

Dimensioning Indigenous African Educational System: A Critical Theory Divide Discourse

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Abstract

The process of traditional education in Africa was intimately integrated with the social, cultural, artistic, religious and recreational life of the people. That is, schooling and education, or the learning of skills, societal values and norms were hardly separated from other spheres of life. The education of the African child, like elsewhere, started at birth through adulthood, with befitting standards required for the survival of the society. Unfortunately, Eurocentrists have doubts about the authenticity of traditional African education. They claim Africa, prior to the introduction of colonial school systems never had and could not talk of education in the real sense of the word due to the absence of what they termed “prerequisites to genuine educational acquisition,” but knowledge in its simplest form, informality. The most important principle of traditional African education often described as primitive cannot lead a concrete framework of the theories and philosophy, one of several methods can rational education. This opinion, which has disoriented many to view African education as informal, has been brought to book by the some Afrocentrist mind-sets. This paper, which falls in the frame of the latter thought, explores the theoretical debates on the issue. Engaging this “informal acuity,” as a blinded cultural paradigmic estimation by Europeans against the reliable perceptual value and application of the formal facet of the indigenous African educational system, the article sustains with concrete examples that education existed in Africa before Islamic or Western schooling. In fact, the misconception about this pre-colonial system gained grounds since indigenous African theoretical and philosophical discussions have not been fully Afrocentric. How this education should work to resurrect itself from invisibility in the history of education, there is this need for a critical corrective theory about African education.

Keywords: Dimension, indigenous, education, critical, theory, divide discourse, Africa

Résumé

L'éducation traditionnelle en Afrique intègre les dimensions sociale, culturelle, artistique, religieuse et ludique. Ainsi, la formation par l'apprentissage et l'acquisition d'aptitudes, de valeurs sociales et des normes se distingue des autres aspects de la vie communautaire. L'éducation de l'enfant africain, comme partout ailleurs, va de la naissance à l'âge adulte selon des standards nécessaires à la reproduction sociale. Malheureusement, les européocentristes sont sceptiques quant à l'idée d'une éducation proprement africaine. Pour eux, avant l'introduction du système éducatif colonial fondé sur l'école, l'on ne saurait parler véritablement d'une éducation en Afrique en l'absence de « préalables à l'acquisition de l'éducation », mais plutôt de connaissances au sens le plus simple du terme, d'informalité. Les fondamentaux de l'éducation traditionnelle africaine souvent désignés et perçus comme étant primitifs ne pourraient pas faire l'objet d'une construction théorique et/ou philosophique, pas plus qu'ils ne s'inscriraient dans les différentes rationalités de l'éducation. Cette perception qui a fait prospérer l'idée de l'informalité de l'éducation africaine a été dénoncée par des penseurs afrocentristes. Le débat qui en a découlé fait l'objet de cette contribution qui puise par ailleurs dans les récentes idées développées sur la question. La prétendue informalité de l'éducation africaine n'étant en fait qu'un paradigme culturaliste élaboré par les Européens pour nier tout caractère formel à l'éducation endogène, l'article postule qu'en Afrique une éducation formelle a existé bien avant la rencontre avec les systèmes éducatifs occidentaux et islamiques. En réalité, la péjoration de l'éducation précoloniale africaine tient à ce que les débats théoriques et épistémologiques sur la question ont souffert d'une faible orientation afrocentriste. Il s'agit dès lors d'envisager des modèles théoriques alternatifs plus à mêmes de sortir l'éducation africaine de l'invisibilité dont elle est frappée quant à ce qui est de l'histoire de l'éducation.

Introduction

Fafunwa and Aisiku (1982: 9) axiom that: “no study of the history of education in Africa is complete or meaningful without adequate knowledge of the traditional or indigenous educational system prevalent in Africa prior to the introduction of Islam, Christianity or colonialism as a whole.” But what is education all about that it has caused a lot of controversy among scholars? The term education Oladele (2008: 118) says is derived from the Latin words, *educare* or *educavi* (*educare*). The former is a conjugation verb meaning “to guide,” “to direct,” and “to educate”. From this, we infer that education is the process of bringing up children by adult members of the family and the society, a process of rearing children, a process of guiding, directing and educating children. However, the process of bringing up, guiding, directing and educating is not limited to children. Adolescents in post-primary educational institutions and adults in post-secondary institutions (such as students in universities) also are guided and directed. These different tasks are more than the school alone can offer. All adult members of the society are concerned with all these tasks and in that way complement the efforts of the school. From this clarification, we deduce that education is bigger than schooling because education takes place within and outside the school. Indeed, schooling can get in the way or disrupt a person’s education as in the epigram of Sir George Bernard Shaw, the Irish dramatist and critic, who once declared that “schooling had interrupted his education.” Hirst and Peters (1990: 23) add that apart from *educare*, *educere*, another Latin word helps to define the word education. It means “to draw out,” “bring up,” “to lead out,” “to raise up,” and “rear a child”. From this latter derivative, a more comprehensive definition of education emerges; that education becomes the slow and skillful process of extracting the latent potentialities of comprehension and dedication. As in the case of *educate*, the tasks implicit or explicit in the meaning of *educere* are more than schools alone can give. All members of the family, the peer-group, the age-grade organization, community leaders, the church, the mosque, the shrine or other place of worship, the school and the mass media have their distinctive roles to play following the set objectives of each. Schofield (1982:23) must have thought along this line when he defined education as: “... the process of nourishing or rearing; the process of bringing up; and the manner in which a person has been brought up; the systematic instruction, schooling or rearing given with the aim of preparation for the work of life, and also the whole course of scholastic instruction which a person has received.”

