

Proverbs and Moral Development in Africa: An Exploration of the Parallels between Culture and Education

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Abstract

This paper examines proverbs in the light of moral development within the African sub-continent. Proverbs are phrases that give witty advice or something that is true. In recent times, the plausibility for proverbs as instructional and educational tool for moral development has been reduced. Perhaps, this is owing to the reality of the New-Age in the Africa of the 21st century; which is confronted with the tension of Euro-Christian civilization, Arab-Islamic Invasion and her indigenous World-view. While the first two civilizations have wielded considerable influence on the minds of Africans, the third has an impact that seems not only to be waning but intellectually on the defence. Thus, certain salient questions need to be asked. They include: Why is the African indigenous World-view on the decline? Does the African culture possess nothing significant for Africans? In the light of the foregoing, this study situates its argument on proverbs within the African indigenous thought system. This is as a way of providing an explanatory justification for the presence of a tool for moral development that is authentically African. This study concludes that an inquiry into African proverbs will contribute to the moral development of the African mind through acquaintance with the indigenous language.

Keywords: Proverbs, Education, Culture, African, Development

Introduction

Proverbs in the writings of the late literary icon, Chinua Achebe “are the palm oil with which words are eaten” (Achebe, 1958:25). This goes so much to show the indispensable role that proverbs play in traditional African society. Etymologically, the term ‘proverb’ derives from the Latin word *proverbium*, which means a simple and concrete saying, popularly known and respected, that expresses a truth based on common sense or experience. They are often metaphorical. Proverbs fall into the category of formulaic language and form a folklore genre (Momoh, 2000:13). Proverbs are often borrowed from similar

languages and cultures, and sometimes come down to the present through language. Both the Bible (including, but not limited to the Book of Proverbs) and Medieval Latin (aided by the work of Erasmus) have played a considerable role in distributing proverbs across Europe. Scholars, pundits and researchers have concluded that cultures that treat the Bible as their “major” spiritual book contains between three hundred and five hundred proverbs that stem from the Bible.

The back and forth of this exploration is that proverbs remain a subset of oral tradition. In fact, it is a central source of knowledge acquisition in traditional African society. The most intriguing part of this source is that even in the modern period, you find most part of our education as part and parcel of its source. However, one thing is key that oral tradition has something to do with culture and in turn proverbs emanates from culture in order to explain reality as it were. Again, it sends metaphorical information from generation-to-generation. This enables humanity to have an insight into previous civilization. Meider declares that a proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, moral and traditional views in metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation.

This, be that as it may, we inquire if this role can still come to be in modern Africa. In other words, can proverb play the role it was accorded in traditional times in these modern times? What are proverbs? How do they inform moral development in ancient times? Can the positive roles of proverbs in ancient times be rejuvenated, modified and then applied to suit modern times? What are the challenges faced if one engages with this expedition? These are the germane questions that this essay purports to investigate.

In a bid to achieve its objective, this paper has eight parts, including this introduction. In the section that follows, the focus is on clarification of concepts and the meaning and role of proverbs in ancient African setting. This is meant to reveal that proverbs play a very vital role in the business of moral development. That is, to uncover the inner kernel of the methodology that would be employed in the course of assessing the veracity of African proverbs. In the third part, contextual education and culture shall be examined. In the fourth section, moral development through education and culture is looked at. In the fifth part, proverbs, education and language pedagogy are considered. In the sixth part, is the possibility of proverb filling the gap for moral development in modern times is critically evaluated. In the seventh section, three plausible recommendations are proposed and the eight part concludes the write-up.

Clarification of Concepts

Who is an African?

Merely looking at this question it looks like asking an obvious question. At face value, one may be tempted to say that the answer to the question is there. That is to say, everyone knows who an African is, but the answer becomes less obvious once other probing qualifiers are added to the question. The fundamental questions are: are White South African really Africans? Are Moroccans, Egyptians and other Arabs Africans as much African as say, Nigerians or Ghanaians? Is Barrack Obama an African? Do all categorized as African or as having an African pedigree perceive themselves as such? Are there levels of “Africanness”, and still more African than others? Who allots this African-ness, and why? How does African identify interface with other levels of identity and citizenship in Africa? In a nutshell, how is the African identity constructed in the face of the mosaic identities people of African ancestry living within and beyond the continent bear? These questions and some others confront someone who intends to empirically delineate the African.

