TRADITIONAL AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the traditional African philosophy of early childhood education, and its implications for education in Nigeria. The paper explores the relevance inherent in African traditional philosophy of childhood education. It is no doubt that every society's educational system is sustained by certain philosophical outlooks and early childhood education is not exempted. Noted that prior to western education in Nigeria, there had been an already existing philosophy of African indigenous education. This educational philosophy was relevant enough to have met the needs of the growing African societies. The system of education was highly pragmatic and geared towards a philosophy of functionalism and productivity. The curriculum although not written but was comprehensive. The learners were taught the core values of the society and moral education was at the peak of it all. This paper tries to ensure that the Nigerian system of education adopts the traditional African educational ideas, blend them into the present day theory and practice of education and ensure a balanced education for the Nigerian child. Based on the discussion, the paper therefore makes relevant recommendations.

Keywords: Traditional, African, Philosophy, Early Childhood, Education.

Introduction

Nelson Mandela said that education was the most powerful weapon to change the world. True, but the issue with this statement is that, while education is now seen as a tool for scientific change, it is gradually losing its original purpose which includes majorly, the transmission of social and moral values. Education in Nigeria is no more fully for the transmission of values; it is about an exclusive transmission of intellectual information. Education without moral values, as useful as it is seems rather to make man a more clever devil. Traditional African education, one must say, had such essential ingredients as: morals, humility, non-violence and co-existence or communalism, tolerance, simplicity, cleanliness and health, self-control,

accepting the importance of self-realization and the search for absolute truth. These ingredients, added values to the type of education given to the child. However, the type of education the child gets today is majorly about intellectualism.

Early childhood education to a larger extent, does not go beyond the simple acts of reading and writing, whereas it is a stage where the child is ripe and ready to be enculturized into his societal norms, morals and values. Recognizing the need for the child to acquaint himself with the values, skills, and knowledge of his society, the child is expected to conform to social norms, which tend to aid social development, peaceful co-existence, and unity in diversity. This calls to say that the child's social and cultural values can be transmitted to him through his early childhood education as was the case in the traditional African society. However, today in Nigerian schools, values and moral education are not emphasized.

In the task of education, the transmission of human values is central. This is as a result of the fact that the younger ones of the human race cannot successfully survive to maturity or engage fully in adult life except they assimilate some vital beliefs and life styles about the world around them. An important medium for

which this can be made possible is the enculturation process of education. In primitive societies, initiation into adulthood provides a ready-made mechanism for the transmission of knowledge. In such traditional societies, the need for instruction in tribal ceremonies, initiations and apprenticeship systems, may have covered spontaneous education with a thin veil of deliberateness and organization. What happens in such less civilized societies is a situation where early childhood education is not actually a major consideration. So, education is neither systematic nor actually given a major consideration. In order words, cultural values may have been passed on by way of oral tradition (Omatseye, 2011).

In traditional African societies, the immediate and extended families as well as the community to which the child belongs, carried out most activities associated with child rearing practices. It was ensured that children were provided with adequate love, care and security, especially in the early formative years. Within the families, the social, emotional, physical and intellectual needs of the child were provided. But in this present generation, due to the sociological and economic changes, which are rapidly leading to modernization and urbanization, the traditional role of the family towards

the education of the child, has been severely supplanted by a more organized pre-school arrangement known as kindergarten, crèche, or nursery school.

A child, far from being born into a vacuum, finds himself in a social and cultural maze, a human environment. The people in this environment begin at once to mould him so that he will respectfully follow their ways (Charles, 2009). In this manner, the information considered essential for both individual and group survival is taught the child, once he is old enough to understand. While this is quite valid, reasoned judgment would suggest that the transfer of cultural and social values from a group of adults to pre-school children is not quite an easy task; the reason being that at birth, the child is as naked culturally as he is physically. More so, cultural and social values cannot be inherited through the genes or genetically. The argument is that since cultural and social values of a society cannot be transmitted genetically, they must somehow be acquired through learning, and the use of intellect. Thus, the average child can be taught to conform to the norms of any human society.

