

INCORPORATION OF TRADITIONAL AFRICAN CULTURAL VALUES IN THE FORMAL EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR DEVELOPMENT, PEACE BUILDING AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Michael T. Katola, PhD

Senior Lecturer

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Nairobi, Kenya

ABSTRACT

In contemporary Africa, formal education is recognized as a basic prerequisite for development. By implication, the school has become important as a socializing agent. In spite of this, schooling is based in institutions designed to impart specific knowledge and skills often unrelated to actual needs of the learners and communities to which they belong. It is for this reason, that need arises for traditional values to be incorporated in the present formal system of education. The values discussed in the paper are analyzed in the context of John P. Miller's holistic education Theory. It is evident that if the values can be integrated in the Present education system. Africa would realize economic development, peace and good governance. The paper concludes that education should not only enable the learners to acquire certificates but to enable them to live as responsible and dependable members of the society.

Keywords: Education, Cultural Values, Development Peace Building, Good Governance.

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 this, the continent has 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 under development but also to destruction of property and loss of human lives. Mwaura (2002:4) may have had this in mind when she lamented that while globalization has increased opportunities and reduced poverty in some countries such as China, India and some of the Asian Tigers, there has been immense disparities in Africa. Third, poor leadership has become the norm in Africa for decades. The continent has witnessed violence, violation 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 to an individual from childhood to adulthood. It was a holistic education, which took into account the social, economic cultural, spiritual and political aspects of life of the learner.

In contemporary African society, education is recognized as a basic pre-requisite for development. This may explain why as early as 1961 the all-African states conference held in Addis Ababa resolved to provide free, universal and compulsory education by 1980. Although the goal may not have been realized by all counties by that time a lot of resources are spent on education by all African governments. By implication the school has become important as a socializing agent. Teachers have a great burden in moulding the youth into responsible members of the society.

The conceptual frame of reference for his paper is John P. Miller's (1988) holistic education. According to Miller, the word holistic is derived from the Greek "holos" which means whole or connected. The concept 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 ecosystem.

Holistic education is different from integrated education but it may be delivered as integrated education. Moral education, for example can be delivered by integrating it into various parts of the curriculum such as literature, history, social studies, civics sports and home economics. This way, learners would see the relevance of the subjects to their own lives. Miller's concept of holistic education is relevant in this paper because 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.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight critical African cultural values that can be incorporated and inculcated in the education system for development peace building and good governance. It is discussed under the following headings

- African Traditional Education in a changing Society
- Education and development
- Education and peace building
- Education and governance
- Conclusion

African Traditional Education in a changing Society

According to Sifuna and Otiende(1992) education is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and attitude and values from one generation to another. The attitudes and values acquired through education are not in born but rather the results of learning process. Values are the powerful directive forces that give order and meaning to act, and make decisions. Acquisition of right values is so important that Carleheden (2006) argues that a central aspect of education has always been a passing on of norms and values.

Before the advent of Christian missionaries and Arabs to Africa, there existed no schools of the type that we have today. Nonetheless pre colonial African communities had an education system which was informal in nature. In that education system no effort was spared by parents, grandparents and elder siblings during the socialization process to bring up community members who perpetuated the values that helped the community to be integrated. These values included honesty, respect, obedience and generosity among others. The system bore similarities but each of the many ethnic groups had its own distinctive features reflecting its particular life and culture. Generally, the education system was designed to create an ideal individual who would fully fit into and be accepted by society. Sifuna and Otiende (1992:149) stress this point in the following words.

The basic similarities in African education system were strongly adapted to the environment; aimed at conserving the cultural heritage of the family, clan and ethnic group, adapted the children to their physical environment and taught them how to use it, explained to the children that their future and that of community depended on the continuation and understanding of their ethnic institution of laws, language and values they had inherited from the past.

Three things that mark out education can be deduced from the above quotation. They include intention to foster learning, concern with environment and certain values. The introduction of western education disrupted the African way of life. Schooling displaced the African education system. Mugambi (2003) observes that schooling is based in institutions designed to impart specific knowledge and skills often unrelated to the actual needs of the learners and the communities to which they belong. In deed schools became centres of cultural alienation instead of being centres of cultural affirmation. This has resulted in many people looking down upon most of their cultural values as inferior and out of date. Such people are more comfortable speaking and writing foreign languages than speaking or writing their mother tongues. Evidently, this is a serious anomaly in a curriculum of education if it socializes the learner with foreign cultures while it allows him to remain in his own culture. Proper education should upgrade culture but should not be a means of vilifying it. For this reason parents in traditional African societies were convinced that the child should not only be oriented to all that is good in the culture of his community but he should respect the culture.