This notwithstanding, literature on philosophy of education is replete with a variety of definitions of the word “education.” While some scholars define it as “the transmission of life by the living to the living,” others see it as “the acquisition of the art of the utilisation of knowledge.” James Majasan (as cited by Hirst and Peters, 1990: 27) sees it simply as “the art of learning.” According to Carter Good (as cited by Schofield, 1982:23), education is “the art of making available to each generation the organized knowledge of the past.” Ducasse (1958:1) adds that it is “a condition of human survival . . . the means whereby one generation transmits the wisdom, knowledge and experience which prepare the next generation for life’s duties and pleasures”. Meanwhile Lane defines education as “the transmission of wisdom, knowledge, experience and skills,” Oladele Taiwo (2006: 6) sees it as “... the total efforts of a community to raise its economic, social and political standards of life.” Hegel (1857) says it is “a progressive perfection of humanity from a simple, uncultivated and primitive mind, through the hard discipline of labour and toil to the consciousness and exercise of its freedom”. This implies that education is a gradual development of the body and mind from infancy to adulthood. No doubt that Asolo (1998) states that education implies a progressive development of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains (or areas) of knowledge. He also claims that this involves “the process of disseminating ideas from generation to generation”. But what Bawan (1994) adds to this meaning is that the aims, procedure and a curriculum of the education must be clearly stated, and of course involve professionals, particular focused domains and particular settings.

Generally speaking therefore, education could refer to both the process of training and the product or result of training in a particular domain. This should be delivered by professionals operating within a particular confine. It can equally be “the process of cultural transmission and renewal,” the process whereby the adult members of a society carefully guide the development of infants and young children, and initiating them into the culture of the society in general and specific domains. In the training or upbringing of children, a measure of freedom is allowed so as to give the opportunity of learning at their own rate and behaving in their own particular ways; provided their learning processes and general behaviour do not present a wide departure from the accepted social standards and conventions of the society in question. Freedom is therefore a relative term and the extent of freedom a person enjoys depends largely on the culture of the society to which he or she belongs and the values which that society upholds.

Hence, what society “A” values as freedom may be condemned as an act of indiscipline by society “B”. For example, the kind of freedom which some parents in the Western world allow their children, such as calling elders by their names, is seriously condemned in the African traditional society. Education in a definitional context can generally be thought of as the transmission of values and the accumulated knowledge of a society. It is given by and acquired from all levels of the society and many people are therefore involved in the process. Thus, it is essentially a societal instrument for the expansion of human culture.

In contrast, “knowledge” is a state of knowing or understanding gained or retained through mere experience (Oladele Taiwo, 2006: 6; Fafunwa and Aisiku, 1982:9; and Bawan, 1994). Consequently, the description of indigenous African education as lacking the instruments of education and denoting only broad based community knowledge values prior to Western education is a fallacy. This issue has caused great split between Eurocentric and Afrocentric academics in perceiving and dimensioning the indigenous African education. Thus, the paper provides an African centered approach to the question of indigenous African education. In engaging a critical discussion about the theoretical clashes on pre-western educational system, it places African educational acquisition in Afrocentric dialectic. This perspective, therefore, calls for discourse regarding euro-orientals on the one hand, the societal framework and afro-oriental on the insight and application of indigenous African education on the other hand. It is hoped that understanding and correcting the misconceptions about the education phenomena from a standpoint grounded in African-centered values, which calls for the validation of African experiences and histories from a wider and more reliable dimension, are attained at the end of this write-up.

Euro-Oriental Dimensionism

Euro-orientals about Africa are based on Hegel’s dialectics. In fact, most of their thoughts are constructed from his philosophical reflections about the people and their history, which exclude them from the universal history; hegelism (Babacar, 2005). Hegel (1857) claimed that the African interior is surrounded by mountains and is unknown, from which they have seldom made their way through “...except when there were outbreaks of terrible hordes which rushed down upon the more peaceful inhabitants of the declivities. Whether any internal movement had taken place, or if so, of what character, we do not know.” He claimed that Africans continued to exist in a state of consciousness which he referred to as the “Infancy of Humanity”. In his theses, one confronts his understanding of Africans as “naive and troubling lack of intellectual rigour”. He alleged that Africans (blacks for that matter) not only constituted a unique and separate race, but that humanity lacked the scientific or intellectual tools with which to comprehend black Africans.

Hegel wrote further that “... the peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all our ideas, - the category of Universality”. According to him, Africans were a unique phenomenon both historically and biologically. In his own words: “... in Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence, -as for example, God, or Law, - in which the interest of man’s volition is involved and in which he realizes his own being.” This distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained; so that the knowledge of an absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting. The African exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state, he declared, and “... we must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality - all that we call feeling - if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character”. The copious and “circumstantial accounts of Missionaries completely confirm this, and Mohammedanism appears to be the only thing which in any way brings the Negroes within the range of culture” (Hegel, 1956:93). From this assertion two things are clear; first, that since Africans were wild and untamed, to agree that they had possession of education was just to discredit the values of education, and second that education could only be brought to them by Christian and Islamic missionaries.

