

INDIGENOUS AND WESTERN EDUCATION: AN EXAMINATION OF THE INFLUENCE AND SYNTHESIS FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN AKPOR KINGDOM**BY****Benjamin N. Nyewusira, PhD: Department of Educational Foundations, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria; E-mail: ben.nyewusira@uniport.edu.ng****Abstract**

This paper, through a historical approach, gives a succinct overview of the land and people of Akpor. The paper copiously x-rays the practices of Akpor indigenous learning system as imbedded in five cardinal goals of the people's traditional education. The paper captures the far-reaching influence of western education on Akpor native learning system. It notes that despite the overwhelming and debilitating effects of Western education on the educational, religious, and socio-cultural economic spheres of Akpor, the people's primordial values and systems of education continue to exist, though in a frail and distorted form. The paper however submits that although Western education has also made some positive impacts on the social landscape of the people, the latent prowess of Akpor primal education is no less still germane in the quest for the revival, functionality, and sustenance of contemporary education.

Keywords: Indigenous, Western, Education, Influence, Synthesis, Sustainable and Development

Introduction

Every human society has its unique ways and system for training and educating its people. Same way, every society has also evolved diverse yardstick for appraising the effects of the education within its social system. According to Nduka (1982) all educational systems; Traditional or Western, Arabic, Greek or Roman aimed at transmitting culture and disseminating knowledge. Thus, what is of paramount importance, irrespective of the type of any education, is the functionality of that education vis-à-vis the goals and aspiration of the individual in particular and the society at large. The two major systems of education; indigenous and western, have become integral in the educational development of the people of Akpor Kingdom. A study of how both systems have formed and shaped the lives of people is therefore necessary in understanding the trajectory of the people's development. Consequently, this treatise on the "Indigenous and Western Education: an examination of the influence for sustainable development in Akpor Kingdom" is geared towards providing clearer exposition on the uses and effects of both educational systems for the transmission of what is worthwhile to the people of the kingdom, on one hand, and for sustainable development of the people on the other hand.

Socio-historical background of Akpor Kingdom

Akpor is a Kingdom in the Ikwerre nationality of Rivers State in Nigeria. According to Ozuru (2004), Akpor's historical origin is rooted in the autochthonous theory that the people have always been in their present geographical location, although oral tradition and recent literatures also suggest that the people migrated from the Benin and settled in their present place of habitation. Geographically, Akpor Kingdom covers an area of 60 square kilometer which lies 50 North and 7° East in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of River State. A key geographical feature is the wide area in the New Calabar River which traverses the Northern boundary of the Kingdom with Emouha and Ogbakiri clans. In the South and West, Akpor is bounded by Obio and Port Harcourt groups of Ikwerre extraction. In the East, it shares common boundary with communities in Aluu in Ikwerre Local Government Area (Mene, 1998). Politically, Akpor Kingdom is headed by the Nye-We-Ali. The Kingdom is made up of ten communities viz; Rumuopkarali, Rumuosi, Rumualogu, Rumuokwachi, Rumuekini, Alakahia, Choba, Ogbogoro, Ozuoba and Rumuolumeni. Ozuoba is the ancestral headquarters of the Kingdom.

The Goals and Practices of Akpor Indigenous Education

Indigenous or traditional education, which had a place of pride in Akpor kingdom, was a veritable and important aspect of the people's life such that the educational practices of the people could not be divorced from the daily activities of the people. This system of education was quite similar to what was observed in neighbouring Nigerian communities although with slight peculiar differences (Chuku and Amadi, 2005). Fundamentally, the native learning system in Akpor has the educational goals of any African society, some of which Matthew and Okpanna (2018) identified as:

