

RELEVANCE OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL ERA: PERSPECTIVES FROM NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the concept of education in traditional Nigerian society through its indigenous system of education. It attempts to offer a critical examination of the system of education while x-raying its relevance or otherwise on Nigerian society in a world of global interconnectivity. The age of global interconnectivity, which is synonymous with modernization, is regarded as the Digital Era. This Digital Era has reduced the world to a global village with its penetrative and technologically dependent-driven approach. This leaves the typical Nigerian at a crossroads leading to what is better described as an identity crisis. The paper thus seeks to analyze the pedagogical methods and core contents of Africa's traditional education and chart a course for its relevance to the Nigerian system of education in the digital era. It concludes with the submission that Nigerians stand to benefit more by allowing for a synergy of the core content of the two eras of education to form the basis for the education curriculum for the nation.

Keywords: Education, Indigenous, Curriculum, Nigeria, Digital Era.

Introduction

Education is the hallmark of ingenuity and productivity for any society, leading to the development or otherwise of such a society. To the extent a society is educated, that extent is its level of development. Education is as old as the existence of human beings. Over the years, communities in Africa, Nigeria specifically, had their form of education before the intervention of the British Colonialists. Every community within the country had its modes of handing down its rich cultural values to its younger generation. This system is what is called the African Traditional system of education. The patterns and modes for the inculcation of these cultural values involved a series of skillfully crafted approaches through which knowledge is handed from the elders in the community to the younger generations. Sadly, with the swift transition from the African Indigenous system of education to the

digital approach, the modern form of education, which is highly digitalized and could be aptly described as the “digital Era”, has no respect for age and distance; Nigerians have seemingly abandoned the traditional African system of education with all its array of human development enhancing attributes. The result of this is the fluid identity crisis the younger generation is thrown into. This study seeks to add value to the beauty of the African Traditional system of education, notwithstanding the palpable developmental effect of the modern system of education. The objective of this study is therefore intended that Traditional African education, with its rich benefits of cultural heritage such as an appreciation for moral rectitude and manpower development through skill acquisition, could be appropriately harnessed and put at the service of Nigerians in this digital era.

Conceptual spadework

The spadework of this research study seeks to cover a delineation of key concepts. A lucid understanding of these concepts is sure to offer us a compass upon which our study would be built. This clarification becomes imperative, especially when we take into cognizance what harm ambiguity and nebulousness of terms and concepts have wrought upon intended meanings. Given this, the study seeks to unveil the meaning of key concepts to stem such abuse and misapplications.

Relevance: The concept of relevance implies disambiguation. For instance, different theories of knowledge have different implications for the learners and their areas of application. These different theories of knowledge also have implications that are relevant to their fields. Thus, we can say that something (A) is relevant to a task (T) if it increases its likelihood of achieving the goal (G) for which it is intended by “T” Hjørland, B. & Sejer Christensen, F. (2002). A thing or a document may be relevant to another thing if it adds clarity to it or when by its application, its value appreciates. US Law Number., 401 of the Federal Rules of Evidence defines relevance as “tending to make the existence of any fact that is of consequence to the determination of the action more probable or less probable than it would be without the evidence”. This means if a fact were to have no bearing on the truth or falsity of the conclusion, it would be said to be legally irrelevant.

Education: The term education, as used today in English parlance, is derived from two Latin words, namely, Educare (educere) and Educatum. By “Educare” or “Educere”, it means “to train” or “to mould”. It also means “to bring up, “to lead out”, or “to draw out”. It means to propel from inward to outward. “Educatum”, on the other hand, denotes the act of teaching as it offers guidelines and principles of teaching. It should be noted that education, thus as explained, does not limit itself to the mere acquisition of knowledge; but that it involves the development of attitude and skills. Over the years, philosophers have consistently offered their views on what could form the best means of education. Thus, it

could well be conceived that education is the process by which learning or acquisition of skills, knowledge, beliefs, values, morals, and habits are received for personal and community development. Education is part of human cultural heritage through which a generation can pass on its cherished values to the next generation. Today, educational goals have become so complex and systematic, encompassing and dealing with different ideas such as the liberation of learners and critical thinking to harness and manage information in modern society.