In fact, Hegel’s philosophy about the “untamed African being” grew so fast and was sustained as good enough by scholars who relied on to discuss and interpret the complexities of education. Their collective stand on missionary and Islamic educational efforts to transform Africans in all forms made them to see the African indigenous education as everything, but education. This primitive description of Africa is buttressed by Boas (1983:180) who defines “primitive as those peoples whose activities are little diversified, whose forms of life are simple and uniform, and contents and form of whose culture are meager and intellectually inconsistent”.

He sustains that “Their inventions, social order, intellectual and emotional life should be poorly developed.” Boas goes on to justify a civilized culture by using technical developments and the wealth of inventions as yardsticks. The types of technology he singles out as making a culture civilized are those which go beyond mere satisfaction of daily basic needs. Thus, African indigenous techniques are primitive since they do not greatly reduce the African’s daily physical preoccupation with livelihood. On this account, he favours European culture as a measure of civilization. However, the academic tradition of putting Europe at the pinnacle of civilizations has largely been addressed and refuted by many other scholars. But this is not the case with Laurie (1907). In his *Historical Survey of Pre-Christian Education*, he did not even include Sub-Saharan Africa in his scheme of analysis or exposition. He started with Egyptians and ended with the Romans. He equated education with civilization and culture as he knew them and, by implication Sub-Saharan Africa was primitive with no education, but simple knowledge. No wonder, Watkins (1943: 666-675) and Murray (1967) lead the bushist concept of describing this educational system as bushism. With examples from the Poro and Bondo societies, they sustain that the traditional African educational institution was the “Bush” school where the training of girls and boys was done in the bush. This entailed equipping the girls and boys for the military, family, agricultural, and cultural purposes. Block (1973: 30-36) adds that in this type of school, failure was virtually nonexistent since every effort was made, encouragements given, incentives provided to make sure that even the most coward went through, like during the circumcision process. Group instruction, group assignments, apprenticeship and age groupings to experience a particular significant event were the most common methods employed to instruct the young. Private instruction by one’s brother or sister, or one of the parents was also provided. Repetition, imitation, internalization and practice were the main methods used for learning so that by adulthood the African was a full member of the community.

Ociti (1973:105-107) stresses that the process of what he terms “knowledge acquisition” starts from the time of the unborn child. He patronizes the theory of none-existentialism, which depicts the absence of valuable ingredients needed for proper pronouncement and development of “educational systems”. He sustains that “... since the Africans knew no reading or writing, they therefore had no systems of education and so no contents and methods to pass on to the young.” For the scholars who think Africa was “*Tabla Rasa*” with respect to educational institutions and processes, “...education... meant Western civilizations; take away Western civilization, and you have no education.” He asserts the truism of his argument when he claims that the weaknesses in traditional African knowledge were explicitly revealed with the advent of Christianity and the European formal school system. “Tribal” education was not an education for change; it demanded conformity, but not individuality, creativity or individual uniqueness. It taught strict obedience to the elders’ rules and authority, which were not always necessarily founded, so that when the missionaries brought their “schools and real education” into Africa, it became a “refuge” for those Africans who wanted to be different from other members of the group (Achebe, 1958). The old system “...assumed that human nature was constant; that there was no revolution to upset the status quo of the old order” (Ociti, 1973:107). To this old order’s amazement, Western schools in Africa became places to go to earn diplomas and degrees, and therefore social prestige, fine clothes, cars, houses, economic and political power.

Sklar (1967:11) in the same thought, avers that traditional African system of education did not produce “scientists” and did not produce great military men, at least not great enough to counter the onslaught of the British, French, German, Portuguese armies and South African Trekkers. Hence Mazrui (1980: 123 as cited by Ayittey, 1991:30) says that “this history of Africa’s military weakness has continued to haunt African leaders and thinkers.” Sekou Toure on his part (as cited by Mazrui, 1980: 124) concludes that “... it was because of the inferiority of Africa’s means of self defense that it was subjected to foreign domination. Sklar maintains that however important and present is the traditional educational system among the African masses, Western schools confer much more, especially onto those who complete the universities, whether they are employed or not. The hope that they will one day be employed or even underemployed and maybe frustrated in their employment is still more comforting than to be unschooled and without the paper certificate from a Western school, prestigious or not. He sustains this ideas by saying that many university teachers know this very well and “...can attest that the vast majority of African students today are first and foremost job seekers who aspire for good salaries, high status, materially comfortable occupations,” and because of their degrees, political alliances and ideological conformity they can get for themselves whatever they desire (Sklar, 1967:11). But the indigenous African knowledge system could hardly give them all these. Hooker (1975: 20) supports Sklar when he says that “. . . it has become the ineluctable case ... that one who possesses a diploma, can bargain, whereas those without certificates have no cards to play”.

And in the case of Africa prior to missionary education, Thompson (1981: 54) maintains, its educational system did not give them this opportunity to “play cards.”