A person who is not an Africanist may wonder if traditional practices should be studied in this age of science and technology. Nonetheless, it is important to underscore the fact that while societies are dynamic and changes are inevitable the core ideas and values of a culture should be zealously guarded and handed over from one generation to the other. The past must be evaluated in the light of present day efforts to build the kind of society we want. This is important because African education is sometimes thought to be a white man's education which must be carried out in the white man's style of life. But it is essential for scholars to make education rooted in Africa instead of being regarded as foreign importation. It is for this reason that an attempt is made in this paper to show how formal education should reinforce the constructive values of cultural socialization.

Education and Development

Christian missionaries introduced formal education into Africa and built some very impressive learning centres like Lovedale in South Africa, Alliance High School in Kenya, Kings College, Budo in Uganda and Achimoata College in Ghana. In these schools the forsaking of the traditional values was seen as a great advance, a move towards civilization and acceptance of high values Kinoti (1984:91). After independence phenomenal expansion in education in terms of numbers of institutions and enrolment at primary, secondary and tertiary levels was witnessed. To date, most African governments spend the largest share of their budgets on education. This is why African can boast of many educated sons and daughters. Among the sons and daughters are doctor, scientists, engineers, pilots, economists, and scholars in leading universities like Harvard, Princeton and Yale.

One question that is raised severally is why Africa is trailing behind other continents of the world, technologically and economically despite the fact that she is endowed with natural and skilled human resources. Trailing behind is not used to mean the continent is backward. The

term is used to mean that even in a world of advancing technology to which Africa could contribute much, it is still not able to do so. Kinoti (1984:38) shares the same argument when he laments that many African countries have ministries with the responsibility of planning development but little development actually takes place.

Why Africa is trailing behind in development? There are several problems. The education system tends to promote rote learning. The main goal for most students and their teachers is not an education for professional competence but passing the examination. In his research Gachanga (2007) found that genuine learning, creativity and imagination receive minimal attention in many African curricula. The present day school is a system of individual examination in which large numbers of students fail. The school also separates intellectual and manual work. This is a serious anomaly in our education system, which should be addressed if we want children to develop physically morally and religiously. This is why Shiundu and Amulando (1992) writing on Kenya's 8-4-4 system of education argued that its graduates are half baked academics and skilful dependants who cannot be effective in terms of satisfying either demands of market place or the expectations of those being educated.

The above discussion reveals that the current education system produces a tremendous waste of human talents. Such violence should not be allowed to continue against the youth. The discussion also reveals that Africa has become a credential society. In such a society, employers use degrees and diplomas to determine who is eligible for a job. In the traditional African society, everyone had an opportunity to work but credentialing has closed doors of opportunity for many. In order to overcome the problem holistic education should be given where by the youth are well prepared to contribute to the society both intellectually and practically. There are many people whose talents are yet to be tapped.

The second problem why Africa is trailing behind in development is due to the colonization of the minds. The continent is experiencing a serious problem of brain drain. Most skilled professionals have left the continent to work in developed countries. Whereas the professionals may have been lured to those countries by attractive remuneration and good working environment it is doubtful if they are proud of their countries. My interview with young undergraduate students at Kenyatta University in Kenya revealed that their wish is to work in either Europe or America. This may explain why there is a high number of people applying for American green cards despite several warnings that some of the lotteries are fake.

When one's mind is pillaged, he develops a negative attitude towards himself. This means that for Africa to develop, their identity as Africans must be emphasized in their education system. In the traditional society the development of self-awareness and self identify was facilitated by the controlled social scope in the African societies. However as Ndung'u (2007:127) observes globalization with its accompanying liberalised electronic and printed mass media has opened up new supermarkets of ideals and values from which the youth choose and pick with ease.

In order for the Africans to counter the negative effects of globalization and gain their identity, appreciation of African culture is a must. Makunike (1974:27) said the following with African culture in mind.

Culture is like the leaves of a tree. They give the tree its shape and beauty, while giving shade to people and animals. Remove the leaves and the trees

loses a vital part of itself but when the leaves have done their job and cease to add anything valuable to the trees, they wither, dry and fall, thereby preparing room for new leaves. No leaves can ever possibly outlive their time on the tree. Likewise, culture should be allowed to do the job for which it was intended. Its premature destruction might make the people whom it was meant to clothe suffer cultural and genuine spiritual and emotional “statelessness”.

The problem of premature destruction of culture highlighted above comes out clearly especially among African Christians during baptism. People either are given or choose names which have no significance to the person and which are equally difficult to pronounce. The family counters the problem by improvising their own corruption of the names to suit their tongues thereby creating a totally different name altogether. The result is that a person is known by different names. The different pronunciation of the same name shows how a name loses its significance and to some extent, its owner feels a sense of loss of identity. If the names given during baptism were African, the problem of pronunciation would not arise. More importantly, African names have cultural and religious values attached to them and this is what should be emphasized in our education system. Once we recapture our identity we will work towards the development of the continent.