African Traditional Education: Traditional education, also regarded as back-to-the-basics, customary education, and conventional education, means the long-established customs and practices that society traditionally employed in its schooling. Traditional education experienced various forms, with some projecting or adopting progressive education practices with more focus on a holistic approach with emphasis on the learners' needs, ranging from academics, mental health, and socio-emotional learning.

As far as education is concerned in Africa, reference must always be made to Africa's traditional or traditional/indigenous system of education, according to Fafunwa. A (1982), no study of the history of education in Africa is complete or meaningful without adequate knowledge of the traditional or indigenous educational system prevalent in Africa before the introduction of Islam and Christianity. Nyerere J. (1976), in his work, would call for a revert to this system of education as he submitted that Africa is not doing well with the intervention of the European system of education. Although Western educationists treated Africa as if it had no system of education, the prevailing shreds of evidence across Africa, as reflected in the various cultural and structural organizations even up to date, point to the fact that Africans had a very robust form of education- hence African Traditional/Indigenous Education.

African traditional education method of learning adopted a pattern that allowed knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be passed from an older generation to its younger generation, mostly through oral communication and actionable practices, according to Mosweunyane. D (2013), this method was successful due to the common ancestral connection among all the members who were identifiable through their characteristics which they also employed to help them adapt to the environment they found themselves.

The Setting of African Traditional Education

The setting for Traditional African education had the elders as the vanguards of wisdom and knowledge, which then served as teachers, especially in the training of regiments for mastery of survival skills. Mosweunyane, D. (2013), citing Schepera (1938), explained that the African traditional schools systematically taught young adults several formulae and songs which inspire them to honour, obey, and support their chiefs whether in good or hard times; and even to face death for the sake of the tribe. Young adults were trained to be

morally upright and courageous even in the face of danger. They understood the essence of unity in the face of threats to their common existence, and hence they could unite easily against a common threat to their survival; hardships and even death for the sake of the tribe were ready sacrifices they could undertake for their common goal. Young adults were further treated with pride, their heritage, and appreciation of community responsibilities as well as arrive at public decisions for the common good without consideration for personal benefits. They honoured and obeyed the old people ungrudgingly and observed all religious practices.

Knowledge, customs, and laws through tribal institutions were passed on to the young by the elders using proverbs and myths, which were told with care and repetition. The young were informed of their past and their cultural heritage to stimulate pride in cultural institutions, which formed the basis of the community's survival in Mosweunyane, D. (2013).

Components of African Traditional Education

Mushi P. A (2009), Ndichu (2013), and Osaat, S. D. et al. (2017) have all identified several pedagogical bases for African Indigenous education. They include Preparationism, Communalism, Holisticism, Multiple-learning, and Perennialism. These philosophical foundations characterized the purpose of African Indigenous Education (AIE) and placed it in a unique position with so much to be appreciated even in our modern system of education. These philosophical foundations of AIE also encapsulate the essential qualities of education for functionality. These foundations are:

Preparedness/preparationism: By preparationism we mean that the whole curriculum of the AIE has the essential goal of making the recipients ready for life. Learning was not essentially about the future but particularly about making the citizen capable of surviving daily amidst the challenges of life. The curriculum specifically aims at equipping the youths with relevant skills appropriate to their roles in society.

Communalism: This is another fundamental principle of AIE in which teamwork and solidarity stand as the hallmark of all academic engagements. Learners are trained to acquire team spirit where productions are done communally. Individualism was frowned upon in traditional communities, and hence, every member conceived of himself as a part of a whole. Training of children was considered a community business. Works like farming, road constructions, marriages, funerals, etcetera, were carried out communally

Holisticism: Holisticism in AIE affirms the reality that education in Indigenous African settings was always given as a whole and not in part. It had the target of moulding a mature

community member capable of managing all societal challenges at a given instance. This approach reflects in totality the essential quality of education for functionality. The curriculum covered everything that would qualify a person to be a fitting member of the community. Thus, the goal of education had the sole purpose of grooming an all-rounded citizen for the community, from moral to social and physical, to become a stakeholder in the community's affairs. Learning was an end in itself and not a means to an end.

