

EDUCATION AND THE AFRICAN ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

This paper discussed education and the African environment. It paid attention to how formal education has influenced the African environment. The paper was discussed under the following headings: Religion and the African Environment, and Cultural Values and the African Environment. It cherished the fact that the African environment has religious connotations as some trees, rivers and persons among others were considered sacred. Cultural values like sense of community life, sense of good human relations, sense of the sacredness of life, sense of hospitality, sense of religion among others were discussed. It was discovered that Syncretism is being practiced by Africans, in an attempt to strike a balance between Christianity and African traditional religion. Also, cultural values have been replaced with what modernization offers in terms of individualistic instead of communal life, ritual killings as an alternative to sacredness of life and socialization replaced sense of awe in worship among others. The paper did not neglect the fact that education shaped African environment positively. Noted among these positive areas where freedom for women, literacy and better health care. It was then suggested that African cultural values should be inculcated into educational curriculum to avoid them going into extinction, and efficacy of Christianity and Islamic beliefs should be emphasized. Descriptive research of correlational type was used for this study, since it attempted to solve the problems of education and African environment.

Keywords: Formal education, African Environment, Syncretism, Cultural values, Literacy and Globalization.

Introduction

This paper discussed education and the African environment. It paid attention to how education has influenced the African environment especially the Western part of Africa. Africa is the second largest continent, covering almost five fifth of the total land surface of earth. The continent is bounded on the west by the Atlantic Ocean and on the North by the Mediterranean Ocean. On the East, by the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, on the South the mingling waters of the Atlantic and Indian oceans. West Africa is in the western part of Africa.

According to United Nations, it has seventeen countries- Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Saint Helena. According to Paul (2021), the population of West Africa is estimated at about 381 million people.

African environment can be described in line with African life in its totality. They are rich in natural resources, in form of tropical timber, cocoa beans and tropical fruits among others. They have rivers that serve as their source of water supply. All these natural resources are useful to them and they are part and parcel of their environment. They cultivate the land to earn their living. Africans also have rules and regulations guiding them within their environment according to experiences of each ethnic group. Africans uphold moral values that are being taught from one generation to another and strictly adhered to. Traditional Africans fear God and revered Him deeply! Everything they did was translated through their experiences of God within their environment. Africans belief in Almighty God and serve him through other gods. Religion gave meaning to them and every other thing flow from it. They served and honored God in their environmental experiences.

Sharing this view, Amelia (2020) contends that:

The relationship between the African people and their environment is much like the two sides of a coin – inextricably connected yet in constant opposition. The people, one side of the coin, live in close dependence on the service-value of natural resources. On the other side of the coin is the environment: the land, climate, water resources which are so intimately connected in a physical sense to the African people. (p. 7).

This is to say that Africans and their environment are more or less the same.

African environment could be understood through their philosophy and culture.

Omojola (2020a) while reviewing Kanu's Sources of *Igwebuiké* Philosophy: Towards A Socio-Cultural Foundation asserted that "African philosophy and culture are always learnt and taught by each ethnic group and would be passed on from one generation to another either through oral tradition or through their signs and symbols." (p. 83). Therefore, African could be understood within their environment in the following areas as stated by Kanu as source of *Igwebuiké* Philosophy: Names that Africa give to their children/or used as titles ascribed to God, African proverbs and African songs which is a normal way of African culture, Art may come in form of painting or sculpture by individuals or by a

group of people with the same understanding, Folktales emphasize the community value and virtues, African symbols come in form of image to represent the relationship between the visible and invisible, African mythology gives meaning and full explanation to the life of a given community in African.

African society regarded education as a means to an end not as an end in itself. Education was generally for an immediate induction into society and preparation for adulthood. In particular, African education emphasized social responsibility, job orientation, political participation, spiritual and moral values. According to vanguard news online (2018), while quoting Fafunwa identified the following as the seven goals of African education: To develop the child's latent physical skill, to develop character, to indicate respect for elders and those in position of authority, to develop intellectual skills, to acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labor, to develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs, to develop, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large.