It is important also to note that part of the African traditional education was to ensure that the values taught promoted self-reliant people. Self-reliance calls for a recovery of a sense of dignity in our ancestral past. This is why African traditional education offered a wide array of areas of knowledge. It involved the study of the history of the family, clan, ethnic group especially the heroes and heroines who were recalled in songs and stories for their immense contribution in the promotion of life of the people. The main purpose for doing so was to make learners proud of their society. It behooves school teachers to develop youth who are proud of being Africans but not an elitist class which has a negative attitude towards African culture.

Education and Peace Building

Conflicts have become synonymous with Africa. These conflicts have bred violence which was never experienced in traditional Africa. According to Rusatsi(2001) the different forms of violence experienced in Africa include physical violence, political violence, state sponsored violence, structural violence, ecological violence and liberative violence. The quest for peace is therefore one of the most urgent concerns in Africa today. Gechaga(2003:18) outlines five factors for the emergence of conflict in Africa. They include politicizing the armed forces, politicizing ethnicity, political patronage, land alienation for instance in Zimbabwe where 4000 whites own one third of the arable land and land grabbing particularly in Kenya where influential personalities dispose other citizens of their land and deny them their rights.

In the African traditional society, conflicts existed but there were established mechanisms of dealing with them. There were cases of conflicts through cattle rustling and use of mystical powers such as witchcraft. There were also cases of conflicts between different families, clans or within a particular family. Such conflicts were considered anti life as they were destructive not only to attacker and the attacked but to the entire society as a whole. Thus, when conflicts arose, reconciliation was mandatory so as to restore social harmony and peace. Peace in this context is what Assefa (1996) refers to as transformation of conflict and

destructive interactions into more cooperative and constructive relationships. Indeed, African traditional society had fewer cases of conflicts compared to the 21st century Africa. First, the society had ethos to which all normal members subscribed. Gyekye (1996) and Bujo (1998) observe that the community was the core of this ethos. The reason was that individual interests were subordinate to those of the community. Thus, communal ethic ensured a common understanding and appreciation of what was expected of each individual member. Second, the traditional curricula were rich in peace education. Members learned about peace from childhood to adulthood. This is the reason why Bounding (2000:41) writes:

Each social group has developed its own strategies of conflict resolution over time, uniquely rerouted in local culture and passed on from generation to generation. This knowledge is woven into religious teachings, into music poetry and dancing ceremonies, celebrations and play. It is present in women's culture and in the world of work, in traditional decision-making assemblies, in environmental lore, and in memory of the past.

Few examples will be discussed here to illustrate how peace education was introduced to children in particular. Respect was a value that was stressed in the education system. Respect gave rise to tolerance and cooperation especially to neighbouring communities. For this reason people who joined different ethnic groups as for example through marriage were not required to recant their own spirits and ancestors. Instead, these spirits and ancestors were usually recognized as an addition to the spirits and ancestors of the dominant group. As a consequence, people from different ethnic groups, could co-exist peacefully while maintaining their ethnic identities. The present education system should increase knowledge and awareness of other people. By so doing individuals will appreciate and respect people of other different ethnicity, religion and political camps.

Traditional education also emphasized human relationships. Children were brought up feeling they had responsibilities towards God, towards other members of society, the dead and those yet to be born and towards nature. The education provided focused more on what the children could contribute to the welfare of the community but not their own self-interests and rights. Education of this kind worked well for the society as it enabled children to acquire an ethic of responsibility, which formed the basis for peace in the society. Human relationships were further enhanced through greetings in Africa culture. Greeting is one of the greatest values. Gachanga (2007) notes that the Luo greeted each other while saying "kwe" meaning peace. He also quotes a study that revealed that a visitor who does not greet people runs the possibility of not being welcomed among the Gabra. Nkoyoyo (199:20) shares the same view when he argues that greeting in an African context is not a dry act done for its own sake. It is something very deep, with consequences that range from praises and blessings to punishment and curses. He goes on to say that a good hearted person who greets others well is praised and honoured in the society; one who does not is a scandal. These two scholars show how greetings relate to peace. It is for this reason that children were taught how to greet people of different age with a view to building relationships. The deep values underlying greeting should be inculcated in the present education system.