Multiple-learning: this means that in AIE, learners were trained to acquire multiple skills at the same time. The multitasking ability was key and central to AIE. This trait reflects education for functionality, as children were expected to learn different things at the same time. For instance, the boys were expected to learn how to cultivate the farm, rear animals, know how to hunt, and even advance in skills of self-defence at the same time.

Perennialism: by Perennialism, we mean that AIE ensured the continuity of the norms and values of the traditions through adequate education of the same to the younger generations, who would, in turn, hand over the same values and tradition to their posterity. In this regard, the recipients were expected to serve as instruments for the preservation of the traditions and culture of the community. Values and norms were simply handed down and received without questioning by the learners/recipients.

Digital Era

Digital Era is synonymous with the digital age. The Collins Dictionary defines it as “the time when large amounts of information are widely available to many people, largely through computer technology”. A further definition that is elaborate and encompassing is the one from Techopedia, which identifies the digital era with the digital revolution and defines it as “the advancement of technology from analogue electronic devices to the digital technology available today. The era started during the 1980s and is ongoing. The digital revolution also marks the beginning of the Information Era. The Digital Era is saturated with words such as ‘artificial intelligence (AI), ‘automation’, ‘big data, ‘Insure Tech’, ‘Internet of Things (IoT), and ‘cloud’- all characterize the language of the digital era. According to the Global Digital 2019 Report, the pace at which technology is evolving is alarming as well as overwhelming. It further affirmed that people are ever willing to embrace this trend. It reported that as of 2019, there were 5.112 billion mobile users, 4.388 billion internet users, and 3.484 billion active social media users across the world. These figures were expected to continue growing between 2 and 9% between 2018 to 2022.

The Digital Era can be seen as the development of an evolutionary system in which knowledge turnover is not only very high but also increasingly out of the control of humans, making it a time in which our lives become more difficult to manage (Jill Shepherd, 2004). While there are many ways to describe the Digital Era, the explanation of its existence is scanty. It is an Era that has blossomed the economic turnover of the world. According to Jill

Shepherd, Evolutionary theory, as an explanation of the system we live in, states that sustainability relies on knowledge turnover. In parts of the system which are relatively stable, knowledge turnover is low, and new variation, when produced, is rarely retained. In other, less stable parts of the system, faster knowledge turnover is advantageous as new knowledge is produced more frequently, allowing for adaptation to the changing surrounding environment. Mixing and matching rates of knowledge turnover makes for a dynamic but ever-lasting world. He further maintains that The Digital Era can be seen as the development of an evolutionary system in which knowledge turnover is not only very high but also increasingly out of the control of humans, making it a time in which our lives become more difficult to manage. For example, in the second-generation Internet, ‘the semantic web’, functionality, which understands the meaning, replaces the search function of unknowingly matching words, which often have multiple meanings.

The problem that Digital Era is pushing humanity into, according to Jill Shepherd (2004), is the possibility of the absence of the human ability to control and regulate artificial intelligence, which is taking centre stage at a speed rate. He holds that in time, within this version of the Internet, software agents will exchange knowledge without human intervention. He explains that our understanding of the knowledge embedded within the human genome about how we relate to the world, generated in association with technology and freely available on the Internet, raises questions about our assumptions of control. Do we know enough about our future to change our genome? Can we control such changes and their diffusion? The social and economic implications of the Digital Era are huge and will increase as technological functionality becomes more knowledge-based, our everyday lives and understanding of ourselves become more linked to it, and it takes on a ‘life’ of its own. Understanding the Digital Era in terms of evolution will help ensure we build sustainable socio-economic relationships both with technology and with the advanced knowledge that technology helps us create

Citing Drucker (2002), Jill Shepherd (2004) explained that the Digital Era is characterized by intense socio-economic transformation on a scale similar to that of the Industrial Revolution. It affects everyday life-extending to socio-economic knowledge and its operation. We can maintain that the Era is interwoven with information and technology (ICT) and its functionality which is increasingly being utilized to mobilize knowledge at a faster speed.

