

EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSTULATES OF AFRICAN INDEGINOUS EDUCATION INHERENT IN THE KENYAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the concept of knowledge in African indigenous education. Traditional African education has specific epistemological postulates that are relevant to the Kenyan education system. The study also explores some of the shortcomings of African indigenous education.

Key Words: *Epistemology African Indigenous Education, Perennialism, Sages, Holisticism, Communalism.*

Introduction

The epistemology of African indigenous education has a significance influence on the Kenyan education system in terms of the aims of education, method of instruction, the content of the curriculum and formulation of educational policies. Epistemology is a branch of technical philosophy that deals with the study of nature, justification and rationality of knowledge. Etimologically, epistemology is derived from Greek words “episteme” which means knowledge and “logos” meaning to study (Landauer & Rowlands, 2001). The main endeavor of epistemology is to answer questions on how we come to know. Also, it encompasses

interrogating the nature and constructing of concepts, the validity of senses, thought of ideas, emotions and all things mental. It is imperative to note that epistemology concern itself with how human mind relates to reality and whether these relationship is valid or invalid.

Epistemology is an essential philosophical entity since it enables an individual to develop proper methods of evaluating facts so as to determine truth. Morrison (2016) contends that without epistemology, we could not think thus making it hard for human beings to obtain knowledge of the world around them. In spite of that, studies by Siteo (2006) portends that epistemological beliefs play a critical role in text interpretations, reading of comprehension, conceptual change and problem solving.

African indigenous education was a lifetime method of learning whereby an individual progressed through predetermined stages of life from childhood to old-age. According to Mushi (2009), African indigenous education is the process of Passing inherited knowledge, values, cultural norms and traditions among the tribal members from one generation to another. Generally, African indigenous education can be referred to a form of learning in which knowledge, skills and attitudes of communities in African traditional societies were passed from senior members of the community to children through practical activities and oral narrations.

Study Objectives

- (i) To analyze epistemological postulates inherent in African indigenous education.
- (ii) To elucidate the utility of African indigenous education on the Kenyan education system.

Methodology: Critical method

Ominde (2016) notes that critical method is a method of philosophical inquiry which puts reflective thinking at a center stage in interrogating a premise. It is a process of looking for reasons for believing one thing instead of the other without taking the other for granted.

Critical method according to Njoroge and Bannaars (1986) has been associated by Socrates; an ancient Greek philosopher who taught through Socratic discussions on issues that were affecting Athenian youths in the streets of Athens. Its major guiding principle is skepticism which is a state of intellectual doubt of premises that support a conclusion and even the conclusion itself. It involves being on the look-out by questioning of claims and assumptions hence encouraging honesty of thoughts and seeks to protect one from fanaticism and hypocrisy. The main aim of critical method is to liberate one from narrow- mindedness and points towards positive evaluation based on clear and distinct ideas. Further, Ominde (2016) observes that critical method is apposite evaluation of ideas so as to arrive at a valid conclusion about facts.

Analysis of characteristics of African indigenous education.

According to Mushi (2009), African indigenous education was community based and centered on solving immediate problems that affected the community. The elders engaged the youths in instructional activities that were directed towards the community and social life so as to effectively fit in the society. For instance, boys and girls were taught some of the edible and none edible birds and how to control those birds that were harmful to the community like those that eat cereals in the fields. In the same way, children were taught how to cultivate, constructing houses and marriage rites. Besides, the parents were instrumental in teaching of gender roles whereby the mothers could teach the girl child on how to take care of a home and to cook. On the other hand, fathers could teach the boys on how to graze animals in the fields and protection

of the family. Education is an important tool that is essential in empowering members of the community on how to solve various problems that confronts them. For instance, the Kenyan education system prepares youths in various professions that are critical in solving pertinent issues in the society like diseases, ignorance, and corruption.

Traditional African indigenous education was illiterate. The instructional method used in the society was oral and Knowledge was stored in the heads of the elders. However, Mosima (2016) reiterates that the Sages were carefully selected from the clan or community and their principal task was to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes to the youths. As noted by Oruka (1990) African societies advocated for philosophical sagacity that was premised on the fact that actual sources and agents of values and knowledge in a given society are in Sages and not the entire community.

According to Oruka (1990) Sages were individuals whose Knowledge on matters concerning the society and wisdom were seen to be transcending that of the community due to their supposedly inborn capabilities of critical reflection. Additionally, Sages were held with the highest esteem on matters concerning knowledge since they were elected rational and critical thinkers whose opinion and recommendations are tacit and commonly accepted and respected by all members of the community. Besides, sages, other members of the society actively participated in matters of educating the younger generation for posterity. Elders in the community were in charge of instilling moral values in the children and disciplining of errant children was a community affair thus justifying a premise that, knowledge acquisition in traditional African society was a collective endeavor since all adult members of the society were involved in one way or another in imparting knowledge to the youths.

Mushi (2009) portend that African indigenous education was a lifelong process that was not separated from societal culture and activities. This implies that the process of learning had no specific time of life or day when it took place. Instead, an individual was supposed to learn in his entire life span from birth to death.

The aim of African indigenous education was to impart knowledge, skills and values that were relevant to the socio-economic activities of the community. The youths were taught skills that were for not only immediate but also long term activities. For instance, Mushi (2009) found out that in the Bena society, members of the community who were earmarked for various roles like teachers, guards and larders were trained in the chiefs (ntemi) residence. However, all students were taught compulsory subjects like history, law, agriculture, religion and animal husbandry. Upon completion of the training, the trainees were deployed to various sectors as teachers, guards and warriors.