An important subject in traditional education was on the value attached to the environment. The elders know that a healthy physical environment implies peace. This is because human community depends on other realities outside themselves to live a full meaningful life. It is for this reason why many times people go to relax in forests, parks and open spaces in order to get peace of mind. Thus, a culture of peace cannot be built if people are violent to their

environment. The wanton destruction of the environment observed in Africa today cannot be tolerated. Indigenous knowledge for environmental conservation should be taught in schools. This would include African worldview and beliefs that encourage the sacredness of certain sites and animals. Peace is beauty and if we destroy our own environment we are destroying peace (Mbataru 2001:14).

In the African traditional education, belief in ultimate reality was emphasized. People had unshakable and deep faith in God who was seen as the nodal point of peace social justice and harmony. God was believed to be interested in the ethical affairs of the people. Thus, parents taught their children who God is and why everyone was a gift from God. The parents also taught the children about the ancestors. The act of fellowship in the home through pouring of libation strengthened the beliefs of the children in their knowledge of the departed members of the family. The fact that no one could talk or cough when these rituals were being performed created an atmosphere of the presence of the unseen guest. As such children grew up knowing that they couldn't hide themselves from God and ancestors; the guardians of peace.

The present education system gives minimal attention to spiritual and moral training. Religious education is an optional subject in secondary schools in Kenya. This may be the reason why the country has experienced many school riots and other antisocial activities by students. There is need to balance the curriculum and emphasize the unique position which religion occupies in life and the need for moral identity in life. Religious Education should be compulsory just as it was in the African traditional curriculum. From the foregoing discussion it is evident that traditional African education system was geared towards instilling peace building in children. Formal education should do likewise.

Education and Governance

Africa is bedeviled by bad governance. Poor leadership as Kinoti (1984:34-36) observes has been experienced in every country in black Africa. He notes that such kind of leadership is guaranteed to keep a country poor and turn a progressive nation into retrogressive one. Principles of good governance requires adherence to the rule of law, respect and protection of every individual human right, governmental accountability and transparency, consistency political openness and tolerance, effective participation among others. These principles have been violated by African leaders. They appoint poor managers to important managerial positions on the basis of negative ethnicity and nepotism. Such appointees tend to misuse public institutions and embezzle funds. In Kenya, the immoral activities are called "eating". Thus funds which should be directed either to provision of essential services or to development are lost.

Many African leaders advocate for democratic ideals but they do not mean what they say. Some have taken up leaderships positions promising to serve only for a short period of time and hand over power to another leader. However soon they are intoxicated with power. This is the reason some of the African leaders have served for over 25 years. In view of this, the leaders required are not necessarily those with a host of academic and professional certificates. A hardworking, creative and honest type of leaders who have genuine concern for and commitment to the well being of their fellow citizens. Such leaders must be created through careful character formation and training of young people. But how is this going to be achieved? African traditional values hold the key.

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. Discipline rested with significant others who were accorded the right to reprimand offenders irrespective of family ties. Such authorities recognized their correction as a duty. Indeed, every member of the society had responsibility in advising and counseling the grown person. Even a stranger would reprimand an errant youth for he/she knew that the society would approve such corrective action. As a consequence, a child was made to conform to mores, customs and standards inherent in the clan to which he was born or lived. Bad habits or disruptive behavior were not condoned in any child. In this regard African traditional education embraced character building.

The social environment played an important role in shaping the content of education. 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 defence. The children then acquired the right values that prepared them as future leaders, as family heads, clan leaders or community leaders. Further, It was the obligation of every leader to do whatever was in his power to protect and prolong the life of the community members. Granted, the position of the king and chief was vested with so much power due to its link with supernatural. However, they had a moral authority to mete out justice, be custodians of morality, law exercise good will and be instruments of peace (Mwaura 2003:98) The African community also had the right to recall and dismiss or suspend any of its leaders whose behavior was contrary to the well-established rules of conduct. Besides, Africans believed that calamity in the form of sickness or death would befall any leader who misused his authority. Such calamity was believed to be an expression of God's wrath. It behooves leaders to avoid such misfortunes by maintaining a high sense of responsibility.

In the present system of education character formation receives no attention. Kinoti (1984:54) shows how the school leaves this important responsibility to the church and the school. This is a major flaw in our education system because a community that forms people for life and for its own welfare emphasizes the need of members to portray good character or moral uprightness. This is because it is from a person's character that all his or her actions radiate. It is therefore clear that if Africa is to have leaders of integrity, the education system must develop the whole person body mind and soul. This is the only way the nation will be supplied with men and women of character, imagination and morality.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to discuss some of the African cultural values that can be incorporated and inculcated in the education system for development, peace building and good governance. The primary goal of education in the 21st Century is not only to enable the learner to acquire good certificates. He has also to learn how to live as a responsible member of the society. In order to realize this goal, African cultural values must be incorporated in the formal education system. As a consequence, learners will acquire what John P. Miller calls holistic education.

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