A basic feature of the Digital Era is the fact that it has changed the way people live and work. Nigeria is no exception to this development. It is thus important that as a nation, Nigeria has to key in so that it takes advantage of the Era to boost the well-being of its citizens. It is an era where there is increasing dependence on technology where knowledge,

whether content-laden and therefore scientifically factual or content-free and is therefore dependent on emotions, is churned out every day.

Methodology/Research Methods

The focus of this research paper was intended to give a complete picture of African traditional education and its relevance to the education system in a digital Era. As such, the study was based on a secondary database and collected research papers, literature reviews, books, magazines, journals, and websites. This study employed qualitative research methodology to drive home its findings. Since the study dealt with projections and postulations on the relevance of African Traditional Education in this Digital Era, the study sought to offer reasons why despite being in a digital era, Africa, albeit Nigeria, should make all efforts to integrate the core tenets of African Traditional system of education within the Digital Era. Based on this, Analytic methods, as well as Document Analysis, were employed to help offer a critical overview of the state of life for Nigerians in the digital era while urging for a rethink and re-introduction of the human psychological dimension of education, which African traditional education system was adjudged to have in quantum. The reliance on artificial intelligence leading to massive cross-dissemination of information places people and their privacies at risk. Only when moral rectitude, a fundamental component of African Traditional Education, is advocated, respect for the privacy of others could remain a mirage.

Theoretical framework

There are many theories put together to inform the development of this study. However, the study primarily used a postmodernist literary theory to drive home its research findings. The decision for this choice was informed by the theory's relevance in shaping and building critical thinking skills to arrive at the research findings by dwelling on an epistemological approach. The Postmodernist theory, which seeks to challenge and create an in-depth assessment of the status quo regarding a phenomenon by evaluating its nitty-gritty, becomes a handy tool in building and developing a case for the inclusion of the African Indigenous system of education in a digitally vibrant society for Nigeria.

Literature Review and Discussion: an overview of African Education in Nigeria

African Indigenous or traditional education is the super glue that connects the African to his environment. Its immense benefit to the personality of the African(Nigerian) permeates the whole of his being, the absence of which leaves him with a crisis of identity. Akinpelu (1981) observed that the colonial masters could not subdue the Africans until they imposed their system of education upon them. Their approach, which promoted a capitalist system that fed on the individualistic instincts of mankind, inducing the attitude of human inequality and domination of the weak by the strong, was foreign to the Africans.

Nigeria, being a victim of Western colonialism, also fell prey to this menace and thus succumbed to this Western entrapment. Given that Africa (to which Nigeria belongs) is underdeveloped, there was no choice but to embrace what was imposed upon her by the powerful West as education. As the world is today described as “advanced” or industrialized and “underdeveloped” nations, Africa (Nigeria), unfortunately, falls into the second description. This classification has made Africa rely totally on the industrialized nations for support as they are the ones who determine what is worthy of being learned (Loomba, 1998). This situation is further compounded by the presence of technology characterized as the Digital Era, which is far more prevalent in industrialized nations than in Africa.

In light of the above imposition, Emeagwali (2006) insists that Africans had an education that could best be described as scientific. He opines that Africans, while interacting with their environment, they were able to transform raw materials into usable tools. Furthermore, over time, they could make hypotheses about nature, the natural world, and society in general. The result of these hypotheses was the fabrication of metallic tools and implements, textile production, traditional medicine, food processing, and the application of various principles which aided their survival.

Against this backdrop, the former Tanzanian African Philosopher Nyere J (1961), in his work - “Ujamaa”, observed that it was high time African intellectuals helped close the gap created by over four hundred years of domination and marginalization of the African people’s knowledge systems, by rejecting the utilization of dominant western worldview of knowing and knowledge production as the only way of knowing. We must start using the African cultural perspective in analyzing realities, especially the moral dimension, to help curb the impending hazards of the abuse of technology. This view was also articulated and re-echoed by Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986) in his seminal work “Decolonizing the Mind”. Ngugi advocated strongly that African Indigenous knowledge should not only be seen as an “alternative” Knowledge but that it should be regarded as one of the dominant knowledge systems alongside those of the West.