Testing and awarding of certificates was nonexistent in indigenous African education. There were no proper examination and all learners graduated ceremoniously at the end of a specific training (Sifuna, 2008). However, for one to be considered as a graduate, it was required that one practices what was learnt during the training period. The members of the community arranged for the rites of passage ceremonies to mark the completion of the training and assumption of new responsibilities in the community by the youths.

A study by Mushi (2009) indicates that practical learning was the main method of instruction in traditional African indigenous education. Young adults in various African societies learned by apprenticeship. The youths were supposed to watch and participate in executing various skills that were learnt. Skills like cooking, carving, clay working, home management and masonry were

insisted among young adults so as to become useful members of the society. Also, it is imperative to note that most of these skills were open to all young men and women since they consisted of basic skills and attitudes that empowered an individual to live and function effectively in their community. Learning by doing instructional strategy was highly regarded in most of the African tribes. For instance, the best way to learn sewing was to sew.

Traditional African society advocated for communalism. This is evident by the fact that learners were taught attitudes that nurtured a common spirit of working together and sharing. Here, the means of production were owned communally. Also, all mature members of the community fully participated in teaching moral values since a child was considered to be a property of the community. For example, upbringing of the children was the role of the whole community. If for example a child misbehaves in the absence of the parents, any adult member of the community was responsible to correct the child on the spot.

The curriculum of African indigenous education regarded holism with the highest esteem. Here, the learner was required to acquire multiple skills so as to fit favorably in the society. The curriculum did not give room for learners to specialize in any given field. When a child learned a particular skill, say fishing, he or she was obliged to learn all other skills related to fishing like food preservation and making of canoes. Besides that, the learner was required to learn basic principles that were essential for the wellbeing of the individual, the clan and the whole society.

Perennialism is another epistemological worldview exhibited by African indigenous education. According to Maftoon and Shakouri (2013), perennialism is a philosophical stance that advocated for a return to absolute and time-bound ideas of human culture. Perennialism

champions for a paradigm shift to ideals that have proven their validity and usefulness by having withstood the test of time. This philosophy ensured that indigenous African communities use their education as a necessary tool for the preservation of the status quo of the tribe. Based on this idea, African indigenous education was conservative in nature and disregarded progressive influence on the minds of the youths in the society. The education system viewed learners as passive recipients whose input was not welcomed on educational matters. Mushi (2009) further observed that any form of criticism or questioning the knowledge that was taught was rebuke elders and the sages. Also, questions seeking a clarification on learning aspects not clearly understood were highly discouraged.

Relevance of African indigenous education to the Kenyan education system

Traditional indigenous education was a basis for education for self-reliance. For instance, the aspect of learning by doing encouraged the acquisition of various skills and attitudes that enabled members of the community to participate in various socio-economic aspects of the community. In the Kenyan education system, the philosophy of learning by doing has been inculcated into the education curriculum. For example; the learner centered approach of learning encourages teachers to provide learning experiences that enables a student to actively participate in the learning process especially in the teaching of science subjects.

Furthermore, indigenous education prepared the youths for life duties in the community. Likewise, the Kenyan education system is not exceptional. It prepares the students to take up various roles in the society after undertaking specialized training in various vocations so as to solve various problems that are affecting the country.

Principally, African indigenous education advocated for provision of education to all members of the community. Both boys and girls were taught various skills so as to become productive members of the society. The Kenyan education system has borrowed a lot from African indigenous education on matters of providing education to the children. Kenya, being a signatory to Education For All, a global movement that was ratified in Dakar, Senegal during the World education Forum in 2000 has shown commitment to meeting learning needs to all children and youths. The Kenyan government established Free primary education in 2003. Since the inception of the program, many children, most of whom were locked out of the mainstream education system due to lack of school fees have been able to access education. The government uses the exchequers' money to fund the education program (UNESCO, 2015)

A critique of African indigenous education

The curriculum in African indigenous education was confined to a specific society or clan and offered an education that was not relevant beyond the borders of the clan. Besides, the education system was too conservative since the elders did not allow to be challenged through questioning the type of knowledge being offered and any form of rebellion attracted severe punishment. Also, unlike the current Kenyan education curriculum which is progressive, African indigenous education had a specific body of knowledge to be learnt which never changed and only concentrated on the transmission of the culture. It is important to note that indigenous education cannot stand the test of time in the current world that is grappling with rapid changes in technological advancements whereby innovation is the core pillar of an advancement in any education system.

Mushi (2009) was critical of the nature of storage of knowledge in African indigenous education. For instance, Knowledge was stored in the memories of the elders. Since it was not documented, it was impractical to measure its measure and to compare with other sources of knowledge from other communities thus making to lack the aspect of universality which is pertinent in enhancing the credibility and validity of any form of education.

Conclusion

A critical analysis of African indigenous education shows that there exist epistemological premises in the traditional education with reference to the nature and content of the curriculum, method of instruction, the aim of education and the manner in which the process of teaching and learning was organized by the elders. Major principles of African indigenous education include communalism, perennialism, holism and provision of curriculum that was practical in nature. The Kenyan education system has borrowed a lot from the African indigenous education through provision of inclusive education, integrating co-curricular activities in the education system for holistic development of the child and teaching of subjects like religious education as a sign of commitment to perennialism.

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