The education of the child in an African setting was done by everyone in the society, beyond the immediate parents and siblings of the child. Thus, the holistic education of the child was the sole responsibility and priority of the members of the society. Every child between the ages of one and six, was curious and watched the gestures of the mother, including her expressions. The child was educated in the art of communication through his language and other communication gestures; he was made to understand what it meant for his mum to smile or frown at him, and other gestures through eye contact. As the child learned to walk, all breakables were removed from his path least he stumbled on them or broke them in the course of play. As the child grew older, he became even more curious about things around him; he gradually recognized that there were other worlds outside his mother's orbit. He learned to manipulate things, played with toys or other objects that were easily accessible to him. To restrain him from doing certain things, outright threats or taboos were introduced to him by his parents or siblings (Uzoma, 2014).

Traditional African childhood education, to a greater extent, encouraged and placed emphasis on character training. Indeed, it was the corner stone of African education. Infact, J.A. Majasan in his study of Yoruba education, identified character training and religious education as the two main

objectives of Yoruba education, and showed that other objectives were pursued through the later (Uzoma, 2014). Everyone in the traditional African society wanted the child to be sociable, honest, courageous, humble, preserving, of good repute and conduct at all times. Hence all hands were on deck since the child was not seen as belonging to his parents alone but to all, especially since if he was to become a menace to the society, all and sundry would suffer for it. In this manner, the information considered essential for both individual and group survival was taught the child, once he came of age to comprehend. The present education of the Nigerian child, highly aims at promoting intellectualism (Epistemology) where the child is taught the art of reciting, rote memorization, counting and reading. He is also taught through play which somewhat promotes the psychomotor skills, but the case of character development, morals and values even though are taught the child, but are not placed at the forefront of the child's education. The axiological and metaphysical aspects of the education of the child, which used to be in the traditional Nigerian setting are now shown lesser attention against what it used to be. That moral aspect of the child's education is still not given much attention. After all, education is meant to be a tool for peace building, good governance and better

leadership, national development etc. It is on this same score that the education of the child is expected to educate the child on the relevance of living a moral life, to ensure peaceful co-existence in the Nigerian society, to ensure good leadership strategy, in order to ensure a developed society. All of these can be achieved if only there can be a borrowing of the ideas of traditional African ideas on education. Hence, education planners in Nigeria are to revisit the school curriculum content for the education of the Nigerian child, do a borrowing from the ideas of African education and engraft them onto the present western ideas of early childhood education content, in order to make products of sound moral conducts, and values (axiology) for a better nation.

On these scores therefore, this research will bring the Nigerian early childhood school practices home. It will highlight the very importance of emphasizing ideas of traditional African education in ECCD centres. Although these ideas are there in early childhood curriculum but there is the need to put them at the forefront of the experiences of the child. These ideas will be seriously emphasized (epistemologically, axiologically and metaphysically) and how they can help tackle the prevalent needs of the Nigerian child especially on the area of values and

moral development, in order to ensure a holistic and balanced education for the Nigerian child.

The Concept of Early Childhood

Early childhood is a stage in human development. It generally includes toddlerhood and sometime afterwards. According to C.P.E. (2014) it is the period from birth to eight years. Early childhood is the most rapid period of development in human life. The years from conception through birth to eight years of age are critical to the complete and healthy cognitive emotional and physical growth of children. It is a period in development where environment actually has an important impact on determining how the brain and central nervous system grows and develops.

Early childhood development is a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to eight years of age, their parents and caregivers. Its purpose is to protect the child's rights to develop his or her full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential. Community-based services that meet the needs of infants and young children are vital ECD, and they should include attention to health, nutrition, education, water and environmental sanitation in homes and communities.

Experiences from early childhood care and development programmes around the world demonstrate the promise for children's well being and for that of their families and communities.

Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is a branch of education theory which relates to the teaching of young children (formally and informally) up until the age of about eight. It is a broad term used to describe any type of educational programme that serves children in their preschool years, before they are old enough to enter primary school (C.P.E. 2014). Early childhood education may consist of any number of activities and experiences designed to aid in the cognitive and social development of pre-schoolers before they enter elementary school.

It is the education from birth through age eight (NAEYC, 2014). It is during this phase of life that the foundations for cognitive, physical and emotional developments are built. This is a period of intense, rapid growth and development with ECDE at the helm of fostering a healthy foundation for life. Generally, the term early childhood education, describes the care and education of children from birth to about six years of age. The new concept of early childhood education

includes child minding centres for infants, kindergarten, crèche and nursery schools. Internationally, education or childcare in a group setting could be offered in day-care or childcare centres, nursery and kindergarten schools. The usage of these terms varies from country to country depending on their philosophical inclination regarding the custodial nature of infant education.

