

African Research Review

An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal, Ethiopia

Vol. 4 (3a) July, 2010

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print)

ISSN 2070-0083 (Online)

The Traditional Beliefs and the Attitude of Children towards Schooling among the Ejgham Communities of Cross River State, Nigeria

(Pp.171-180)

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the influence of traditional practices on schooling among Ejagham children of Cross River State in Nigeria. In pursuance of this study, three hypotheses were formulated. A questionnaire was administered to 820 Ejagham children found in the major Ejagham speaking areas of the State. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis and the One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) techniques were used to analyze the data at 0.05 alpha level. From the result of the study, kinship attributes and involvement in early marriage practices were found to have a significant negative influence on the attitude towards school amongst Ejagham children. Level of involvement in traditional practices was not found to have a significant influence on the Ejagham child's attitude towards schooling.

Introduction:

Any observer of the Nigerian social structures may fall into the trap of overlooking the impact of the traditional practices on the attitudes of its people. Those in the intellectual and religious social leanings tend to transmit

the notion that tradition has lost its grip on the attitudes of the people, yet their daily activities keep portraying that their attitudes are still richly controlled by traditional beliefs. This is seen very significantly in the mode of transmission of values and cultures like dressing, greetings dancing and many other postures to the children both at home, school and Church etc.

The child is usually the centre of attraction in the minds of a family. The members of that family, therefore, take interest in directing and curbing the child's future. Their basic reason is that the child and the society usually hold parents responsible for whatever attitudes that their children develop in life. It therefore becomes incumbent on the parents to hand down to their siblings some values and beliefs that they hold at high esteem in their societies. Amongst the Ejaghams of the CRS in Nigeria, some of these common traditional values that are handed down include Kingship, initiation into traditional societies, early marriages etc.

Awareness of these values is brought to the Ejagham child from when the child is tender to when he/she matures. This awareness models the child's attitudes to many activities in the society especially schooling.

This research looked into the effects of traditional practices on the attitude towards schooling among Nigerian children using the Ejagham children of Cross River State of Nigeria as a case study. The following practices were studied amongst Ejagham children in Cross River State in Nigeria kingship, early marriages and initiation into traditional societies.

Traditional Practices and the Nigerian Child

The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) defines the child as an individual aged 0 – 16 years. At this age, most Nigerian children are still very dependent on their parents for sustenance and survival. Children of this age bracket have their parents as models in the society and would, in most of the time, take to the dictates of their parents.

“Traditions are behavioural patterns, which are socially acquired, shared and transmitted from one generation to another” (Tambo, 2003). He views tradition as values, beliefs, rules and behaviour patterns that are shared by a group of people and passed on from generation to generation. Hunters and Whitten (2003) outline the following as features of tradition:

- Provision of societies body of daily behaviour as well as its concept of mortality

- Telling members of the society what is correct behaviour and also explaining why it is correct to do the right thing
- Dealing with the nature of things and with unanswerable questions about life and death.

Hornby (2000) conceives beliefs as feelings that something is real and true. These feelings are always developed in the minds of the people either through direct involvement or through education. Beliefs are subsumed in traditions. They are neither tangible nor visible but manifest through psychological states and behaviour of a people. Based on beliefs people practice a pattern of life that gives the identity of the people.

Children in Nigeria exist in the midst of a multitude of traditional beliefs. The outlook of many ancient customs reflects the cultural background to which the child belongs to their applications follow the cultural idiosyncrasies of the society though there exist some common features spreading across the heterogeneous cultural milieu. The Ejgham child is brought up with a lot of efforts put to let him/her practice and belief the tradition and are threatened or rejected if they should violate any of the underlying social customs implicit in them.

Kingship and Schooling among the Ejghams

All communities base their social identity on descent from a common ancestral background, within a social network of human interactions. These make them live together in harmony and love. Kingship in the Ejgham society is the blue print by which society is organized, the principles on which structure is provided and the values and ideas by which people live. Kingship potentials regulate the relationship among individual members of the society, groups and social positions. Roles in the society are assigned on the basis of kingship. The rights and privileges enjoyed by those occupying positions of the community are determined by their relationship with the royal social class who act as moderators of the society. The authority in a particular group is bestowed upon people by virtue of their line of descent.

The Ejgham children pose themselves in the community depending on the degree of kingship reposed on them or their parents. The kingship positions that they can aspire to, prescribe the values they pursue and the taboos they observe. This, therefore, invariably influences the attitude of the children who come from such activities in the community including school. Children who come from such homes would want to carry airs that may call for special

treatment and attention in school especially with regards to correction, direction and other school activities.

Early Marriages and Schooling Among the Ejaghams

“...Zulai was married off immediately. She was about 10 years old. This made coitus painful for her. Zulai was therefore subjected to the traditional *cushiri cut*”, Wyse (1997:41). The tradition of early marriages had dominated in the Ejaghams within the immediate past. Parents perceived the delivery of the female child as a source of income. This income is got through the female child either by introducing her to men early enough to attract goodies or by giving her out for marriage to people who will take responsibility of major events in the family. This tradition gives the orientation to the female child that may not be conducive for healthy attitudes towards schooling.

Parents also identify children in certain families that have admirable traits or enviable family descent of kingship and make pledges for marriage. This in some cases is done when the child is just born, with some symbolic traditional pledges. As both children grow they are made to understand that they are couple. This sense of attachment to matrimony at a tender age affects the child's lifestyle and attitudes in the community in general and attitude towards schooling in particular.

Traditional Societies and Schooling amongst the Ejagham

Along with other cultures, the Ejagham society is organized on the basis of kingship and associational groupings. Membership in any of the associations is associated with certain personality attributes. Within the Ejaghams, there are traditional societies that perform certain economic, governmental, social, religious and educational functions. Members of these societies organize themselves to facilitate the performance of their roles. Members of these associations have certain levels of personality attributes that they are expected to live up to.

Children are initiated into traditional societies such as the Mgbe, Ohom, Nnim, Nkim, Angbou, Nkanda etc. These initiation ceremonies enable the children learn their roles in the society in relation to sex, age and capabilities. The initiation of children at an early age is also to ensure that they develop affection for culture and also gives the insurance that tradition and identity is effectively handed down to subsequent generations. In most cases the children do not have the right to question why they are initiated into one society or the other as they may be accused of challenging the gods of the

land. Some are made to know that their selection to perform certain duties is ordained by the gods.

Children who are initiated into traditional societies exhibit certain character traits that make them feel that they are special icons in the community. Such children have a feeling of high value and are accorded a high esteem in their various societies, hence, would expect all other communities to hold them at that esteem. This acquisition may have an influence on the child's attitude towards schooling.

Statement of the Problem

"Schools are established in societies with a common curriculum, with the primary reason of transmitting knowledge and national character" (Edet and Alvin, 1982). For this reason the product of schools are no longer meant for local and traditional consumption. With the increase in the number of schools in Ejagham communities, there is no corresponding increase in attitude towards schooling. This is observed in the drop in the number of Ejaghams that finally register in Universities and higher institutions all over the Federation. In the same light, the number of Ejaghams that occupy positions of responsibility by virtue of their academic qualifications is countable as compared to their population within the State. During cultural festivals, one will be appalled by the number of children and youths that patronize the traditional activities many of whom are permanently based in the village. More embarrassing is the number and age of female children that are nursing mothers especially in the rural areas of the Ejagham villages. Elite groups have wondered what could be the cause of this ugly trend. Some have attributed it to the economic situation of the nation and have even offered scholarships as a means of remedying the situation. Despite these efforts the trend has not changed for the past ten years. It is for this reason that, these researchers decided to find out if children's attitude towards schooling could be as a result of traditional practices among the children in Nigeria using the Ejaghams in Cross River State of Nigeria as a case study.

Hypotheses

In order to guide this study, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested in their null form at 0.05 alpha level.

- i) There is no significant influence of kingship attributes of the child to the child's attitude towards schooling

- ii) There is no significant influence of involvement in early marriages on the child's attitude towards schooling
- iii) Level of involvement in traditional societies does not significantly influence the child's attitude towards schooling.

Methodology: This study was carried out using eight hundred and twenty (820) children from four Ejagham communities in Cross River State. These communities are the Quas, Akamkpa, Etung and the Ishiburi from Ogoja. Children whose ages were estimated at 10 to 15 years drawn from secondary schools and in the local communities were given questionnaires and guided on how to complete them. Table 1 shows how the questionnaires were distributed.

The respondents to this questionnaire were selected using stratified random sampling in the various communities. The instrument passed through a due process of validation. To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, the Cronbach Coefficient Reliability Ratio was used which ensured the internal consistency of the instrument. Table 2 shows the reliability estimates of the instrument.

Results and Interpretation

Hypothesis One: *There is no significant influence of kingship attributes of children on their attitudes towards schooling.*

Using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis, the results in Table 2 below were obtained.

The result of the analysis reveals a significant r-value of -0.86 at 0.05 level of significance with 818 degrees of freedom. Consequent upon the finding, the null hypothesis was rejected while the research hypothesis was retained. It therefore means that there is a significant influence of kingship attributes of children on their attitude towards schooling.

Hypothesis Two: *There is no significant influence of early marriages of children on their attitude toward schooling.*

Using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis, the results presented in Table 3 were obtained.

The result of the analysis reveals a significant r-value of -0.55 at 0.05 level of significance with 818 degrees of freedom. Consequent upon the finding, the null hypothesis was rejected while the research hypothesis was retained. It

therefore means that there is a significant influence of early marriages of children on their attitude toward schooling.

A further observation of this result shows that the correlation coefficient is negative. It is an indication that the more the children are exposed to early marriage practices, the less their attitude towards schooling.

Hypothesis Three: *The level of involvement of children in traditional societies does not significantly influence their attitude toward schooling amongst the Ejagham tribe.*

A one-way analysis of variance statistical technique was used to analyze this hypothesis. The result is presented in Table 4.

The result of the analysis reveals a non-significant F-ratio of 2.81 at 0.05 level of significance with 2 and 817 degrees of freedom. This therefore means that the null hypothesis was retained and the research hypothesis was rejected. This result means that there is no significant influence of level of involvement of children in traditional societies on their attitude towards schooling among the Ejagham children.

Discussion of Findings

The results of hypothesis one reveals that the higher the kingship attributes of children the lower their attitude towards schooling among the Ejagham children. This could be as a result of the authority that the children think they possess that make them think that much is already secured for them. This can therefore make them not build much interest in venturing into where many unprivileged children go. Schooling being an activity where social class does not influence its performance the children might always feel marginalized when found in such environments hence build negative attitudes towards going to school.

The results of hypothesis two also show a significant negative relationship between children involvement in early marriage practices and their attitude towards schooling. The more the Ejagham children get involved in early marriage practices the less their attitude towards schooling. This could be because at the time when children find themselves coupled, their orientations begin to be tilted towards making a family and how to raise money fast to maintain a family. They may think that schooling, which is considered as a very long term investment, could delay them in meeting up their matrimonial responsibilities.

The third hypothesis revealed that the level of involvement in traditional societies does not have any significant influence on the attitude towards schooling among Ejagham children. This result could be so because the children see many elite in higher institutions and with high academic attainments who also have high positions in their traditional societies. This observation makes them nurse the feeling of continuing to aspire in schooling while at the same time maintaining themselves in the traditional set ups.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- Children who by dint of their birth have kingship attributes should be counseled separately in schools and at home on the need to back up their kingship strengths with education through schooling. Also parents should be very cautious on the reactions they make to the reports that they receive about their children, especially from teachers.
- Parents should not accommodate the idea of children presenting to them their boy/girl friends unless they are mature and are ready to marry.
- The involvement of children in traditional societies should be done with caution. After initiation, the children should be allowed to mature before they can progress in the rungs of the society in question.

Table 1: Distribution of Questionnaires in the Major Ejagham Locations in Cross River State

Location	Males	Females	Total
Quas	139	101	240
Akamkpa	68	102	170
Etung	114	126	240
Ishiburi	88	82	170
Total	409	411	820

Cronbach Coefficient Reliability Estimates of Main Research Instrument (N=820)

S/N	Variables	No. of Items	\bar{x}	Coefficient
1	Kingship attributes	10	30.28	0.79
2	Involvement in early marriages	5	12.32	0.87
3	Involvement in traditional practices	5	17.14	0.82
4	Attitudes towards schooling	10	23.25	0.91
Total		30	21.37	0.89

General Description of Main Variables (N = 820)

S/N	Variables	No. of Items	\bar{x}	SD
1	Kingship attributes	10	30.28	3.16
2	Involvement in early marriages	5	12.32	2.09
3	Involvement in traditional practices	5	17.14	1.82
4	Attitudes towards schooling	10	23.25	2.28
Total		30	21.37	2.84

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Influence of Kingship Attributes of Children on their Attitudes towards Schooling (N=820)

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r_{xy}
Kingship Attributes of Children	24,830	49,343	113791	
Children's attitude towards Schooling	19,065	28981		-0.86*

*p < 0.05 df = 818, Critical r = 0.088

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Influence of Early Marriages of Children on their Attitude towards Schooling (N = 820)

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r_{xy}
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Early marriages of children	10,103	24338	123746	
Children's attitude towards				-0.55*
Schooling	19,065	28981		

*p < 0.05 df = 818, Critical r = 0.088

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