1. Physical Education

One of the most popular Ikwerre cultural competitions is wrestling, known as *Egelege*. Wrestling promotes physical and sensory development; it is loved by all and sundry. Wrestling is not just a sport in Akpor Kingdom; it is also an

event that is celebrated with pomp and pageantry. For the young males, wrestling provides an opportunity for them to learn and exhibit the elements of human kinetics. Wrestling is a skill; it is learnt and acquired in such a way that you have to master the dexterity and artistry associated with the exercise. The elders very much experienced in wrestling taught male children and adolescents all known wrestling styles and techniques. Before wrestling contest, elaborate training and preparations are made. Chuku and Amadi (2005, p. 83) remarked:

During the period of rehearsals the youths, especially the male folk are allowed to practice or learn how to wrestle. The wrestling square is usually cleaned by youths. Wrestling drummers do their preparation by replacing and strengthening bad drums. About eight days to the beginning of annual wrestling contest, the drummers would resume rehearsals; members of the wrestling team would divide themselves into two groups to wrestle against each other in mock competitions. During the period of rehearsals the youth, especially the male are allowed to practice or learn to wrestle. While the community is preparing to usher in wrestling season, the wrestlers also make their own preparations. Some individual wrestlers seek charms to aid them in the contest.

Amadi (1973, p.7) re-echoed the latter part of the above observations when he said: "I should fear no man if wrestling were merely a test of bones. It is much more and one must fortify against invisible powers".

2. Character Development

Character formation and development also features in Akpor indigenous education. For this goal to be achieved, it required the tripartite efforts of the parents, siblings and other members of the community. Much as the child was taught some rectitude at home by his parents, his siblings and other senior persons in the society equally corrected him in areas of misconduct. Elderly members of the community did not allow any child to behave in whichever way he or she wants. Examples of how parents, siblings peers and other members of the community helped in developing the child's character can be observed from the fact that though it is the primary duty of the mother to acquaint her child (as soon as she is mature) with knowledge of sanitary norms, it was the peer groups and siblings who flog the child if she was involved in immoral act. Also, the elders could punish the children of their neighbours without the parent's consent if the child does wrong. Indeed, the external influence of neighbours in the upbringing of the child has given room to why the Akpor man could name his child *Nwoha*, which is translated to mean that the child does not belong to his parents alone but to the community as well.

Again, Akpor indigenous education inculcated the values of love and togetherness. The principle of love, unity and togetherness was highly traditional. In fact, the unifying spirit that indigenous education sought to perpetuate is clearly manifest in *Ekepiaige* (New Yam Festival) in Akpor. According to Chuku and Amadi (2005), *Ekepiaige* was one of the means through which the sense of communalism and collectiveness are cultivated as an annual occasion for the Nye-We-Ali to remind the people of the need to prioritize defense against external aggression and avoid internal wrangling.

3. Intellectual Development

The intellectual development of the child in indigenous education was mainly acquired through observation, imitation and participation on the part of the child. The child was able to know the geography of the area through seasonal features. The history of the area was transmitted to the child by the elders during moonlight tales. Proverbs and riddles constituted a formidable intellectual exercise. Indeed, an adult who was not proficient in proverbs and riddle was ridiculed in Akpor as *Nye-Obia*, i.e a stranger in his home. Chukwu and Amadi (2005, p. 4) noted that: "A fellow who is unable to interpret a proverb directed to him is scornfully regarded as an Ibo . . . an Akpor man that cannot decode an Ikwerre proverb is said to lack the knowledge of the land". Indigenous Mathematics was another way for intellectual and mental training. Mathematics in Ikwerre, Apiaha, is as old as time. It was passed from one generation to another. Children were taught addition and subtraction with the aid of Odara seeds or with empty shells of periwinkles. In Akpor, the following words are used to indicate mathematical signs such as Ogwucota +; Omuba x;; Egwehoma -; Ekeme ÷; Owhuyaru = (Chuku and Amadi, 2005).

