

DISCOURSE OF PECULIARITIES IN THE ATTRIBUTES OF TRADITIONAL EDUCATION IN THREE NIGERIAN ETHNIC GROUPS

By

Samuel Agbonna Ayorinde, Ph.D.: Department of Educational Foundations and Administration
Alvan-Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Nigeria

Abstract

The article presents an expository description of the core attributes of traditional education in each of the three major ethnic groups of Nigeria. It is a comprehensive discourse of the uniqueness of the elements of curriculum, instructional materials, teaching strategies, classroom, teacher and evaluation in the rubrics of the culture of these ethnic groups. Specifically, the paper focuses on the peculiarities in the systems of traditional education in Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo societies. The article conclusively asserts that traditional education is peculiar to societies and it is the bedrock upon which other forms of education in any given society are built.

Keywords: Discourse of Peculiarities, Attributes, Traditional education, Three Nigerian Ethnic Groups

Introduction

In every society, there are established means of instructing and educating people. There has always been means through which societies keep its members in line with relevant and useable knowledge. Education is an institutional process and practice that societies develop over time and sustain through cultural and value orientations. Education, be it informal or formal, is a product that society needs to grow itself. It is a mechanism that is set in society to guide members towards acquisition of knowledge and skills. Many textbooks categorized education into three types, namely: formal education, informal education and semi-formal education (Adesina, 2005; Fafunwa, 1998; Ugwochukwu, 2018). The informal education is synonymous to traditional education. However, this categorization often creates ambiguity when it comes to explaining what they mean by *semi-formal education*. To avoid such pedagogical ambiguity in this article, we are going to categorize education into only two. The two are formal education and informal education. In this discourse, informal education will mean traditional education.

Also, in our discussion, reference to the roles of teachers in informal education would be emphasized. Therefore, it is important we have clear understanding of the concept of 'teacher' as used in this write-up. Generally, the roles of teachers in cultural assimilation, propagation and change are carried out either in a formal or an informal setting. We should have it in mind that when we use the word *teacher* in informal education, it is in general sense. We are not talking about classroom teachers alone. In an open society such as in an informal setting, teachers could mean parents, elders or artisans. The teacher could be anybody in the society. In whatever perspective we put the concept of *teacher*; the fact is that teachers perform their duties in either a formal (school) or an informal (open) environment. At whatever setting and level, teachers educate. Teachers make learning happen. Education is the process of acquiring cultural, productive skills and knowledge that are needed for survival in a given Society. In informal education, acquisition of all these is life-long.

What is Traditional Education?

Traditional education is also called informal education. It is defined as the conscious and unconscious channels and processes of impacting knowledge and skills on members of a given society in an open environment other than within the walls of school rooms. Before the advent of Islamic and Western education, there were various traditional means through which members of Nigerian communities were made to acquire knowledge and skills needed for survival in the peculiarities of their society. Those traditional means exist till today. Take for instance; in every community, there are means through which young members learn the rubrics of their language, values and cultural ceremonies and there are also ways through

which older members learn how to adapt to social change and remain relevant in their changing worlds. Characteristically, the content and process of these means of informal or traditional education are organized and implemented in an unofficial or undefined (open) environment. In traditional education, the learning environment could range from our parents' kitchen or farm to market, neighbor's apprentice shop, river banks and community shrine. To understand the concept of *traditional* or *informal education* clearly, we have to keep it in mind that this type of education does not mean an education that only took place in olden days. Many erroneously believe that traditional education occurred only in preindustrial era and not in modern days (Ugwochukwu, 2018; Ayorinde, 2022; Faruq & Hassan, 2020). The fact is, informal education is a lifelong experience that is not limited by school calendar or by completion of specified curriculum. It is a component of our daily experiences. The principles and practices that are utilized in informal education can vary from one cultural environment to the other. Processes of informal education vary as culture of societies varies. The following discussion illustrates the principles and practices of informal education across the three major ethnic societies of Nigeria. The focus is on Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa societies.

The Igbo Traditional System Of Education

Who are the Igbos?