Some scholars have pointed out that the African is not one but many races and peoples with diversity of languages, cultures, traditions and belief systems. Such scholars argue that it may be difficult for example, to talk of African philosophy, but easier to talk of “African Philosophies” (Mbiti 1969:2). For some scholars, the African is simply a radical category – a black man with certain Bantu features. But this classificatory scheme often poses more questions than it answers. According to Azenabor (2002:10), the term “African” is a racial geographical entity. “African” is a continent inhabited by a people of a particular race, which could be Black, White, Arab, Negro, etc., but differently with similar culture, custom, common history of colonial experience and tutelage. It is precisely because of their similarities and commonness that enable us to classify them as one. For example, we talk about “African Philosophy” instead of African Philosophies” because of their similarities and commonness.

Corroborating this Iroegbu (1994:116), writes of Africans:

the Sub-Saharan black central as well as White South African are all included in this geographical definition. Equally included are the historically African-oriented, Afro-American and Afro-Asians peoples whose roots are African. Though they live no longer in the African continent, yet they are tied by history and origins to

African. They are part and parcel of the African reality. Others involved, and who can do African philosophy are those who, though not African by geo-political delineation, are sufficiently informed, versed and interested to reflect on the African mystery just as some non-westerners do reflect on western reality. For instance, when Tempels wrote “Bantu Philosophy, he was contributing to the questions of African Philosophy. Thus, despite their diversities in forms of cultures, the Africans have common traits and similarities.

Education: The Nature and Meaning

Education has its root from the Latin word *educare* which means ‘to make or mould.’ The concept of education or definition of education is not an easy task to tackle because educators have not unanimously come out with “the” definition or “clear-cut” concept of education. In other words, Education as a concept is defined in various ways that some seem to contradict others. Each definition is based on the bias, understanding and background of the author. We have definitions and concepts of education and for the purpose of this work with its limitation in scope, we would consider some definitions of education, understanding the concept of education as having a universal connotation in terms of formal, non-formal and informal education.

According to Kneller (1964:20), education can be viewed from two senses. These include the Broad sense as well as the Narrow/Technical sense. He further asserts that in the broad sense education deals with the act or experience that helps to create a formative effect on the mind, the behaviour or character of a person or the physical ability of, a person or an individual. In its technical or narrow sense, education is the process by which any society through schools, colleges, universities and other institutions deliberately transmit its cultural heritage that is, its accumulated knowledge, values, skill, from one generation to another.

Accordingly, Azenabor (2005:5) describes education as a continuous reconstruction of experience and the adjustment of the individual to the society, to nature, and to his fellow human being. Education is therefore concerned with the moral, physical, mental, societal, cultural, intellectual and spiritual adjustment of an individual. For education to have any impact, it must possess what is worthwhile to those that are committed to it. Thus, education is a means through which a person can learn or a process of imparting or acquiring knowledge. Taiwo

(1981:10), sees education as the total effort of a community to raise its economic, social and political standard of life. In this definition, education is the responsibility of society.

On his part, Ukeje, submits that education is an investment by the society to make itself a better place in which to live and a better place in which to make a living (1966:23). Dewey states that “education is the reconstruction or re-organization of experiences that increases the ability to direct the course of subsequent experiences (1916:39). In the same token, Meroyi (2011:22), posits that education entails the development of learners intellectually and morally, that is expected to result in the positive transformation of the individual. According to Plato, education should deal with morality as it is what enables an individual to show the right conduct to other members of the society. Aristotle, however, believes that education makes an individual develop a sound mind in a sound body’. He is of the view that education impacts both the mind and the body.

Similarly, Rousseau holds that education is the development of the individual from within by interacting with the natural environment with the aim of fitting properly into the society. Nyerere (1968), conceives the goals of education as:

To transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom, knowledge, skills, values and attitudes of the society...to enable the young live in and serve the society and to prepare them for the future membership of the society...it involves the active participation of the maintenance and development of the society.

The foregoing definitions indicate that education has three basic foci: *information*, *formation* and *reformation*. It is informative because it has to do with the communication of ideas and facts that are meant for some definitive goals and objectives. It is formative since the facts given in information are fashioned to constitute the mental and personality structure of the recipient. They prompt one to behave in a more controlled and reasonably regulated manner that affects a person’s way of life. It is reformative because it may help to adjust an already structured pattern or behaviour. Education thus, possesses the capability to reconstruct a personality (Iroegbu, 2005:220). This point is aptly reiterated by Fafunwa (1972:11), who states that education is the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives.