Philosophy of Traditional African Early Childhood Education in Perspective

Like in all other traditional African societies, the need to educate the child from pre-school stage, no matter how informal, dates back to the pre-colonial era in Nigeria. In effect, early childhood education has always existed in Nigeria even before the advent of western civilization and formal educational practice. Aghenta (1992) has said that the history of early childhood education in Nigeria can be traced to the pre-literate era, when fishing, hunting and agriculture constituted the mainstay of the economy. No study of the history of education in Africa is complete without adequate knowledge of the traditional or indigenous educational system prevalent in Africa before the arrival of Islam and Christianity.

Fafunwa (1991) infers that even though Christianity and Islam have had their great influence on the Nigerian education scene, these are only recent developments. It cannot be compared to indigenous education which he says, is as old as 'man' himself in Nigeria. Thus, one can say that education has always been in existence in Nigeria. But in contemporary Nigeria, there has been considerable advancement. Educators, psychologists, physicians, pediatricians, sociologists, and other practitioners now appreciate more the need to expatiate on facts that concern the early stages of the child's development. These include how children imbibe knowledge and skills. Generally, there is a renewed effort to appreciate and improve the pre-schooler's muscular control and motor co-ordination, mental abilities, emotional stability and control, oral and written modes of communication, work and play activities. All of these were done with the aim of articulating a philosophy for early childhood education.

The education of the Nigerian child begins from infancy as is the case in any European, Asian or American societies. In the early stages of development the child is closest to his mother. This is quiet universal because from birth to about age five, the mother and not the family has a heavier responsibility of rearing the child.

Generally, indigenous education in Nigeria was aimed at improving the physical, cognitive and psychosocial development of the child. This was also intended to assist him develop morally, aesthetically, socially and vocationally. Right from a very early age, the child is taught informally by his parents and older siblings. This was in compliance with the practical life of the traditional Nigerian people. The child was taught some facts about how to live according to the norms and expectations of his society. Such knowledge was transmitted orally. The method of instruction in the traditional system of education consisted of discovery, role-playing, observation and imitation. The activities were centred on games, problem-solving, story-telling, learning by doing and so forth. Oral tradition constituted the mode of instruction in the old Nigerian society. Children were taught songs, told folktales, and instructed in the legends and stories of great warriors, animals, gods and the ancestral spirits. Parents were careful to instill in their children, through instruction, a sense of belonging and achievement through hard work. Such was the kind of early childhood education available to the Nigerian child before the influence of Western education arrived in Africa in the early 16th century (Johnson, 2014).

Thus, one can say that before the coming of Western education, Nigerians had their own educational practices and systems aimed at bringing up the young in the way of life of the people. The educational system was such that the child acquired skills, knowledge, patterns of thoughts and attitudes which the communities recommended for effective living. It is however noteworthy that one could make subtle generalizations on traditional educational practices among Nigerian ethnic groups. This is because most times, such practices have similar features. Subjects taught were traditional beliefs and practices, ethical principles and practices, and various occupations, depending on the locality. For instance, ethnic groups located in riverine areas taught their young ones basic skills in fishing and other related occupations. These were aimed at building responsible and self-sufficient individuals. Ijie (1999:254) asserts thus:

> *Education among Nigerians before they began to adopt western education was strictly a purposeful enterprise aimed at the survival of the individual in the society. Though there were minor differences arising from peculiar experiences and needs of individual communities, it can be generalized that a Nigerian boy or girl received from the family and the village, his or her*

early education comparable to nursery and lower primary education of the present systems.

In traditional Nigerian Society, education was functional and aimed at training the child to acquire knowledge and skills through the apprenticeship system. Such training included traditional occupation in farming, fishing, hunting, carving, pottery-making and so on. Education was basically seen as a means to an end, one that equipped its recipients for specific roles and occupations in life. At a very early age, once the child was weaned, he was taught to accept some moral responsibilities, while helping to meet the socio-cultural needs of his evolving society. According to Fafunwa (1991) education in traditional Africa aimed at producing a man or woman of character with the useful skills appropriate for his or her status in life.

