
AFRICAN ETHICAL VALUES AND ITS CONTRIBUTION FOR THE HOLISTIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The study aimed to examine African ethical values and its contribution to the holistic development of the person.

Statement of the problem: Holistic education emphasizes the interconnectedness of the mind, body, and spirit within the context of a wider world. While indigenous peoples, such as Africans, have a rich history of such holistic education, there seems to be a disconnect with modern systems of education that tend to ignore these indigenous methods.

Research methodology: The study applied desktop review methodology to gather relevant literature.

Findings: The study found that indigenous peoples, notably indigenous Africans, have historically practiced holistic education. The focus of holistic education is on the relationships between linear thinking and intuition, the mind and body, various domains of knowledge, the individual and the community, and self and soul. African traditional education predominantly took place within family, peer age groups, and village gatherings. African ethical values are anchored in traditional religion and a sense of community. However, modern systems of education do not consider the indigenous ways of education, which are pivotal for holistic learning.

Recommendations: Education should serve a dual purpose: not just to bestow academic qualifications but to groom responsible and dependable members of society. Modern systems of education should integrate aspects of indigenous methods to foster holistic education. There is a need to address and challenge prejudices against African culture. The education system should be adapted to cater to both individual and community needs, emphasizing the holistic development of the person.

Keywords: *Communality, cultural values, African Tradition, morality, Education*

INTRODUCTION

Africa is the mother of many educated sons and daughters, some of whom are internationally renowned politicians, lawyers, scientists, doctors, economists, and scholars. In spite of these great achievements, the continent grapples with a galaxy of problems. First, the continent is poor compared to other continents in the world. It is the least urbanized and the most underdeveloped. Second, Africa is experiencing many conflicts. Civil wars and ethnic strife have become a fetish. Conflicts lead not only to economic underdevelopment but also to the destruction of property and loss of human lives. Third, poor leadership has been the norm in Africa for decades. The continent has witnessed violence, violations of human rights, corruption, injustice, and oppression, especially after attaining political independence. These problems were minimal in traditional African society because the education system inculcated the right values in an individual from childhood to adulthood. It was a holistic education, which took into account the social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and political aspects of the life of the learner (Katola 2014). Education is an issue that touches everyone personally, professionally, and as citizens of our respective nations and the world. According to Miller (2019), the concept of holistic education is based on the premise that, each person finds identity, meaning and purpose in life through connections to community, to the natural world and to the humanitarian values. Education within a holistic perspective seeks to develop every person's intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative and spiritual potentialities. In this way, the term holistic education simply means cultivating the whole person and helping individual to live more consciously within communities and natural ecosystems (Miller 2019; Katola 2014).

Holistic education is different from integrated education but it may be delivered as

integrated education. Ethical education, for example can be delivered by integrating it into various parts of the curriculum. This way, learners would see the relevance of the subjects to their own lives. The basic goal of education is not only to enable the learners to develop intellectually. He has also to learn how to live as a useful and responsible member of the society. Thus, holistic education has the potential to facilitate such learning since it attends to all aspects of personality (Katola 2014). Ethics is essential to all human being no matter where they live or no matter what kind of life they lead. Ethics is what makes man a human being. Any society without medium of ethics will collapse. This being the case, however, many foreigners have erroneous understanding of African morality. Some even tend to regard Africans as devoid of morality and moral consciousness. For instance, they asserted that, Africans do not distinguish between good and evil, they are devoid of moral content or of universally accepted ethical norms (Husien & Kebede, 2017).

THEORETICAL REVIEW

This study was guided by the holistic education theory as proposed by Miller (1990). According to Miller, the open classroom (often referred to as the “integrated day”) approach, whole language, environmental and global education, accelerative learning, and numerous other alternative schooling methodologies represent contemporary manifestations of holism in education. For Miller, defining holistic education necessitates consideration of the broader cultural and intellectual contexts of holistic thought. In Miller’s view, being a person means being a complex whole that is greater than the sum of its individual parts or roles. Holism acknowledges multiple levels of wholeness. A person exists within increasingly expansive contexts of meaning: family, community, subculture, social order, biosphere, and the universe at large.