Given the sweeping impact of technology across the world, Africa, albeit Nigeria inclusive, there is an urgent need to hoist the emblem of Africa’s indigenous moral compass in the educational structure of Nigeria’s learning institutions. The reawakening of critical moral tenets, which emphasize empathy, solidarity, brotherhood, and community consciousness, should not only be brought to the forefront but be carved out as essential tenets in the teaching-learning process within the learning institutions. The advocacy here is, therefore, that the key components of the African indigenous system of education should form the core content of the curriculum for education in all institutions of learning.

Education in the digital era: Perspectives

Given the global influence of technology, which is tagged the “digital era”, it is safe to say that as humans, we have plunged ourselves into an era where artificial intelligence has over the coast of human destiny. So much of human activity is influenced by sophisticated technology. Of course, this feat on the human part has benefited humanity in great ways, but it has had a damaging impact as well. Harpreet Kaur (2019) identified the benefits of the digital Era to include the following:

Increased Productivity- It takes an employee an average of 12 minutes to find the paper document they are looking for. With a well-executed digitalization and document imaging plan, this can be reduced to a few seconds or less.

Cost Efficiency- The cost of printing and paperwork can be exorbitant. It involves various sub-costs like equipment management, paper records maintenance, and cost of space.

Easy accessibility- Documents that have been converted can be easily accessed through the cloud or system using any device that has internet, anywhere, or anytime.

Enhanced Security- A scanned document is a trackable document. If needed, only certain users can access the documents, and workflows can be set up along with permission groups for an individual, which enhances the security and maintains the confidentiality of the document.

Enhanced Information Preservation- Information stored in paper formats is degradable information and degrades further every time it is handled manually. Document imaging ensures that your business's most important data is saved and preserved for the future.

Disaster Recovery- There is always a risk of disaster, whether it is natural or man-made. Fire, flood, earthquakes, or other destructive phenomena may cause a major disaster for your paper documents, seriously affecting your business. Through document imaging, you have a safe repository of your data which can also be shared on the cloud or your local document management system, enabling you to recover precious documents with a simple click.

Saves space- Real Estate space is expensive, and eliminating paper storage can give you more space, reduction in rent, reduced off-site document storage fees, or the potential to open up a new office

Stay Competitive- From multinational firms to small organizations, digitization has been the mantra of the new age of document management. Document digitization efforts have repaid businesses with reduced costs, efficient workflows, and satisfied customers.

Environmentally friendly- Document Imaging and the overall document digitizing process add to your green credits and is an environment-friendly initiative. It removes the need to create multiple backup copies and unnecessary printing, increasing the eco-friendly quotient of your company.

On the other hand, the disadvantages of the Digital Era involve an over-dependence on electronics in which learners, instead of gaining knowledge from technology, simply use it. A situation where learners use instead of learning from technology is not good for humanity. Study habits that are the key to self-discovery are at risk as readily available answers are accessible on the computer. This dampens creativity on the part of the learners. Furthermore, websites could be used to promote propaganda against an ill-perceived culture, making people entertain biases against such cultures without actually encountering such cultures firsthand. It could be used as a breeding ground for misguided information, which often harms the gullible younger generation. Furthermore, the advancement of technology has driven people apart by endangering their interpersonal relationships. People are constantly glued to their electronics at the expense of shared discussions on physical interactions. Part of the problem of the Digital Era is that it requires huge financial backing for the development and maintenance of the technologies. Hence it is capital intensive. Finally, with the discovery of the capability to generate artificial intelligence, which sometimes could act contrary to its expected operation due to technical glitches, the risks human being are exposed to with this development is disastrous. Without control, its repercussion can only be imagined. Furthermore, devices such as biotech and weaponized gadgets in the hands of morally bankrupt individuals are a recipe for the destruction of the world.