The African child was born into a home or society where he looked up to his ancestors and elders for support. The older siblings of the young child were characters to also look up to, and imitate. But the traditional family with their communal living provided an anchorage for the younger ones in all aspects of their training. In this society, the extended family system, no matter how distant, was seen as a member of the child's immediate

home, and played a role in the upbringing of the child. But today, with modernization and increasing economic problems, it is becoming difficult to look beyond the immediate family.

Traditionally, in the African society, males and females had specific roles; the father as the head of the home was responsible for providing all such basic needs such as food and shelter. His word was law in the home. His wife was subservient to him. Her major role was that of a wife and mother. She produced and took care of the children. She was also expected to cater for all in the home. But with modernization and increased responsibilities, both husband and wife go out in pursuit of their livelihood, while most of child rearing is left to an employed housemaid or day-care centres. As the child grows, he moves into a pre-school or a kindergarten where formal learning begins.

Basically, the traditional agencies of socialization included the family, peer group, social group and age groups. Even though these are still crucial to the early education of the child today, they are quite modified with lesser roles. In effect, the cohesiveness of traditional African society is now weakened with the emphasis on child individualism as advocated by

Rousseau and other child-centred pragmatists. Thus, in most contemporary African societies, the younger generation having imbibed formal and western education are faced with a new situation, which can be described as a clash between a village economy and a monetary one; an extended family consciousness and a nuclear family one; a polygamous attitude and a monogamous substitute; a comprehensive inclusive living and an occupationally oriented existence; an imported secular religion and a traditional system between group living and its authority and constraints, and a self-oriented existence. What can be deduced from the foregoing is a situation where conflict systems would naturally affect parental and societal values. In other words, the young African child in a modern African society is one caught in a web. While at home, he is taught to observe, imitate and mimic actions of his older siblings, (as the theory and practice of education), as he leaves home for a more formal and organized pre-school system, he is taught to develop a sense of curiosity, and drive for autonomy and independence.

This notwithstanding, an exploration of traditional African education would reveal functionalism as its underlying philosophy. Education was more of an initiation process into the society. The typical African child, just like the pre-schooler in modern society, was taught in the most practical way. He was made to learn from older people, especially from his older siblings, at that tender age. He learnt through imitation, recitation and demonstration (Okoli, 2005). He was taught elementary practical skills like weaving, accompanying the older ones to fish and learn ways of fishing, and helping out in the kitchen on little errands. He participated in recreational exercises like dancing and singing, wrestling, drumming and other physical displays that suited his age. Finally, he imbibed intellectual training from story-telling, stories from local history of his people, poetry, proverbs and riddles. He was also taught through play the names of plants, animals, birds and the local geography of his area. Generally, physical, intellectual and oral training also began at infancy, as is the practice in contemporary pre-school education.

For Fafunwa, the goals of traditional African education can be summarized as follows:

i.   To develop the child's latent physical skills

ii. To develop the child's character

iii. To inculcate in him respect for elders and those in position of authority

iv. To develop intellectual skills

v. To help him acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour

vi. To develop in him a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs

vii. To understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large (Aminigo, 2008).

Methods of instruction in the transmission of knowledge, skills, ideas, attitudes and behaviours were informal. They consisted of discovery, rote-memorization, observation and imitation. The activities were mostly centred on games, problem-solving, storytelling, learning by doing and so forth. Also, content of instruction could be found in legends, proverbs, riddles and myths. The legends of the Nigerian people were relayed to children and the general households as lessons, in the form of proverbs. Most times, on moonlight nights and around the firesides, parents and elders educated the younger ones on the great stories of their race. Such knowledge left lasting impressions in the mind of the child. It also helped the child develop his identity as a part of a cultural heritage.

The Concept of Philosophy

Philosophy is a critical, rational and continuous search for solutions to the problems and questions that arise in the mind consequential upon reflection on human experience. Philosophy is a diligent and rational search for solutions to the basic questions and problems about the ultimate meaning of reality as a whole and of human life in particular.

Philosophy is said to be an activity of a highly abstract nature. It is known to be the oldest or the mother of all academic disciplines. Philosophy can actually be said to be a method for the exploration of concepts in the world of knowledge and the search for truth. In order words it is an attitude of mind to be developed in an educated man, by which man views himself and the physical universe and its data of daily experiences (Osaat, 2010).

