

## Part II:

# Educational Psychology can wear African Clothes



## 4. The original Traditional African Education

Just like in every other human society, indigenous education existed along with the history of the African people. The methods and goals of education may differ from place to place, from nation to nation, from society to society, however it is a natural and basic need for every human society to seek and apply functional ways of educating its youth according to the needs of the society. Here, we shall take the case of Nigeria as example. Before the advent of the Islamic (Arabic) and the Christian (Western) educations in Nigeria, and their formal establishments in the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively, the African people and traditions had their own spectacular ways of bringing up their young ones.

In the history of humanity, different peoples have different conceptions and descriptions of an educated person. The old Greek idea of an educated man was one who was mentally and physically well-balanced. In old Rome, the emphasis was on the oratorical and military competence. In the middle ages, in England for example, the Knights, Lords and Priests were considered the educated elite of the society; while the French society spoke of the scholar, and the German society emphasized the patriot. In the same way, the brave warrior, the good leader, the man of noble character, or the man of special skills was considered well-educated in the original African societies.

### *4.1 Methods of the original Traditional African Education*

In the Old African society, the purpose of education was clear; functionalism was the main guiding principle. And this necessitated the methods that were used in education. It was necessary to use the means that would captivate the interest of the young and thereby arousing their enthusiasm in learning. The society educated its young according to its needs. As a result of this functionalism, A.B. Fafunwa<sup>1</sup> described the African traditional education as a means to an end and not an end in itself. Education was generally for an immediate induction into society and a preparation for adulthood. In particular, African education emphasized social responsibility, job orientation, political participation and spiritual, religious and moral values. And the methods and systems used in bringing up the young ones were geared towards these directions. The major methods of educating the young people which were applicable and functional in the traditional societies were fundamentally the attitude of *general participation*, the *principle of learning by doing* and the method of *story-telling (or story-singing)*.

---

<sup>1</sup> FAFUNWA, A.B., *History of Education in Nigeria*, Ibadan (1974) 2004.

#### 4.1.1 The principle of general Participation and Learning by Doing

The young people are perfectly integrated into the lives and activities of the community, which are ordered according to grades to facilitate active participation in the society. The young learn automatically from the partners in their group; be it working, dancing and singing, hunting, playing, etc. The method of general participation is closely associated with the principle of learning by doing; and their practical applications and functionality will be more understood in conjunction with the other methods of upbringing, as well as in our discussions about the goals and objectives of the traditional African education.

*Children learnt by doing*, that is to say, “children and adolescents are engaged in *participatory education* through ceremonies, rituals, initiation, recitation and demonstration. They are involved in practical farming, fishing, weaving, cooking, carving, knitting, and so on. Recreational subjects include wrestling, dancing, drumming, acrobatic display and racing, while intellectual training included the study of local history, legends, the environment (local geography, plants and animals), poetry, reasoning, riddles, proverbs, story-telling, and story-relays.”<sup>2</sup> Children are actively integrated when all these activities are taking place. They are allowed to observe, ask questions, practice and get involved. They learn by taking part; they learn by doing.

Upbringing and Education in old Africa was an integrated experience. It combined physical training with character-building and manual activity with intellectual training. At the end of each stage, demarcated either by age level or years of exposure, the child was given a practical test relevant to his experience and level of development and in terms of the job to be done. This was a continuous assessment which eventually culminated in a passing out ceremony, or initiation into adulthood. Every member of the society participates; and the young ones pass out with accredited profile according to one’s talent. After this stage, they keep on participating in the group, but now as educator-members with the responsibility of schooling the younger ones. Life was an act of total participation: either schooling others or being schooled by others, for the upkeep of self and society. Unemployment, if it existed at all, was minimal and very few young men roamed the villages and towns. Furthermore, outside the general level of participation in education for all in the society, the secret cults served as institutions of higher or further education for the stronger and the fit elect. “It was at this level that the secrets of power (real or imaginary), profound native philosophy, science and religion were mastered.”<sup>3</sup> It was a great sign of recognition for a child to be accepted in any of the secret groups – which are in effect meant for people of mature minds and courage. One feels in such a group honoured and grown up, and consequently embraces

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 2.

the challenges of tougher learning. The young member must not expect a preferential or milder treatment; instead he must prove his learning-fast ability and courage in order to justify his membership. If he lacks the knowledge of anything, he learns it by doing what others are doing and participating actively in the life of the group. The principles of participation and learning by doing can be better concretized and more clearly understood in the other following methods:

#### 4.1.2 *The method of Story-telling (Akuko)*

Story-telling or Story-singing is a major educational method in the African traditional set-up. The human being is a story-telling animal – *Homo Narrans*. It is more so a serious means of sending across a message in a most interesting and palatable form. This method still plays a very important role in the transfer of values, knowledge and information in modern Africa. I can still remember my childhood experience in the 1960-70s, how we used to gather in front of houses in the moonlight after dinner to hear stories from our elderly ones, and also to tell the ones we already knew. We learnt of new ideas, new social and moral values, and also learnt new styles of dancing, singing and humor. Stories in different forms and styles were rendered and sometimes song. And they were for the young ones sources of delight and educative information. As I wrote elsewhere, “In the absence of written records, storytelling is one of the functional aspects of oral tradition, which, in addition to its use as homiletic embellishment and fluency in oratory, is mostly used in the upbringing of children in the thoughts, wisdom, philosophy and worldview (*Weltanschauung*) of the people.”<sup>4</sup> Among the many uses one can make of stories, two major designates are most prominent as can be seen in the Igbo-African life and culture: Story as *Akuko Ala* (story about local events and happenings), and Story as *Akuko Ifo* (folklore).

*Akuko ala* fosters the continuity of traditional events and cultural heritage. *Akuko ala* is also seen as the forum for family or friendly lively (but unthematic and unsystematic) discussions over day-to-day happenings and the sharing of experiences. *Akuko-ala* tells of the human community in its confrontation with its environment and its adventures of the human neighbours, highlighting all the time the qualities of courage, endurance, heroic self-sacrifice and exceptional moral excellence of those whose actions gave shape and solidity to man and the community. *Akuko-ala* goes beyond tales of exemplary courage meant to inspire people in the present through an appeal to hero-worship; it, more significantly, erects communal icons, which are the permanent benchmarks in the collective imagination of the community<sup>5</sup> as well as in family forum. *Akuko-ala* in this

<sup>4</sup> NDUKAIHE, V.E., *Achievement as Value in the Igbo/African Identity: The Ethics*, Berlin, LIT, 2006, 226.

<sup>5</sup> OBIECHINA, E., *Nchetaka: The Story, Memory and Continuity of Igbo Culture*, Owerri, Ahiajoku Lecture Series, 1994, 18.

sense has very close relationship with folklore. E. Obiechina clarified that in addition to *Akuko-ala* applying to the stories that explain the mysteries of life and death, of the visible and invisible world, of gods, spirits and ancestors, of the origins of things, their relationships and underlying unities, it describes the genesis of human institutions, underwrites essential beliefs and philosophical ideas and validates social codes and approved modes of action. On this level, it encompasses what in Western categories are called myths and legends.