The Igbos, as used here, comprises ethnic people of Igbo or 'near-Igbo' descendant. Igbo is generically used to include people that are predominantly native to Nigerian states such as Imo, Ebonyi, Abia, Anambra, and Enugu. For generalization purpose, it shall also refer to people who are from states that have close lineage with the Igbos. This second category of states include: Rivers, Delta, Cross River and Akwa Ibom. Dialectically, the Igbo are sub-grouped into the Ekpeye, Etche, Ezza, Anioma, Ikwo, Ika, Mbaise, Ohafia, Nri-Igbo, Ishielu, Izzi, Mgbo, Ngwa, Ukwuani, Oratta, Ohuhu, Ubani, Omuma, Onitcha, Ogba, Ikwerre, Aro, Nkalu, and the Eda people (Ugwochukwu, 2018; Ajayi & Crowder, 1976). The Igbo speak varieties of *Igboid* languages and dialects and many speak a kind of Nigerian English that could technically be called *Pidgin English*. Igbo communities are rich in culture and tradition. Though, the communities are organized by clans, the practice of village affiliation allows homogeneity in the content of what children learn traditionally (informally) in their communities. Among the Igbos, the various *Nsibidi*, - (set of symbols), *Ichi* (facial scarifications), *Uli* (a kind of visual art design), and clothing items such as *Isiagu* and *Okpu Agwu* are samples of concrete culture among the Igbos (Ugwochukwu, 2018; Ajayi & Crowder, 1976).

Before the advent of Western religion and the subsequent Western education, Igbo people were predominantly traditionalists. They practiced traditional religion. Earlier activities of Christian missionaries in the area yielded a large number of Igbo people becoming Christians, particularly tilting towards the Roman Catholic doctrine (Fredrick & Michael, 2009). The traditional societies of the Igbo people are highly fragmented and are built into the hearth of forests. This provides avenue for farming, a major profession of the Igbos. This is far before the advents of oil business. Today, many are traders and civil servants. Many have also excelled in politics and international engagements.

Specific Features of Traditional Education in Igbo Societies

In this section, the discussions are made under distinct aspects of educational practices, starting with the teachers.

Teachers in Igbo Traditional Education:

Just as in any traditional society, the available teachers in Igbo societies include elders, parents, artisans, spiritualists and members of age grades. The fact that Igbo societies are politically fragmented and structured in the line of quasi-democratic republicans allows some forms of individualism and self-independence. But this does not mean that there is no spirit of communalism in Igbo communities (Raman, 2008). Younger members of the communities are communally (jointly) taught and guided to acquire morals and skills by older members. In traditional education, much is expected from elders particularly in the area of socializing the youths. Performing this role may not be difficult for elders as they are seen by younger ones as the custodian of Igbo tradition and political leaders of communities. As role models in Igbo communities, elders are respected and titled. They are seen as source of dignified and productive wisdom, knowledge and skill. Most of the informal learning takes place at the age-grade gathering. At such gatherings, elders guide the

younger ones, groom them to become dignified adulthood and possibly become titled elders as well. It is how to attain certain levels of being admissible to respectable higher age-grades in the Igbo community.

Curriculum in Igbo Traditional Education:

Culture, which includes folkways, mores, norms and values that are uniquely Igbo, form the rubrics of what are taught and learnt in Igbo traditional system of education. However, much of the Igbo culture and content of learning in informal education have become westernized or European. The reason is not far from the fact that Igbo communities had earlier contacts with European culture through the Catholic Missioners, far before other parts of the country had such encounters (Ajayi, & Crowder, 1976; Ugwochukwu, 2018). Ordinarily, learners are taught elements of farming, trading, visual art, music, dance, fashion, cuisine, marriage rites and language. The informal learners in Igbo societies are very likely to learn the art of masquerading, mask carving and other forms of traditional entertainments. More is taught by practical exposure to traditional activities such as the *atilogwu dance*, and *Odinani rituals*. Though, in modern day Igbo societies, religious activities such as those of the Roman Catholic have taken over some of these traditional practices, but that does not mean the ceremonies are not still in existence. Above all, some content of teaching and learning in Igbo informal education may include taboos and norms relating to humans, animals, speech, places, objects and behaviour.

Instructional Material and Strategies in Igbo Traditional education:

Instructional materials in Igbo informal education consists of local items and natural environment. Specifically, children are taught elements of their tradition, knowledge and skill using artifacts, food and clothing items such as the *Isiagu and Okpu Agwu* that are wore by men. The items of clothing also include blouse and wrapper wore by women – and sometimes wore by men. Through exposure to some of these items, younger ones learn Igbo fashion and could thereafter appreciate their culture particularly as it relate to appearing in traditional attire for special occasions and festivals. Igbo people are industrious and they passionately engage in trading. A lot are taught the youths by exposing them to how to source and market wares. Other instructional materials that can become handy when there is need to learn aspects of Igbo music and entertainment include the percussion instruments such as the *udu*. This is made in the form of a clay jog. There is also what is called *ekwe*- a kind of hollowed log, and a craftily-made iron hand bell called *ogene*. Others are *opi, ichaka and igba*. In Igbo societies, strategies employed in teaching traditional education include, oratory, oral renditions, storytelling, modeling, imitation, recitation and exercise.