The Concept of Metaphysics

About 70 B.C. when some of the works of Aristotle were edited, Andranicus of Rhodes came about the term "metaphysics" a derivative of two Greek words: Meta "beyond" and Physics, physical things, meaning: "things beyond the physical realm". That is, things beyond the ordinary sense perceptions. Issues considered here are those which are

beyond empirical or scientific and deal with the ultimate reality. It is the theory or study of "Being" in general. It is also defined as the science of being and of its essential attributes. It studies nature in general and some factual or scientific questions about the world. It deals with topics such as soul, mind, immortality, spirit, predestination, life after death, the existence of God, life and eternity, etc. Metaphysics has branches like ontology, cosmology and theodicy (Osaat, 2010).

The Concept of Axiology

The word axiology is derived from the Greek word "axios" meaning "worthy". Axiology therefore, means the worthwhileness of things. It deals with the origin, the nature, the classification and the place of values of things in the world. Value and value judgments appraise the worth of objects, actions and reactions, programme of events, concepts, feelings and so on. It is obviously the study of value. It deals with the establishment of the importance of value priorities on things, people and the environment. This branch of philosophy deals with problems of values and value judgments as to what is good, worthwhile, beauty, ugly, bad, etc. Value is an integral part of education, which in itself is a process undertaken with a view to improving on things regarded as

desirable or valuable (Osaat, 2010). It is subdivided into ethics and aesthetics.

The Concept of Epistemology

This branch of philosophy deals with the study of the problems of truth or knowledge and how it is obtained or verified. It determines whether a particular experience or events constitutes knowledge or not. Its Greek derivative "Episteme" means "knowledge". So, it is the science of the truth-value or validity of human knowledge. The object of epistemology is knowledge itself. It is the theory of knowledge which rightly investigates origin, methods, scope how valid the knowledge is. Epistemology is obviously an inquiry into the nature, experience, beliefs and of issues or things. Epistemology asks questions such as what is knowledge? How do we know what we claim to know is the truth? What are the origins of knowledge? etc. There are sub-branches closely related or with features of epistemology grouped under it. These are applied led philosophy, logic and criteriology.

Implications of Traditional African Philosophy of Early Childhood Education for Education in Nigeria

The goals of traditional Nigerian early childhood education like some modern

educational aims can be said to have their own philosophical underpinnings. Nebota (1971) describes the philosophy of indigenous Nigerian early childhood education as "live and let live". He also goes further to affirm that it embraces the three components of contemporary philosophy. His explanation of epistemology is reflected in instructions, ceremonies and oral traditions. Ethics, he affirms could be attained from moral and character training. Aesthetics, he says, is inherent in the skills, knowledge and facts of these traditional beliefs, and the beauty in transmitting such beliefs, while African metaphysics centre on destiny and life after death. The traditional Nigerian or African educational philosophy is expressed in its practice and belief in communalism and functionalism, which helps to prepare the child for a functional future, Also, in the opinion of Furley and Watson (1978) the philosophy of indigenous African early childhood education was expressed in the individual's positive relationship, with others. In effect, a display of right attitudes and behaviour helps the individual integrate easily in the society.

Epistemological Implications of Traditional African Early Childhood Educational Practices for Education in Nigeria

In the belief system of the traditional Nigerian society, knowledge and wisdom complemented each other. This sterns from the fact that in the African hierarchy of beings, after God, the All-knowing, the one who should come next must be a person who possessed leadership qualities and was an embodiment of knowledge. To further express this view, Mbiti (1975) has said that the greatest honour that any African society can bestow on anyone is his recognition as a sage or wise one. It is however, important to note that in most traditional African societies, the concepts knowledge and wisdom were significant in terms of their perceived divine origin. The African theory of knowledge has a close affinity with the African notion of reality. In effect, knowledge and wisdom have their meanings in the individual's understanding of existence.