*Akuko Ifo*, on the other hand, is made up mainly of tales about human beings, personified animals and animated trees, nature and spirits. These constitute the largest corpus of the traditional oral stories and are important for their use in introducing and educating the child into the culture of its people, into the ethical principles and moral values of the society, and into the structure of feeling of the group, in addition to providing recreation and entertainment. Most often, names of animals are used to construct and build up these stories. But as Theophilus Okere remarked, “none of these stories of animals is of animals. A lot of the zoological details are really just good anthropology. Animals are being used to describe, to criticize and to comment on the human condition. Of course at the level of description this is good entertainment. But there is more than entertainment and there is more than anthropology.”<sup>6</sup> What is more is that stories also act as the bearer and transmitter of the socio-cultural and moral values of the people. And the child learns these values by hearing those stories. “Storytelling plays a very important, if not the chief role, in transmitting the social and moral values to children in Igbo homes. The Igbo, like all other African people, take delight in reciting fairy tales, legends and folklore, which teach philosophical truths by the use of animals. Moral lessons are thus rendered in a captivating and vivid way, which attracts children and motivates them to imitate the values promoted in such stories.”<sup>7</sup> Participation of the child in these circles where the stories are told induces imitation of the figures and ideals in the stories, which in turn enhances learning.

This is the very idea being discussed in “Model ethics”. Taking the world religions for example, Christian ethics has the person of Jesus as a model, as well as the many legends of the saints (holy men and women), whose virtues ought to be emulated. So it is with the Islamic Mohammed, the Buddhist’s Buddha, etc. Here the life-story of the so-called model is taken to be ideal and should be learnt and imitated. In this sense, Karl Homann<sup>8</sup> means that the moral relationship between the so-called model and the individual concerned is very active and functional. The virtues found in and propagated by the models are seen and

<sup>6</sup> OKERE, T., “Foreword” in IGWEGBE, I.O.O., *The Meaning of the Beginning*, Enugu: Snaap Press, 2002, iv.

<sup>7</sup> IKEGBUSI, J.P.C., *Christian Parents as Primary Catechists of the Child through Promotion of a Christian Family Culture*, Münster, 1989, 81-2.

<sup>8</sup> HOMANN, K., “Wirtschaftsethik: Die Funktion der Moral in der modernen Wirtschaft” in *Wirtschaftsethik und Theorie der Gesellschaft*, (hrsg. Josef Wieland), Suhrkamp, 1993, 48.

taken by followers as the absolute measure of morals and behaviour. The African Traditional Religion has no founder and as such no human person to be idolized as model. It is a religion that originated from nature; and it is all about the relationship between the humans and their surrounding nature. So the Africans keep observing nature around them and discovering in them such beings that possess those qualities which the human beings cherish as value; they form stories with these beings in order to educate the young on these virtues.

There are different types of stories reflecting different aspects of beings, life and nature. As recorded by Rems Nna Umeasiegbu,<sup>9</sup> there are stories about the tortoise, stories about animals and birds, stories about people, stories about husbands and wives, stories about kings, stories about spinsters, of spirits, and so on. There are also explanatory stories, which are designed to satisfy the curiosity of children, thereby attempting to find answers to questions which children often ask. For example: Why the bat is neither a bird nor an animal; Why the sheep has no horns; How the dog started barking; Why the hawk hovers around a burning bush; Why lizards nod; Why the millipede is blind, etc.

Interesting lessons are often projected with stories about the tortoise. An interesting story of how the tortoise (*Mbe*) desired and succeeded in marrying a princess when he had only one ear of maize is a practical example: Once upon a time, the tortoise desired a wife in the person of a princess. He had neither wealth nor the nobility required for such a venture, but he only relied on his intelligence and capability in manipulating situations. He took an ear of maize and set out on a journey to a distant land where the king had ordered in oath, a replacement of any article destroyed or killed with the very object of destruction. He decided to visit and play guest to different farmers of varied categories. First, he played guest to a poultry farmer and requested to sleep where the cocks were. Before dawn, the cocks had fed on his corn. Therefore he got a cock in return. He went to a fox farmer, played the same game and got a fox. He played the same tricks with a crocodile dealer, and requested for the eggs of the crocodile, which ate the fox, being fully aware that such eggs serve as special delicacy on the eating table of the princess. On reaching the king's palace, he could only be offered to stay with the servants. This was the golden opportunity for him to put the crocodile eggs where the cooks would find them for the princess' breakfast. The tortoise woke up the following morning and announced loudly his missing eggs. Behold, the princess had eaten the eggs. It was traumatic for the king to give out his daughter in such a manner and to such a level of being; but his oath would not be broken. *Mbe* has made it, marrying a princess when he had only an ear of maize.

When the child often heard such stories, he learnt the integrity of the king, who did not want to break his word and promise; and on the other hand he/she was unconsciously being morally fortified towards being a determined human being

---

<sup>9</sup> UMEASIEGBU, R.N., *Words are Sweet: Igbo Stories and Storytelling*, Leiden Brill, 1982.

and towards being courageous and persistent in the pursuit of his/her ambitions. Children were thereby also warned against the dishonesty paraded as tactfulness in this figure – *Mbe*. One must not lie, or invent evil tricks in order to have his way. *Mbe* (Tortoise) has an intelligent but a very negative image in Igbo stories. When someone is nick-named *Mbe*, he is regarded to be a very cunning human being. “There are many folk stories, traditions and fables which teach philosophical truths by the use of animals instead of human characters. It is through these stories, traditions and fables that one comes to understand some of the unspoken thought patterns, beliefs and wisdoms of the people.”<sup>10</sup> All the members of the family or group (old and young) participate and sit together for story-telling. And it is normal that stories are told turn by turn. It is always the responsibility of the elderly persons in the group to analyze the positive and negative significances of every story. Children are thereby asked some questions to ascertain if and what they have learnt from the story. Sometimes the children are required by the next round of story-telling to repeat the stories of the present sitting, just to confirm that they have really learnt. It is always a thing of pride for a child to boast of knowing more stories than others. Now, because children learn and remember songs faster, stories that have very important themes and values are often song.

#### 4.1.3 *The method of Story-singing* (Akuko n’egwu)

Some of the traditional stories command more influence and attract more audience of the children when they are song or put into music. Music is part and parcel of the African life. There are so many aspects of life and experience that are better expressed in music than in any other form of communication. Mbonu Ojike wrote: “Certainly, the African has no great literature besides music. And their music is not written either.”<sup>11</sup> By this statement, Ojike must have meant the ‘Folk Music’, which has been defined by the International Folk Music Council at Sao Paulo in 1954 as “the product of a musical tradition that has evolved through the process of oral transmission.”<sup>12</sup> An examination of different categories of African music demonstrates vividly that African traditional music is orally transmitted and grows out of human experiences. It is also an inter-human phenomenon, which operates as part and parcel of almost all cultural activities. There is always a corresponding music to the different aspects of life, secular or religious. We have Egwu nwa (music connected with child birth); Egwu eji alu nwanji (music associated with marriage); Egwu mgbu (wrestling music); Egwu onwa (moonlight play songs and dances); Egwu mmanwu (masquerade music); Egwu Ozo (music connected with Ozo title ceremonies); Egwu eji akwa ozu

<sup>10</sup> ILOGU, E.C.O., *Christian Ethics in an African Background*, Leiden: Brill, 1974, 42.

<sup>11</sup> OJIKE, M., *My Africa*, NY: John Day Company, 1964, 223.

<sup>12</sup> See KARPELES, M., *An Introduction to English Folk Song*, London, 1973, 3.



(music associated with funeral ceremonies); Egwu ikpe (satirical songs); Egwu oru (music used at communal work); Egwu agha (war songs).

