Educational Reform and Value Re-Orientation for Preservation of African Communalistic Principles

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Abstract: Education is a vital instrument for inculcating and transmitting those cultural values that are necessary for making the child a better human being for his own benefit and that of other members of the society. Africa is blessed with such values that are capable of making one a better human being but these values are neglected by our educators in preference to what is western. This paper therefore highlights some of these values which are the principles of our communal society. It calls for redirection of our interest and value system towards these African communalistic principles which are vital values and the need to reform our education for proper integration of these values. We believe that if we succeed in this assignment, we would produce a better Nigerian society.

Keywords: Education, Values, Educational Reform, Value Reorientation & Communalism.

1. Introduction

This work is concerned with the need to re-orientate our value system towards African communalistic values and reform our education system to be instrument of preserving and transmitting this cultural heritage. In order to achieve this, we shall begin the study by explaining what is this educational reform, value reorientation, communalism and communalistic values and how we can reform our education in order to serve as instrument of preserving and transmitting the values.

2. Educational Reforms

For us to understand what an educational reform is, we have to make conscious effort to understand the concepts of education and reforms. Etymologically, education is derived from two Latin words, namely educere and educare. The first word educere means to lead forth or draw out. Among scholars that viewed education from this perspective were Plato and Socrates. Socrates always emphasized “I cannot teach anybody anything; I can only make them think”. This is because he believed that ideas are innate from cradle, and as such the function of any educator or teacher is to help the child bring out what he already has. On the other hand, educare means to train or mould. The
scholars who see education as *educare* believed that a child has no idea from birth, that is tabular rasa (a blank sheet of paper) and the responsibility of the teacher is to feed or send in ideas that will make him knowledgeable. This has generated the issue of nature nurture controversy. None of these is totally wrong but each moves to the extreme level. The issue came up as a result of extremism and exclusivism.

Education is neither a mere product of nature nor nurture as education has to do with the development of natural endowments in man through the process of nurturing and training for a better and useful living. This is similar to the conception of education by Igboabuchi and Ofojebe (2010) as a group of processes by which individuals are assisted in life through proper direction and guidance, to develop their potentials and capabilities for their own benefit and that of society in which they live. In developing the individual, education tries to inculcate that value that is necessary to make the child a better human being for his own benefit and that of other members of the society.

Reform means transform, to form, remove defects, to make better and to bring to a better way of life. According to Akudolu (2009), reform is an introduction of new methods, ideas which focuses on making changes on what has been in existence. Educational reforms emphasize the need for making changes in our educational system for the purpose of inculcating those values necessary to make the individual a better human being useful to himself and to the society.

3. Value Re-Orientation

Value is simply defined as the worth of a thing. When some thing is said to have value, it means it worths something and should not be disregarded. It generally means something which is good, esteemed, desirable, liked and worthwhile. It may be considered as what is preferred or cherished by an individual or group. Ezejiegwu (2012) defines it as concepts widely held by people in society about what is important to the well being, survival and identity of a society. It includes all kinds of rightness, virtue, obligation, truth, honesty, beauty, justice, fairness, peace, love, unity and so on. People do not value the same things. Different cultures emphasize different values. Our value system is determined by our upbringing and experience. Our behaviours and decisions are determined by our values. We tend to pursue those goals in life which we value.

To orientate means direct interest of somebody to something while to re-orientate means to redirect the interest of somebody to something which is important but is neglected. Our value system indeed has gone off from what is African. Some of these African values are very vital to our being, existence and development. We have taken in to anything foreign as better than ours even when they are detrimental to us. Thus the need for value re-orientation in Nigeria. One of the core values neglected which if transmitted well through educational process would help to curb various social vices in our society is our African Communalistic Values. What is communalism and communalistic values? This is what we shall move to study.