Contextualizing the Notion of Culture

The term “culture”, has a number of definitions but broadly speaking, it refers to a complex of the attitude, values and beliefs, as well as the traditional institutions of a people. Alternatively, it may be described as the totality of the way of life of a people, which includes their thought system, language, value system, traditional practices and institutions (Ekanola, 2005:92). It is a total way of life of a people in their attempt to harness and conquer their environment. It is what gives meaning to their politics, economy, language, religion, philosophy, aesthetics and so forth. According to Iroegbu (2005:272), culture is the expression of the life of a given people in various external forms. It involves the acquired ways and manners of doing things which a people have like their lifestyle and eventful activities to which they still adhere. It is life in its practice as different from mere theory. Culture is lived life. It deals with a people not with mere individuals. What a people share, appreciate and promote in common is their culture.

Culture is the structural identity of a people; it is the particular characteristics that distinguish a people, as ‘this people’ and not ‘that people’. Culture is expressed in people’s speech, dressing, eating, dancing and various aspects of daily life. A people are known by their cultural identity and culture makes people, define and identify them. In his article entitled, “*Society, Culture and Education*”, Itedjere (1995:18), states that when a child is born, he has a total sum of physical characteristics transmitted to him from the parents. Due to his superior mental equipment, man transmits ideas, habits and technique from one generation to another. These features of man are called social hereditary. In view of the foregoing fact, this argument further suggests that a child has both biological heredity and social heredity that shape their being in the world.

The point of analysis and exposition is that culture is a social heredity of man (transmission) on the one hand, but on the other hand, culture can also be acquired through learning (diffusion). It is in line with this proposition that Ottaway (1962:21) argues that culture is the configuration of learned behaviour, and the results of behaviour, whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society. Holistic definition of culture touches on all areas of human life. This is the evidence in a scholarly work done by Onokerhoraye (1988:102) when he writes:

Culture refers to the total way of life of a society. It is made up of its members’ customs, tradition and beliefs, their behaviour, dress, language, their work, their way of living,

relationship network and their attitudes of life, the focus of the group's loyalties and the way they all perceive the world.

Culture may be considered as the sum total of the way of life, the belief system, norms, ideas and ideals which a people cherish or value and which they wish to transmit from one generation to another. People cherish their culture as it expresses their life and gives motivation (Iroegbu, 2005:273). Speaking of culture and its relevance, Falola (2018:266), writes:

In Africa and elsewhere, culture shapes the perception of self and the interaction between people and their environment. It explains such as why people respect old age, have many children, take care of their children, work hard, take to polygamy, and support male dominance. It justifies work ethics; for example, the desire for money without having to work for it; gender division of labour; consumption habits and accumulative styles. It defines norms of behaviour, such as inter-and-intra-generational relations, codes of conducts for holders of political offices, and the difference between gift-giving and corruption. It defines boundaries among people, as in the case of gender roles or relations between the poor and the rich. As a means of communication, it enables understanding, and when a foreign language is imposed, it serves to consolidate domination. It is the basis of identity, and ultimately of development.

At this juncture, it is imperative to acknowledge that culture is classified into two aspects, namely, material and non-material. Material culture embraces tangible things which people have made and from where great deal of things can be learnt. They include the material outfit of man (dress), buildings, crafts, implements and weapons. The non-material culture on the other hand, can be described as a system of customs, as well as, man's spiritual achievements. They include language (which is the most important and unifying element of cultural ideas), beliefs, habits, norms, morals, philosophy, religion and social organization. All of these can be collated and transmitted as the cultural and educational heritage of a people (Shotunde & Irabor, 2017).

One of the important indices of culture is language. Interestingly, it remains the most potent medium by which education can be transmitted. One's indigenous language which ultimately may be one's first language should therefore, assist in

the thinking processes. In teaching and learning processes also, studies have revealed that the pupils taught with the use of local languages perform far better than the controlled group where a foreign language was used as a medium of instruction (Fafunwa, 1975:217; Alabi, 1976:67; and Babawale, 2012:3).