As regards the effect of such music when it is played or sung, Chinua Achebe (whose *Things Fall Apart* – translated into more than twenty world languages – ex-rays the traditional life of the African before its colonial corruption) wrote: “In those days Okudo was still alive. Okudo sang a war song in a way that no other man could. He was not a fighter, but his voice turned every man into a lion”<sup>13</sup>. The child learns to be motivated into action by hearing such music. Ifionu on another note observed that in the Igbo traditional society, “music performs other social functions besides pure entertainment and aesthetic enjoyment. *Egwu onwa* (moonlight plays and dances), *Mgba* (wrestling competitions) and *iti mmanwu* (masquerade displays) are probably the most universal, traditional, recreational, and entertaining activities in Igboland which bring people together; not only people from the same community but also neighbouring towns.... In wrestling competitions, each group of competitors has its own *Ekere Mgba – Nkwa* (summoning drums) in which the players, especially the flutists, call praise-names of the competitors and encourages them to put in their best.”<sup>14</sup> By constantly performing such musical festivals, the Africans preserve and propagate their culture and express them in a language that is understood and loved by all. And children are integrated; they take part and learn the process. In short, the Africans sing out and dance their worldview, their culture, their philosophy of life, their wisdom, and their sentiments. And the participation of children in this music-making and dance is a profound way of educating them in their cultural world view and philosophy of life.

Furthermore, through this act of coming together, sharing stories together, singing and dancing together, children learn the value of solidarity. Music therefore, as well as story-telling, fosters solidarity among the people. “Whether the musical situation is meant to provide entertainment or is created for ritual and religious purpose, the ultimate effect seems to be the same: to bring the community together, to forge a social, aesthetic or mystical link among its members and to unite emotional responses around defined rhythmic waves and melodies. Music, dance and song become for the community an instrument for creating social, emotional and aesthetic solidarity.”<sup>15</sup>

The African musical instruments and their symbolic significances are also very educative to the young. The *Igba* (big drum) instrument is sometimes referred to

---

<sup>13</sup> ACHEBE, C., *Things Fall Apart*, London, Heinemann, (1958) 1982, 141.

<sup>14</sup> IFIONU, A.O., “The Role of Music in Igbo Culture: An Ethno musicological Explanation,” in: *Igbo Language and Culture*, vol.2 (eds, F.C.Ogbalu/E.N.Emenanjo), Ibadan: Oxford University Press 1982, 42.

<sup>15</sup> OBIECHINA, E., *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1975, 58.

as the *talking drum*. When beaten, it has the capability of spurring one into action. It is seen as the *leading voice* that tells or signals to the dancer what he is to dance and which dance-movements are necessary. The *Ogene* (Iron Gong) instrument provides a far-reaching sound that is very much needed to attract the audience. The *Ekwe* (wooden Gong) in its function is popularly called “the summoner”. The *Oja* (bamboo flute) talks to people and says things in the very tunes which only members can understand. There are many other local musical instruments; and depending on the music at stake or the festival in question, these instruments call and summon all into participation in body and spirit. They speak to the people in their tones as it were and the people understand and respond appropriately to them. The child is brought up to learn how these instruments symbolize the different aspects of leadership and followership, as well as different characters and personalities that make up a living society.

Summarily, prior to the invasion of the western culture, the African societies effectively educated themselves and their children in their traditional way and with their traditional methods. At that time, traditional education was fully capable of supplying the necessary ingredients to maintain the levels of social, economic, technical and cultural attainments of the society.<sup>16</sup> Among the tools for this traditional education, general participation in storytelling and music were key avenues for transmitting very important themes and high values and norms in a palatable manner. These render traditional values nicely appreciable and unforgettable. But over the years, traditional education which proved effective when it was simply a matter of handing down experience from generation to generation, and when techniques were relatively simple, appears today insufficient and incapable of offering great possibility for progress in the assimilation and spread of highly sophisticated experiences and knowledge in modern technology.<sup>17</sup>

One may relatively argue over the sub-standard nature of education in the old African tradition, but the fact is that, irrespective of the level of education and training given, it was functional because the curriculum was relevant to the needs of the society. The aims and goals were met and these served the needs of the society in question effectively. Naturally, the aim, the content and the methods of traditional education are intricately interwoven; they were not divided into separate compartments as we have them today in the westernized system of education. For that time, the characteristics of African traditional education may be described in the words of Abdou Moumouni with: “(a)- The great importance attached to it, and its collective and social nature; (b)- Its intimate tie with social life, both in a material and a spiritual sense; (c)- Its multivalent character, both in terms of its goals and the means employed; and (d)- Its gradual and progressive

<sup>16</sup> OKEKE, A.N., “Traditional Education in Igboland”, in: *Igbo Language and Culture*, vol.2 (eds, F.C.Ogbalu/E.N.Emenanjo), Ibadan: Oxford University Press 1982, 16.

<sup>17</sup> GRAHAM, C.K., *The History of Education in Ghana*, London: Frank Cass, 1971, ix.

achievements, in conformity with the successive stages of physical, emotional and mental development of the child.”<sup>18</sup>

In consideration of these therefore, one may be judged as being unfair in categorizing the old African traditional educational system as substandard since it has addressed itself (with success) to the needs of the then society. One must not forget 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; that is to say, it is a process for transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth and for disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both. All educational systems, whether traditional or western-oriented, seek to achieve these goals irrespective of the curriculum, methods and organization designed for the purpose. After all, when evaluating any educational system, one must determine the extent to which it is meeting the objectives and needs of a particular society at any given time. Therefore, the methods of traditional education were very sufficient at that time when we relate them to the following goals and objectives of the original African traditional education.

#### *4.2 Objectives of the original Traditional African Education*

The primary objective of the traditional African education was to perpetrate the values of the traditional society, and to equip the young ones with such knowledge that would help them face the challenges of their lives and the tasks in their communities and the environment. The aims could be multilateral but the general and final goal is to produce an individual who is honest, human, respectable, courageous, skilled and cooperative, and conforms to the social order of the day. Certainly the traditional educational objectives are numerous and varied, but we shall take bearing from Babs Fafunwa who identified seven cardinal goals: (i) – to develop the child’s latent physical skills. (ii) – to develop character. (iii) – to inculcate respect for elders and those in position of authority. (iv) – to develop intellectual skills. (v) – to acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour. (vi) – to develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs. (vii) – to understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large.<sup>19</sup> In the treatment of the objectives of education, we must not forget that regional needs and interests play very important roles in determining how the young ones are brought up. This notwithstanding however, the following basic objectives are fundamental in educating the child in any African society.

---

<sup>18</sup> MOUMOUNI, A., *Education in Africa*, London, 1968, 15.

<sup>19</sup> FAFUNWA, A.B., *History of Education in Nigeria*, Ibadan (1974) 2004, 6-7.

#### 4.2.1 Development of Moral Character and Reputable Personality

The development of reputable personality is considered the primary objective of the African traditional education. Character-training is the fundamental base and the corner-stone around which every other revolves. Good character is one of the primary cultural values. Character-training goes along with religious education, since ethics and religion are in the African worldview inseparable. For the African, there is no ethics devoid of religion and vice versa. All the African values and in fact all his life point to his religion and his religion dictates his way of life. Deep within his being, the African feels an irresistible religious imperative. It is religion, which makes the first and most absolute claim in the life, hopes, aspirations, fears and joys of the average African person. Traditional religion is at the very heart of traditional society. "Religion in the indigenous African culture was not an independent institution. It is an integral and inseparable part of the entire culture. Religion in the African sense was practical. One's entire action is reflective of one's religious concepts and practices as is seen in the ordering of society. This is because social morality is dependent on religion."<sup>20</sup> In other words, moral education is synonymous with religious education.

