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Sociocultural Competence as a Basis for Functional Education: A Focus on Nigeria *(Pp. 52-58)*

Chukueggu, Chioma O.C. - Department of English, Rivers State University of Education, Rumuolumeni - Port Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria

E-mail: cchukueggu@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

This paper examines the relevance of socio-cultural competence in functional education. It highlights the various roles that a good knowledge of the African cultural values can play in enhancing meaningful education of in the present Nigeria educational system. It also examines various aspects of the indigenous Nigerian culture and how teachers or educators can use them as a basis for improving the knowledge, ideas and skills that are already inherent in the Nigerian educational system. Finally, it emphasizes that we cannot alienate functional education from the socio-cultural values of the people, because most of the socio-economic and political problems in the Nigerian society today, could be traced back to the importation of the European culture and a neglect of our own socio-cultural values.

Keywords: Culture, Values, Training, Self-reliance, Agriculture, Technology.

Introduction

It is obvious that a good knowledge of the sociocultural background of a people contributes to functional education. Sociocultural competence refers to a deep-rooted knowledge about the ways of life of a people. This includes aspects of their everyday life, products and behaviour. The ways of life of a people according to Andah (1982), is an embodiment of all the material and

non-material expressions of the people as well as the processes with which the expressions are communicated. These include: the way they think, the things they do, their skills, ideas, values, norms, goals, symbols, beliefs, and so on.

Functional education in any society should include appropriate facts and figures about the ways of life of the people (social, religious, political, ethical, intellectual, scientific, technological and artistic). Neuner (1996) asserts that the learners' own world and their outlook on life, play an important role in their perception and evaluation of the foreign world and as such their own world must not be excluded from their learning experiences but should be used as a basis for selecting topics and learning tasks.

Functional Education

According to Fafuwa (1974) education is the aggregate of all the process by which a child develops the abilities, attitudes, and other forms of behaviour, which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. This definition includes both formal and informal education. Through the process of education, an individual learns the ways of life of his society. These include knowledge, skills, and values, so that he can function effectively as a member of his society and contribute to its development.

Education cannot exist in a vacuum and cannot stand apart from the society. As a result of this we can only operate meaningfully as teachers, scholars, researchers, politicians, religious leaders, administrators, educators and so on, if we understand the society in which we and our people live. Education plays the role of an agent through which the society socializes her young. The school system is therefore, a means of inculturization. It should inculcate into the child the ideas, values, beliefs, skills and knowledge, which are considered to be significant in the society.

In the Nigerian society today, the significant role of education as an agency for transmitting the culture of the indigenous society to the young ones has not quite been achieved. This is as a result of Nigeria's historical experience: the Trans-Atlantic Slavery and European colonialism. Those Nigerian elites, who passed through the missionary schools were only exposed to European History, European Geography, English Literature, Latin and so on. At the end of the day, they lost their cultural identity. They were trained in the system that made them feel ashamed of their indigenous cultural heritage. They were taught to despise their own cultural values as well as those who tend to place any value on them.

For education to be functional, it must seek to meet those societal needs that could be achieved through education. The needs of the society are expressed in the educational goals and objectives of that society. The introduction of the 6-3-3-4 educational system in Nigeria is a bold step towards cultural transmission and functional education. The Nigerian National Policy on Education (1981) emphasizes the following:

- i. The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity;
- ii. The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual in Nigerian society;
- iii. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and
- iv. The acquisition of appropriate skills, and competencies both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of society;

Literary speaking, the goals of education in Nigeria have not changed so much from the goals of informal education in the traditional African society. Education in the African traditional society was seen as a means to an end (to serve some purpose). Emphasis was on social responsibility, character training, job orientation, political participation, spiritual values and moral values. Similarly the present educational system places emphasis on functional education; education for self-reliance; scientific and technological advancement; improvement of the economy; emotional, physical and intellectual development, and so on. Therefore the present Nigerian school system needs to derive a lot of ideas and skills from our cultural heritage, if the objectives are to be achieved. We should get back to our roots so that we can explore, utilize, and channel our cultural experiences into our present ways of life, government and development.

Education for self-reliance should focus on one's ability to show or have confidence in oneself. Before the advent of the European Colonialists into the Nigerian society, the various ethnic groups were self reliant. They were able to produce their own agricultural products, farming implements, household artifacts, crafts, medicine, to mention a few, but with the advent of the Europeans, Nigerians began to lose their ability to produce things by themselves and today they have become very dependent on foreign made goods and services. Some Nigeria, those Awoniyi (1979) referred to as "cultural hybrids" despise Nigerian-made goods. They want to live in the

world of the Europeans and would prefer imported goods to the locally-made ones even when the later is of higher quality.

A good knowledge of the Nigeria sociocultural background can contribute to functional education in the following areas:

- a) Agricultural Education
- b) Technical/Vocational Education
- c) Character Training
- d) Physical Training
- e) Intellectual Development
- f) Citizenship Education; and
- g) Leadership education.