Moral Development through Education and Culture

The concept of development has many definitions and meanings. However, the fundamental contrasting term for development is envelopment. Envelopment is the putting of something, for example, a letter in an envelope. Etymologists trace the origin of development to the French word: *developper*. The latter means to bring out from the envelop something that was enveloped. It is to *de, un*; and *velopper*, wrap; hence, to develop literary means to un-wrap. Thus, development is the un-wrapping, un-folding, *un-velopping*, un-veiling, out-growth, or growing out of what was enveloped, hidden or latent. Development is unwrapping of potentials. It is a conscious, articulate and beneficial unveiling of the inner potentials of the resources of a given society (Iroegbu, 2005:290). Thus, Burkey (1993:35), defines development as a process by which an individual builds up self-respect, and becomes more self-confident, self-reliant, cooperative and tolerant to others through becoming aware of his/her shortcomings as well as his/her potential for positive change.

On the other hand, the word 'moral' etymologically comes from a Latin root {*mos, moris*} and means the code or customs of a people, the social glue that defines how individuals should live together (Nicolar, 2001:7). Morality is a word, which traces its roots from- '*mos*' (custom) and '*mores*' (practice), both of Latin derivative - to such other connotations as 'custom' and 'practice.' It is a regular and accepted mode of behaviour. More often than not, moral codes are enshrined in or rather, perpetrated by means of norms, or rules, or commandments (moral codes/ customary laws) to which every member of a given society is expected to observe. In this wise, morality frames the value systems and behavioural patterns of conduct specific to a group of people who identify themselves as citizens of a said society. Put differently, it means conventionally approved rules of behaviour in the society. Morality affirms the consciousness of the predicaments of man, his or her capacity to choose to act in a number of ways which may be right or wrong.

According to Nicolar (2001:30), morality is a complex system of general principles and particular judgments based on cultural, religious, and philosophical concepts and beliefs. Echekwube (2005:32) writes: Morality bases its judgment

on the rational nature of man and his final destiny which make his actions morally right or wrong. From this, morality which implies, judgment of right or wrong actions, is only applicable to rational beings. Rosaline (1994:26), describes morality as the principles that govern our behaviour. Without these principles in place, societies cannot survive for long. Vital (2007:51), states that morality is the quality of being in accord with standards of right or good conduct or a system of ideas that fall into those same categories. Morality is a system of behaviour in regards to standards of right or wrong behaviour. Morality is defined within the context of: (1) moral standards, with regard to behaviour; (2) moral responsibility, referring to our conscience; and (3) a moral identity, or one who is capable of right or wrong action.

The most significant aspect of the development of any nation is undoubtedly the moral development of the citizens of such a nation. A nation that misses out on this is obviously heading for a disaster. Moral education is undoubtedly lacking in most of our primary and secondary schools, and even tertiary institutions in Africa. There is also, no gainsaying that we live in an era that is plagued and bedeviled by all sorts of crises and social ills especially amongst students of higher institutions. The vices dehumanize and degrade the human person. The vices include: rape, drug abuse, cultism, prostitution, examination malpractice and so on. We live in a seducing society with the media and the internet advertising pornography at every interval. There is a common showcase of pornographic picture at every opportunity by means of the mass media. A very serious concern now is: how to handle these menaces that have befallen educational institutions and the society at large?

To tackle the problems that emanate from the above, a lot needs to be done. The concept of morality must be properly understood as a form of arrangement between individuals in social situations which gives adequate considerations to the interests of others. In other words, rational or reason-based morality must be preferred to religious or traditional morality. The reason-based ethics make students see the whole point to morality, why they must be moral and how they can develop and progress morally. Such a morality while admitting of sanctions plays down the role of fear and threats in obtaining compliance. It will also appeal to the reason and enable them adjust their behaviour for the better. To enhance this type of reason-based moral education, school managers must thoroughly understand the philosophical foundation of the culture on the ground. By so doing, one will have a broader moral outlook on life.

According to Omoregbe (201:84), there are three major levels of moral development. They are the level of instinct, the level of custom, and the level of conscience. The level of instinct pertain to the human instinctive impulses. Here, one tends to consider as right or wrong what one has an instinctive inclination to do, and as wrong what one has an instinctive aversion for. The level of custom signifies that whatever is approved by custom is considered morally right and whatever custom condemns is considered as morally wrong. The level of conscience is that stage where one no longer relies on social custom, but thinks and reflects for oneself on moral issues. This level is the highest level of moral development and so must be sought after by every well-meaning individual for societal development to take place.

Through education and culture, moral development could be achieved. In other words, culture and education are veritable instruments for the transformation required by any nascent nation aspiring to attain the lofty height of sustainable development. The simple reason for this is the fact that culture as a collective consciousness of a people, from which their history and philosophy are authentically derived has the potential of creating a harmonious co-existence (Momoh, 2000:8; Okoro, 2013: 28). This can only be made possible when a profound system of education is drawn from the culture of a people.