Thus, holism’s focus on the individual is neither atomistic nor ahistorical; holism inherently embraces a radical, global, ecological, and broadly spiritual perspective. Indeed, it’s these very aspects of holistic thought that aim to reconnect and reintegrate the individual into these larger contexts of meaning. This theory holds relevance for this study, suggesting that beyond classroom instruction, students and educators should actively pursue knowledge, skills, experiences, and attitudes that extend beyond the conventional syllabus. Without such a holistic approach, learners might simply navigate through the education system, emerging as

individuals not fully prepared to meet societal expectations. Every learner has unique educational needs and capabilities, all of which are invaluable for not only addressing their personal needs but also serving their community. The African traditional education system expects learners to acquire education that bolsters community development. Thus, Miller's holistic education theory aptly guides this paper on "African Ethical Values and its Contribution to the Holistic Education System".

ETHICAL VALUES IN AFRICAN CULTURE

There are many types and classifications of values. As people differ in their conception of reality, then the values of one individual may be different from those of another. Life seems to force people to make choices, or to rate things as better or worse as well as formulate some scale or standard of values. Depending on the way we perceive things; we can praise and blame, declare actions right or wrong or even declare scenes or objects before us as either beautiful or ugly. Values occupy a central place in a people's culture. It forms the major bulwark that sustains a people's culture, making it more down to earth and real. Based on cultural considerations, some forms of behavior, actions and conduct are approved while others are widely disapproved. To show the extent of disapproval that followed the violation of values that to others should be held sacred, the penalty was sometimes very shameful, sometimes extreme (Idang 2015). Now the question is what are African cultural values? What is the source of African cultural values? In our sense we talk about ethical values.

African culture is embedded in strong moral considerations. It has a system of various beliefs and customs which every individual ought to keep in order to live long and to avoid bringing curses on them and others (Idang 2015). African cultural values pertain to those social ideals indigenous to African people. This is not to say that there is homogeneity of cultures among various African nationalities. Rather, it means that among the multiplicity of cultures within the continent, there are seminally consistent principles that cut across board. These range from their sense of communality, to their sense of the sacredness of life, hospitality, respect for authority and the elders; from their sense of the sacred and of religion, to their sense of language and proverbs, among others (Columbus 2014).

The sense of community or communality refers to the awareness which identifies an individual not as an isolated ego, but as an entity whose being and survival is consequent

upon its union with other human beings within an identified locality. The elders are the agents for the implementation of the social, political, moral and religious will of the people. As custodians of the people, they are believed to be in close contact with the ancestors with whom in justice and fairness, they govern the affairs of men (Columbus 2014).

Foundations of Ethics in Africa: In the 17th century, a generally held notion that, religion was the foundation of morality and that without religion, morality cannot exist was challenged. In 1690 Bayle posited that, religion is neither necessary nor sufficient for morality (Amoah & Peprah 2022). Arthur Schopenhauer is one of the Western philosophers who did not believe that morality should be based on religion. Religion according to him makes people behave morally because believers are promised an eternal bliss that would be attained in life after death (Schopenhauer, 1903). Many Christians live morally because they want to be in Heaven. Buddhists, on the other hand, behave ethically due to the promise of *Nirvana* and Muslims abide by the moral teachings of the Quran and the Hadith because of *Jannah*. This motivation for doing what is good on the basis of religion according to Schopenhauer is ultimately founded on ‘selfish egoism’. Schopenhauer also declares that if any action has as its motive an egoistic aim, it cannot have any moral worth. According to Schopenhauer morality rather has compassion as its foundation and not religion. Compassion is a day-by-day occurrence, free of any clandestine motive. It involves sharing and alleviating the suffering of others (Schopenhauer 1903).

This concept doesn't work in Africa, for African religion is not something outside of the person, but it is part of the person, it is the way of living of the person. Therefore, African morality is founded on African concept of the spiritual reality (religion) and it is determined by the conception of human welfare, which it takes its base from the Traditional Religion (Husien & Kebede 2017). There has been a divergent view regarding the concept and philosophy of African traditional Religion. Some have seen Africans as not having the capacity to reason on the concept or the philosophy of God. This led them into giving all forms of derogatory names to African traditional religion. The fact that Africans are notoriously religious is no longer an issue for debate among scholars today. This is because various peoples of Africa own a religious system and a set of beliefs and practices which bind them together to their ultimate. The religion of Africans is their existence and their existence is their religion. The entire organization of their common life is so interwoven with

it that they cannot get away from it (Husien & Kebede 2017).