The ordinary life of the African is conducted in relation to the sacred. In the words of E.B. Idowu, we take our religion wherever we go: in the family, at work, in the market, in the village square, we are always conscious of our religious imperatives. Life and morality are considered direct fruits of religion. Africans do not make any attempt to separate the two, and it is impossible for them to do so without disastrous consequences.<sup>21</sup> In this connection, Arthur Leonard observed of the African-Igbo: "they eat religiously, drink religiously, bathe religiously, dress religiously, and sin religiously. In a few words, the religion of these natives is their existence, and their existence is their religion."<sup>22</sup> In effect, any act of upbringing in life, and the education into any field of life is always influenced by the traditional religious imperatives and the cultural/moral norms with all its dos and don'ts. J.S. Mbiti summarized the situation thus: "In traditional religion there are no creeds to be recited; instead, the creeds are written in the heart of the individual, and each one is himself a living religious creed of his own religion. Where the individual is, there is his religion, for he is a religious being. It is this that makes Africans so religious: religion is their whole system of being."<sup>23</sup> At one with culture, religion is inextricably linked to the whole of life, whose personal and communal activities it animates. The feeling of wholeness is an im-

---

<sup>20</sup> ONWUBIKO, O.A., *African Thought, Religion and Culture*, Enugu: Snaap, 1991, 24.

<sup>21</sup> IDOWU, E.B., *Olodumare – God in Yoruba Belief*, London, 1962, 146.

<sup>22</sup> LEONARD, A.G., *The Lower Niger and its Tribes*, London, 1966, 429.

<sup>23</sup> MBITI, J.S., *African Religions and Philosophy*, London, 1982, 3.

portant aspect of the African life.<sup>24</sup> Here religion determines morality and life in general, and life in itself must be moral and religious.

It must be pointed out here that religious/moral education or character-training is not a responsibility solely reserved for any religious leader or special teacher. In this sphere also the principle of general participation is at work. The child lives, sees and learns what he observes the elderly ones in his environment do. He learns to respect what the society holds important and learns to uphold the dos and don'ts in his environment – be they religious, moral, social or cultural. And every member of the society sees it as a responsibility to acquaint the child with the norms – in all its ramifications – of the community. The parents, siblings and other members of the family and community participate in the education of the child. Everyone wants him to be sociable, honest, courageous, humble, persevering and of good report at all times. N.A. Fadipe confirms this point as he writes about the African-Yoruba ethnic: “The education of the young Yoruba in the codes of manners, conventions, customs, morals, superstitions and laws of his society is therefore achieved through various members of his family and household, his extended family (usually located in the same compound), his kindred and his neighbourhood. The more inclusive the group becomes, the less direct responsibility of the average member of that group for the training of the child. But, even though a large part of the early training is known as the direct responsibility first of the mother and next of the other members of the child's immediate family, the full training is a co-operative effort in which members of each of the more inclusive groups must play a part. It is through this process that the child builds up his code, whether of manners or of morals, item by item as they come incidentally into the field of his experience.”<sup>25</sup>

Educating the child in the norms of the society is not always a very easy task. Sometimes reward and punishment play very important roles and are often used as methods for instilling knowledge in the young in addition to the traditional methods of participation and learning by doing. Here the child is rewarded for acting according to norm, and punished for the opposite. It is believed that the reward should encourage him to behave more positively, and punishment should deter him from unacceptable actions. In this process of upbringing, it is guaranteed that the seniors teach the younger ones what to do; and it is also presumed that the elderly one who rewards or punishes knows the standards of the norm. The African child participates actively in the group, listens to instructions and tries to imitate what he sees others doing. He gets rewarded if he does well, and gets corrected if he goes wrong and sometimes punishment is ad-

---

<sup>24</sup> APPIAH- KUBI, K., “Jesus Christ – some Christological Aspects from African perspectives”, in Mbiti, J.S., (ed), *African and Asian Contribution to contemporary theology*, Bossey, 1977, 204-8.

<sup>25</sup> FADIPE, N.A., *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, Ibadan, 1970, 311.

ministered in the case of his constant failure to profit from the corrective instructions given him. The child observes how people of his own age or those who are older behave when faced with given situations, and are rewarded for mastering the situations. He then tries to imitate their behaviours when he finds himself in a similar situation. A negative variant of this is to observe how those who fail to conform to given norms are punished. Every child is always afraid of such punishments and this pushes him into putting in his best in learning. However we know from educational psychology today that punishment, in relation to learning, has a deep and far more negative effect than positive. Through punishment, the child feels depressed and lacks every motivation to learn. The child has the feeling of honour and pride, on the other hand, when he is rewarded. And this absolutely motivates him to show that he can do more.

In training the moral character of the child, the African-Igbo for example, has a moral code, which was basically built up from the supposed injunctions of the earth goddess. These include the approved observances and prohibitions, “the do’s and don’ts”, the “ways” of the land – *Omenala* – (norms and customs of the land). The primary task and goal in educating the child is to equip him with the *omenala* of his society. In addition to its moral functions, the *Omenala* also performs fundamentally cultural, political and social functions in the Igbo society. Meanwhile, instead of the individual moral responsibility (as in Christian morality), the Igbo traditional morality emphasizes group morality, with life as the ‘*summum bonum*’ of its values. Therefore every one must learn from childhood to respect life and all other values which promote harmony in the society more than his personal interest. The harmony in the society is more important than the individual interest. This explains the emphasis the African lays on ‘general participation’ in the life and activity of the society. This group morality is as a result of the community consciousness where the value of goodness is not readily seen as the exercise of personal responsibility, but rather, primarily as a means of realizing the social morality of the group. The danger here is that it is capable of removing from moral life the joy of its inner motivation, which is the essence of morality itself, resulting from choice, personal decision and responsibility.<sup>26</sup> Most African traditional societies extol the demands of the community to the detriment of the individual’s freedom. Perhaps we may find the reason for this in the observation of Paul Tillich who said that freedom as a choice is not absolute, but rather is controlled by many factors such as time, place, conscience and religious beliefs.<sup>27</sup> In this perspective, the child is trained to cherish social harmony, since it is only the moral harmony in the community that can guarantee the individual morality.

Hence, it can be said, in the words of Ilogu, that, “morality in the Igbo traditional society like all sacral or ontocratic communities was first and foremost the

<sup>26</sup> ROUBICZEK, P., *Ethical Values in the Age of Science*, Cambridge, 1969, 58.

<sup>27</sup> TILlich, P., *Systematic Theology*, Vol.III, Chicago, 1963, 233.

concern of the community. The essence was primarily to keep the harmony, well being and effective co-existence of the members of the 'community' made up of dead ancestors, the present generation and the children yet unborn. Hence the great amount of vigilance exercised by all the members of the community in helping everybody to know of the contents of the moral code and observe them scrupulously."<sup>28</sup> Customary usages, demands of the gods, spiritual forces and the fear they generated, availed narrow confines of choice. Consequently, moral duty is seen as an "imposition", on the one hand from the gods, and on the other hand from the routine of lineage links of relationships (corresponding to the horizontal, divine-to-man; and the vertical, man-to-man relationships in its moral code). If the community remains faithful to the *omenala*, it is rewarded and blessed by the gods, otherwise, it could be punished or cursed. And this process is transferred to children upbringing. The child must be taught to respect the *omenala* in order to avert the punishment of the gods on him and on the entire community. The fear of chastisement from the gods, not only on the individual defaulter, rather on the entire community, forces every member of the community to ensure the observance of the *omenala*. This is why it is a primary objective to teach every child the *omenala*; and also using the method of reward and punishment to encourage observance or deter the child from defaulting.