Accordingly, culture is what gives order and meaning to education. Put differently, meaningful education systems for national development and transformation must take deep inspiration from the internal or home culture. Invariably, this makes culture to become the hallmark for distinctive national growth. Similarly, the philosophy of education for national orientation and transformation must of necessity derive from culture. It goes without the saying that once a synergy is achieved between culture and education, the training of the intelligential (the human resource) with a common orientation and the passion for national and environmental transformation is made possible (Okoro, 2015).

In most Nigerian private schools especially and even in some homes, it is an anathema to speak vernacular. The fallacious assumption is that any child that can speak the English language is automatically smart and intelligent. The fact is that there is no correlation between the ability to speak and one's intelligence. In essence, as important as language is, as a tool of culture, no language has been made the language of technology from the history of humanity. It is people who invest in them to make them so. So, as Africans, we need to put the necessary resources into developing our indigenous culture through education, thereby

granting us a wider audience in world politics. However, one way to achieve this, in respect to our indigenous education is through proverbs. Therefore, regardless of one's educational attainment, one's mother tongue plays a pivotal role in our perception of the world. For instance, most of the religious faiths where vernacular is used have a deeper affinity with the messages preached because it appears that they are been reprimanded morally. In fact, when a preacher employs the proverbs of such indigenous languages, the message becomes more comprehensible. In all, there should be a synergy between culture and education and there should be no alienation of one from another.

Proverbs: Its Role in Ancient African Societies with Examples

A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form...handed down from generation to generation" (Irabor, 2013:5). This implies that proverbs are often used metaphorically and it is in understanding their metaphorical nature that a person can unravel their meaning. Proverbs have their origins from oral tradition, they are generally worded in such a way as to be remembered easily and they are passed from one generation to another. Proverbs function as "folk wisdom", because they contain advice or state a generally accepted truth.

Put differently, proverbs are parts of every language and culture. Proverbs have been used in the dissemination of knowledge, wisdom and truths about life since time immemorial. They have been considered an important part in the fostering of children, as they signal moral values and exhort common behaviour. Proverbs belong to the traditional verbal folklore genres and the wisdom of proverbs has been guidance for people worldwide in their social interaction throughout the ages. Proverbs are concise, easy to remember and useful in every situation in life due to their content of everyday experiences. Proverbs are complex reflections of how a people perceive the role of education and pedagogy. Proverbs can be used to provide a link between education and culture.

In the traditional and modern African societies, proverbs are generally accepted as quintessential in communicating ideas and ethics among both the old and the young. An authentic African does not conclude his speech without encapsulating his thoughts in a suitable and appropriate proverb. Hussein (2005:18) underscores the point made above when he observes that Africa is a continent known for its rich oral arts and that proverbs are the most widely used in the continent's long tradition of oral arts. Proverbs may not play any aesthetic role, although they

serve as the acceptable medium of transmitting knowledge and convention from generation to generation (Hussein, 2005: 19). On this note, Ajayi and Raji (1995:28) poignantly observe that among *Yorùbá's*, proverbs have a didactic function, especially, for the younger generation.

African elders use proverbs when they talk. But when proverbs are employed either for pedagogic reasons or for predictive purposes they are often terse but explanatory (Akinjide, 2014:33). For Fayemi (2010) “proverbs are essential oral traditions that Africans use in storing and retrieving any aspect of their cultural worldview... proverbs picture reality”. On proverbs, Chiku & Rick (2004) contend that:

African cultural heritage (proverbs, taboos, dirge etc.), passed on from generation to generation, has been a source of guidance for African communities in times of peace, uncertainty, birth, life and death”. Proverb is a basis of their self-identity, self-respect and self-confidence. It has enabled them to live in harmony with their physical, social and spiritual environments. This heritage provides a foundation for leadership, guidance, problem-solving, decision-making, self-reliance and development.