Nigeria: Relevance of Traditional African Education in the Digital Era

Marah (2006) submits that African Traditional education had a process that was intertwined with the social, cultural, artistic, religious, and recreational life of the people. This, in itself, is ‘schooling’ as it empowers the people with the relevant knowledge of their general existential realities. This knowledge is critical in the digital age because it can serve as the foundational base upon which knowledge acquired digitally can be harmonized for the benefit of society. In the face of a globally dependent human structure on technology, Nigeria, being a part of this global project, cannot be said to be left behind. There is a need for an integration of the core values of the African traditional values within the education system of Nigeria so as not to lose these values, which are the hallmark of our identity as Nigerians and Africans by extension. The failure to adequately integrate this rich knowledge into the scope of knowledge nowadays has resulted in people becoming selfish and isolated from fellow human beings while becoming dependent on technology-a situation where people use and take advantage of their fellow human beings instead of adding value to their lives.

Osunade (1994) identified some of these core values of the African traditional education system which can help the Nigerian society maintain its dignity in the face of a digitally dependent world to include, among others, character development, belief in the Supreme Being, filial regard, and solidarity among community members, acquisition of vocational and technical skills, strong moral rectitude displayed in honest and sincere search of self-sustenance.

Character Development: character development is an outstanding feature in African Traditional education. The emphasis on good character development stems from the African understanding that character is what defines a person and not wealth or fame. For a typical traditional African, the character is the stuff that shapes his perception of the world. To get it wrong is to perceive the world wrongly in consequence.

Belief in the Supreme Being (God): in a digitally dependent society where the belief in God is gradually being regarded as an old-fashioned concept, Africa's firm conviction in the supreme being as the determiner of human destiny stands as a gauge for the Nigerian in a society that is making science to be the hallmark for human conduct- a situation that is eroding our common sense of the divine in one another as human beings. This is a sad scenario as such ideas are stripping us of our human sense of solidarity as children of God to whom we shall all account for all our actions. A scientifically built society, allowing no room for the belief in God, births a society that is rudderless with regards to morality as each individual's moral compass becomes his or her caprices for dealing a relating with others- as a situation which could be responsible for serious atrocities, only with the strong belief in a Supreme Being who is benevolent, altruistic, fair, and just and who commands us to treat one another in like manner can our society in this digital era be sustained.

Filial regard and solidarity among community members: the virtue of respect, a core component of Africa's traditional education, needs to be implanted in a similar vein within the education system in Nigeria's education curriculum. This is because the current society, although acknowledged as power, has also given room for the abuse of such power among young people. The young people who are regarded as digital immigrants because of their vast knowledge of electronics, most of them tend to abuse such power and knowledge by engaging in various crimes against the older generation, who are regarded as the emigrants of technology. Because of this, a strong reference to a culture of solidarity, a key element of African Traditional Education within the Nigerian system of education, can go a long way in salvaging Nigerian society.

Acquisition of Vocational Training and development of a healthy attitude towards honest labour: although there is no gainsaying that the digital era has come with it a mass method of production, it has not helped us tame the menace of crime. Furthermore, as pointed out above, the digital era has retarded human ability for creativity as learners simply become dependent on the system. Thus, Africa's cherished value of learning by doing

should be flaunted and made to be a string parameter in the Nigerian curriculum for education.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Given the above overview of the impact of the digital era in Nigeria, it would be accepted that Nigeria is at a crossroads. It is either the country is swept off of its core values which are embedded in its indigenous education system, or a concerted effort is made to redeem and sustain such values. The research study submits herein that the way to go is for an all-inclusive education system, both formal and informal, to be made where core African values as anchored within the traditional education system be made to serve as a guide. This would help checkmate the overdependence on electronics and, by extension, help maintain the identity that is uniquely Nigerian and, by extension, African. Furthermore, it is recommended here that government and all stakeholders in African indigenous tradition should come up with initiatives that would advance an in-depth study of the pros and cons of the digital era to the maintenance of the identity of African indigenous people, especially in Nigeria. By doing so, Nigerians would be forewarned of the negative effects of the digital era and thereby create necessary measures to safeguard the younger generation, who are digital immigrants, from overdependence on technology at the expense of the core values that identify the Africans in the global space.

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