Every ethnic African society has its different way of emphasizing the same character education. According to J.W. Lieber, "among the Efik and Ibibio, there were very stringent taboos about incest and adultery; and stealing was also considered a very serious offence."<sup>29</sup> Similar attitudes were prevalent among many other Nigerian ethnic groups: "among the Ibos, Yoruba and the Nupe, adolescents were taught to avoid heterosexual activities, to shun acts of immodesty, masturbation, aggressive behavior"<sup>30</sup>, and to refrain from divulging secrets. The Igbo have a catalog of taboos on sexual morality, the preservation of life and honesty.<sup>31</sup> In the traditional Nigerian society all parents want their children to be upright, honest, kind and helpful to others, and will spare no pain to instill these qualities – the saying 'spare the rod and spoil the child' is very much in vogue. It might perhaps sound an overstatement but has some element of reality in it to say that all Nigerian parents, irrespective of ethnic group, prefer to remain childless than to have children who will bring shame and dishonour to the family. The Igbo say "*Aturu muru Ebule gba-aka nwa*" (literally: a sheep which gives birth to ram has practically no child). Translated into family life, this means that whoever has a child who is out of con-

<sup>28</sup> ILOGU, E.C.O., *Christian Ethics in an African Background*, Leiden: Brill, 1974, 127.

<sup>29</sup> LIEBER, J.W., "Efik and Ibibio Villages", in: *Institute of Education, University of Ibadan*, 13, 1971, 53.

<sup>30</sup> LIEBER, J.W., "Ibo Village Communities", in: *Institute of Education, University of Ibadan*, 12, 1971, 62.

<sup>31</sup> OLISAH, M.S.O., "Taboos in Ibo Religion and Society, Social and Religious Values of Abominations among the Ibo", in: *West African Religion*, 11, 1972, 1-18.



trol and cannot conform to family and societal norms has practically no child in the real sense of it. The child must be brought up with such a character that conforms to the norms of his society. There are other hundreds of idioms, proverbs and folk-tales on moral and ethical behaviour and the consequences of bad behaviours and misconduct. Disdain is the answer to ill-manners or acts likely to bring disrepute to the family. Severe physical punishment is generally meted out to young offenders in the hope that this will serve as a deterrent. In certain localities, parents deliberately put temptation in the way of the child to test honesty, perseverance and truthfulness. In certain instances, a child is confided in and warned not to divulge the secret. Then the parents or guardian devise all kinds of traps to test the child's endurance. Each child or youth is also expected to know about hospitality, etiquette and other social values.

Even the norms, which do not have much to do with morality and character, but facilitate good image in the life of the society, are also taken seriously in the up-bringing of the child. When a norm takes the function of regulating the social life of the community, it is regarded as a social norm. People keep their promises not because they fear being prosecuted, but because they fear developing a bad reputation. The pressure to signal that one has good reputation and a desirable character leads in other contexts to conformist behavior and a generation of social norms. "To be in society is to participate in its dialectic."<sup>32</sup> Failure to conform to relevant social norms raises suspicions about one's character and reliability in relationships of trust. Social norms have some 'enforcement mechanism', which could be institutional, or psychological, or physiological.<sup>33</sup> Our social lives are highly regimented by manners. In the modern times for example: one must hold a knife and a fork in a certain way, eat with one's mouth closed, look people in the eye but not steadily, wear clean clothes and the right sort of clothes, shake hands when introduced, comb or brush one's hair properly, send greeting cards to one's friends and associates, avoid staring at defects in other people's appearance, cheerfully say "fine" when asked about one's health, cover one's mouth when one yawns, and apologize when one fails to do any of the above. All these elements follow from the signaling model, according to which, signals of observable actions are promoted for conformity. In actual fact, there is no logical reason why a fork should be held in one way or the other; people attach significance to how one holds a fork only because of prior and contingent beliefs about the type of person who holds a fork in a certain way. This is why such norms could differ from country to country, from region to region, even from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. And in the African scenario, that certain food items – like the "*Fufu*" – for example, should be eaten with the right hand is merely a social convention, and has nothing to do with morality.

<sup>32</sup> BERGER, P.L./LUCKMANN, T., *The Social Construction of Reality*, N.Y, 1991, 149.

<sup>33</sup> See POSNER, E.A., *Law and Social Norms*, Cambridge, 2000, 12-15.



In the original African tradition, introducing the child into the norms of the society was the duty of the parents and family members, community members, and in fact every elderly person in the society. Let us cite a simple example of the sanitary and aesthetic norms of the African-Igbo ethnic. One of the most important of these is in regard to the use of the right and left hands. Owing principally to the fact that before the diffusion of the white man's culture the use of forks and spoons for eating was unknown, the fingers were the African natural forks and knives. To this effect, the employment of the right hand, traditionally used for eating, had come to be forbidden for handling dirty objects. For instance, unless strictly unavoidable, the right hand must not be brought into contact with mucus or with any of the other waste products which come out of the human body. As a corollary, the use of the left hand is forbidden for eating, for shaking hands, and for handling respected objects. In fact it is an insult to offer somebody the left hand during a hand-shake or greeting; and it is considered ingratitude and disrespect of the highest order to receive a gift or any object from one's senior with the left hand. Every one learns such norms from childhood. Any child from the neighbourhood who lacks knowledge or shows defiance for such a convention must be called to order immediately. But if he should refuse to take correction from his fellows, it is the duty of the adults to seek to restrain him. If the child remains recalcitrant, the extreme step of thrashing or stopping him from eating with others may be taken. The ability to take instructions and live by them is one of the big signs of a child who is open and adequately ready to respond to education.

It is costly to respect norms and manners; the benefit however is cooperation from the others. Some people fail to respect manners because they do not care about these benefits. Other people fail to respect manners because the cost to them is idiosyncratically high. Jürgen Habermas adds that, "the tension between facticity and validity, which then enters into the mode of action coordination itself, sets high demands on the maintenance of social orders".<sup>34</sup> The first group of people does not offend us because we derive intrinsic pleasure from observing them use the right or left hand correctly, but because their failure to do so shows that they do not value us. The second group of people evokes our sympathy if we discover the source of their failing. A person with a broken right hand might eat with the left, as might a person from a foreign culture. We discount the significance of their violation of the convention and look for other signals of their type, and these signals duly provide elaborate apologies and explanations. But if we cannot discover their idiosyncratic cost, we classify them in the first group and assume that they belong to the bad type. Fearing such a fate for their children, parents train children in manners and relevant norms of the society in order to ensure that their costs are low. Often, even the bad types with proper

---

<sup>34</sup> HABERMAS, J., *Between Facts and Norms*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998, 8.

breeding signal elaborate manners as a way of revealing that they belong (or can belong) to the good type.<sup>35</sup>

Social norms are always about observed behaviour. Relatively, people are more willing to tolerate the violation of norms when the agent tries to conceal his behaviour than when norms are openly violated, and publicly flouted. The person who is ashamed by his behaviour and takes steps to conceal his conduct from a wider audience incurs extra costs, and by incurring these costs he signals to those who know about the behaviour that he belongs to the good type. When he stops trying to conceal his behavior, people shun him because he is showing that he does not care what they think about him. "The signaling theory suggests that any costly action can be a signal, that is, a mechanism for establishing or preserving one's reputation."<sup>36</sup> A child naturally feels sorry the much he is conscious of his misbehavior. That is why it is not the best approach to punish the child for his inability to respond to signal and manners.