Scholars such as Mokitimi (1997), McKenna (1974), Penfield and Duru (1988), Kuzwayo (1998) and Prahlad (1999) have made enormous contribution to the debate on proverbs. Mokitimi (1997), remarks that many proverbs act as catalysts of knowledge, wisdom, philosophy, ethics and morals. Proverbs, he posits, are used mostly orally. Penfield and Duru (1988), call this the “social mode of communication” in oral societies and describe proverbs as “not only reflective of life but part of life”. Kuzwayo (1998), points out that the Nguni proverb “*mothokemothokamothoyomongwe*” (meaning “A person is a person through others”) is a description of the African way of life, also referred to as *Ubuntu* (meaning “humanness” if directly translated). Kuzwayo (1998) thereafter, points out that the study of proverbs can be seen as old-fashioned and retrograded, but he remains convinced that “many problems are caused by lack of cultural pride and values.

According to the Wolfgang Mieder (2004), proverbs have been used and should be used in teaching as didactic tools because of their content of educational wisdom. Durbin Rowland (1926), has identified some arguments for the use of

proverbs in language teaching. Rowland says that proverbs “stick in the mind”, “build up vocabulary”, “illustrate admirably the phraseology and idiomatic expressions of the foreign tongue”, “contribute gradually to a surer feeling for the foreign tongue” and proverbs “consume very little time”. Proverbs are not only melodic and witty, possessed with rhythm and imagery; they also reflect “patterns of thought”. Proverbs also change with time and culture. Some old proverbs are not in use any longer because they reflect a culture that no longer exists.

An interesting aspect of proverb is the question; ‘how do proverbs perform these cultural functions?’ It is an exploration on the functionality of proverb. The response to this question will be contextualized borrowing some proverbs as illustrations.

Consider for instance these *Yorùbá* proverbs: *Ikoko ti yio je ata, idi re a gbona*. Which translates: “success is attained through persistent efforts.” This proverb extols the virtue of perseverance. Such is the case with another proverb; *Akii n kanju la obe gbigbona* which translates literally “one does not sip hot soup in a hurry.” These proverbs extol the virtue of patience, and prudence in choice-making. They say that choice-making needs to involve some elements of prudence to avoid making irrational or arbitrary choice.

There are some fundamental issues at stake here. First, there is the question of decision-making which rests on prudence. Second, there is the issue of rationality in decision -making, and third there is also the cognitive process that underpins the decision making. The issues are logically related in the sense that one lends support to the other. The elder who says one does not sip hot soup in a hurry knows that people do throw caution to the wind while making decision in life. Sometimes the notion of prudence demands that a person is sure of the choice he wants to make. However, this is only possible where a person acts with a reasonable sense in selecting options where they are available. In this regard, the exercise involves a judicious selection of these options (Akinjide, 2014:34). Proverbs also constitute a repertoire of African ideological configuration on gender, politics, socio-economics, race, sex, etc.

Consider again an Igbo proverb, “*An okra plant can never be greater than the person who planted it.*” This proverb is philosophical. It is used to teach children respect and obedience to their parents and elders throughout their lives. The tall growth of okra seed is used to indicate the rapid growth of children, who sometimes presume that the value of human equality is found in individual height.

In a child's mind, many okra plants are obviously taller and, therefore, greater than the people who planted them. In this proverb, it is immediately clear to them that *being tall, does not mean being greater* (Onah, 2001).

Furthermore, consider an Akan proverb which says: "*All heads look alike, but their contents are different*" and according to an Igbo proverb, "*the mind, or thought is like a bag, each person carries just his*". The truth of these proverbs is deontological and philosophical. It is evident and meaningful when verified from the situation it refers to. So, the negation of the actual situation an African proverb seeks to explore raises the surprising agitations and objections about the philosophical character of African Philosophy that is found in her culture and disseminated through proverbs. In short, it takes philosophical reasoning to show the philosophy and non-philosophy in any given thoughts (Onah, 2001).

Significantly, proverbs are the expression of the character and manners of a nation, their specific way of thinking, seeing and feeling. Proverbs are a complex reflection of how a people perceive the role of education and pedagogy. Proverbs can provide a link between education and culture. In fact, an important benefit of transmitting information via proverbs is that they refer to a core group of virtues and vices reflected in folk ritual and real life situation, like the work-ethics etc. Such virtues operate in productive employment, which according to circumstances can help test a person's moral character. Consequently, they can help decide when a moral issue is adjudged moral or immoral, or amoral. Generally, they can influence the work efficiency and overall morality of a society (Stoian, 1978).