4. Concept of African Communalism

Communalism is a way of life which is community oriented that has a greatest manifestation in traditional African society as well as other primitive societies. The family bond expands into the extended family system, and extends into the communal life. The underlying principle could be stated thus, “I exist because we are” The individual finds himself inexorably connected to the community. He can only define himself in the context of the community. It is a unique phenomenon that binds the community in a brotherhood of well-being. It is truism that communalism is found in many communities in the world but in varying degrees depending on its level of development. Growth in economy, science and technologies cause the decline of the practice. This is because many modern technologies distance people from others, weakening the traditional practice in a great way. The Western world, with its growth in science and technology, as well as its high advancement in civilization, has its communal relationships among people therein negatively affected. Similar scenario is gradually taking place in many African societies today. It is becoming a case of everyone to himself and nobody for the other; a society wherein the ‘I’ reigns.
5. African Communalistic Principles

To understand what communalism is all about, it is imperative for us to highlight some of the principles that underlie the practice both in Africa, Igbo land and many other societies where it is practised. These principles are values that are very vital for the development of society and need to be preserved through our educational system.

a. Love and Sense of Brotherhood: Communalism is a social system in which a people or a community lives together as one family. It is based on the brotherhood of all in the community. It is a social system that perceives every person in the society as a member of one family with a duty and a right to contribute and share in the well-being of that society. Family, in Igbo-African society is more than European father, mother and children but includes grandparents, uncles, aunts, in-laws, cousin, nephew and others who may have their children. In some cases, a number of kindred with their wives and children come together as one large family. Since all this family can trace their common descent and share a common living place, they enjoy some consciousness of their identity and a sense of solidarity. Many communities in Igbo land were said to have are a common origin and live together in particular geographical location and this makes the members to see each other as nwanne (brother or sister).

b. Caring and Hospitality: Underneath the principle of love and sense of brotherhood are caring and hospitality. Because, the people love and see themselves as brothers and sisters, they care for each other; the concern of one is seen as the concern of others. Everybody seeks the welfare of another. Due to the love and sense of oneness, “a person can just arrive at the house of the other he regards as his nwanne without any pre-information but with every confidence that he is free to stay with him as long as he…wants, and he is so accepted” (Ewelü, 1999). The person who is visited gladly accepts the visitor and integrates him into his family as a member. Sometimes, he may invite his friends, introducing them to his visitor and at times they would spend time at evening to entertain the stranger. He protects the interest of the stranger. But at this time when things have fallen apart, it is difficult to accept strangers in your house. Some benevolent people had by so doing accepted thieves and bad eggs into their houses. Even though Igbo people accept strangers, it is still difficult to reconcile their act of killing strangers for sacrifices in the olden days. But this can be explained as obedience to gods.

c. Unity and Solidarity: Another principle that underlies the practice of communalism is the principle of unity and solidarity, oneness and social cohesion. This is possible because “Communalism is the social life of the African which is founded on the African belief that all human beings are members of one family of mankind”(Nze,1989). They see themselves as one and do things together. This is called “Igwebuikę” in Igbo communal society. The individual and the community are inseparable; what happens to an individual happens to others and what happens to the community happens to the individual. This can be illustrated with a story of an Olu man with an amputated hand. As he was returning from his fishing expedition, his fish was snatched from him by people from the neighborhood. He could not offer resistance because of his incapacity. He therefore cried out aloud that an abominable act had been committed in Olu. The cry echoed and the Olu people went to war to retrieve their fish. Therefore what belongs to an individual belongs to others and what affects one affects others. There is no exclusive private ownership and use of property. Though individual may own property, they are readily made available for others’ use. All resources ultimately belong to the community and aim at the well-being of all in the community. Even individual achievements are seen as achievements and resources of the community.

d. Interdependency and Interrelatedness: In Igbo cosmology, there is interaction and interdependency among the hierarchy of beings and among human beings. According to Ogugua (2003), “the Igbo people hold the idea of unity of beings and interrelationship which exists among them; it does not exclude the idea of interdependency”. An individual interacts with others and depends on them for most of his needs while others also depend on him. Solipsism is absurd in a communal society and this is typified in Igbo proverbs: Onye nodu so ya, odudu atagbue ya (If somebody lives alone, tsetse fly would bite him to death); Oko koba anu-ohia, o choba osisi, ma okoba mmadu, O choba ibe ya (If animal’s body irritates it, it goes to a tree for help, but if it irritates man, he looks for somebody to scratch him) and Aristotle is very close to this when he says that he
who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god. In other word, interdependency and interrelationship is a principle of every society but it is so vital, fundamental and prominent in a communal society. This takes place in form of give and take, interaction, fellowship, communion and communication.