African Traditional religion has no written scripture like other religions but is orally transmitted from one generation to another through songs, liturgies, proverbs, short sayings, myths, and others. This makes it prone to experience exaggerations, modifications and distortions yet the kernel of the religious beliefs and practices remain intact. Mbiti (1969) said that, Africans are notoriously religious, and each people have their own religious system, with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates into all the department of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it. In Africa life is religion, and religion is life. This means that religion could not be explained away from morality in Africa. Whoever tries it will be seen as a stranger to Africa (Husien & Kebede 2017).

In traditional Africa, the action or behavior of individuals is judged as moral or amoral based on the interaction in the society. A person is not simply good or bad; instead, he or she may act in a good or bad way depending on the consequences of his or her action viewed in the community. According to John Mbiti (1969), one act may be good in certain circumstances, while it is evil (sinful) in others, depending on its impact upon the relation of the parties involved. From the African viewpoint, moral principles are primarily concerned with the maintenance of good relationship with others as opposed to the maintenance of justice and individual rights in the West. In Africa what is right is what connects people together; what separate people are wrong (Husien & Kebede 2017).

African morality is naturalistic and humanistic in that, moral principles are addressed to the social and natural conditions and features of human beings, their needs and interests in the context of their communal existences. Thus, African morality can be understood in terms of communalism and social welfare. Basically, the African morality is concerned with the goodness of all human being. Consequently, the essence of goodness and good life in African traditional thought has to do with doing well and not to harm. To this extent, the African traditional morality or ethics is essentially social oriented and anchored on the well-being of social being (Bujo2001). The concept of immorality in African traditional religions posit that, since the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately, every member of the community is expected to act in such a way as to promote always the good of the whole society. It is held that, whatever happens to the individual is believed to happen also to the

whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual (Husien & Kebede 2017). An often-quoted line from John Mbiti's book "African Religion and Philosophy" supporting this view is: "I am because we are; and since we are therefore I am" (Mbiti 1969).

CHARACTER AS CENTRAL TO AFRICAN ETHICS

In Africa, the ethical value evaluation reference is made to the character of a person. A person is morally evaluated according to his/her character whether good or bad. African ethics is, thus, a character-based ethics that maintains that, the quality of the individual's character is the most fundamental. The justification for a character-based ethics is not far to seek. What the society can do regarding moral conduct is to impart moral knowledge to its members, making them aware of the ethical values and principles of the society. In general, society satisfactorily fulfills this duty of imparting moral knowledge to its members through ethical education of various forms. In African societies, ethical education includes telling morally freighted proverbs and folktales to its younger members. The ability to act in accordance with the ethical principles and rules of the society requires the possession of a good character. It is from a person's character that all his or her actions, good or bad, radiate (Segun 1996). The following African proverbs explain this: "wherever a man or a woman goes to dwell, his or her character goes with him"; "If there is character, ugliness becomes beauty, if there is none, beauty becomes ugliness," (Nigerian Proverb); "A pretty face and fine clothes do not make a character" (Congolese Proverb).

A person is responsible for the state of his or her character, for character results from the habitual actions of a person. The African proverb "it takes a whole village to raise a child" is all about character formation. The bad or good habit is not an inborn character. The ethical values narratives would help young people to acquire and internalize the ethical values of the society. The action or deed that led to the acquisition of a newly good habit must be persistently performed in order to strengthen that habit; it is in this way that a good character is acquired. Over time such an acquired virtue or character becomes a habit. Therefore, according to Africans the acquisition of character portrays the fact that, the original nature of an individual was morally neutral, neither good nor bad. A person's original moral neutrality will, in the course of his life, come to be affected to become good or bad by

his or her actions and responses to moral instructions, advices and persuasions. Consequently, what a person does or does not do is very crucial to the formation and development of his or her character, and thus, to becoming ethical or unethical (Segun 1996).