Agricultural Education

In the traditional African society, children were trained on how to clear the bush in preparation for farming, how to plant seeds, how to weed grass and how to harvest crops. They were also taught how to rear domestic animals. This accounts for the sufficiency of agricultural products then. When the Europeans came, they were attracted by our agricultural products and had to think of ways of exporting them to their own land.

Today, some of the Nigerian graduates in agriculture and agricultural Engineering have all the theories of agriculture in their heads but lack the practical skills they require for effective farming. To get back to effective agriculture, the school system needs to imitate the traditional society by equipping children with practical skills needed to produce enough food. The emphasis of agricultural education should be on practical skills.

Technical/Vocational Education

The various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria are endowed with some technological skills and abilities such as; weaving (baskets and cloths); smiting (iron smith, silver smith, and gold smith); casting (bronze casting); art (sculpture, painting, and carving); dress making; soap making; health technology (use of herbs) and pottery. One of the objectives in the educational policy is that children should be educated in such a way that they would be able to manufacture things by themselves. In order to do this, the educators, teachers, and all those who are directly involved in educating the young ones, should expose them to indigenous technological skills. If they are exposed to all the technological processes, it will be easy for them to

advance to greater heights. The technical, vocational, and art teachers should aim at inculcating these skills into the young ones.

Character Training

In the traditional African society, great importance was attached to character training. The child was expected to be sociable, honest, courageous, humble, persevering and of good report at all times. He was educated in the codes of conduct, patterns of moral behaviour, and laws of the society, (by parents, siblings, relations and neighbors). Folk stories of morality and good manners were employed to drive home some practical truths. Since the National Policy on education emphasizes the development of good character in children (especially at the character formation stage-pre-primary and primary stage) teachers should employ some of the mediums used in traditional education such as telling children folk stories with good moral implications.

In the Nigerian society today, it is becoming increasingly difficult for parents and teachers to bring up children of good behaviour. This is as a result of the influence of the western world, where it is felt that the child should be allowed to do things his own way. Today, we find a lot of teenagers engaging themselves in all kinds of immorality, smoking, stealing, drug addiction to mention but a few. The use of punishment as a corrective measure for bad behavior should be emphasized in schools, as was done in African traditional education.

Physical Training

In African traditional society, great importance was attached to the physical development of children. The emphasis was on helping the young ones to develop the strong body physique needed to face the challenges of their daily life. This was done through wrestling, dancing, drumming, acrobatic display, racing, climbing trees and so on. To help children develop into physically strong healthy adults, there is the need for physical exercises like acrobatic dances, wrestling along with other forms of physical training that are already present in the school system.

Intellectual training

In the African traditional society, the intellectual growth and development of the African child was highly encouraged. Children were taught through observation, participation, and imitation. The curriculum comprised of mathematics, Local History, Local Geography, Botany, Zoology, Philosophy and Psychology. They were taught through the use of proverbs and riddles.

They learnt from the elders, the history and Geography of his their community. Proverbs were used to encourage children to engage in abstract reasoning and reflection.

Today, the intellectual development of the child is given great attention in our educational systems. The curriculum is very wide and includes all the subjects that would foster the intellectual development of the child. Greater attention is now given to science subjects, because the child is expected to use his intellectual skills to find solutions to the problems in his environment. Therefore, teachers can employ the children's sociocultural knowledge in teaching science subjects. They should encourage students to participate activity in the lessons (learning by doing) instead of being passive observers. Students should also be provided with all the instructional materials they need, so that they can practicalize the theories they learn. In the school curriculum, the content should be related to the immediate environment of the children.

Citizenship Education

In the traditional African society, it was one of the objectives of informal education to inculcate into the young ones, the spirit of good citizenship: Citizens who had respect for elders, respect for the laws of the land, and concern for the well being of every member of the community. This was achieved through the age group system. They learnt how to relate to other people as well as how to work as a team in community development. The grandparents, uncles, and aunts were utilized in teaching children the laws of the land and respect for elders.

Since the school system is an agent for cultural transmission, it should inculcate into the young, the norms, values and the laws of society. The consequences for disobeying them should be stressed. The teachers and educators should know the social norms themselves, so that they can inculcate them into their pupils and students.

Leadership Education

African traditional societies have always had leaders of thought and men of wisdom: men who had the interest of their societies at heart. They were the village heads, priests, councilors and kings. They ruled by the consent of the people and achieved peaceful government. The politicians and leaders of today have a different spirit altogether. They are like the colonial administrators, who had selfish motives in their divide and rule system. Most of our leaders are those who had passed through the missionary educational

system and are more English than English themselves. Therefore leaders need to be re-oriented. They have to understand the culture of the people they are ruling before they can achieve success. Also, the political culture of the indigenous African societies should be taught in schools because the children of today are the leaders of tomorrow.

Conclusion

Having discussed some of the ways in which the knowledge of our sociocultural background can contribute to functional education, one can conclusively say that education is much more meaningful both to the individual and the society, if it is embedded in the culture of one's social environment.

Teachers, educators, and curriculum planners should not lose sight of the fact that, the society is dynamic and their task should be to prepare and educate the young ones for change as well as stability. In doing this, they should carry the socio-cultural values along with them.

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