Classrooms in Igbo Traditional Education:

Like in any form of traditional education, there are no specific places for learning Igbo tradition or learning basics of economic life in Igbo communities other than the open society. Thus, members of Igbo communities become traditionally educated as they interact with one another at places such as domestic arenas, village square, designated points of meeting for age grades, shrines, churches and even on the road. Others could include farms, or even at the venues of ceremonies or at coronation.

Evaluation/ Reinforcement in Igbo Traditional Education:

Like in any form of traditional education, evaluation of learning processes in Igbo society is on daily basis. Traditionally, there are behavioural expectations- a kind of dos and don'ts that are built into daily interactions of the members of Igbo community. Older members of communities evaluate how youths conform to the set of rules through observation. More specifically, expectations of parents, elders, members of age grades and trade masters serve as benchmark upon which the behaviour of the members of society is assessed.

In traditional Igbo societies, proficiency in informal education is reinforced or appreciated with social recognition and titles and general dignity, particularly inform of granting promotion/initiation or passage to different categories of age grade. It also includes award of chieftaincy title, and/or granting permission to wear some culturally dignified attires. The attires are symbols of adherence to good behaviour, display of profitable skills and knowledge of Igbo culture. Thus, it is possible to see some Igbo individuals that wear red or black cap, hold walking stick, elephant tusk, horsetail or use edifying beads to symbolize their attainment of certain age grade, social status or to indicate their success in other traditional examinations/challenges.

Some are even promoted from the rank of the *Nze* titleholder to member of the *Igwe's (king's)* cabinet. These promotions are very important and are cherished in Igbo communities (Raman, 2008). They are a kind of motivation for younger ones- who strive to behave in accordance to their culture so as to get the traditional recognition and rewards too.

Traditional Education In Nigerian Hausa Societies

The northern part of Nigeria has been the main domain of the *Hausawas* (Ajayi, 1976). Scholars put their population at between 30-35 million. They are predominantly Islamic, i.e. Muslims. Islam is a foreign religion that the Hausa aristocrats adopted in the 11th Century CE (Raphael, 2010; Beck, Black, Krieger, Naylor, Shabaka, 2003). The Hausawas, (also known as Hausas) are found in Nigerian states such as Kano, Sokoto, Kaduna, Kastina, Yobe, Gombe and some are found to be indigenes of North Central states such as Kwara, Kogi and Nasarawa States. In these states, they live near-nomad life. Nomad life is characterized with non-permanent residence. It is a life style that is peculiar to the Tuareg, the Mande, Fulani, the Berbers and the Wolof of Senegambia (Beck, Black, Krieger, Naylor, Shabaka, 2003). The Hausas sparsely occupy the desert part of Nigerian lands. They are mainly in the North West and North East.

The Hausas happen to be the first ethnic to be exposed to foreign education in Nigeria. Historians have it that as far back as 1500 CE, the Hausas were already using a modified form of Arabic letters called *ajami* to express and codify their own language (Beck, Black, Krieger, Naylor, Shabaka, 2003). In addition to this, the Hausas had received Arabic education and/or Islamic education many centuries before Christian missionaries brought Western education to other parts of Nigeria (Adesina, 2005). The subsequent set back the Hausas have in Western Education can be attributed to the age-long theological clash between Christianity and Islam. It can be attributed to the fact that the Colonial leaders who arrived later to make European (Christian) Missionary education official in the country were Europeans themselves. Thus, justifiably, they favored the European missionaries rather than the Islamic missionaries that have no lineage with them. Today, Islam has absolved the original traditional culture of the northern Nigeria so much that a discourse of the dynamics of informal education in this part of Nigeria could be nothing other than a discourse of Islamic culture. Among the Hausas, clothing items or styles such as *Babban riga*, *jalabia*, *juanni*, *abaya* and *Ijab*; food items such as *Kosai*, *koko*, *tuwo* and *kunnu*; and *Kakaki* – a musical instrument, are samples of Hausa items of concrete culture.