Roles of Proverbs in Education and Language Pedagogy

There are three identifiable forms of education. These are formal education, informal education and non-formal education. Formal education has to do with the type of education received in institutions of learning. This creates a means where the teacher and the learner can interact for the learner to receive education. Informal education deals with receiving education that is not got from formal settings. It could be education from the home, religious bodies and the society at large. Non-formal education on the other hand, deals with a form of education that is though planned, but not done in institutions as a formal programme. It is carried out through workshops and skill acquisition processes and it is organized. Both forms of education contribute in moulding a child's behaviour and attitudes.

The following aphorisms aptly describe the importance and the need for education.

“No one is born learned”

“No matter how fertile the earth, without a worker, it remains barren” and;

“The most beautiful flower, if not cared for, becomes wild.”

The point here is that, “regardless of their social status, people need education” (Gheorghe, 1986). Thus, education is the best way to teach traditions, customs, and culture. The acceptable consensus that morality is subsumed in the definitions of education is a clear indication that morality and education are logically connected. Thus, this paper explicates the interrelatedness between morality (moral development) and education and how both can be harnessed harmoniously for the survival of the human society in terms of moral standard.

On the other hand, language is a great weapon with which mankind can carry out socio-political, economic and technological exploits. It is the distinguishing mark of man from other mammals and it possesses an empowering potential such that any nation, culture or tribe wishing to be relevant cannot do without (Oduh, 2004:99). Language is the soul of culture, the heart of the environment and the spirit that motivates and directs a people’s life. The power of language is better expressed in the words of Max Muller: “Every man, even the finest thinker is a slave to language, particularly, the language in which he has been brought up” (Njoku, 2000:108). Corroborating this, Ki-Zerbo (1990), holds that Language is like a bank or museum in which, over the centuries, each ethnic group has deposited all it has built up and accumulated in a way of mental and material tool, memories and resources of imagination. Language is the heart of every culture. It embodies culture and values of a people. Language mirrors the culture in which it is used either through spoken word or written word. A people who has lost their language has lost their culture and identity. The point here is that culture, education, proverbs are disseminated through language.

Inclusion of proverbs in formal education will not only help to diversify educational process and make it brighter and interesting, it will also help to solve a number of very important educational problems. Proverbs in the classroom can improve students’ learning experiences, their language skills, and their understanding of themselves and the world. This happens because:

First: proverbs provide an opportunity for students to be knowledgeable experts as well as learners.

Second: proverbs provide an opportunity for students to learn about each other and their shared values.

- Third: proverbs provide an opportunity for students to gain insight as they discuss their experiences and work out their understanding of proverb meanings.
- Fourth: proverbs provide an opportunity for students to use their home culture as a stepping stone into school culture.
- Fifth: proverbs provide an opportunity to improve thinking and writing as students both provide and receive information.

Proverb as a Tool for Moral Development in Contemporary Africa

The education of an African child like every other child all over the world usually begins at home. It begins with the interaction between the child and the environment. In this regard, education is not confined to the experience a child acquires in school. For instance, parents sometimes use proverbs, taboos and folklore to educate their children at home. These cultural resources are used to draw attention to the consequence(s) of bad conduct. African parents do not spare their children when they are involved in misconducts. There are lessons to be learnt from folklore, proverbs and taboos: especially when elders often organize moonlight stories where folktales are told and interpreted by young children. Marah (2006:18) captures this form of education when he says that “stories are used not only to amuse and express feelings, but to also teach ideal form of behavior and morality.” In schools, a teacher may use proverbs to caution his/her pupils/students against bad conduct. When the need arises, a teacher may use the proverb such as: “*Bi a baso 'ko sarin oja ara ile eni nii ba*”, which translates “If you throw a stone to the market place you may hit your own household.” This proverb performs some cautionary roles by: (a) warning students of the consequences of wrongdoing, and (b) deterring them from engaging in social vices.

The moral values embodied in this proverb are expected to moderate the students' conduct and behaviour. Thus, proverbs are expected to provide a theoretical framework for championing (i) the virtue of patience, (ii) the notion of prudence in anything a person does, and (iii) the use of rational enquiry in conjunction with prudence where one is faced with choice-making. However, the epistemological import of proverbs lies in the predominant stress that is laid on the fact that: (i) behind every perceptual experience is the problems of perception, (ii) the awareness of these problems may help to effect a cautionary role on how we perceive and interpret human behaviour and (iii) facial expressions are much more complex, sometimes incongruent with intentional dispositions.