e. Belongingness and Participation: It is not only that one belongs to the society, but one should also participate in it. He belongs to society by participating in the activities of the society. In Igbo society, it is a common feature for people not to attend a burial of a member simply because he did not attend burials when he was alive. I am because we are and we are because I am part of the ‘we’ is the guiding principle of Igbo communal society. This social collaboration is seen as essential legacy which ought to be lived, recognized at all times and preserved at all cost. Therefore stringent departure from it is punished by severe sanctions such as social ostracism, as deterrence against multiplication of such acts.

f. Equity and Equality: Communal society is an egalitarian society where there is equity and equality, justice and fairness. Everybody whether poor or rich is respected and treated with dignity. The rich does not oppress the poor but sees his wealth as the wealth of his community and the community sees the success of a member as the success of all. It is a just and peaceful society. It is a society where justice is the hallmark of individual relationship. The guiding principle of the relationship is whatever you want people to do to you do same to others. This can be said in another way in Igbo, ‘Onye emegbula ibe ya. Egbe belu, ugo belu, nke siri ibe ya ebena nku kwa ya.’(Do no evil against another). May the kite and eagle perch, anyone which says that another would not perch, let its wing fell it). Fairness and impartiality is used in the judicial process as any form of injustice is punished by the gods. Because of fear for the wrath of gods, people do things justly. Partiality, prejudice, lies, bribery and corruption are abhorred in Igbo society.

6. Preserving the Communalistic values through Reformed Education

Every society tries to pass on to coming generations those things it values through the process of education. Thus knowledge, skills, beliefs, customs, arts and culture considered valuable are transmitted. Unfortunately, African communalistic values have been dragged to the backyard in our educational system. Where it is available, it receives less attention. We have taken in to whatever that is western and termed everything African as obsolete and archaic (Akudolu, 2014). This resulted to various vices and erosion of our identity.

We emphasize the imperative of science and technology and Western education without conscious efforts to look at what we have. Our curriculum still possesses much Western traits. Western education moves towards physical development with materialism as its philosophical foundation while African communalistic value moves towards character development and egalitarian society. Its foundation is morality. The emphasis we place on Western values which is materialistic to the neglect of African humanistic values has given rise to various forms of evils alien to our society. We have embraced western education without making efforts at removing those aspects that are not good for us and without properly integrating what we have that will give our society a moral foundation. The consequence of this omission is that we are infected with western problems. Today we are bedeviled with bribery and corruption, ritual killings, raping, prostitution, kidnapping, terrorism, armed robbery, examination malpractice, social injustices, cultism and various forms of violence.

7. Recommendations

From what we have discussed so far, it is obvious that there is urgent need for us, our educators, curriculum planners and nation as a whole to redirect our interests to these vital character formation values we have but are neglected. These should be synthesized and built in our curriculum from pre-primary to tertiary institutions. Emphasis should be put in African Studies such as our histories, religion, cultural practices and languages. Through such African studies, our culture will be explored and ethos therein internalized. These African studies should be made to be compulsory in all levels of our education. Igbo Language as well as other African languages should be made to be instrument of communication in all our education levels and subjects. Every African region should be made to communicate and teach within their region with their local language while English Language is to be
used as a lingua franca outside the region. This is because much emphasis in English language in our educational system causes the death of our local languages. These languages are value themselves. Think of our proverbs, folklore and stories with their moral lessons. These languages are our mark of identity and if they die, we lose our identity in the global world.

8. Conclusion

We have seen the need to redirect our attention to our traditional values which are cultural heritages worthy of producing better persons. Our fore father made these values the content of their informal and traditional education and produce individuals who had respect for elders, human lives, and community ethos. The vices of today were not prevalent in their time as it is today. If we combine these values with positive aspects of western culture, our society will be far better than theirs in all aspects. Therefore there is urgent need for us to repackage our education to include these communal principles in its curriculum.

9. References