4. Vocational Training

In Akpor, agriculture, trade, crafts, fishing, hunting, palm fruit gathering, native doctoring, hair plaiting, basket making, palm wine tapping etc were learnt as vocations. Young men were taught how to make *Nperete* that is, fishing traps while young women learnt how to make *Odudoro* i.e ropes used for tying foodstuffs. Interesting persons who wanted to gain knowledge in different crafts were made to pass through the tutelage or mentoring of an expert, such apprentice were trained for a period of six month, one year and above until the learner is eventually furnished with the requisite knowledge, after which he/she is discharged by his tutor or mentor (Chuku and Amadi , 2005).

5. Development of Cultural Heritage

Like in most African societies, culture in Akpor is not just taught, the child makes a personal conscious effort on his part to practice all the norms and culture of the environment in order to be seen as acceptable and functional in the society. Children learnt the norm and cultural heritage of Akpor through participation in ceremonies and rituals. As the child grew up, the dictates of the society made him see reasons why he should be socially responsible and culturally integrated. From birth onwards, a gradual education into the various strata of the society begins. Effectiveness of traditional education was evaluated from the way the child observed the norms and customs of the society (Ibekwe, 2015).

Ingress of Western Education to Akpor Kingdom

Western education in Akpor is traceable to 1913 when initial attempts were made to establish a primary school in Ogbogoro, exclusively by the missionaries. The first central primary school in the area was nonetheless established in 1939 as a Native Administration (N.A) School. The first post-primary school in the area started in 1957 as a Teachers Training Institute, Ozouba. The school which later became famous as Akpor Grammar School Ozouba, has now been handed over to the Catholic Mission and renamed as Our Lady of Lourdes, Ozouba in 2007. Suffice it to say that there are three universities domiciled in Akpor Kingdom. They are: University of Port Harcourt, Choba, main campus of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuorlumeni and the National Open University at Ozuoba. The establishment of these major tertiary institutions in particular and the general exposure of the people to the tenets of Western education in general have no doubt resulted in a mixed experience that exposed the people to both the negative and positive influences.

The Negative Influence of Western Education on Akpor Indigenous Education

The challenges that Western education pose to Akpor indigenous education can be examined from some beclouding and eroding effects of the former on the latter. These include:

(a) Educational Influence

The very point of contact between African indigenous educations with European education makes a subject of interest. The end result being that the latter is gradually overshadowing the former. As Okonkwo (1988, p.33) succinctly puts it: “colonial curriculum served as instrument of ruthlessness accompanied by supper-human cunning which enables a foreign domination in Africa”. Okonkwo paints a clearer picture of this when he observed that colonial education policy was totally directed at disorganizing established traditions and institutions, hence colonial education discouraged the indigenous technology in an earnest effort to create market for European technology. Today, the Akpor people who were known for traditional training in vocations like agriculture, fishing, weaving of basket, hair plaiting, wine tapping, carving of masquerade masks, etc are new jettisoning all these in pursuit of white-collar jobs that are offered through formal education. In the same vein, traditional instructions on the arts of wrestling have been replaced with couching on western kinetics and dangerous martial arts.

In Akpor today, there is less emphasis on the acquisition of skills and crafts, owing to the preponderant stress on paper qualifications. Unemployment among Akpor youths is now prevalent. Parents spend enormous resources in the education of their children but after graduation these children still remain burdens to them and society because western education could not bequeath skills and crafts that can make them functional in society. According to Wahua (1993) an individual is adjudged to have acquired knowledge if he or she can display such knowledge to the administration of others. Woke (2009, p.47) asserted that: “in Ikwerre perspective of knowledge, any knowledge acquired and not applied cannot be described as knowledge”. Another way through which western education overshadowed Akpor indigenous knowledge is through the teaching of English Language in schools, even where the National Policy on Education provided that the child be taught in the local dialect during the earliest part of his schooling (FRN,2013). Following the dominance in the acquisition of English Language, Ozuru (2005, p.16) noted that many modern families today have “graduated” to families where English is the child’s first language and the mother tongue (if ever the child learns it) becomes the second language. Often, this is done by the simplistic assumption that if a child starts with English at home, the school process becomes easier. This erroneous assumption prompted some posers by Ozuru (2005, p.16), and they are: did Wole Soyinka, the noble Laureate in literature start with English at home? Did Elechi Amadi whose novel, “The concubine”, has been translated into German and many other foreign languages start with English at home? The answer to these questions, as he noted, is; emphatic No.