Challenges of African Proverbs in 21st Century African Community

Discussions of African values are predicated on the acceptance of African culture; except that there may be no consensus among scholars on what may count as African culture (Makinde, 2007: 232). Primarily, this is due to the varied beliefs and traditions that exist among African people. However, this may not count as a major reason to deny African culture. Hay (1958:5) tends to reinforce this belief with the analysis of the Japanese culture vis-à-vis the Western culture. According to him, 'western culture' is not the culture of any specific country or people; rather it is only an imaginary construct. For him "there is actually no such thing as 'the west' and so there cannot be any reality in the idea of 'western culture'." This view is of course, held in relation to an attack on ethnocentricity which rests on the assumption that America and Europe represent universalized models of civilization and culture. The implication is that the reference to African culture too rests on the assumption that we are dealing with a socially constructed term. Thus, the term 'African culture' may, therefore, be considered a 'construct' designed for the purpose of marking out 'African culture' from the rest of the world. In this respect, the particularity of certain cultural elements among African people does not invalidate the present issue already discussed.

Be that as it may, from the discussion so far, it is very obvious that although proverbs are significant, it faces a lot of challenges. This cannot be wished away. Several factors militate against the role(s) that proverb can play in the twenty-first Century African Community.

First, the impact of globalization on culture is immense. Though culture is not static but dynamic, however, the impact of globalization is fast eroding some cultures which are not able to withstand it. Africans seem to be the worst victims. It is so bad that cultural assimilation from other parts of the world supersedes those that are indigenously African.

Second, African indigenous languages are fast being replaced by the languages of the colonial masters. It is very easy to find Africans who cannot speak their own indigenous tongues. In this case, the full force of meaning implied in proverbs is lost if converted to their indigenous interpretation. In the face of these two crucial challenges, what is to be done?

Recommendations

First: Need for increased interest in Indigenous Languages. Policy makers in the education sector must take cognizance of the role of the indigenous language

in the dissemination of thoughts and ideas. In fact, teaching and learning in the indigenous language must be given priority over the foreign language.

Second: Need for the Inclusion of Study of African History: Past, Present and Future. Most of African school curriculum is mostly built on Western history and culture at the expense of African cultural heritage. This has led to the forgetfulness of our culture and hinders African development.

Third: Need for Funding and Sponsorship of Indigenous Researches. Funding of native linguistic researches and indigenous knowledge should be encouraged. Such move will necessarily fill the gulf between Western and indigenous knowledge and practices.

Fourth: Need for Moral Education in School Curriculum. Moral education should be included in school curriculum. This will enable students to acquire those virtues or moral habits that will help them individually to live good lives and at the same time become productive contributing members of the society at large.

Fifth: Need for Leadership and Political Will. Leaders must exhibit the political will for the marriage between culture and education to grow. It also entails the continuity in government policies, in respect of educational development; even if there is discontinuity in head of government.

Conclusion

What we have done in this work is a primary response to Toyin Falola's (2007:31) clarion call that, "The humanities must search for Africa in Africa and not elsewhere." It is useful and valuable for the African scholars to explore and exploit valuable oral traditions such as proverbs to revisit the past and its cultures. This is because past cultures have shaped present cultures, which is why we have, at the same time, elements of the primordial and civic competing within the same space. The *Yorùbá* proverbs may not have succinctly captured the historical experiences of pre-colonial and post-colonial societies but it cannot be neglected as irrelevant. Given the spate of the globalization of culture and the problem of lack of comprehension of their indigenous languages of Africans in contemporary times, the input of proverbs seems to have depreciated heavily.

Most importantly, this study has inquisitively explored discussion on moral development. It stresses the fact that the ethical or moral assembly should

deliberate on the kinds of values that are acceptable to the whole world, using religion in this regard to propagate morality may look reasonable but it must be noted that there is little homogeneity in terms of universal religion and universal morality. The home, the larger society and the school should not renounce their responsibility as regards the moral development of the child. This becomes imperative as asserted by the Yoruba proverb which says, 'When the home is unhappy the town appears to be like forest.' All the agencies of education first have to complement each other in making morality an achievable phenomenon in every society of the world and Nigeria in particular. As a matter of fact, the paper has established that education, proverbs, and culture function as instruments that are used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, thereby making morality an inescapable phenomenon in the societies of the world.

In sum, the tinkering of the traditional Africans on the subject of moral development, is worthy of further academic attention. This research implores the need to desist from the outlook that primitive Africans lacked the intellectual capacity for critical thought. African culture has the capacity to fill in the ethical and spiritual gap left open by the craze for materialistic development.

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