The Nigerian traditional education, has as one of its goals the development of the child's intellectual skills. This is quite similar to any modern educational system that seeks to develop the child's power of reasoning. In the traditional system, such learning is achieved through storytelling,

folklore, proverbs, riddles and tongue twisters; also local history and geography. Much of this was done only through memorization, observation, imitation and full participation. He was told stories of great warriors and heroes in the land of his birth, and taught songs that accompanied great events. So, it was not uncommon to find among the Mbiris of pre-colonial Nigeria that great importance was attached to teaching their young ones praise songs of one of their great leaders, "Ichien-Uku". The children were told of the greatness, wealth and fame of "Ichien Uku" in stories and songs. As a warlord, especially in his battles against the British government, his name was on the lips of everyone. Thus, it was not uncommon to hear little children singing songs in his praise and other leaders of the ethnic group on festive occasions. For instance:

> Ichien Uku Ichien Uku
>
> Ye weke obi iji Iunenyi agha ebo

Translation:

> Ichien Uku Ichien Uku
>
> You were stouthearted in facing the British.

To this day, this song is used at every funeral ceremony in Mbiri land. Such songs, reflecting the myths and legends surrounding the historical .exploits and warfare of the Mbiri people are also typical of other ethnic legends. Nursery rhymes, poems and songs of great men and women of the Nigerian society can be composed and taught the children instead of the foreign ones they sing which have no value content as regards the Nigerian social realities. The child in the traditional Nigerian setting was made to understand his. It was a way of building up his intellect. Knowledge was also imparted to the Nigerian child through didactic stories. Through reasoning he appreciated the moral implications of stories told him. The implication of this for Nigerian schools is that, if the Nigerian school children are told stories on the negative effects or penalties of stealing, it is expected that they would reflect on them and act accordingly. They are expected to desist from stealing, which is considered an evil, an ethical act. This can cause the child to grow in fear and save the Nigerian society from restive activities such as stealing, kidnapping, armed-robbery, vandalisation of public property, and other illegal acts, etc.

Riddles and proverbs can also be told the Nigerian child school which can help in the development of his sense of reasoning. As early as three years of .age, the child was already exposed to proverbs and riddles. These came by way of warning, advice, and generally helping the child

exercise his intellect. To drive home the meaning implicit in every proverb, the elder who told it also took time to go beyond the literary meaning. For instance, the little child who fought outside and ran into his parent's arms for protection could be told a proverb like, 'cowards die many times before their death'. The implication for the Nigerian child is to teach him to always face his battles squarely. Generally, it was believed that proverbs communicated lots of messages, deeper meanings, and effective teaching tools for the child's learning. Proverbs communicated a variety of meanings depending on the child's level of reasoning, understanding, maturity, and age.

Sound games with traditional features offer the pre-schooler experiences that are relevant to themselves and their background. Participation in these traditional games and songs can also offer opportunity to children from nuclear homes, who in most cases have little knowledge of their cultural background. They are now offered a chance to learn that which they would have learnt from elders, extended family members and the community at large. Essentially, these traditional songs, dances and games are of great cultural values. Thus, if injected into the Nigerian nursery school curriculum

they would be better preserved as national ethos.

Metaphysical Implications of Traditional African Early Childhood Educational Practices for Education in Nigeria

The metaphysical elements in the Nigerian indigenous early childhood education are actually grounded in the African conception of man and the supernatural, in the universe. This, well expressed, helps the typical Nigerian child to find meaning in the hierarchical structure of being, with God as the ultimate and the overall. Omatseye (2011) succinctly averts that conscious of a hierarchy of beings, the average Nigerian sees a universe which is presided over by a Supreme Being at the very top of the hierarchical structure, below which are divinities and spirits which are followed by ancestors and then heads or kings of ethnic groups, etc. The implication here is that power comes from the top to the lower segment in the society. From this, one can deduce the typical Nigerian mode of thought. Thus, without gainsaying, the place and presence of the Almighty God, as the centre of all things is highly recognized, in Nigerian philosophy.