In collaboration with the non-existentialism are Whitehead (1962), Blackmore and Coosey (1980). Their ground breaking works on African educational system brings to the spotlight the informalism paradigm. According to these scholars, African traditional system is purely informal in nature since it is only community based. Their descriptions are predicated on the fact that there were no schools (with wall), valuable aims and objectives and no curriculum in the establishment and evolution of the idea of education. Ayittey (1991:30) says “without any written literature, the natives of African relied “... upon oracles, proverbs, story telling and music to educate and inculcate. One would think that although much of African history centered on oral tradition, a written script would be in Africa somewhere, but nothing is found.” In fact, Bloom (1968), Coetzee and Roux (1991 as cited by Schofield, 1982) append with the argument to add that the system was void of particular subjects to be thought, written documentation, professional teachers, professionalization, definite places to be called school environment, diplomas, school fees as found in the modern system, and consequently discards itself from the universal application of real education. All these, as formal character of education, they sustain, were introduced into Africa by the Islamic, Christian and colonial educational systems, “...where a formal nature and purposeful dimension of know-how in the acquisition of educational values were concern. Anything out of this was termed abstract, unsure knowledge” and informal. But much of these assertions and arguments about African indigenous educational system were constructed on subjective, bias, unfounded and ungrounded speculations. This is the reason why more critical research on African traditional education has consistently brought such assumptions to book.

Afroclinic Dimensionism

Indigenous African education has generally been understood as a simplistic process of socialization involving the preparation of children for work in the home, the village and within a select ethnic domain. Such “free” thought and understanding of the African educational system was perhaps influenced by the preparationist aspect of the educational system. It is for this reason that Marah (2006) says that the indigenous African indigenous tutoring involved understanding education as a means to an end. The end being social responsibility, spiral and moral values, participation in ceremonies and rituals, imitation, recitation, demonstration, sport, epic, poetry, reasoning, riddles, praise, songs, story-telling, proverbs, folktales, word games, puzzles, tongue-twisters, dance, music, plant biology, environmental education, and so on that formed the bases of preparationism. In effect, role playing constituted another dimension of this agenda.

The African child was educated to know, internalize and practice roles appropriate to sex and age. In the early years of childhood, the child’s education is largely in the hands of the biological mother, and the community assumes the greater role as adolescence approaches. Thus, language training is received from the mother, and the extended family. The peer group, or age-set also become significant as the youth approaches the stage of circumcision. At this stage orature, comprising of myths, legends, folksongs and folktales, proverbs, dances, and so on are all in line to prepare the youth for adulthood. The oratory form constituted one of the means through which this education was given (Smith, 1940: 64-83).

Against the preparationism background of the oral culture of traditional African groups, people relied on such oral media as speech-forms, dramatic performances, and ritual symbolic forms to communicate their important ideas, beliefs and values to members of the community. The uses of folk-tales as educative devices in traditional African societies as well as stories are used not only to amuse and express feelings, but to also teach ideal forms of behaviour and morality. Children learned by listening to their elders, imitating or “emulating” them. These stories were usually handed down from one generation to the next with the main concern to induct the youth into the moral, philosophical, and cultural values of the community (Mawonde, 2003). In some communities of West and Central Africa for example, there were griots “walking dictionaries,” historians or verbal artists who memorized the history, legends of a whole people and would recite and teach them to their apprentices or audiences publicly or privately. They also employed direct instruction in the process.

Imitation and role plays constituted another part of the education. Children were taught social etiquettes, agricultural methods and others that ensured the smooth running of the social entity of which they were an integral part. The boys observed and imitated their father’s craft and learned practical skills which they performed according to their capacities as they matured into manhood and later became heads of their own households.

The education of girls was differentiated from that of boys in accordance with the roles each sex was expected to play until adulthood. Initiation rites marking the transition of individuals and groups from one significant stage of life to another also abound, like in several parts of the world. But, as Thomas-Emeagwali (1993) rightly points out,

“... rites of passage tend to reach their maximal expression in small-scale, relatively stable societies like those of Africa that are cyclically-oriented in their pattern of time-reckoning, societies where change is bound up with biological and meteorological rhythms and reoccurrences, even technological innovations.”

Initiation rites, says Brickman (1963: 399-416) had far-reaching implications for the life of individuals and the community at large. They involved different aspects of life including the psychological, social, economic and political. The religious dimension was clearly important as traditional African groups relied on the supernatural power and divine authority of ancestors and other spiritual patrons to validate their worthwhile activities and to ensure the lasting success of their initiation events. There are several rites of initiation for boys as well as for girls into the adult status. These rites, says Marah (2006) like the *Ima Muo* among the traditional Igbo, the *Egungun* of the *Yourba*, *Poru* for young boys and its counterpart *Sande* for young girls in Liberia, generally mark their transition of young adolescent boys and girls from “social puberty” to full adult status with all the attendant roles and responsibilities. The *Luguru* of Tanzania referred to their initiation of young males as *n’hula*, meaning growth and maturity. This began with the seclusion of the candidates in camp under the supervision of a specialized male elder, *kisepi*. During the period that lasts between two and four weeks (a period long enough to brew the beer to be used for the rites) the candidates were fed on a rich diet of chickens. They learn to share everything in common and they are exposed to the “treasured secrets”, including the historical landmarks, myths and symbols of their community. Marah (2006) says that one of the major avenues through which the African youth received his or her education was, and is still, in some quarters during several grades or initiation ceremonies.