Social norms describe the behavioural regularities that occur in equilibrium when people use signals to show that they belong to the good type. Social norms are thus endogenous: they do not cause behaviour, but are the labels that we attach to behaviour that results from other factors. As E.A. Posner puts it, "Social norms do not 'cause' people to do anything, except insofar as they try to figure out what is optimal by imitating others"<sup>37</sup>, and we cannot so easily determine whether a child is the good type to be rewarded or the bad type to be punished without understanding the motivation or the lack which underlies his behavior or learning problems. This is one of the reasons why I did and keep criticizing the system of reward and punishment as a method for bringing up the child. If the child is often punished for his failures, he loses interest in learning and develops fear – which psychologically is a negative ingredient. Although reward is better than punishment, it is still not the ideal. If the child is often rewarded for learning, the motivation gets an attachment like in the stimulus reaction in the animal training. What happens with learning when the reward stops?

Undoubtedly, African traditional education in the area of character-training is severe, to say the least, but this is because the African society as a whole attaches the greatest importance to character-training. All the other goals and objectives of traditional education: Physical education, vocational training, religious education, cultural heritage and respect for elders as well as co-operative community effort are considered necessary for the development of 'good character'. Meanwhile, the absence of any of these goals or aspects of education is tolerable as long as good character prevails, but the absence of 'good character' on the part

---

<sup>35</sup> ELIAS, N., *The Civilizing Process*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982, 158.

<sup>36</sup> POSNER, E.A., op cit, 24.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 58.

of an individual is the most shameful thing that he can inflict on himself, his immediate and extended families, his community, and the entire society.

#### 4.2.2 Promotion of Cultural Heritage and Values

Everywhere in the world, education, whether modern or ancient, aims at perpetuating the culture and values of the society. The cultural heritage must be passed unto new generations. According to Aylward Shorter, “culture is the whole way of life, material and non-material, of a human society. It is essentially social, the product of a society’s tradition and its interaction with other societies. Culture is a dynamic, not a static, phenomenon. It is also the product of human history.”<sup>38</sup> Culture has a social origin and a social function; and also a mental character. It describes the extent to which people are attracted by certain ideas and norms. Trying to explicate further characteristics of culture, Roy Wagner<sup>39</sup> sees culture as being made up of “invention” and “convention”. Convention refers to what is held in common, “agreed upon” in society. Invention refers to the appropriation of culture by individuals or groups of individuals who thereby contribute to its ongoing development. A culture is therefore a dynamic cluster of concepts and norms, the form of which is historically specific. Important to note is that cultures are never completely closed systems. Individuals and groups, drawing on economic and institutional resources and on local, national or even global links, often impose their own definitions on these clusters. However this aspect of “invention” does not mean that cultures have no coherent identity, or that there are no continuities in the successive forms taken by cultures. “Convention” remains an essential characteristic of culture. And children cannot be left out of these “inventions” and “conventions”.

Ikenga-Metuh and Ojoade go on to explain the already mentioned broad categorization of culture into material and non-material classes, which also reflects the social and mental character of culture. “Material culture consists of all objects, physical traits, instruments, tools which are made and used by people in various aspects of their community life, while non-material culture refers to ideas, attitudes and ways of doing things which constitute the people’s way of life. Non-material culture could be further classified into the cognitive and the normative aspects. The cognitive consists of the ideas, knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs, and patterns of expression and communication prevalent among a given people. While the normative culture consists of the rules, norms, morality and other accepted ways of doing things in a particular society.”<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> SHORTER, A., *African Culture, an Overview*, Nairobi, 1998.

<sup>39</sup> WAGNER, R., *The Invention of Culture*, Chicago, 1891.

<sup>40</sup> IKENGA-METUH, E. /OJOADE, O., *Nigerian Cultural Heritage*, Jos, 1990, 2.

African traditional education attaches considerable importance to this aspect of training. The young must be taught to cherish their cultural heritage and ways of preserving them. The peculiarity here is that this is done without elaborate equipment or complicated teaching methods. The child just grows into the cultural heritage of his people. He imbibes it by participating in the life of the society. That means, culture in the African traditional society, is not taught; it is caught. The child observes, imitates, and mimics the actions of his elders and siblings. He watches the naming ceremonies, religious services, marriage rituals, funeral obsequies. He witnesses the coronation of a king or chief, the annual yam festival, the annual dance and acrobatic displays of guilds and age-sets, and often participates with his own age-group or his relations in the activities. He listens to elders in their oratorical competence: using proverbs, idioms when rendering speeches and learns along. The child in a traditional society cannot escape his cultural and physical environment.<sup>41</sup> He is just born into it and must live the life. He has no choice of subjects as is the case in modern education. He has the obligation to participate in every expected aspect of life in his community and society.

#### 4.2.3 Community Participation

We pointed out earlier that general participation was an important method of educating and transferring knowledge in the African traditional society. Now, it is not only a method but also a goal and an objective in itself. In the traditional system the child is made to appreciate his role as a member of his immediate and extended family as well as that of the community at large. The newly-born child immediately becomes the child of everyone in the household – uncles, aunts, cousins, and even friends and neighbours. And he automatically takes part in the life of this larger group since he is considered a member. He is immediately integrated as one of those inheriting the cultural heritage in the larger group. He must be trained for a better active participation.

A community consists of a group of people most of whom have solidarity and have enjoyed relationships with each other that have substantial temporal continuity extending into the past and are expected to continue into the future. A common past supplies the focal points around which people signal their types.<sup>42</sup> New comers (like the child) enter the community without changing its character because they enter cooperative relationships only by conforming to the established signals and norms. That is why the child must be conscientiously taught how to participate actively in his community. To belong to a community confers various advantages; people are more willing to help members out, to watch over their houses when they are away, or to keep an eye on their children when they

---

<sup>41</sup> FAFUNWA, A.B., op.cit, 40.

<sup>42</sup> POSNER, E.A., *Law and Social Norms*, 2000, 35.

play outside, above all, communal environments supply valuable collective goods. People who are born into communities and who have lived in them for a long time have preferences that are aligned in such a way that they particularly value the public goods supplied by that community. Most often however, the collective goods produced by the community “communal goods” depend on the existence of coercive mechanisms of non-legal enforcement. And children born into such a community are likely to adapt to its values. And to be able to adapt appropriately, education is inevitable.

Africans in general see the community and communal living as a defining element in their identity. There is a community-based understanding of identity in Africa. One seeks his identity not in himself, rather in his ability to participate in the community and the extended family. Africans tend to say: “I take part, therefore I am.” Just like René Descartes in his western thinking anchored his existence on his ability to reason – “cogito ergo sum”<sup>43</sup>, the African anchors his existence in his ability to participate in the life of the society. Individualism per se is alien to the African. The African is dependent on his or her social world. The person who alienates her/himself from this social world is seen as nobody. J.S. Mbiti summarizes the African understanding of his being thus: “I am, because we are, and since we are, therefore I am”<sup>44</sup>. A person, according to Mbiti’s description of the African, is society or community oriented. Happiness and sadness are also communally based. When one suffers, the whole community suffers, when one has joy, the whole community is joyful. This is the religiousness of the Africans. To live in isolation is something tragic for an African. And the child must learn to play his part in this community living.