Features of Traditional Education in Hausa Societies

In this section, the features are discussed under distinct aspects of educational practices starting with the teachers:

TEACHERS: Imams are the main teachers of traditional or informal education in Hausa societies. In most cases, these teachers have both academic and spiritual powers and controls over younger members of Hausa communities. In a typical Hausa community, parents, craft masters, artisans and nomad heads are mere supplementary teachers who may only function to further promote the efforts of the Imams (i.e. the *alfas*, *lamam*, or *ostaz*) in their delivery of informal education. The teachers also include ordinary members of the society; people who will be willing to give some informal moral instructions, advice and counseling to the younger members of society.

CURRICULUM: Curriculum of informal education in Hausa society is mainly Islamic culture. Children are taught the rudiments of Islam and are exposed to other activities such as sourcing of charity and communal labour. This does not mean that the youths cannot be taught some folk and cultural philosophies, literature; mores, norms and social values. Some learn farming, craft making, cattle herding and entertainment skills. Informally, a Hausa female youth can learn the process of Hausa cuisine. Taking time to acquire knowledge needed to process or turn sorghum, millet, rice or maize into *tuwo*- a kind of grain porridge or to other delicacies such as *kosai*, *funkaso*, and *koko*. Many of these are made from grains.

Male and female Hausa youths are potential students of cattle rearing in a typical Hausa setup. However, some may be engaged in fashion industry, picking the skills of how to produce clothing items such as *jalabia*,

juanni, abaya or fula. They are also good traders that delight in migrating from communities to communities (Gbadeyanka, 2001). Hausas are major producers and marketers of farm produce in most cities of Nigeria. They are predominantly migrant traders.

Instructional Material Strategies: A typical Hausa society is rich with natural resources utilizable as teaching aids. There are natural and rustic endowments that can be used to teach youths almost everything needed to survive as a nomad or as a promising Islamic scholar. The strategies of instruction can include: recitation, storytelling, imitation, modeling, discipleship and indoctrination. Others can be crafting, dance and exercise.

CLASSROOMS: Informal education in Hausa societies can take place almost in any place of their community that is ethical and Islamically acknowledged. The community mosque can also be a useful venue of informal education for the Hausa people.

Evaluation/ Reinforcement: Evaluation of informal education in Hausa societies is structured in line with Islamic injunctions. Persons whose behaviours are not in line with Islamic value system are regarded as not adequately educated (Beck, Black, Krieger, Naylor, Shabaka, 2003). Such persons cannot be regarded or recommended for any socio-political benefit in Hausa lands. Thus it is common to find Hausawas striving to learn and behave in accordance to Islamic ethics so as to earn communal recognition and commendations. Basically, evaluation and reinforcement of bodies of traditional and religious knowledge and skill among the Hausas are illustrated in the *Sharia* – a collection of Islamic injunctions on human behaviour.

The Yoruba System Of Traditional Education

The Yorubas are mainly indigenes of South West Nigerian states such as Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Oyo, Ekiti, and in some North Central States like Kwara and Kogi. In terms of language and culture, Yoruba people are related to other Nigerian ethnic groups such as Igala, Bini, Itsekiri, Nupe and Ebira (Babalakin, 2011, Beck, Black, Krieger, Naylor, Shabaka, 2003). Yoruba traced their origin to Ile Ife in the old Oyo Empire (Babalakin, 2011; Adesina, 2005). They speak Yoruba language, a subset of the Edekiri language. Traditionally, Yoruba people are predominantly traditionalists, warriors, farmers and hunters. Many Yoruba people however combined these with trading and occultism. Despite their earliest contacts with the European Christian missionaries, a large number of Yoruba people are Muslim (Raphael, 2010, Adesina, 2005).

Traditional political leadership among Yoruba people is *gerontocratic*. This means that leadership is not tightly centralized as among the Hausa people and not as loosely fragmented as among the Igbo people. Political power resides in the hands of *Obas* and *Baales-kings* and their *Oloyes- council of elders*. The powers of these leaders are however checked or balanced by religious or occult groups such as the *Ogboni Cult*. Because of heavy presence of Western Education in Yorubas lands, many of them are civil servants and they run their societal life in line with Western culture. Items of culture that are peculiar to the Yorubas include the following: *Aso ofi*, - a kind of clothe, *gangan*, - a kind of musical instrument, *amala* – a kind of food; and *ibamu* – a kind of facial mark. They are samples of concrete culture among Yorubas. Anywhere in the world, these items symbolize Yorubas.