Before western education, the Akpor people were taught basic morality and respect for elders. Today the emphasis of western education is on the respect for the fundamental human rights of the child via the Child Rights Act. The act of traditional greeting which was taught from cradle is gradually vanishing as western education stresses less of that. Prior to western education, elderly people in Akpor had the right to teach and punish any child who defaults

morally, whether the person is a relation to the child or not. Formal education system rather than produce persons found worthy in character, has actually produced many with dysfunctional behaviours. Mandus (2001,p.5) noted that “the forceful wind of western culture came and subdued not only the philosophies of the native people, but also their pattern of educating their children. In the same vein, Woke (2009) observes that through western education, as it is practiced today, some parents have become over protective of their children to the extent that teachers or other members of the society do not have the right to discipline them. Consequently, this has led to gross lack of discipline and poor character formation.

(b) Religious Influence

Traditional religion in Akpor is an integral knowledge system of the people. It is a religion that has been handed down from generation to generation by the forebears. But where it exists in contemporary times, it is only with minimal intensity. Bearing in mind that western education came into Akpor via the exclusive activities of the missionaries, it became certain that missionary cum educational movement of the whites had an inevitable encounter with the traditional religious system. According to Wotoghe-Weneka (1993) the encounter brought about religious change on the traditional religiosity of the people. He further noted that the traditional morality and corporate life of the people was so affected by this contact that “Things fell apart” for the traditional religion. Weneka (1993,p.19) finally submitted: “it is evident that that traditional religion is becoming increasingly outmoded, especially among the educated people”.

Organized traditional religion is crumbling as evident from the neglect of most shrines of traditional deities which are already replaced by church buildings or school structures. Part of the places where the Central Primary School and Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School, Ozuoba are located were places where the goddess python, *Eke RukaniAkpor*, moved around for preying. In 1957, Mr. Clement Nwosu, the headmaster of St.Clement’s school, Ozuoba had killed the baby goddess python. He had to bury it with all traditional rites accorded a dead person. However, in 1997 when Mr. Mathew Uzowhe, an administrative staff of Akpor Grammar School (Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School) killed another goddess python, he refused to comply with the traditional rites of burying of the goddess snake, insisting that he was a Christian who should not compromise his faith by venerating a snake. In fact he petitioned the Rivers State Ministry of Education over the demands by Akpor chiefs on him to ceremonially bury the snake. In response, the authorities in the Ministry of Education directed Akpor chiefs to leave its staff alone. At this point the Nye-We-Ali and his cabinet quickly left Mr. Uzowhe to be. So it was the triumph of western dictates over traditional institution (Nyewusira, 2010).

(c) Cultural Influence

In the course of full span evangelization and education by the missionaries, not only was Akpor religion tampered with but also cultural ideologies were greatly mutilated. It was natural that the missionaries generally considered their own (western) cultural values better than those in Akpor. They condemned the Akpor people and their values without reservation. That explains why Akpor people initially antagonized western education refusing to take their children and wards to school. The influence of western educational culture was so great that natives were made to drop their native names and were made to only register in school with their English or Baptismal names. According to Chuku and Eke (2003, p.65) “Some persons, on getting ‘inchrised’ came to the conclusion that their old names constituted barrier to their progress”.

The most embarrassing of this cultural adulteration with western education was that most Akpor people began to imitate western culture and while condemning their primal value systems; a situation that confined its people to cultural labyrinth and hybridization. That is what Mbiti (1969, p. 219) meant when he stated that:

...for the individual the change has come too suddenly plunging him to darkness for which he has not been traditionally prepared. It alienates him from traditions of his society and from his root so he became an alien both to traditional life and to the new life brought about by modern change.

