out of this number 100 were selected from JSS 3. The reason is that JSS 3 is a transition class. The students of this section were considered of age. The school principals, class teachers especially form teachers and counselors were involved in the study. They provided useful information concerning the study.

Research Questions

1. To what extent can the study of African traditional religion in secondary school be relevant?
2. Can the study of African traditional religion in secondary school help in the moral upbringing of youths?
3. To what extent does the neglect of African traditional religion in secondary school affect the moral life of the youths and the society?
4. How can moral norms found in African traditional religion challenge the contemporary youths to amend their way of life?

Discussion of Findings

The findings show that majority of the respondents in all the schools sampled held the opinion that study of African traditional religion in secondary school is relevant. For example, 80% were of the view that if the religion is introduced it will help the youths to know more of how the religion looked like a couple of past centuries. It will help to project the distinctive personality of the African youth and this will help in the search for self-assertion and self determination.

On whether the study of African traditional religion in secondary school will help in the moral upbringing of youths. 280 respondents strongly agreed that study of the religion is vital in contemporary society. According to them, moral life of today's youth is in shambles. In traditional society people abhorred crimes; if crimes were committed, the offender must appease the spirit to avoid visiting him or her with some punishment, which sometimes resulted to death of the offender and by extension, the family or community. But today, crimes are committed with impunity to the extent that they appear to have been accepted by the society as social norms. This explains why a total of 70 respondents disagreed. Perhaps they have not enough knowledge of the past.

On the extent to which the neglect of African traditional religion in secondary school education has affected the moral life of the youths. The same total of 280 respondents agreed that neglect of African traditional religion has affected the moral life of the youths very drastically. In the opinion of 40 respondents, neglect of African traditional religion in education system can lead to discontinuity of culture and moral benefits obtained from it. According to them, African traditional religion can help the youths trace their cultural heritage.

Furthermore, they held that in traditional society what obtain today in the society such as kidnapping, raping, corruption, disrespect for the elders, shunning of worship or lack of interest in worshipping God on the day of worship, insincerity, lack of trust, deliberate killings or murder, telling lies, ritual practices among others, all these were abhorred in traditional society due to punishment associated with them. Traditional man and woman dreaded the spirit so much that; they were conscious of the fact that the spirit is watching their individual and collective activities, and so, no one would like to be visited with punishment. But today, reverse is the case. People commit all sorts of crimes as if there is no God and that the spirits are no longer watching. In traditional society people believe that the deities do not waste time in inflicting pains on the offender, but today due to advent of Christianity, the Christian doctrine teaches that God is a merciful Father, and so the contemporary society takes his mercy for granted.

On how moral norms found in African traditional religion can challenge the contemporary youths to amend their way of life. Many of the respondents, specifically 85% were of the opinion that African traditional religion should be introduced in secondary school curriculum; if introduced and taught very well by experts, the youths will benefit tremendously from the traditional norms and values. For example, African traditional religious moral norms can challenge the youths on community consciousness and being one's brother's keeper, that is, being available to help one's neighbor even in academic matters. Thus those who have low IQ can benefit from those whose intelligent quotient is high through group study.

The norms of the African traditional religion will obviously be a wakeup call to the contemporary youths, hence the youths will know that sincerity, truthfulness and justice are virtues that one can possibly stand on. Traditional norms abhor sexual immorality. Contemporary youths can learn to avoid sex before marriage. Contemporary youths can learn that traditional norms abhor abortion and euthanasia. In traditional society, homosexuality, lesbianism, gay marriage are never practiced, they are abomination. The contemporary youths must shun such practices because they are against nature. Traditional norms can also challenge the youths of today by teaching them how to be obedient to the one who teaches them particularly the teachers.

Conclusion

This study is on the relevance of African traditional religion on education of the youths in secondary school. The study was carried out in Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State. All the eleven public secondary schools

in the area were used for the study. The researcher observed that there are moral values in African traditional religion that if introduced as a course of study in secondary schools, they will help to direct the minds of the contemporary youths and the society will benefit from them.

It is unarguable that religion guides the youths in their academic aspirations to face the future task and responsibilities with hope and confidence in God (Okeke & Okoye, 2016). From the findings of the study it is clear that religious/moral education is indispensable in promoting a healthy society. This implies that it must be mandatory for a child who will serve the best interest of this nation to learn the precepts of religious implementations and abide by them. If the youths of Oyi and indeed every youth embrace ideal religious practices there would be a change in the society and crime will reduce to its barest minimum.

Recommendations

Below are recommendations based on the findings of this study:

1. The study of African traditional religion should be introduced in secondary schools for it will help the youths to reconstruct their past in order to understand the present and to effectively plan for the future political, social, religious and economic sphere of their life.
2. The study of African traditional religion in secondary schools will help to project the distinctive personality of the African youth and this will help in the search for self-assertion and self determination.
3. The moral norms embedded in African traditional religion will be a wake-up call to the youths hence they will challenge them (youths) on how to stand by justice, truth, honesty, respect and obedience to constituted authority.
4. There is no doubt that the moral norms in African traditional religion will help to direct the minds of the contemporary youths towards positive thinking and society will benefit from it.
5. Curriculum planners should not shy away from including the study of African traditional religion in secondary school level for if introduced, the religion will hopefully inculcate in the youths the right norms and values expected of them.

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APPENDIX

Statistics of Schools, Teachers and Students in Oyi L. G.A.

Location of School	No of School	Type of School	Name of School	Population of School	Male	Female	Population of Teachers	Name of School & Teachers Sampled	Name of School & Students Sampled	Principals Sampled	Counselors sampled
Oyi L.G.A - Ogidi Education	11	Co-edu	Unity Sec School, Awkuzu	220	68	152	12				

Zone											
		"	Model Comp re Sec. Sch, Nkwel le- Ezuna ka	514	295	219	11				
		"	Progre ssive Sec Sch, Umun ya	511	200	311	13				
		"	Comm un High Sch, Nkwel le- Ezuna ka	1,063	491	572	22	5	130	1	1
		"	Comm un High Sch, Awku zu	755	415	340	19				
		"	Cave City Sec. Sch, Ogbu nike	1,058	598	460	35		118	1	1

		''	New Era Sec. School , Nteje	992	362	630	20	9			
			Comm unity Sec. School , Awku zu	556	284	272	16				
		Fem ale	Wome n Educat ion Centre	11	Nil	11	5	1	5	1	1
		''	St. Monic a's Colleg e, Ogbu nike	1,580	Nil	1,580	34	4	35	1	1
		Boys	Boys High Sch, Nteje	221	221	Nil	17	3	30	1	1
		Tota l		7, 481	2713	4768	204	22	318		

Source: Ministry of Education, Oyi L.G.A Headquarters, Nteje.