Having identified the hierarchy of being in African thought, the crux of the matter is to articulate and communicate these

conceptions directly or indirectly to the child. As early as age three, the child was acquainted with notions about the Supreme Being, God, before other gods and deities. In fact, educating the child on the reality of his own existence or being started from the premise of the metaphysical hierarchy as perceived and promoted by his cultural tradition. In almost every African myth and legend, God is presented as the creator. However, he was also viewed as having some relationships with minor gods and spirits. As Omatseye (2011) has succinctly put it, "as for God's relationship with the smaller spirits and divinities, it is correctly believed that these lesser beings are only manifestation of the attributes of the Supreme God. He also pointed out that the notion of God and gods constitutes an underlying and unifying system of beliefs, myths, symbols and rituals which permeates African thought. Drawing on this unifying system makes "being" possible. What can be deduced from this in the opinion of Omatseye is that in times of crises or troubles, the "being" which the African mind has made possible are called upon to mediate between man and the Supreme God. The ancestors who are also higher in hierarchy of beings could also play intermediary roles in times of trouble.

The implication of this in traditional education is that right from a very early age, the child was made to understand God's or god's position in the scheme of things. He was also made to see religion as pragmatic; one which may go beyond just the spiritual. Consequently, he was taught to recognize God as the creator and the gods and deities as having practical roles to play in the life of every person. A child's knowledge of these matters could help to understand and respect authorities, and also instill spiritual discipline in him. According to Michael (2014) indigenous education fosters discipline through the provision of religion. It nurtures the child spiritually. The African religion is based on the superstition that there is continuity between the spirits of the departed and the living. The so-called dead and the so-called living are mutually interdependent. They need each other. These are reciprocal obligations. And everyone knew that if they failed in their duties towards the dead, they (the dead) had the powers and the disposition to call them back to loyal obedience by sending sickness and misfortune upon them. Knowing this, they were careful in performing their duties. Thus, through traditional education, the child was also equipped with ideas about life and death.

On the issue of death, the child also learns retributive, justice through indigenous education; that punishment for evil

committed is paid for while living, and not after death. The injunction here is that the offender has ample opportunity to repent while on earth. As most traditions will put it, the man who committed evil while on earth and does not repent, will have his evil spirit roam at death. Likewise, the man killed unjustly will have his spirit visit his killers. Most importantly, traditional education teaches the child that it is a taboo to take another person's life. The killer is forever haunted until sacrifices are offered through the gods and diviners. It is only after this that the roaming spirits are put to rest. Also, central to this tradition is the fact that the Nigerian indigenous early childhood education exposes its recipients to the reality of man's existence, with God as the ultimate, and man's personal god, household gods, ancestors and spirits as his intercessors. This knowledge is passed down to children orally through myths and legends, stories and proverbs. Basically, the moral here is respect for God as creator, respect for culture, tradition and authority. The child is also educated in community rules, laws and taboos.

Axiological Implications of Traditional African Early Childhood Educational Practices for Education in Nigeria

In the development of character, a child once born into the traditional Nigerian home was the direct responsibility of all the community. Even though a major part of the child's early training is the direct responsibility of his parents and immediate household, the entire community still played a major role in the character formation of the child. Every member of the community expects a new member to be honest, disciplined, co-operative, conform and hold in high esteem the norms and traditions of that society. To successfully achieve this, everyone in the community must show interest in the character training of the child. According to Fafunwa (1991) among the Yorubas, the education of the young Yoruba in the codes of manners, conventions, customs, morals, superstitions and laws of his society was therefore achieved through various members of his family and household, his extended family (usually located in the same compound his kindred and his neighbours.

In effect, character training in traditional Nigerian society was a dual responsibility which came directly and indirectly. The direct responsibility rested on the child's

parents and immediate household, while his training was also complimented indirectly by the extended family and other older members of the local community. As Fafunwa (1991) has asserted even though a large part of the early training is known as the direct responsibility, first of his mother and next of the other members of the immediate family, the full training is a co-operative effort in which members of each of the more inclusive group must play a part. It is through this process that the child builds up his code whether of manners or of morals as they come incidentally into the field of his experience.