Perhaps the worst of this cultural desecration is in the area of dressing for the female folks. This is so because prior to western education, the Akpor woman was known for her descent dress code. The native cultural disposition frowned at garment and garbs that exposed certain parts of the body to the public, particularly on the part of the female gender. The influence of reckless dressing, that has become part of the life style of female university students that live in Akpor communities, has rubbed-off on the dress sense of the people. Even married women now recklessly want to dress like these students (Nyewusira, 2010). On the other hand, the male youth in Akpor have taken to showing-off like modem citizens, while imitating the students in the universities around their communities. Before the establishments of higher institutions in the area, one could at a glance easily identify a typical country boy from Akpor. But the picture is different today as some locals, who without undergoing university education,

now emulate the fashions, slangs and general lifestyle of the students that live around their localities. In the same vein, social vices such as campus cultism, drug addiction and other forms of social maladies have permeated Akpor communities through the clandestine and nocturnal activities of the off-campus students who live in virtually all the communities. Love-making on bear ground which is highly sacrilegious in Akpor has become a norm by some stranger-students around the communities, thereby leaving the custodians of tradition to making continuous spiritual atonement for this sacrilege (Nyewusira, 2010).

Akpor has inversely suffered high economic losses owing to the establishment of three higher institutions within it. To adumbrate Anele (1999, p. 45):

A cursory glance at the hectareage of land acquired for the establishment of both Rivers State College of Education and University of Port Harcourt by the government staggers the imagination. A total of 42.25 hectares were acquired from Rumuorlumeni community in 1971, on which was erected the College of Education. The hectareage acquired from Akpor clan for the establishment of University of Port Harcourt is 1402.142 hectares

This massive land space occupied by University of Port Harcourt largely belongs to Choba, Rumuekini and Alakahia. Anele (1999) lamentably noted that owners of this and other vast portion of lands that host the universities have not been adequately compensated. The dispossession of land for establishment of universities has therefore implicitly resulted to ravaging hunger and starvation amongst the farming and fishing population who not only lost their lands, but their sources of livelihood to the institutions. As such, this is perhaps the greatest sacrifice the people of Akpor kingdom made for the development of formal educational in the area.

Positive Influence of Western Education on Akpor Indigenous Education

(a) Socio-Cultural Influence

Human societies are not static and as such every society is always in a flux or process of change. Change could be internal or external and the dynamics of change is a reflection of the operative innumerable contradictions, some latent and some manifest. Western educational and missionary activities stopped and changed the dastardly act of the killing of twins in Akpor. Prior to western education, babies who cut the upper first tooth or had some form of birth disorders were easily regarded as abomination. Western education has helped to satisfactorily explain these as unavoidable biological occurrences. In Akpor, it was not just the missionaries that spearheaded the campaign against the killing of twins. The first crops of educated men in Akpor joined forces with their educators to curb and eventually exterminate such inhuman practices. Hence, the biography of Chief P.G. Akani, one of the sons of Akpor who completed his standard six in 1935 at St Peters Central School Isiokpo, read thus:

As a social worker, he fought for the awareness of evil of the killing of twins and other babies that present their legs during child birth. He described this fight a fierce battle because traditionalists saw him as desecrating the land by allowing these babies live. These are existing testimonies of his victory, with the support of the missionaries

Again, the health/social advantages of having health and educational institutions closer to the people cannot be over emphasized. The establishment of the University Teaching Hospital in Akpor has provided the people the opportunity to closer health care services. With the policy of quota system admission, which also gives preference to candidates of host communities, more admission opportunities are open to indigenes of Akpor who seek for admission into the three universities that are located in the area. In addendum, there is no gain saying that western education, especially with the establishment of universities, has improved the formal literacy and educational achievement of the people. Akpor owes its men and women of diverse professional competences mostly to proximity of these universities to its people (Nyewusira, 2010).

