

# THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL EDUCATION IN CURBING RESTIVENESS AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTHS

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## **Introduction:**

If any educational program or programs is to be successful, estimating how it will assist the learner to properly adjust to the prevailing conditions of his environment is quite important. Learning within any educational system in all its ramifications is intended to provide knowledge and information to enable the learner to face the challenges around him. That is why, educational processes are peculiar to different societies and in essence targeted at achieving certain experiences of life. The experiences of life of societies are usually predicated on their cultural orientations and essentially based on accepted values, norms, belief-systems, knowledge and history. Accordingly, the expectation has been that; the younger members of society should conform to the dictates of these cultural orientations. However, the reality has been that, quite a significant number of youths in societies in Africa appear not to have manifested the characteristics to show that their learning in their traditional cultural societies have been effectively carried out.

In this paper, attempt has been made to assess the role of education in the African traditional system with particular reference to Nigeria. This effort is in support of the desire to fundamentally address the issue of youth restiveness in the Nigerian society. The Nigerian youth today appears to be in the vanguard of activities relating to armed robbery, thuggery, thief, fraud, murder, insubordination, drug addiction, idleness to cite but a few. The assumption is that if the traditional educational system in Nigeria has been effective enough, perhaps the magnitude of these social vices would not have reached the present peak.

## **Cultural Education in Traditional System**

Cultural education implies giving the youth in the village or community an all round and complete learning without any walls. Through cultural education, social value systems are taught to the young while they are reminded of their obligations to the society. Zerbo (1977), agrees that, culture helps to regulate man's existence in

the society. That, it is important for improving the age-old habits of the people as well as the requisite good manners of social deference. Cultural education in the African situation is a collective responsibility of every member of the family and the community at large and where a child is found to be operating counter to the societal expectations, he is reprimanded by any adult member of the community.

Fafunwa (1983), argues that the aim of cultural education is to produce the individual who is honest, respectful, skilled, cooperative and conforming to the social order of society. Such education places emphasis on character training. He then identified certain objectives of cultural education, which among others include:

- i. Developing the child's talents in physical skills,
- ii. Developing ethical character,
- iii. Inculcating respect for elders and those in positions of authority,
- iv. Developing Intellectual Skills,
- v. Developing a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs.
- vi. Understanding, appreciating and promoting the cultural heritage of the country at large.

Fadipe (1970), against this background, observed that among the Yoruba, the education of the young in the codes of manners, convention, customs, morals, superstitions and laws of the society is achieved through various members of his family, household, his extended family, kindred and his neighbourhood.

The African traditional educational system assumes the position of a well laid out system that its antecedents are potent enough to achieve its goals. It stands out as a practically oriented system by which means its lofty ideals should not be intractable to achieve. Surprisingly, the features of today's youths (upon which the system is centrally placed) seem to be far from giving the impression that the system is operating at its highest level. Quite against the objectives of the system, the youths have acquired sophistication in the tenets of bribery, fraudulent activities, armed robbery, thuggery, murder, disloyalty, greed, stealing among others.

Can one adduce an explanation by alluding to the fact that, the cultural patterns of traditional African education have not given room for the

expected social expansion based on the complexity of dynamic social changes?

This question takes us straight to the issue of cultural patterns of education in Africa, where variations may occur amongst societies on account of cultural diversity. Cultural pattern is defined as the methods of learning by the members of the society. However, broad based cultural patterns are noticeable in many societies as vehicles for the transmission of norms and values of society from the basis of traditional education which in turn help the child to develop native intelligence for good living. Some of these broad-based cultural patterns are: Language, Folklores, Poetry, Proverbs, Drama, Music, Dance, Festivals and Rituals. We shall discuss each of them below:

**Language:** Language plays a very powerful role in the education of an individual. It introduces the child into the world. Without Language, the child's world will be narrow and infact meaningless. How the child perceives his environment invariably depends on his level of language proficiency and how he acts depends on his understanding of situations around him. The relevance of cultural patterns for traditional education in Africa is most important for the individual across all years of existence. Usually, the child is most influenced by the cultural patterns of society. At this period, the child imbibes the cultural norms and values of the society before he develops into adulthood. Corder (1973), sees language for its part, as an 'object', skillful human behaviour or a social event geared principally towards ensuring communication among human beings. In human social interaction, effective communication is essential for good conduct and this entails that without sound language, there will be poor communication, poor social interaction and subsequently poor conduct by younger members of the society. How effective have the diversified Nigerian languages promoted the realization of the objectives of traditional education among the youngsters.