Supporting this view, Omojola and Kanu (2020) opined that:

African education comes from what to do and how to behave well. For example, at rising, children are taught to greet elders, sweep the surroundings, they are also taught from time to time to respect elders, to have value of honesty, charity, industriousness, cleanness, humility, support- members helping themselves in developing someone's project, as a group or people of the same trade helping themselves. (p. 2).

This is to establish the fact that Africans have traditional education that promotes African values.

Europeans introduced formal education to Africa as a means of Evangelization which entails getting people converted to Christianity from African Traditional Religion. Adewuya (2004) represented this idea in this form: "The first documented literature on the entry of Education to Africa by the colonialist in latter part of the nineteenth century mentioned 1842 when evangelization was brought in to replace the slave trade that had ravaged the peoples of the Western and Eastern coast of Africa about five centuries" (p. 1). Therefore, schools were later built along side with churches and many Africans were attending schools free of charge in some areas and also attending churches. They were also participating in the celebration of their regular festivals quietly.

In the mind of Mbiti (1969), while reflecting on Christianity in Africa in relation to schools averred that “schools became the nurseries of Christian congregation, and converts earned the name of “Readers”. The same buildings were used as schools from Monday to Friday, and as churches on Saturday (for catechumen lessons) and Sunday (for worship). As we saw, it is Africans who have been to school that are most deeply affected by modern changes” (p. 232). By implications, it was the enlightenment gained through education that brought about transformation to the lives of those who participated in the formal education. In the same vain, Nbefo (1996) affirmed that “The missionaries, on the other hand, saw the schools as a means of winning the war against Satan by making the new generation going through schools Christian” (p. 49).

Religion and the African Environment

One of the most prominent activities in African environment was religion. Africans were able to see God in their environment and worship Him accordingly. In the opinion of Mbiti (1969), “...all African peoples associate God with the sky or heaven, in one way or another.” To corroborate this claim, Kwesi (1984), stated that:

Generally speaking, however, the environment has a special meaning for the Africans; he loves the environment, he fears it, and he senses something mysterious about it. The elements, plants and animals, the land and all that is within and on it - these plays a vital role in the African apprehension of reality” (p. 49).

Accordingly, Onwubiko (1991) in his reflection on Sacred objects and places in Africa maintained that “...the shrines of deities, some streams and rivers together with the fish in them... are sacred. Some images are sacred..., some persons too are sacred-these are the religious personnel in African religion” p.63.

Consequently, Kanu, Omojola and Bazza (2020) while citing Idowu opined that:

Usually, women are more religious ones who are more frequently caught in this practice by wayside shrines, sacred trees, sacred brooks, at cross-roads, or at any other places marked with some sacred signs, asking for a blessing on their journey, their work, their wares, their family or their private undertakings. (p. 5).

It is, therefore, important to appreciate the fact that African environment has religious inferences. So, separating Africans from their environment would be

tantamount to removing them from their natural habitat; since their religion being practiced in their environment represents their ways of life.

Cultural Values and the African Environment

All society develop values from their regular experiences to guide their day to day activities and to keep their environment peaceful and in good relationship with one another. These values form peoples' character and keep them from unwanted misunderstandings. There are lots of cultural values in Africa but for the purpose of this work those values that are common to many Africans will be selected and how these values have been influenced by education will later be discussed. The most collective cultural values in Africa as identified by Onwubiko (1991) are as follows: "Sense of community life, sense of good human relations, sense of the sacredness of life, sense of hospitality, sense of the sacred and of religion, sense of time, sense of respect for authority and for elders, sense of the language and proverbs as cohesive of the community based on the truth" p.13. It was a taboo for any member of a given community in Africa not to adhere to these values.

The above values were cherished by Africans as they lived a communal life to support and care for one another. In this process, the idea of good relationship became easy as it was already in their life style, as solidarity was a must. Therefore, there was consideration and compassion for others. Africans respects human life as there was punishment for whoever kills. The idea of shedding of blood apart from that of animals was not allowed, to the extent that the blood of virginity was celebrated to show that life has been preserved as Onwubiko (1991), while citing Davidson pronounced in this statement "the blood of virginity is the symbol that life has been preserved, that the spring of life has not already been flowing wastefully, and that both the girl and her relatives has preserved the sanctity of human reproduction" p.23. African sense of the sacred and of religion was second to none. They held religion in high reverence and they had religious celebrations with complete sense of awe.