The implication of this for modern day Nigerian society is that since the child cannot be under the watchful eyes of his parents at all times, all other members of the extended family and community at large can also help to impart morals and correct the child when he errs. For instance, besides parents, neighbours have a responsibility to teach children respect for, and how to greet elders properly. Also, any member of the community can discipline a child for the use of abusive language. The implication of this for modern day education in the Nigerian society is that since the child cannot be under the watchful eyes of his parents at all times, the school through the teacher

can help impart morals and correct the child when he errs. For instance, besides parents, teachers have a responsibility to teach children respect and how to greet elders properly. Another implication of this for modern day education in Nigeria is that, parents will no more see any reason for coming to their children's school to fight teachers who discipline their children, or give them strict instructions never to touch or correct their children since they are not their parents. This will make the Nigerian child grow with respect for elders, peers and oneself. As previously explained, the traditional Nigerian society was basically organic with co-operative team spirit, and respect by all for societal norms. If any child therefore is to be accepted as a full member of his community he must abide by the rules, and respect the values and culture of his people. He must also subject himself to corrections. In traditional Nigerian society, all parents want their children to be upright, honest, kind and helpful to others, and will spare no pains to instill these qualities. The saying, "spare the rod and spoil the child" is very much in vogue. All Nigerian parents irrespective of ethnic groups, prefer to remain childless than to have children who brought shame and dishonor to the family.

Essentially, character training through moral education was mostly achieved through: stories, folklores, proverbs, legends, myths and dances. Michael (2014) describes proverbs as effective tools for moral development. He sees proverbs as the condensed wisdom of the great ancestors which help to convey moral messages, develop the art of language, an instrument of social control that enables children to gain insight into the tribal custom and philosophy.

Also, from the many traditional cultural songs and dances, the traditional Nigerian child was made to appreciate the aesthetic value in the reservoir of art and culture of his people. Once he was old enough to take steps, he was socialized in various dance steps and songs. This was taught mostly through imitation and observation. Even as a very little child, folk lullabies were sung to him in order to stop him from crying. Girls were also taught to dance gracefully. They also learnt the beauty in their culture through the display of beads, (jigida) and other beautiful ornaments around their waist, wrist and neck. What can be deduced from this is that Nigerian indigenous education also had its axiological import. This is reflected in the ethical and aesthetic values implicit in respect for elders and authority, moral and character training, proverbs, stories,

folklores, folktales, dances, myths and legends. From all of these, the child was made to acquire knowledge, right from his early stages of development. He was taught to discern good from evil. Words expressing anger, fear and jealousy were expressed in proverbs. . Children were made to understand that anger, fear or jealousy could cause serious threat to the mental stability and general well being of the individual.

The discussion so far has been an effort to articulate some axiological elements of indigenous education. The implication of the analysis made so far has also revealed that whatever the child imbibed, right from his formative years, by way of traditional education had metaphysical, epistemological and axiological angles to it.

Conclusion

The attempt of this paper has been an exploration of the various philosophical tenets as they pertain to issues and rationale for pre-schooling. This was traced to African beliefs and practices, and its relationship to the traditional and contemporary education in Nigeria. In exploring the various worldviews that have influenced the development of early childhood education in Nigeria, it was discovered that Nigerian traditional

education has a deep philosophical root that is basically practical but tinged with considerable religiosity. Harnessing these values from the metaphysical, epistemic and axiological perspectives could indeed imbue the young Nigerian child with a deep sense of pride in the African race. This would be as a result of being able to understand his culture, norms and ways of life of his people.

In conclusion therefore, even while the educational practices of early childhood education in Nigeria, seem to embrace western educational philosophies, it should embrace that of traditional Nigerian educational philosophy, for a holistic child rearing programme.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- If we agree that the sum total of the aim of pre-school education is to prepare young Nigerian children to become better citizens of Nigeria, then we must begin to teach them early enough with things that have relevance to their culture and society. It is therefore recommended that we appropriately blend Western philosophy with African thought and beliefs to benefit pre-school education. Indeed, the Nigerian child

if exposed to this kind of education, will grow up to appreciate better his societal norms and heritage.

- If the Nigerian pre-schooler is to be equipped with balanced and well-rounded education, then the metaphysical, epistemic and axiological implications of African philosophy should be applied to meet specific needs. These needs transcend mere schooling. The actions of educators who understand and are guided by African beliefs could help transmit such knowledge to the Nigerian children and thus provide a framework for meaningful educational experience.

- In order for the values and morals of the Nigerian society to be taught the learners, values and moral educations should be taken seriously. The curriculums should be highly enriched with traditional Nigerian contents and such subjects be made compulsory at all levels of education in Nigeria.

- If the Nigerian society must comfortably talk about equality of educational opportunities and social justice, then it begins with equality of educational opportunities in early childhood education, which is the basis and not at the tertiary level.

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