In the real sense of it, African anthropology is human-centred and socially oriented. Accordingly, individuals were continually reminded that a fulfilling life could not be lived in isolation from their human fellows. Rather, life is possible only in communal relationships in which individuals try to strike a balance between the private life and the social life, thus maintaining the network of relationships with their fellows so that every person is provided with a space to breathe and live a meaningful life. A human being is human only because of others, with others and for others.<sup>45</sup> In such a society, an individualistic life-style is out of the question, and as such, finding a fulfilling life means normally resorting to the community. From the early years of the child, this feeling of not living for oneself, but rather for the immediate society, is gradually and consequently instigated in the child.

---

<sup>43</sup> DESCARTES, R., *Die Prinzipien der Philosophie*, Kap. 1. Über die Prinzipien der menschlichen Erkenntnis, Elsevier Verlag Amsterdam, 1644.

<sup>44</sup> MBITI, J. S., *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann, 1969, 106-109.

<sup>45</sup> MAIMELA, S.S., “Religion and Culture: Blessing or Curses?” in *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*, vol. 5, 1, 1991, 1-12.

As we discussed earlier, the child's early education is the responsibility of not only his mother but of everyone in his immediate environment. His peer group is also very instrumental for his orientation into an active participation in the society. Age-groups are often engaged in dance, cultural plays, communal work and many other activities which bring the young people together. They may also help other members of the group in clearing, planting or harvesting or help the community at large in road-building, or the chief of their village in performing a given task or assignment. A child is brought up to cherish going on errands for the entire community. And when he is of age, he assists the community also financially. He does this by making the contribution levied by his age-group, extended family, chief or uncle as the case may be. Shying away from community responsibility is considered an abnormality. Each household in the traditional society is a socio-economic entity. Everyone is his brother's keeper. Moments of joy or sorrow are shared by everyone; and the child is taught how to take part and what roles he has to play. This is best demonstrated when there is a birth, a marriage or death in the family or community. Every member is expected to regard the occasion as his personal celebration. Consequently, friends and age-associations as well as others who are in one way or the other connected or related with the celebrant join him in the ceremonial observances. For every close or distant relative's birthday, marriage or death, active participation of both young and old is expected. It is considered the highest punishment to ostracize someone from participating in the activities of the family or community. In the same way, up-bringing is considered a failure if the young one lacks the relevant qualities for active participation.

#### *4.2.4 Respect for Authority and Seniors*

Closely related to and seen as one of the fruits of character-training is the respect for one's seniors and elders or those who are in authority, particularly the chief, the cult leaders, the diviners, relatives (especially uncles/aunts) and other neighbours. Every child learns how to react when he meets anybody at home or on the way. Every person has an art of respect accorded to him/her depending on the status. "A child learns early how to respect his elders and superiors. Failure to surrender one's chair when an elder entered was heavily frowned upon as grave bad manners."<sup>46</sup> Among many other signs of respect, greetings play a major role; and the child must be able to differentiate between the various forms of greetings, how they are rendered, and when each is needed and for whom. The African has a complicated greeting system. There are special polite greetings or salutations for parents, elders, peers and chiefs. There are morning, afternoon and evening greetings; there are greetings for various situations – playing, dancing, drumming, sit-

---

<sup>46</sup> OKEKE, A.N., *Traditional Education in Igboland*, in *Igbo Language and Culture*, vol.2 (eds, F.C.Ogbalu/E.N.Emenanjo), Ibadan: Oxford University Press 1982, 17.

ting, standing, farming, fishing, weaving, swimming, walking, working, convalescing; and there are special salutations for different kinds of festivals and ceremonies on such occasions as birthdays, burials, marriages, yam festivals, observance of ancestor worship, and many others. African children must be brought up to show good manners while talking to their parents and adults. They usually look for directives from adults before taking any step in public gatherings.<sup>47</sup> They greet everybody they meet on the way as a sign of courtesy. It is usually strange to see or pass by somebody on the way without exchanging words of greetings with the person, even where the person is unknown to the fellow. Moreover, such courtesy is seen as sacred duty for the young towards the older person.

Verbal greetings are often accompanied by physical gestures. We can see some differences as well as similarities in many African ethnic cultures in their forms of showing respect through greetings. A Yoruba man will prostrate to his elders and chief, even if the chief is younger, but he merely shakes hands or exchanges verbal greetings with members of his peer-group. The Yoruba woman in a similar situation will kneel. In any situation, the man extends the same physical gestures to male and female elders; the woman does the same. Also the Yoruba in certain sub-groups lies on the ground when greeting a very important Oba.<sup>48</sup> Among the Nupe ethnic, men crouch and women kneel to an elder. And the Nupe people of the same age-group crouch simultaneously for each other. In the same way, Nupe women crouch for each other, and in this position they exchange verbal greetings that can last for minutes. The Hausa ethnic raises his clenched right fist to greet a superior or a chief, and have the same pattern of greetings for age-group like the Nupe.

The Igbo man bows his head when greeting a chief and elders of high repute; offers both hands to greet a senior; and offers one hand or mere words of greeting among peers. And the Igbo woman stoops a little down before her elders or seniors irrespective of sex. It is a sign of respect to offer first the words of greeting to an elderly person before he reacts. A child cannot wait to be greeted first by his father or mother, uncle or aunt. The child wakes up from sleep and goes immediately to his father or mother and says: "Good morning Papa/Mama." It is usual that the elder in any encounter with the young, and at any time of the day waits for the greeting of the child before he responds. On no account however, should a younger person extend his hands first when greeting an elderly person. The offer of hands goes the other way round. The senior offers the hand first if he deems it necessary after the younger person must have verbally and respectfully greeted.

Moreover, secret cults, special groups and societies have special greetings known only to their members. Drummers, dancers, singers, fluters and trumpeters also signal their greetings to important personalities, friends and even ene-

---

<sup>47</sup> NDIOKWERE, N.I., *Search for Greener Pastures: Igbo and African Experience*, Nebraska: Morris Publishing, 1998, 287.

<sup>48</sup> FAFUNWA, A.B., op.cit, 13.



mies in occasions via their respective media. It is perhaps not exaggerating to say that the Africans have one of the most complicated verbal and physical communication systems in the world, and the child must master the various salutations of his own ethnic group before he reaches maturity; otherwise, he is regarded as a child not well brought up. False signals can make a young person notorious in the society. The parents and the extended family take this aspect of up-bringing very seriously so that the child may not show bad manners when he meets people in the society and so brings shame to the entire family.

#### *4.2.5 Development of Physical Skills*

Growth belongs to human nature, and every little child naturally develops both emotionally and physically. The African child likes to explore his immediate environment, observe adults in their activities, and imitate them – he enjoys discovering new situations. Here there is no cultural difference between the African, the European/American or the Asiatic child, but the *modus operandi* may vary in terms of method and tools for physical training. In traditional African society the child intuitively jumps, climbs a tree, dances or performs a balancing act because his siblings or his elders do the same. Every child discovers his limbs and in no time he also discovers their uses. It is a natural process of growth and the physical environment, no matter how limiting, challenges the child to try out new things. The African child is however fortunate to have had the whole of nature at his beck and call with which he exercises himself. He goes into the bush, cuts down branches and brings them home as firewood. He goes to the stream, fetches water and carries it home on his head. He goes to the fields and plays with the animals. More so, the African child, unlike the European child, has unlimited access to the stimulating world of African music and dance. He needs no teacher or specialist to teach him the first steps. He observes the adults and other children and naturally falls in step. The child finds himself in the group around him and learns by doing and by active participation. Most of the dances are acrobatic in nature and as such enhance physical fitness. The infinite varieties of African dance-movements offer the child one of the best media for physical exercise.