In the African traditional society, a sense of morality was instilled in the mind of people right from childhood. The aim was to ensure that, everyone grew up as responsible member. African traditional education embraced character building. The child had to learn that he could not live alone, and that the group that made his life possible, demanded conformity to its manners and obedience to its laws and defense. The children then acquired the right values that prepared them as future leaders, as family heads, clan leaders or community leaders (Katola 2014).

AFRICAN CULTURAL PREJUDICE

Makumba (2007) in his book presented the misconception of some Western scholars towards African. In this paper we are presenting only two scholars. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804): one of the first philosophes to lend academic expression to the cultural prejudice of the West against Africa was Immanuel Kant. In his work *Van den verschiedenen Rassen der Menschen* (1775) he held that mankind consisted of only one race and the original human species was white, appearing as dark brown. The black race came as a result of humid weather conditions that bore upon the original white species. He said that the indigenous Americans and the blacks are spiritually inferior in the human species. For Kant, the difference between blacks and whites are as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour. Therefore, a person's skin determines his or her rational ability. According to him black people are disqualified from the real of rationality (Makuba 2007; Amankwaah 2023).

Georg W. F. Hegel (170-1831): his perspective is from a historical point of analysis. According to him the human history is rationality and freedom rather than feelings and inclinations. He thinks that Africans are incapable of reflecting, or reasoning, or planning. African proper or essence is wild and untamed, beyond the pale of humanity proper, cannibalistic, ungodly, or without religion, and without history because they are incapable of cultural development through history. According to him Africans are not human enough to deserve freedom and respect because he believes that they lack what is fundamental to existence, that is rationality, African has no reason; has no historical world properly speaking, which

means lacking in cultural and civilization. He believes that Negroes are without morality and are incapable of political organization (Makuba 2007; Amankwaah 2023).

Western scholars and intellectuals had justified colonialism as a “civilizing mission” meant to rescue Africa whose only mode of regulating conduct was through religion and magical sanctions. According to these scholars, in traditional cultures, there are no behavioral patterns, which can be properly referred to, as ‘moral’. The argument here is that behavioral patterns of the purely secular kind, which exist in more complex societies, were completely absent in traditional African societies. Racism, hatred as well as racial prejudices are age old problems that devalue our world. In particular, the peculiar problem known as *negrophobia* has remained the black man’s burden all through the ages. This though is now copied issue to keep harping on the old argument that colonialism is responsible for the woes of the African continent. It is however a big surprise to discover that, by some twist of logic, those same imperial scholars who provided the intellectual justification for colonial domination are usually the ones celebrated as intellectual experts in African intellectual circles. This philosophical claim concerning Africa is a prejudice. It doesn’t have a base, and it is far beyond the true nature of Africa. Today’s problem is our current education system which undermines our cultural values.

THE CHALLENGE OF MODERN SYSTEMS OF EDUCATION

Africa has been in cultural dilemma ever since its forceful integration by European countries through colonialism, slavery and partition. Ever since their experience with colonialism, majority of African countries and people have been unable to, independently, articulate or chart their own history, culture and identity. African’s attitude today is largely influenced by the perception and viewpoints cultivated as a result of slavery as well as colonial and post-colonial education. As a result of this, we tend not to appreciate ourselves or our cultures and therefore disregard or undervalue the potential contributions this heritage can make to our contemporary development efforts. We thus tend not to believe and have confidence in ourselves our endemic capabilities and potentials (Maduagwu 1999).

The present-day extreme individualism of the West, the outcome of centuries of laissez-faire capitalism, is being transmitted across the world as the final stage of world civilization to which all cultures must strive to attain. On the other hand, the age-long communal life of the

Africans, which is generally known as extended-family system, is being looked down upon as primitive. Under the extended family system, everyone is intrinsically tied up with all members of the society. The orphans and the poor are not abandoned (Maduagwu 1999).

Again, development in the West is conceived almost exclusively from material or technological perspectives, with little or no consideration for the human persons who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of these developments. For the ordinary modern African, development, as being transmitted by the CNN and other Western media means: fast cars, sky-scrapers, mobile telephones, hair styles, extravagantly luxurious houses with imported furnishings, international designers wear from clothing to shoes to hand-bags, wrist-watches and perfumes, and weekend jamborees in five-star hotels in and outside the country - especially at public expense (Maduagwu 1999).