As members of the younger generation imbibe their societal cultures, it appears that, not much of the critical components of our languages are passed on. Basically, the concrete aspects to do with speaking and listening may have become problematic at the initial stage resulting in the difficulty in the proper understanding and appreciation of the society's values and hence poor conduct. This is because, in many children, initial false concepts formation are difficult to be discarded in

later life once imbibed. It therefore appears that, the foundation of social development of some children in African has given rise to their restiveness, culminating into undesirable conducts. The following are measures to improve on the rôle of language in order to enhance learning in the traditional education:

- i. Our indigenous languages should be linked to national development. Most industrialized nations use their respective languages as languages of technology and the whole process built up in their cultures. This approach can be adopted by Nigerians and the entire process of development and commitment can be linked to our cultures. It can thus be stated that our technological uses of our languages are linguistic uses for national unity, integration and cultural development.
- ii. There is the need to exhibit desirability and pride in the use of our local languages. As it appears, some traditional societies may not have realized these and the magnitude of damage done to our cultures.

**Folklore:** This is a popular means of education in various societies. Through this children are taught various things and virtues within a specific culture. The child is told stories where various aspects of life are re-enacted and morals stressed!

He is taught, for instance, the virtues of leadership, wisdom, honesty, achievement, success, failures, love and affection among other virtues. By this, the child is made to understand himself and his universe and thus, develops the ability to survive within his environment.

Folklores are taught through songs, direct story-telling and poetry and in most situations, direct experiences are drawn from the environment. In folklore, as patterns of education, animals, plants and indeed various elements of nature like, the moon, the sun and the river do play virtual roles in the process of learning. It has been argued that, folklores are important means by which meaningful learning can be accomplished and that order and sanity can be achieved. Little wonder then that, Okot Bitek (1984) in his "song of Ocol" explained that those Africans who insist in following the ways of white people are foolish because they misunderstand their own ways and do not know themselves.

He also argued that if they try to destroy African traditions, they will certainly fail. The poem goes like this:

“Listen Ocol, my old friend,  
The ways of your ancestors are good,  
Their customs are solid  
And not hollow,  
They are not thin, not easily breakable,  
They can not be blown away,  
By the winds,  
Because their roots reach deep into  
The soil”.

As argued by Okot (1984), folklore taught through poetry, instills pride and nationalist consciousness in the minds of children who are taught. It ensures that children appreciate their traditional customs and heritage which in turn shape their perspective of the larger society. Folklore is a powerful and effective pattern of Cultural education and its impact is capable of influencing the life pattern of the entire community. If this is actually so, the incidences of youth restiveness in the Nigeria society calls to question the effectiveness of the claim. We have seen and experienced the sights of dishonesty, failures, disaffection and a host of other social vices. Perhaps, following measures in the application of folklore as a pattern of education can help minimize the occurrences of these:

- i. Folklore which hitherto had been very popular in most traditional societies in Africa is gradually disappearing as most parents, older siblings and extended family members hardly find time to be with the children when they look forward to it in the evenings especially during moonlight. Most older members of the traditional societies now engage in jobs quite different from those of the forefathers and some even travel to urban centres to perform such duties. These activities do not allow them time and reasonable opportunity to teach the children by this method. To achieve this popular means of traditional education, older members of the society especially parents, should make out time to be with the children at such sessions. Story-telling and other means of folklore can be used as a way of redressing the restiveness of youths and create conditions for them to imbibe good virtues.

method and expressions as this will help to sustain the interest of his audience.

- iii. He should be able at applying appropriate strategies to dramatize his story in very captivating manner to evoke laughter and in extreme cases of sympathy to evoke cry. This is meant to make learning outcomes quite permanent in the learner and such that, he can utilize the lessons throughout his life.

**Proverbs:** Proverbs are aspects of folklore and poetry used as tools in traditional pattern of education. Proverbs teach moral lessons, provide cultural models which aid in inculcating traditional values and beliefs in the young ones. Below are some examples of proverbs from the Igbo culture, Arinze (1992);

- i. Ants may try, but they cannot devour rocks.
- ii. The lizard that climbs the iroko tree cannot be called a baby lizard.
- iii. A child who washes his hands properly can eat with the elders.
- iv. The child whose mother mounts her pot on fire each day cannot complain of hunger.

Some measures for profitable learning through proverbs:

- i. Proverbs must be clearly stated to the learner and the meanings and possible implications brought to his knowledge.
- ii. They should be drawn from the environment of the learner so that the needed familiarity is achieved.
- iii. They must be based on things on objects known to the learner.