Africans derived joy in sharing, hence their sense of hospitality was superb. Everyone in the community shared whatever they had in common, no matter how small. Therefore, nobody lacked anything. In their sense of religion, morality, coming from these cultural values were simply the fruits of their religion and it was impossible to separate them. Religion was not just a practice of worship but a fountain and source of virtues. Therefore, the outcome of

religious worship was translated and lived out within the community through their good relationship with one another.

In their value of time, Africans had control over their time as “socialized time, here is the use of time which does not sacrifice social duties and human relations on the alter of clock-time punctuality” (Onwubiko 1991, p. 25). In the same vain, Omojola (2021) averred that:

Time is planned at every stage – time to begin work, time to marry and time to have projects as achievement because, time to Africans also means what one has achieved in life in terms of family, wealth and societal status. There is evaluation from time to time especially when peer groups are compared. Peer group societies are formed to support, encourage and mainly for evaluation (p. 110).

Africans had deep respect for elders and old age. They equally held parents in high esteem. Whoever disrespect elders were collectively punished. Above all, Africans sense of the language and proverbs as cohesive of the community based on the truth was paramount as this was the vehicle of proper communication and proverbs were ways of given better explanation to every spoken word.

Cultural values in Africa were ways with which they lived within the environment. It worked for them because of taboos attached and penalty incurred on those who did not do the right thing according to the culture. These values are gradually disappearing based on the impact of education and they are been replaced with western culture received through education.

Negative Influence of Education on the African Environment

Formal education has much effect on African environment in a more confusing manner. In African traditional religion, deities, rivers and rocks among others were worshiped and they translated this devotion into action through their art, culture and philosophy. At the arrival of Christianity and Islamic religions, some Africans accepted to be dedicated to these beliefs and later turned it to syncretism in an attempt to strike a balance. In the mind of Nbefo (1996) although referring to Igbo tradition in particular opined that “...the ambivalence of Christian practice in which Christian worship the Christian God as well as the gods of the traditional shrines has led professor Nwoga to question the existence of the idea of a Supreme Being in the Igbo traditional thought” (p. 49).

To support this view, Famoriyo in Igbekele (2021), as he was applying the issue of signs and wonders in the sacred scriptures to the contemporary age preached that Christians “still refuse to change, but instead rush to places where they are often deceived by charlatans” (p.315). This is to establish the fact that Africans are not comfortable with Christianity which was introduced through education but still seek solutions to their problems elsewhere. Therefore, Kanu, Omojola and Bazza (2020a), although reflecting on Sacrifice in Yoruba culture, orated that “civilization has reduced the frequency of this practice, (offering sacrifices to gods) not making an emphatic statement that they are no longer in practice but that they are done most of the time in secret” (p. 140).

In the areas of cultural values, Africans appear to be losing their ethics on the platform of civilization as Kanu and Omojola (2020) discoursed in this statement “African people have been able to transfer smoothly, their indigenous knowledge from one generation to another until the arrival of the colonial masters, who through civilization and modernization reduced the consideration for African indigenous knowledge” (p.185). The sense of community life of communal living has been exchanged with individualistic life where technology has succeeded in taking the place of African togetherness. Since closeness is gradually declining, sense of good human relations is not likely to flourish. The issue of the sacredness of life has drastically deteriorated. Today in some of African countries, blood of virginity that Onwubiko (1999) was celebrating as one of the ways of keeping life sacred is nothing to write home about. It has become a thing of the past in this generation where virgins are considered to be fools!

Ritual killings are common and people can do anything to make money even killing of immediate family members. Africans sense of the sacred and of religion has been substituted with socialization. Religious leaders display and demonstrate during worship in the name of working miracles. The knowledge of science has watered down the importance of reference in religion. The sense of hospitality has turned to stealing and cheating where thieves would disguise as guests to steal from charitable people. There is need to think twice before helping those in dear need to avoid trouble.