(b) Economic Influence

The emergence of formal educational institutions in Akpor, particularly the establishment of universities, has contributed immensely to economic prosperity in Akpor. Most families in Akpor have taken to real estate management because of the high demand of accommodation by university students and lecturers around the communities. Property business has become a lucrative economic enterprise around all the communities. Indeed, there is no community in Akpor that does not accommodate either students, lecturers or the administrative staff of these institutions. Currently, being a landlord has become the commonest occupation in Akpor Kingdom. In addition, land speculation and vendoring have become a familiar business for the people. Besides, so many lock-up shops and malls owned by indigenes and non-indigenes alike are opened around the immediate communities that

play host to these schools. Much more, the universities have provided local-content employment opportunities to the indigenes of Akpor (Nyewusira, 2010).

The Synthesis

There is no denying the fact that indigenous education is very relevant in the overall educational schemes and practices (Okoli, 2005; Nyewusira and Okoli, 2011). At present, indigenous education still plays a critical part in the life of a child because the child must necessarily be exposed to traditional education before engagement in formal education. The prospects for the continuous existence of Akpor indigenous teachings is predicated in the recent calls by afrocentric scholars that since western education has failed to produce functionalism in society, it was high time that education practitioners rediscovered and injected the importance of indigenous education into our contemporary school system (Bulus, 1995). Aminigo (2003) noted that, in the midst of obvious negative orientation in modern society, it has become essential to fall back on the principles, practices, values and ethos of indigenous learning system for suitable and sustainable development. The advocacy for a mix of the principles of functionalism, as laden in the indigenous system, with some sophisticated aspects of formal education is only logical and rational. In essence, just as indigenous trado-medical practice complements orthodox medicine, the salient values of indigenous education can be used to also address the ethical distortions in the formal education system.

More so, in era when moral education seems to be waning, the values of indigenous curriculum for the revival and strengthening of moral education has become inevitable. Matthew and Okpanna (2018) have noted that inherent in the primary aim of traditional education was value-orientation. To this end also, Kosemani (1999, p.37) emphatically instructs that “the curriculum for moral education must borrow heavily from traditional African values”. All of these lend credence to the enduring relevance of indigenous education. In Akpor, some indigenous think-tanks have been clamoring for the revival of the people’s vernacular in line with provisions of the National Policy On Education (FRN, 2013) that children be exposed to the dialects of the school environment. Those in the forefront of this clamour are members of **Oga-nuruwhu** Akpor, **Ogbakor Ikwerre** Convention and **Ikwerre** Development Association. It is believed that the advocacy of these groups will strengthen and sustain the quest for the revival of Akpor dialects through the basic education scheme that is targeted at enhancing and diversifying the communicative skills of the child.

Conclusion

Despite the overwhelming influence of western education on Akpor primordial education, it has not completely been eclipsed. The fact remains that though western education has modified the trend of native teaching and learning in Akpor, it did not completely destroy the primeval educational system. It is equally obvious that the continuous relevance of Akpor indigenous education to contemporary education cannot be wished away. Much as western education has antagonized and eroded some Akpor indigenous values, it is also germane to re-emphasize that modern educational system can learn from the basic tenets of Akpor traditional education and vice versa.

Recommendations

The general concern about the low moral and spiritual content of contemporary education is indisputable, but the solution does not solely lie in government’s transfer of schools to missions, as it has done with the first central secondary school in Akpor (Akpor Grammar School Ozouba, now Our Lady of Lourdes).

1. Moral and values education is not the exclusive reserve of mission schools, hence the urgent need for the restoration and re-integration of some effective traditional ways of thinking and teaching into western education, so as to engender a compact development of the people and their immediate society.
2. Deliberate policy actions should be put in place to ensure the renaissance of those worthwhile components of indigenous education that were hitherto eroded.

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