In fact, to better understand the nature and strength of this type of educational system, the social environment within which it operated is of great interest. It was the facial value of this environment that committed Western researchers to make alarming misinterpretation about the system. Mawonde (2003) says that Africa in the pre-colonial period included a large number of autonomous societies. Some of these attained a high degree of political organization, for example, the kingdoms or *Ashanti* and *Dahomey* in West Africa, and the *Zulu* under *Shaka* in South Africa. Other societies were acephalous, that is, without organized kings or chiefs, such as the *Talletsi*, the *Ibo* and the *Yako* of West Africa, the *Nuer* of southern Sudan and the *Tonga* of southern Zambia. Despite such political differences, African societies were marked by certain distinctive traits. An individual in such a society was born, grew up, and spent most of his life in his village, which contained a small number of people. Much of his time was spent in the production of food. There was a simple division of labour based chiefly on sex and age. Men lived in close relationship with nature (the land, vegetation, and animals) because of the available technological development. They were related to each other by extended ties of kinship which bound them to such unlineal kinship groups as the lineage and the clan. These ties supported a network of reciprocal ritual, social and economic obligations.

Political power was based on religion and partly emanated from the ritual relationship of the chief or king to the land and to the ancestral spirits. Despite differences in status, as emphasized by formal etiquette and ritual behaviour, there was a general uniformity in the standard of living. Although the society was stratified between the rich and the poor, the main aim of the former was to gain followers by providing for the poor land, for which they themselves had little use. They rather had riches in terms of surplus stocks of cattle and grain (Mawonde, 2003). From this backdrop, if limited to the aforementioned dimension of Africa educational system, one can likely think that was all Africa had to offer. This was what definitely influenced some Western researches and some disoriented African scholars to misapprehend this system. But the system had more than just this to offer. As a matter of fact, it possessed the characteristic for which it was denied by Eurocentric minds. Detailed accounts of African peoples leave one in no doubt that African societies did possess a kind of education equated to time and generations. This was formal not informal as thought by many. Thus, to deny indigenous African education of this is a real crime, therefore the non-existentialism, bushism and informalism paradigms are brought to book.

The description of African system as having no schools (with wall), valuable aims and objectives, no curriculum particular subjects, written documentation, professional teachers, professionalization, diplomas, school fees merely translated the inconsequentiality of real findings about the system.

Marah, J. K., (2006) announced that the sustainability of the system relied strongly on its valuable aims, divided into individual and community orientations. In relations to the former, he says that character development reigned supreme, which included the following: to cultivate good habits and to develop the right attitude to life and work; to develop children's latent physical skills; to develop the intellectual skills and capacity; to develop his or her potentialities to the full so that he or she could acquire knowledge and training in a profession and so earn a good living (summary of 2 and 3); to preserve the cultural values and heritages of the immediate family; to parentalise, and to position himself or herself in the society into which they were born to live (explore the world and find his/her own place in it). And the community orientation for Funteh (2003) entailed to preserve the cultural heritage and legacy of the extended family (clan and tribe); to inculcate respect for elders and those in position of authority; to acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour; to develop the spirit of division of labour; to develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs (develop good citizenship); to understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large; to adapt members of the new generation to their physical environment and teach them how to control and use it for survival; and to explain to younger generation that their own future and community, depend on the understanding and perpetuation of the institutions, laws, language and values inherited from the past.

Boateng (1983: 334) says that understandably (in accordance with these objectives), the content of the system grew out of the physical and social situations with the use of a strategic approach to transmit knowledge, skills, ideas, attitudes and patterns of behaviour. Itibari, (2006), claims that all of these were tagged by some curriculum or content. The content was perceived from both the physical and intellectual levels. The physical level involves sports activities (hunting expeditions), love making, fetching of water, farming, house construction, healing, singing, dancing, wrestling, memory carriage and display, tapping, carving, manufacturing techniques, trade and commercial tactics, division of labour, respect of values, and so on. Meanwhile the intellectual level represented bravery, calculation, management, parenthood (understanding, willingness and execution), cultural understanding, memorizing capacity, patriotism building and value preservation, power transmission (physical and spiritual), sound judgment between true and falsehood, spiritual drilling, power of speech, power of anger control and dispatch, soul serenity and so on. Boateng (1983: 336) structured these elements into the following major areas of knowledge, namely, history, sociology, anthropology, environmental (plants, medicine and astrology), metaphysics, geology, geometry, arithmetic, hygiene and sanitation, communication and leadership, religion, chemistry, science and technology.

In fact, in the arena of science and technology, the historically and presently alike, Sunal, *et al.* (1998:120) say Africa is generally unrecognized or extremely discounted. This fact is most evident in a simple review of most college and university textbooks, which the overwhelming majority does not mention Africa, except for an occasional reference to animal life (non-human), mineral sources or plant life. Consequently, the historical or contemporary African contribution (that is, state of knowing or understanding) to the identification or investigation of natural phenomena (science) and technology is absent, although research has documented indigenous technology in Africa in many areas. These technologies include manufacturing skills, agriculture, food processing, civil engineering, transportation, mining, and communication. Considering this quintessence, a quick review of the literature reveals that Africa had produced carbon steel 1,500 to 2000 years ago on the western shores of Lake Ukerewe (aka Lake Victoria) in Tanzania, created a stone astronomical observatory in Kenya on the edge of the Lake of Turkana 300 years before the birth of Christ with each stone aligned with a star, and via the Dogon of Mali, plotted the orbits of stars circling Sirius and revealed the nature of its companion although it was invisible to the human eye to chart Sirius B, the smallest and heaviest star in the sky representing a 700 year old tradition (Van Sertima, 1991:9-10). Adams (1991:27-29) says that a medical text was developed about 5,000 years ago in ancient Egypt, and Finch (1991:14) claims that the iron technology was developed no later than the middle of the first millennium in West Africa. Sutton (1982:297) on his part did a host of other works in the pure and applied sciences generally unknown to most in the world at one time or the other. However, the contributions set by Africa and her people to history has seemingly remained absent in the consciousness of many, and subliminally fuel the myth that an indigenous subject did not exist in the traditional African system.

Funteh (2003: 38) says that the viability of the system was buttressed by the dynamics of the instructors who animated these aims. He claims that the instructors varied from one society to the next, but that there existed commonality amongst them as concerns age, gender and responsibility. From the ages of 0-3 the teachers were the biological mothers, baby setters - siblings, cousins, and the antis.

From the ages of 3-7, all the above plus grandmothers, and sometimes grand fathers played the role as teachers. Children between the ages of 8-12, experienced the place of gender role, the teaching efforts of their mothers and co. (for girl children) and fathers and co. (for male children). This does not neglect the place of self versus role play and religious priests as the educators. From the ages of 13-16, gender role continues, with skilled parents and professionals, peers or friends serving as teachers as well. Between the ages of 17 and 55, the royal king makers (for kings), friends, marriage partners and societal experience play the role of a good teacher, and at 60 to 90 years children, priest and ancestors intervene as the principal educators.

Understandably in accordance with these objectives, the content of African customary education grew out of the physical and, what is more important for our present purpose, social situation. As to the methods, the transmission of knowledge, skills, ideas, attitudes and patterns of behavior was done in a systematic manner. Thus tribal legends and proverbs were told and retold by the evening fireside, and through them much of the cultural heritage of the tribe was kept alive and passed on to the children. There were riddles to test children's judgement, and myths to explain the origin of the tribe and the genesis of man. Such orality narrated with care and repetition was an added value to the African child's training in what was often a complicated linguistic system without a script. As Mair (1972) says it, "... many societies had this very organized form of instruction, and its transmission was purely formal, knowing that formality does not imply only script writing". In her description of Twentieth Century Ganda fathers, she says "... they would, through formal instruction, teach their children appropriate manners and the knowledge of genealogical positions of different clansmen. Names of trees, plants, animals and insects as well as the dangers and uses of each were learnt as boys herded cattle or farmed land with their fathers, and girls helped their mothers in household work." Boys were taught to staged mock battles, make model huts and cattle pens meanwhile girls made dolls, played 'husband and wife' and cooked imaginary meals. The importance of plays in customary education in Africa has been underlined by many observers.

Like Mair, Kenyatta (1965), brings the informal nature of the system to book. He analyses how the Kikuyu endowed with a pronounced age-set system, formal education was, in the past, imparted through succeeding stages of initiation, from status to status. He claims that the assumption of each status was accompanied by a sequence of rites which organized instruction of one sort or another. Initiation ceremonies and formal training for adulthood have also been reported from many other societies like those in East, Central and Southern Africa, particularly among the Sidamo (Ethiopia), the Nandi (Kenya), the Masai (Kenya and Tanzania) and the Pare and the Makonde (Tanzania). Clarke (1970) affirms this in his own words: "...indeed in many traditional societies of Africa, formal education most strongly manifested itself in the initiation ceremony. This ceremony marked the transition from adolescence to adulthood and often consisted of circumcision for boys and clitoridectomy for girls." The extent of formalism in the initiation and the post-initiation training can, with advantage be illustrated with reference to the Poro society in West Africa, as Scanlon (1964: 23) declares. This society functioned among the Kpelle, the Gbunde, the Loma and the related peoples of Sierra Leone and northern Liberia, extending as far as the border of Guinea. Among these peoples, a youth after circumcision, was initiated into the Poro; his formal entry into the adult world could not take place before the completion of the Poro education. The length of a term in the Poro School was theoretically four years, but the time a youth had to spend in it varied. Joining the school was not obligatory. However, a boy who did not go through it had no social standing so that traditionally membership of the Poro society was practically universal.

Marah (2006: 16) claims that the coming-of-age ceremony thus sustained the individual at a critical stage in his life, the transitional period between late childhood and adulthood, through interaction with his peers. In many places different clans, villages and segments of a tribe participated together in the ceremony, thereby stressing the integration of the entire society. It was during the ceremony and the accompanying training that a major part of the tribal mythology, accumulated knowledge and skills, and appropriate attitudes were transferred to the young initiates. But to the extent that adults took part in the ceremony some of these cultural components were reinforced for them too. To make the occasion memorable, Clarke (1970) maintains that sanctions of all kinds were brought to bear upon the neophytes, thereby asserting the authority of the society over the individual. The ceremony was attended by considerable pomp and spectacle which impressed upon the participants the significance of the occasion. Popular display was always contrasted with certain secret rites (a series of acts including gestures and verbal expression, their sequence established by tradition) that were confined to those who had themselves gone through similar experiences.

Those who went through similar experiences were in themselves teachers at a given point in time. In fact, this brings us to another stage of dissociating with the claims that the characteristics of formal teaching was introduced only by the Koranic and Christian school systems whereby they was school environment (buildings and walls), professionals giving lectures, paying of school fees and so on. Mbiti (1970) says that "... apart from formal training for all adolescents, there was, in most societies, formal education for a number of functional categories. Among these could be included herbalists, drummers, blacksmiths and priests." In most cases, training for such occupations was organized through a kind of apprenticeship system. In a limited number of societies that developed standing armies and formal training in warfare, this apprenticeship was imparted through an institutional arrangement of the state. In the case of blacksmithing for example Chem-Languee (1992: 13-15) says that the training was undergone in a specific smithing environment, a house constructed with a big yard for the purpose. Taking examples on how the activity was carried on among the Nso', Chem-languee claims that this "compound" contained a number of students and a teacher(s) mostly professionals in the activity. They thought their students specific tasks and methods of coming out with excellent products, and of course how to succeed in the field.

Funteh (2003: 57) adds that in Kwaja, these students studied in shifts, especially in situations when they were many in the blacksmithing school. To be called a student in such a school, the person must have completed his or her schools fees, which varied from community to the other. But it ranged from three goats, six fowls and nine jugs of palm wine, representing the three years of scholarly pursuit. The student could give these items all at once or pay yearly for the duration of his or her scholarship. The fees included a goat, 2 fowls and 3 jugs of palm wine. And after the completion of the course, all apprentices got a small cutlass, designed by their master which they kept as a sign of having successfully completed the training. It also served as a recommendation for them to upon their own training centres, if they wished. This was a certificate or diploma. Funteh maintains that obtaining this diploma did not only translate the completion of the course, but the good moral identity such a student professed. In the case of the health sector, the student left the parents (if they themselves were not herbalists) and stayed with the teacher (often a recognized herbalist or healer) for the duration of time required for him (she) to acquire the necessary know-how in the discipline. This, Funteh equates to the contemporary dormitory schools, and concludes that the African educational system provided dormitory school life for their students prior to colonialism. Before the completion of the training, the school fees was supposed to have been completed as well, which differed from one society to the other. The same rules applied to those who wanted to become professional drummers, builders and traditional priests, but for the latter which required witchcraft and lycanthropical¹ training that demanded more time and other secret and sacred issues. Becoming a priest was prestigious but also deserved an in-depth knowledge of nature and the society.

The *New Encyclopedia Britannica* (1997:2) affirms Funteh's assertions about the presence of a formal character in the African indigenous educational system (especially with priests) when it says that the transmission of values and the state of knowing or understanding gained or retained through experience or study in Africa began in ancient Egypt about 3000 BC years ago, at the beginning of the history of civilization. The nature of this early education was predominately in the hands of priests and the intellectual elite within ancient Egyptian theocracy. It adds that they (priest) instructed in the humanities, sciences, including medicine, mathematics, and geometry, and also in applied sciences of architecture, engineering and sculpture. These certainly question the declaration that the system was void of particular subjects to be thought as in modern form of education. The negative judgment of Africa and its contributions to human civilization is simply waved away just with a hand when critical research expresses enough facts of the duality of the formal education systems in Egypt. One was for scribes and the other for priests, but many others taught subjects within this flow and with an additional reading and writing skills. Consequently, Africa is not the historical or educational stepchild of Islamic or Western education when history verifies that an African process of education was transmitted and accumulated throughout the continent before the advent of invasion or colonialism as represented in Ancient Nubia in the east, the Great Zimbabwe in the south, and at the University of Sankore in the west.

¹Lycanthropy was the act that an individual could allow his soul to leave him when either in a trance or asleep and through some mystical means transform his shape totally into that of a desired animal and appear to particular people. However, the person's actual body was rarely transformed. This was done by individuals, especially the old, who wished not to harm others, but used it as means of notifying their beloved ones of their death which occurred sometimes not long after they must have showed themselves. They used such means to communicate with the ancestors as well.

In contrast to the non-existence literature myth, research about the presence of scripts in the African system minimizes the value of this myth. In this regard, Clarke (1970) sets the tone for this discourse. He says, “contrary to a misconception which still prevails, the Africans were familiar with literature and art for many years before their contact with the Western world”. He proves this by stating that one of the earliest written African language was Ge’ez, also known as Ethiopic, deriving from the liturgical language of the Ethiopian church with its inscriptions from the 3rd and 4th centuries before Arabic (according to biographies of Ibn Khallikan, Arabic was invented by an African named Abul Aswan) was introduced via Arab conquest in the 7th century (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1997:162). In West Africa, states Winters (1991: 208-21), the Mande invented several scripts that were used throughout the Western Sahara to meet the demands of long distances trade (allow merchants a way to keep records of their business transactions), to preserve religious doctrine, and to record obituaries. Hence, the oldest inscriptions are dated at 3,000 BC with a proto-Mande syllabic script of approximately 200-300 signs and 40 different forms; and thus current evidence of the script can be found in Mauritania and Morocco. Tedla (1995:134) and Karenga (1993:75) confirm this by declaring that historically there were many scripts in Africa, like the scripts of ancient Egypt hieroglyphic; the Meroitic and Coptic scripts of Nubia; the Amharic, Sabeian and Ge’ez scripts of Ethiopia; the Berber and Carthaginian scripts of North Africa; the Swahili Perso-Arabic scripts of the east coast of Africa; the Nsibidi scripts of the Efik of Nigeria; the Mende scripts of Mali and Sierra Leone; the Moum scripts of the Moum of Cameroon; the Toma (aka Loma) and Vai scripts of Liberia; the Bete scripts of the Bete of Ivory Coast, the Akan scripts, and the *A-ka-u-ku* scripts invented by the Bamum around 1896 in Cameroon.

Conclusion

This paper attempted a discourse of the critical theoretical clash about indigenous African educational system, between the Eurocentric and Afrocentric minds set. The former, operating on the tune of the Hegelianism, bushism and non-existentialism, devalued or better still denied the presence of indigenous African education due to what they termed absence of real symbols of education. According to them, Africa cannot talk of education in the true sense of the word but knowledge in its simple form. But limited to judgment of African values from a narrow and close angle of Western culture, and not understanding enough the features and mode of the educational system made misleading declarations, and concluded that the system was nothing short of “informality,” with its formal character introduced only with the establishment of Koranic, Missionary or Colonial administrative schools. Such misjudgments have caused some Africans to think things out their way. Findings from critical Afrocentric scholars prove the contrary, amongst which is this paper’s objective. It argues for the purely formal setting and experience of the system, indicating how it possessed all what it was dispossessed of or recognizably denied, in terms of aims, contents, subject, professionals, school environment factors, diplomas and so on. It is from this light that our perspective calls for further critical discourse regarding the character and utility of African education, the placement of indigenous African theoretical and philosophical ideas at the center of African educational policy formation; the resurrection of African epistemology, and the institution of a corrective critical theory of African education and knowledge. Like Dei (1994:3-5) in his elucidation of Afrocentricity and pedagogy, we incline to suggest that the examination of Afrocentricity is instinctively an alternative way of knowing the world, and thus an investigation and understanding of the phenomena from a perspective grounded in African-centered value, which calls for the validation of African experiences and histories as well as a critique of the continued exclusion and marginalization of African knowledge systems, educational texts, mainstream academic knowledge and scholarship. As a matter of fact, there is need for an entire dialectics of Afrocentric theory which will consequently allow space for a holistic discussion of the challenges of African education, and assign the idea that there are “...commonalities in African peoples’ culture(s) that should be interrogated and investigated to serve as the basis for Afrocentric unity and clarity about its complete educational system” (Dei, 1994:7).

No wonder Tedla (1995:209-211) calls for a new form of African education rooted in the positive aspects of indigenous thought (philosophy) and education. She says that the introduction of the concept of Sankofan education will be good as it serves as a buffer against the uncritical and often unconscious negative images about Africa, which have lead some young Africans to value the sensibilities of Africa by Western values, and thus devalue the traditional African way of life. Consequently, she defines Sankofan education as an African centered education anchored in indigenous African thought but as well borrows ideas and technologies from other peoples of the world.

However, her cornerstone attributes rest upon African cultural heritage, the transcending of ethnic and national blinders to appreciate the relatedness of the African world community experience, the placement of Africa and its values at the center of investigation, the preparation of learners to contribute to society and acquisitive goals that concern cultural and academic excellence, spiritual development, community building, and physical fitness and health. Accordingly, at least four preliminary questions arise relevant to a theoretical development of critical African education (1) how should it be defined? (2) how can it be infused with current discourse/study on African education? (3) what are its implications for social policy in Africa? and (4) why is it important or relevant to the continuance of indigenous African education and schooling?

It is in this light that Horton (2000) lands on a critical demography that conceptually applies to critical African education theory that can: (a) institute the development and application of ideas, theories and methods that fit the African ethos even within the modern context of educational application; (b) articulate the manner in which domestic and international social, economic and political structures differentiates, dominate and subordinate African education, (c); call for a more explicit discussion and examination of the nature of power and how it perpetuates oppressive educational and social structures; (d) institute a systematic approach to discourse concerning African education; (e) develop, articulate and research situations that can meet the requirements of a wide variety of circumstances, principles, and procedures; (f) explain the nature or behavior of select phenomena and its historical and contemporary sophistication. How can it function as a reflective, descriptive, explanatory, and predicative theory that effectively challenge the status quo also constitute an important question Africans need to answer. The formal appreciation of the indigenous African education paradigm obviously depends on the intellectual or academic community and a general recognition that can become a useful approach in the study of African education when the history and contemporary advances in African education are ignored. Thus, more attention must be given to the question of critical African education theory in hope that it will transcend eloquent rhetoric to become an agent for progressive policy formation, pedagogical structural changes and possibilities for new research modules. In this way, we can apply the insights of Kwame Nkrumah (1968: 30) which beckons on us in his own words:

To me equipped with a clear knowledge of our objectives, we are in a position to undertake a critical appraisal of recent developments in African history [, because] this is necessary if we are to draw positive lessons from past experience to determine both the area of deviation and the need for correction, and to devise a more effective strategy for the future [in this ever changing world].

It is in this vain that (Parker *et al.* 1999: 117, 137) declare that the days of ignoring the African contribution to global knowledge and education should be the past. For example in a study to generate curriculum recommendations that were multinational in origin, perspective and responsive to the reality of the interconnected positions of human existence, Africa was absent among a nine nation multinational 182 member panel from an array of professions. The task of the panel was to reach a consensus on (1) complex global crises that humans will face in the next 25 years, (2) human characteristics needed for dealing with these crises, and (3) education strategies needed for developing the human characteristics needed to deal with the crises, yet Africa was absent. Surely African views, issues and knowledge could have contributed to the above issues, but the African voice was ignored, and ironically, the researchers acknowledged the absence as one of the limitations of their study. This oversight (and general lack of respect), and other education centered activities that exclude Africa should be aggressively addressed at international education associations and meetings by progressive scholar-activists. And most interesting, there seems to be a subliminal lack of respect for African education and knowledge throughout pedagogical discourse.

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