Sense of the sacred and of religion has been replaced with moral decadence, pornography, indecent dressing and syncretism. Africans still struggle to keep sense of time. Instead, they perform Western programs like education in African time stuff as Omojola (2021) ranted:

Universities seem to be administered in the light of African time where academic events are performed behind schedule. Sometimes, academic calendar is not available as at when due to give directions; there is lateness in commencement of classes, examination papers are delayed and results are not available to time. Many a time, events like matriculation and convocation do not begin as intended and students and guests are seated for a long time (p. 107).

Laziness is common as against Africa life style. Sense of respect for authority and for elders is dwindling. Rudeness and lack of discipline are the order of the day. As for sense of the language and proverbs as cohesive of the community based on the truth, learning foreign languages is being celebrated while African languages are being termed vernacular. All these are evaluation to help Africans retrace their paths. Although, education has a lot of positive side that added value to African life.

Positive Influence of Education on the African Environment

Education became the vehicle of enlightenment since inception and it has not stopped to function as that. The first noted influence of education on Africans is literacy. Many Africans can now read and write with knowledge of Arithmetic. This is helping Africans to have proper documentation of their values and to move with time. It has also contributed to their easy flow of business. An average business man can cope with buying and selling as against trade by barter of old. This is because they are now knowledgeable through the influence of education.

Another prominent area is freedom for women as being a woman could be considered a cause in the past according to Nbefo (1996) that "From the view point of western civilization, it is correct to say that women lead a difficult life" (p.141). In typical African setting, women were used as part of men's or husband's property. Widowhood was common and nothing happens if the woman dies before the man. Then, wife of the deceased was given out to a member of his family as inheritance. Women were living at the mercy of men; they hardly do anything without the approval of the husband. In connection with this assertion, Kanu, Omojola and Bazza (2020b) submitted that women in Yoruba culture depended on their husbands in this statement: "Their rank traditionally depends on that of their husbands. Therefore, wives of kings, chiefs and *Ifa* priests were honored more than those that were married to ordinary members of the community' (p.2).

Part of these positive areas was the influence of education on the issue of killing of twins. Imagining killing of children that a woman carried in her womb for nine months in the name of culture. This is to establish that women were really tortured and suppressed at a time. At this time as well, child mortality was common and thanks to better health care brought through education that has greatly influenced this. With education therefore, things are better for women and they too can now enjoy a bit of good life, unlike before. "Education is the major channel through which confidence can be gained to make major improvement in the society, through acquisition of values that will be common to all, against ethnic values that individual gained in the home training. From these educational communal values, majority can think alike and share the same views from their broad orientation" (Omojola 2020b, p.182.).

Recommendation

Based on the discussions above, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Efficacy of Christianity should be emphasized by religious leaders to Christians to avoid confusions and those who are willing to remain in traditional African Religion should be given enough freedom to practice their belief.
2. Cultural values should be taught in schools under language to enable passing on the core values of Africans to the next generations for continuity.
3. Those areas that education has influenced positively should be celebrated while African should be eternally grateful for this impact, like in the case of killing of twins that has been eradicated from Africans soil, widowhood that is gradually fading and education for girls.
4. African scholars can now develop are encouraged to develop more literatures on African life style and to also develop African environment to a better standard.

Conclusion

This paper discussed education as it affects the African environment. Both formal and informal education have the purpose of training a child physically, developing his character, vocational training and respect for the elders and peers; only that formal education is done in an organized manner and it has academic disposition. African environment was characterized by many forests full of

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animals of numerous types. With formal education therefore, there are lots of deforestation and most of these lands have been used to build schools, churches and hospitals among others. This is really having a lot of effects on climate change, which cause African environment to be disassembled and made collegiality, communal life and connectivity difficult. This has then been replaced with technology. Getting connected with family and friends is only possible now with social media.

Also, rivers and streams are polluted and interchanged with pipe borne water. All the creatures that Africans marveled at and worship in the past are no longer visible to this generation as African environment is becoming populated with people of different cultures. It is, therefore, important that African scholars come up with suggestions on how African values can be inculcated to educational curriculum so as to make meaning to this generation.

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CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES**