International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH) Ethiopia

Multi-Culturalism in Education: A Critical Assessment of the Impact of Colonization and Globalization on Indigenous Africa Values

Ezedike, Edward Uzoma, Ph.D
Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities,
University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
E-mail: uzomaezedike@gmail.com
Phone: +234803684202

Abstract

This paper undertook a philosophical assessment of the impact of colonization and globalization on the indigenous African value systems. It focused on the problem of acculturation resulting from the introduction of alien and alienating philosophy of education by colonial authorities, and lately that of globalization. The objective of this study is to examine the impact of colonial education, and globalization with their attendant cultural dynamics on contemporary Africa. Our method is non empirical but critical in nature and as such uses no quantifiable data. Findings revealed that the colonial imposition of western culture through western education in Africa has brought about a cultural paradigm shift resulting in the bastardization of African cultural values. The paper further highlighted that the forces of globalization, though highly beneficial in some respects, are quite inimical to indigenous cultural values that were transmitted through traditional education. It concluded that multi-cultural education has a latitudinal effect on our thought patterns with the tendency of creating pluralistic value perspectives and moral crisis. The work recommended some remedial measures that could help curriculum planners in Africa promote an Afro-centric, value-based educational system. It suggested, for example, the principle of moderate liberalism which implies the sifting of wheat from the chaff when it comes to multicultural education and cultural values, by taking into consideration the relevant contemporary existential needs of the various African peoples. You should mention the adopted theoretical framework in your abstract.

Key Words: Multiculturalism, education, colonization, globalization, philosophy

Introduction

Every culture be it Western, African or Asian have always demonstrated a vested interest in education. The *raison d'être* is that education, as Dewey put it, is a means of social continuity of life (Dewey, 1938, p. 3). This is to say that the ineluctable biological facts of human existence

such as birth and death of each of the constituent members of the society make education a sine-qua-non to social existence and well-being.

Before the advent of colonization in Africa, different African peoples have already developed an indigenous system of education that is based on indigenous cultural values. Though conscious of this fact, colonial educators brought with them ideas from western culture that culminated in the introduction of formal education and a new curriculum with emphasis on western values. However, between the African and western philosophy of education lies some considerable cultural and historical differences. The colonial educational curriculum failed to integrate the cultural values of the various African peoples, and thus, became incompatible with the indigenous philosophy of education which is vital to the socio-cultural development of the African society. Globalization, on its part, though quite beneficial in some respects, has also contributed significantly to the erosion of our cultural values in Africa through the principle of cultural diffusion transmitted through the cables and internet and incorporated in some recent educational curricular. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to highlight these value-laden issues (Weston 2001, p. 49), which have constituted stumbling blocks to sustainable education in Nigeria particularly, and in Africa, at large and to show the way forward.

The Concept of Multiculturalism in Education

The concept of multi-cultural education, which serves as our theoretical framework in this paper, is all about social change through the means of education. It is a latitudinal concept that harbours a place for a multitude of perspectives and voices in the educational curriculum. In a broad sense, multi-cultural education involves learning from our interaction with foreign cultures; say western culture, Asian culture, or Arabic culture. In a narrow sense, it could mean learning from other cultures indigenous to Africa. This implies that new horizons for learning have a strong multicultural foundation. Edward B. Tylor, the British anthropologist, posited that culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs or any other habits and capabilities acquired by members of society (Tylor, 1871, p. 1). If we are to use this as our working definition of culture, we could say that multi-culturalism is an amorphous configuration of different beliefs, values, practices, attitudinal inclinations and world-views in an education system. Because it is value-based, and permits the transmission of different values across geographical boundaries, multi-cultural education represents a threat to traditional values for the conservatives and a promise for a more inclusive society for the liberals.

Though a relatively new concept in education, multiculturalism could be traced to the colonial conquest and the subsequent introduction of colonial education in different parts of the world. Colonialism does not deny the existence of other cultures but it does affirm the superiority of the culture of the colonizing authorities. In other words, colonization involves the introduction of alien cultural values in a monocultural society and it emphasizes that the colonizers have a superior culture that the colonized needs to imbibe. This argument is usually used as a justification for colonialism. With respect to Africa, the curriculum of colonial education promoted the assimilation of western culture, ideas and values. In recent years, multi-culturalism has become re-enforced with the emergence of globalization. With its attendant principle of cultural integration of different peoples of the world, globalization has made the whole world, a global village. Following this development, multi-cultural education aims at dismantling the systemic, curricular and pedagogical impediments to learning of traditionally marginalized students (Hanley, 2009, p. I). Thus, the objective of multi-cultural education is

the globalization of schooling to such an extent as to accommodate the needs and perspectives of many cultures. It is believed that this will help in shaping the ways in which children are educated, culminating in the transformation of the society.

Proponents of multi-cultural education argue that it addresses the educational needs of a society that struggles with the conservative tendencies of mono-culturalism. In contradistinction with what Karl Popper called an "Open Society" (Popper 1945, p. 1), a mono-cultural society, it is argued, is plagued with the problem of sclerotic and stereotyped knowledge being averse to change. In view of this, multiculturalism lays emphasis on education as a means of social change and transformation.

Multicultural Education and Social Dynamism

Education, viewed from the social perspective, could be described as a systematic socialization of a generation of young people by which they learn relevant religious and socio-cultural values (Durkheim, 1973, p. 2). It involves a whole lot of social processes that bring a person into life in a culture (Gutek, 1974, p. 4). Perennialism as a theory of education advocates the perpetuity of certain values or ideals and eternal truths considered absolute. Thus, education is seen as a means of conserving our cultural values and social ideals. The theory of progressivism, on the other hand, advocates that educators should be ready to modify their methods and policies in the light of new knowledge and changes in the society (Kneller, 1971, p.48). Progressivists hold a pragmatic view that change is the essence of reality. This implies that education should be employed as a means of social change or a continual reconstruction of experience (Dewey, 1916, p. 89).

In view of the foregoing, we could locate the philosophy of multiculturalism within the context of progressive theory of education. When education assumes a multi-cultural dimension, it becomes broad-based, inclusive and a veritable instrument of social change. Hence, Aggarwal (1981) argued that education is not only concerned with the perpetuation of society, but also, with its progress. In other words, education should both be conservative and progressive in approach (Aggarwal, 1981, p. 81).

However, one critical problem with multi-cultural education in relation to social change is the direction or outcome of change. As a dual-edged phenomenon, change may be positive or negative, progressive or retrogressive in nature. Social change brought about by multi-cultural education may not necessarily be positive or progressive if left unregulated, unguided, unsifted and irrelevant to the indigenous social milieu. It could be argued, therefore, from this premise that colonial education and globalization brought both positive and negative changes to the contemporary African society.

The Impact of Colonial Education on Africa

Education, when viewed as a means of social change and transformation or as a process of cultural transmission and renewal, becomes a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge which is critical to the development of the society. The contents of teaching curriculum, therefore, become very central or strategic to the education of the people. If this be the case, to what extent should education respect the beliefs and customs of a people? Again, how could the school curriculum be drawn without making it a threat to the socio-cultural norms and values of the society? These are questions that appear unaddressed by colonial educators.

While it is an incontrovertible fact that, to a large extent, education during the colonial era played a positive role in the areas of promoting literacy among Africans, eradication of certain diseases, abrogation of some barbaric laws and customs and improvement in science and technology, it equally brought about some lopsided, negative changes on the continent. It is quite germane to point out that, probably, due to epistemic naivety of a group, education may subtly and unnoticeably take the form of indoctrination. This is a kind of education where the learner has no say but rather swallows the line, hook and sinker of what the teacher says without any critical reflection. Indoctrination has to do with the presentation of beliefs, values, and ideologies to students in an uncritical, non-tolerant, conservative and parochial manner. It appears, therefore, that indoctrination was part and parcel of colonial education in view of the fact that, to the present day, its curriculum incarcerates the conceptual universe of many formally educated Africans. However, it is quite germane to note that indoctrination in this context does not necessarily mean that colonial education is monocultural just as indoctrination does not also mean the absence of other important viewpoints. It simply implies that the colonizers emphasized the superiority of their views and values and de-emphasized, or even denigrated that of the colonized.

Multi-culturalism embedded in the philosophy of colonial education introduced an alien and alienating system of education to Africa which profoundly distorted Africa's cultural practices, world views and epistemologies. Africans were from this time forward, introduced to a system of education that systematically sought to undermine the pride they had in their culture, language and traditions. It could equally be argued that the school curriculum was designed to make African youths identify with and embrace European history, traditions and cultures whilst remaining, at least for the most part, ambivalent towards their own cultural traditions (Hotep, 2003, p. 1). They were taught more about the history and geography of the western world than African history and geography, even though, their colonial teachers were arguable not entirely ignorant of both the history and geography of Africa (Mwankikagale, 2000, p. xiii). Apparently, this system of education largely (if not wholly) subordinated indigenous African world views and epistemologies to ideals of classical learning (Kikaye, 2009, p. 69).

In Anglophone Africa, for example memorizing European historical facts, meticulously reciting the works of western poets and thinkers, and speaking as well as writing flawlessly in the Queen's English becomes what Ngugi Wa Thiong' O calls the measure of one's readiness for election into the band of the elect (1993: p. 32). The educational experience in the Francophone Africa was even more alienating from the African culture. The French policy of cultural assimilation adopted in colonial schools was tailored towards making Africans real Frenchmen in all aspects: mental outlook, linguistic nuances, dress culture, dietic habits and so forth. The Belgian educational policy in Africa was the most dehumanizing (Omatseye, 1992. p.161). The Belgians, as Kimble relates, held that it is better to have 90 percent of the population that are capable of understanding and helping the colonial government in carrying out its projects than to have 10 percent of the population so full of learning that it spends its time telling the government what to do (Omatsaye, 1992, p.115). That to the present day, the transplanted Eurocentric system of education has produced an intelligentsia class with a quasi-aristocratic perspective of education, branded with the principles of western culture and aliened from African history, world-views and culture is incontrovertible (See Bayart, 1982, p. 265; Kikaye, 2009, p. 69). Ali Mazrui noted that because of the lopsided nature of colonial education, many Africans have an insatiable obsession with western values but not western skills, capitalist greed

but not capitalist discipline, western culture of letters but not western culture of numerals, western consumption patterns but not western production techniques (Mazrui, 1996, p. 70).

It is lamentable, however, that some post-colonial African leaders have perpetuated the same vision animating the colonial system of education, which invariably, has continued to shape and to inform post-colonial Africa's system of education (Bayart, 2000 p. 2).

Globalization, Education and African Culture

In addition to the foregoing state of affairs, education and cultural problems in Africa are further exacerbated by the accelerating forces of globalization through its principles of neo-liberalism and cultural diffusion. It is quite clear that when the globalizing process of diffusion collides with cultural or socio-political protectionism, it is culture and protectionism that wind up in the workshop for repairs (Rosenau, 2000, p. 20). Globalization entrenches a systemic breakdown of cultural barriers and encourages the assimilation of values from other cultures. Globalization is virtually opposed to nationalism which seeks to protect the interest of an individual nation or culture. Put succinctly, nationalism has to do with the idea of supporting one's country, people and culture. It involves the support of one nation's interests to the exclusion of others. The philosophy of globalization, on the other hand, is more inclusive and latitudinal. Its implications for education are that it makes room for cultural tolerance, complimentarity and compromise in the educational system. The inability of some curriculum planners and teachers in Africa to be discreet and selective on what is passed on to learners from alien cultures makes globalization a threat to indigenous values (see Ozumba, 2001).

The foregoing notwithstanding, we cannot deny the fact that, on the positive side, Africa is benefiting in many ways from the proceeds of globalization. Globalization has opened up for Africa, and other continents of the world, to new and exciting opportunities through the power of information technology (internet, cable T.V, cell-phone (GSM) etc); advancement in modern transportation technology and mutual socio-economic alliances. These new global-based technologies have made the dissemination of information much faster and on a vast geographical scale. Though culturally risky, technology has intensified the penetration of previously closed socio-cultural systems, accelerated inter and cross-cultural interactions while also helping to foster diverse-cultural associations and alliances (Kikaye 2009, p. 90). Information and Computer Technology has also made education less cumbersome for both teachers and students in Africa. Internet (do you mean electronic libraries? (e-libraries), internet journals, internet courses (programmes run online) and e-research facilities, as well as forwarding and receiving of educational materials through the internet are all part of the positive impact of globalization on education in Africa. We here of electronic journals, electronic libraries, (e-journals, e-libraries, etc) Just be sure!

These new and exciting opportunities have, however, not come without corresponding economic, social, cultural and educational costs. The current process of globalization is generating unbalanced outcomes between Africa and Europe because it is void of level play-ground. Of particular note is the systematic breakdown of traditional cultures and encompassing systems of morality (see Landau, 2012, p. 232). Partly bombarded by the glitz and glamour of Hollywood motion pictures, many African youths are increasingly being submerged in the cultural currents that flow from the West. This implies that when viewed from the negative perspective, multicultural education through information and computer technology, though quite helpful, could promote the transmission of some unwholesome cultural values to African students and scholars. In all, the good, the bad and the ugly are all infused in a globalized,

internet-based education because of its latitudinal nature which is opposed to the traditional way of education.

Conclusion

So far, it is incontrovertible that the contents of contemporary African school curriculum have been shaped by the forces of colonization and most recently, globalization. Invariably, the contemporary African mode of life and espoused cultural ideals could, to a great extent, be traced to the impact of multicultural education along with the impact of modern science and technology. It is equally an undeniable fact that Africa is benefitting in diverse ways from the combined forces of globalization and western education. Hence, it could be argued that a holistic abandonment of the concept multiculturalism, especially westernized education, may not only be counterproductive but also impracticable. The recent upsurge of bloody violence in Northern parts of Nigeria by Islamic fundamentalists owing to their aversion to western education which they regard as sinful Boko Haram (*Sunday Sun*, 2009, p. 6), is quite irrational, very retrogressive and most unfortunate at this 21st century Africa.

Recommendations

As the way forward, what is needed now is a dialectical synthesis of Afro-centricity and multi-culturalism in our educational curriculum, taking a critical cognizance of all the strands of the African socio-historic experience. Curriculum planners in Africa should apply the principle of moderate liberalism by sifting the wheat from the chaff when it comes to multicultural education by taking into consideration the relevant contemporary existential needs of the various African peoples. This implies that school curriculum should reflect the basic cultural values of the African society it serves. It should be based on the conditions, problems and real needs of the people. Far from being a fossilized instrument, school curriculum in Africa should be flexible, progressive and dynamic in order to ensure the realization of the ever-changing socially determined, multi-cultural but mutually beneficial objectives. There is also the need for a periodic review the *National policy on Education* to make it relevant to changes in society. This, we hope, will ensure a sustainable, Afro-centric, value-based education in Nigeria and Africa at large.

References

Adeyinka, M. B. & Adeyinka, A. A. (2002). Some key issues in African traditional education. *McGill Journal of Education,* Spring: 1-4

Aggawal, J. C. (1981). *Theory and principles of education: Philosophical and sociological bases of education.* New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.

Bayart, J. F. (2000). *The state in Africa: The politics of the belly.* London: Longman.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education.* New York: Macmillan.

Durkheim, E. (1973). *Moral education.* New York: Free Press.

Editorial (2009). Sectarian crisis in the North. *Sunday Sun*. August 2.

Ezedike, E. U. (2009). Multiculturalism in education. In Uduigwomen, A. F. & Ogbinaka, K. (Eds.) *Philosophy and education: An introductory text for Nigerian undergraduates*, pp. 419-425. Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). *National policy on education.* Lagos. NERDC Press.

Gutek, G. L. (1974). *Philosophical alternative in education.* Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co.

Hanley, M. S. (2009). The scope of multicultural education. www.newhorizons.org. Retrieved 27th July, 2018.

Hotep, U. (2003). Decolonizing the African mind: Further analysis and strategy <http//www.ndufront.org./htm. Retrieved March 31.

Kikaye, M. K. (2009). *Environmental challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa: Possible solutions.* Online material. Retrieved August 11.

Kimble, G.T. (1960). *Tropical Africa.* New York: 20th Century Fund.

Landau, R. S. (2012). *The fundamentals of ethics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mazrui, A. & Mazrui, A. (1996). *Political culture of language: Swahili, society and the state.* New York: Binghamton University.

Mwankikagile, G. (2000). *Africa and West*. Huntington, New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Okeke, C. I. O. (2000). A framework for curriculum policy for social cohesion in Africa. *The Journal of Multiculturalism in Education,* 2000-2009, Pp.1-

Omatseye, J. N. (1992). *Educational philosophy and the African school.* Benin-City: Jodah Publications.

Ozumba, G. O. (2001). Philosophy of education and leadership in Nigeria. *Sophia: An African Journal of Philosophy Vol X, pp.?*

Rosenau, J. N. (2000). The complexities and contradictions of globalization. In Bateman, T. M. J., Mertin, M. & Thomas, D. M. (Eds.) *Readings in contemporary politics.* Ontario: Nelson.

Tylor, E. B. (1871). *Primitive culture: Researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art and custom. 2 Vols.* London: Murray.

wa Thiong O., N. (1993). *Moving the centre: The struggle for cultural freedoms.* Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.

Weston, A. (2001). *A 21st Century ethical toolbox*. New York: Oxford University Press.