**Music/Dance:** In African cultures, drumming, singing and at times clapping and stamping are necessary and inseparable from dance. Among Africans, according to Ahua (1992), music and dance are reflected in almost every stage of human life such as birth, marriage, worships, during planting and harvesting times, recreational activities, death and funerals.

experience as exposure to these appears to be completely overwhelming. The most important aspect of this is that, music and dance are important media of education in traditional societies especially in Africa as it helps to disseminate cultural values within a given generation. They help to ensure the transmission of societal values from generation to another and help in the perpetuation and survival of African societies. Such traditional music and dance like the 'Bata and Apala' of the Yorubas, the Atilogwu of the Igbos' and the 'Kalangu' of the Hausas' serve as important instruments in cultural education. In view of the deteriorating state of our moral system in the traditional African societies, it is only pertinent to re-appraise the roles of music and dance as instruments for educating the youths in the values of the society. Akpabot (1992) agreed that, the decline in moral standards in the country is not unconnected with the decline in ancient tradition which sought to bring order to the society.

The following are some suggestions to redress the ailing system:

**i. Sanitizing Society through art (Music)**

Over the years, art, particularly music, has played a crucial role in transforming societies. It can therefore still be employed for this purpose.

Concerned people in societies who are not professional musicians but who can unite to form musical groups that seek to reform society by pointing out its ills and misdeeds should be encouraged. In western societies, policemen and other law enforcement agencies are needed to maintain law and order, however in some traditional Nigerian societies, law and order was maintained by concerned members of the community. These concerned members made up of young men formed themselves into adhoc orchestras which operated mainly at night moving from house to house singing and playing on musical instruments. What is special about them is the contents of their songs which spotlight the ills in their community. Like masquerades, they disguise their voices to tell the community about the ills committed by some members, for instance, the wealthy businessman who makes his money by operating as a robber, the government official who receives gratification, the young lady who prostitutes and the young man who makes his

to confront them, more so, they arm themselves to forestall any attack. The result of their activities is that moral values are held very high in community as no one wants to be scandalized. The agitation for law enforcement agents is therefore unnecessary in such societies.

It is quite obvious that, the absence of this method of cultural education has been responsible for the high rate of moral decay in most societies in Africa. It is only necessary to return to this method of education and perhaps re-organize it to meet the emerging challenges of the new society.

Aged popular musicians who can meticulously comment on the current state of our societies in objective manner to raise the peoples' consciousness so as to react to them appropriately is quite necessary.

It is not to encourage musicians who will sing to expose the nature of various professions in order to lure the youths into embracing such and doing away with idleness.

**ii. Rituals and Festivals:**

Rituals and festivals are yet other important means of art by which cultural education proceeds. While children and adults participate in the activities of various festivals, during initiation ceremonies, the youth is taught the secret activities of the adult which lead him to the attainment of his manhood in the society. Festivals are avenues for learning and reminders of the existing cultural practices, so that they are not forgotten and for the new members to avail themselves of such knowledge and information. In festivals like wrestling the child is taught how to rejoice in victory and accept defeat in good faith. This is a virtue to be carried out throughout life.

On the other hand, rituals, when performed affords the child the opportunity to observe the elders, listen to the use of language of that community and watch how the rites are performed. Through these, the child is exposed to the wisdom of the elders and hence develops team spirit in his relationship with other members of society.



Some measures to promote rituals and festivals as patterns of traditional African education in order to curb youths restiveness in Nigeria are suggested below:

- i. Festivals that reflect specific themes and focus on goals, aspirations, values and norms of the society can be planned. While festivals are very entertaining with music, songs and dance, the youths learn the society's values, norms and beliefs. In most festivals today, the emphasis is centrally placed on entertainment.
- ii. Rituals and initiations need to be reintroduced.

**Caution:**

- a) In initiation into manhood/womanhood, for those who perform below expectation, should be asked to repeat in order not to turn out misfits into the society.
- b) Only festivals with good and sound intentions for the survival of the societies should be allowed.

**Conclusion:**

Cultural patterns of education are fast breaking down and giving way to modern patterns of education. This is not unconnected with colonialism, cultural contact and the process of modernization. There is thus, an obvious threat to cultural patterns of education in African countries, as urbanization has led youths to abandoning the villages for the cities in search of job opportunities and better conditions of life. Due to this development, those youths who were not properly trained in the values of their traditional societies have been the worst culprits of social vices. They often do not fit in properly as a result of poor orientation from their traditional societies.

The advent of Islam and Christianity has not helped matters as these religions have raised the peoples' knowledge in such manner as to question and abandon their cultural values. In all these, a gap has been created between traditional and modern education, a situation that appears to weaken both systems of education. The evolution of modern education in Nigeria, though, has attempted to reflect in the background of Nigeria's indigenous cultural patterns of education, there is the strong desire for complete implementation of all aspects in order to redress the many problems of the youths.

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