Features of Informal Education in Yoruba Societies

Discussion here is structured under distinct aspects of educational practices starting with the teachers

Teachers in Yoruba informal education:

Informal education in Yoruba land is delivered collectively. In a typical pre-industrial Yoruba society, people are tightly knitted and the responsibility of bringing up the younger members is seen as that of all available adults in society. Thus, parents, elders, artisans, and spiritualists serve as teachers in the system of Yoruba traditional education. Some forms of informal education can also be provided by cliques and/or colleagues at social clubs, secret societies, religious units, occupation or trade guilds such as the *parakoyi* (*league of traders*), the *Egbe Ode* (*guild of hunters*) and *Egbe alajeseke* (*cooperative society*).

Curriculum in Yoruba Traditional Education:

The content and procedures of what is taught and learnt in Yoruba informal education revolve round their culture most of which reflect in their folk and cultural philosophies, religions, literatures; mores, norms and social values. For example, Yorubas value respect of elders and protection of their names- integrity. They cherish situations in which their names (integrity) are unsoiled. Thus, children are taught informally not to soil family names and to remain chaste. The curriculum also includes teaching and learning of farming skill, crafts, social etiquette and occultism. Occultism is taught to learners who want to become *aborisha or olorisha*- (priests and priestess). Yoruba female children can also learn housekeeping which includes husband tendering, preparation of cuisine, particularly pounded yam. Other contents of instruction include dance and music entertainment. For example, the *Ilorin* and some *Igbomina* people among the Yorubas of Kwara State origin traditionally learn a kind of music and dance call *waka*. It is a rich local music laced with dance steps and displaying of rigorous shaking of buttock. This mostly features in their traditional weddings.

Instructional Materials and strategies:

In most cases, adults in Yoruba lands employed proverbs, oration, religious effigies, traditional attire and items of art as instructional materials in the process of delivering traditional education to younger ones. Clothe items such as *agbada, dansiki, ofi, kembe, iro and buba* and other elements of nature such as weather- as in reading of time- are useful materials. In addition to these, abundant mountains in Yoruba lands can be used as teaching aids for series of cultural activities including idol worshiping. To teach and learn music, items such as *gangan, omele, bata, iya ilu, sekere, agogo* and *olufon* can be very handy. Instructional strategies in Yoruba informal education can include storytelling, modeling, recitation, physical exercise, and oratory. building, farm, apprentice's shop or shrine. Others include venues of traditional ceremonies and venues of meeting for socio-cultural groups and churches.

Evaluation/ Reinforcement in Yoruba informal education: In Yoruba system of traditional education, it is the collective effort of every adult member of society to evaluate the progress made by children in learning the contents of their tradition. In the open society, uncultured children are chastised and words are sent directly or indirectly to the parents of such children, to notify and warn the parents of their failure to bring up their children or wards in accordance to the culture of the society. In addition to this, individual family ensures their members are upright most importantly to protect the name of the family i.e. to ensure integrity in whatever they do. Well behaved members of society are appreciated with praise-statements such as *omoluabi- well behaved child, omo oko- true son or daughter of the family*. Misbehavior can earn children or the culprit names such as *omo ale- bastard*. Yoruba people can be very sensitive of these statements of commendation or blame so much that they would rather strive to behave themselves to avoid the negative ones.

Though age grading is not emphasized in Yoruba culture as in Igbo culture but Yorubas have means of commending and/or approving good behaviours with granting of chieftaincy titles. This in a way encourages the upcoming youths and/or adults to strive to attain prowess, utilize providence and become productive members of their society. Their traditional leaders can also give some formal recognition to well behaved sons of the land at important ceremonies. Such commendations happen during communal ceremonies like the *Ojude Oba ceremony* among the indigenes of Ogun State and during *Eyo Festival* of Lagos state people and during *Amoyo Day* ceremony in Amoyo Town of Kwara State.

Conclusion:

Traditional education is no doubt the foundation of all forms of education in our societies. It is the first form of education that is culturally varied and relative to the environment it is in practiced. Understanding the variability of traditional education can go a long way to provide stakeholders and teachers in particular with deep understanding of people of different societies are what they are. Such understanding could also provide them with the foundation upon which they should design and evaluate the formal education.

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