One essential negative influence of colonial education was emphasis on technical and secularistic acquisition of skills as against character formation. The traditional African informal education was first and foremost communalistic, promotion of unity and harmony of communal experiences where the individual is a unit within the organic whole. The emphasis on traditional education was character formation. The colonial education both at its beginning in Africa and as it has been maintained by African leaders since de-colonization neglected the character formation aspect of education. The neglect of character formation has given rise to moral depravity which now characterize the present-day African society. This is manifested in the virtual collapse of family values, rampant corruption in public life and excessive materialism among the so-called educated elite (Maduagwu 1999). Africa has continued to adhere to the colonial educational system which was deliberately designed for the mental and material exploitation of Africans. The African child is taught to loathe manual labour in favour of white-collar jobs. African traditional educational system was essentially vocational. The so-called modern educational system in Africa has succeeded in producing useless educated Africans who cannot be gainfully employed in the society (Maduagwu 1999).

The modern education system views African cultural values as barbaric. Without any doubt, the western education has influenced and programmed us into embracing the cultural elements, whether good or bad, of the west that we have imbibed through the indoctrinating study of the western civilization, history, astronomy, anthropology, philosophy, medicine,

etc... As unthinkable as it sounds, it is quite tangible, and tragically so, that many of educated Africans view African customs and traditions as barbaric, because of too westernized education system. The current education system doesn't help the Africans to reflect and valorize their cultural values; in the contrary the Africans are taught into thinking of everything indigenous to us as inferior and admire those things that come from the western world. In the current education system, the educators command advanced knowledge of the other people in the world, their history, and culture but do not know anything about our indigenous ways of life. How we African continue to downgrade our own culture when we do not know anything about it in the first place?

In view of our wonted proclivity to scorn our culture after acquiring the western education, it will not be a discourtesy toward any educated African to query whether the education we acquired is to enrich our thinking or to make us think that we are neither to being western. In fact, most of us have forgotten who we are because we are lost in the pages of textbooks and confused by the various teachings and knowledge of the foreign culture that we have imbibed through the mindless indoctrination of the western education. It is no surprise that some of our educated lots see themselves as being closer to the western in the dubious hierarchy of cultural superiority.

Truly, to be educated in the western way is good. The science, medicine, technology, and the rest are amazing. It is one thing to be educated in the western way and still know what one is and where one is from, but it is another to acquire the western education and completely forget about the essence and totality of the behavior patterns and belief system of our cultural values. It is a shame, and will continue to be so for many years, that we have not been able to put our much professed and celebrated western education into practical use for the benefit of our people. All we know is to contribute in the sadistic revelry and senseless assault on our very own cultural and ways of life (Evbayiro 2010).

How valuable is our western education in terms of maintaining our cultural balance and harmony with our past? Of what worth is the education that does not tell us anything about who we are? Of what value is the education that tries to transform us into what we are not and can never become? Of what value is the education that distorts our past and tends to shorten our future?

CONCLUSION

In our current education system, ethical values should be encouraged given the fact that culture ought to be knowledgeably innovative and instrumentally beneficial to people in such a way that the society can move from one level of development to another. In the same way, negative and harmful traditional practices that dehumanize people and render them as unimproved and backward people without a future should, as a matter of urgency, be discarded since culture is an adaptive system, together with values that play a central role in giving the society its uniqueness. We must not divorce ourselves from our culture and ways of life just because we are enchanted by western democracy. While we can enrich our culture and society with elements of the western culture, we should not be anti-African traditional values. The current education system discriminates against African cultural values by regarding them as having no contribution for today. It tries to present values that concentrate only on knowledge-based-education, which somehow ignores the ethical and social life of the society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is recommended that our education should be adapted to the needs of individuals and community; this is to enable them to be useful to themselves and the society at large. Their aims and objectives of our education should be clearly defined and geared towards the development of character and acquisition of family life. Educational curriculum in Africa should be based on cultural values and norms of the society. Africans should join hands to enforce values of the people and discourage our young ones from copying everything Western blindly. Everyone should make himself an agent of cultural enforcement. Any anti-cultural behavior should be condemned openly, and people should be counseled on the need to adhere to one norm and keep societal values. African traditional values should be inculcated into the young ones, and this should be monitored not only by the teachers but all elderly members of the society as it used to be the case in the past.

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