There were and still are a good number of sporting activities: running, wrestling, and hunting, climbing, digging, throwing, and swimming and so on. In fact in most communities living around the river, there are such traditions of throwing the child into the river and letting him fight his way out of the waters. Of course he gets assistance immediately his elders notice that he is in danger. This is a most practical way of training him physically and emotionally in swimming, which is an absolute prerequisite for a life as fisherman if he decides in the future for such a profession.

Generally, we cannot underestimate the importance of manual labour in the life of the African. Agricultural work and other physical works sustain life and people



in existence till today in the African continent; and there is no alternative other than training the child fit for this challenge. The human being generally depends upon material goods for his maintenance and existence. He needs food, shelter and clothing, etc. These make work a human obligation, a duty as well as a right. "Work is the normal way of self-preservation. It is ordinarily by his work that a person satisfies his material needs and the needs of those entrusted to him. To the extent that a man is able to work and has no other legitimate source for his sustenance, he must acquire what is necessary for his livelihood by his labour."<sup>49</sup> The African Igbo believe that "*Aka aja aja butere onu mmanu mmanu*" (soiled hands bring about an oiled mouth); therefore there is no room for idleness. Everybody must be strong enough to work hard. In those days, agriculture was the major economic activity. Most manual work was done in the farms. Equiano wrote about the Igbo: "Our land is uncommonly rich and fruitful, and produces all kinds of vegetables in great abundance... All our industry is exerted to improve those blessings of nature... Everyone contributes something to the common stock, and as we are unacquainted with idleness, we have no beggars."<sup>50</sup> That means, bringing a child up to self-dependence is one of the primary goals of educating him.

The traditional Igbo community attitude to work made it impossible to rear up lazy men within the community. Most manual labour was often communally undertaken and work was made attractive for all. "When a job had to be done, the whole community turned out with supplies and music and proceeded to sing and dance its way through to the successful conclusion of each particular chore. In this way work was converted into a pleasurable productive pastime."<sup>51</sup> Thus everybody (old and young) was encouraged to work. Even those who naturally have lazy attitude towards work, found another incentive to work – i.e. – the attraction of the music. Work was more enjoyable as a collective action, and every person longed to participate. As such, everyone could earn a living and was able to support his family no matter how meager his resources. Thus work teams which turned out into "musical teams" made work very light and appreciable; and at the same time helped to ensure the physical fitness of all participants.

Originally, manual labour was inseparable from physical strength. And in the African context, "We are all habituated to labour from our earliest years", according to Equiano<sup>52</sup>. This habituation was given expression in the lean infertile years in a certain basic communal indiscipline founded on raw strength. A man was a man only if he could both cater for his family and defend that family.<sup>53</sup> A man

<sup>49</sup> PESCHKE, K.H., *Christian Ethics*, vol 2, 1997, 638.

<sup>50</sup> EQUIANO, O., quoted in ONWUBIKO, O.A., *African Thought, Religion and Culture*, Enugu, 1991, 106.

<sup>51</sup> OKAFOR, F.C., *Africa at Crossroads*, NY, 1974, 22.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. EQUIANO, O., *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African*, Norwich, 1794.

<sup>53</sup> ECHERUO, M.J.C., "A Matter of Identity", in: *Abiajioku Lecture Series*, Owerri, 1979, 12.

lacks respect if he is unable to present himself as a strong man. That is why in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the priestess rebuked Unoka (Okonkwo's father), for his laziness and lack of the strength to work. Hearing his complaint about his poor yield, the priestess retorted: "Hold your peace", screamed the priestess, her voice terrible as it echoed through the dark void. "You have offended neither the gods nor your fathers. And when a man is at peace with his gods and his ancestors, his harvest will be good or bad according to the strength of his arm. You, Unoka, are known in all the clan for the weakness of your matchet and your hoe. When your neighbours go out with their axe to cut down virgin forests, you sow your yams on exhausted farms that take no labour to clear. They cross seven rivers to make their farms; you stay at home and offer sacrifices to a reluctant soil. Go home and work like a man."<sup>54</sup> This rebuke was a practical portrayal of the impression of dismay in the community when a man is not fit and strong enough to face and tackle his challenges and responsibilities like a man. And every effort is made in every community, through education into integrated work attitude, to avert the young people from exposing themselves consciously or unconsciously to such misery.

Evidently, we can now see that the major reason why the development of physical skill is seen as one of the objectives of African traditional education is to ensure that the child is brought up to be physically fit in order to be able to face, in different fields of life, the work and survival challenges of nature around him in the future. It must not be forgotten that most of the professions and jobs, which existed in the original African traditional society – where there were no machines, required enormous physical strength and skills.

#### 4.2.6 Intellectual Training

According to A.B Fafunwa, "if by intellect we mean the power to integrate experience, and if intellectualization is the process of reasoning abstractly, traditional African education can be said to encourage intellectual growth and development. Observation, imitation and participation are some of the major learning processes even in this modern age. The African child or adolescent learns the local geography and history of his community. He is very familiar with the hills and dales, the fertile and the non-fertile areas; he knows the rainy season and when to expect a dry spell; he knows the time of the hunting and fishing seasons. Local history is taught by the elders in each household and the songs of praise which accompany many of the historical events make the oral traditional history a stimulating experience which is hard to forget. Botany and zoology are taught or understood through observation; actual instruction is often accompanied by demonstration. Animal behaviour is an important subject both for pro-

---

<sup>54</sup> ACHEBE, C., *Things Fall Apart*, London, Heinemann, (1958) 1982, 13.

tective reasons and for rearing purposes. Proverbs and riddles constitute a formidable intellectual exercise. They are used as media for developing the child's reasoning power and skill in decision-making."<sup>55</sup>

In the African world, local wisdom is highly appraised. Wisdom is weaved in proverbs and wise sayings, which constitute common vehicles for expressing and conveying both secular and religious ideas and feelings to future generations. "Proverbs are derived from a detailed observation of the behaviour of human beings, animals, plants and nature, and in them are expressed the folklore beliefs, values, attitudes, perceptions, and emotions: indeed the entire cultural system of the society. The effectiveness as well as the force of proverbs is derived from the collective imagination that apprehends the basic principle connecting a literal fact and its allusive amplification. This collective imagination vivifies an experience by placing it beside another that has the community's seal of approval."<sup>56</sup> These collective imaginations fascinate the young people, and they learn with enthusiasm these arts of expressions and use them in speeches to show that they are coming of age.

When the child begins to talk with proverbs, the society sees him with respect as an intellectually developed human being – a wise and respectable member of the society. As Albert Obiefuna puts it, people respect the wisdom embodied in proverbs for they strike like arrows into the heart. Proverbs are used to express the moral as well as the ethics of the society. They are convenient standards for appraising behaviour in terms of the approved norms and because they are pungently, sententiously and wittingly stated they are ideally suited for commenting on, and correcting the behaviour of others irrespective of their age and dignity.<sup>57</sup> Proverbs embody wisdom and wisdom in turn causes joy. One of the reasons behind the African penchant for proverbs is the conviction that certain truths are so sublime and sacred that they may not be directly expressed. Such truths need being "economized" in words in order to be expressed.<sup>58</sup>

The elders, who are considered as fountain of local wisdom, are revered, among other things, for their proficiency in using proverbial diction. To be a real African includes the ability to draw from this corporate depositum of the community. Francis Arinze related this to the Igbo ethnic: "The Ibos love to use proverbs. For them to speak always in very plain and simple language is to talk like inexperienced, little children. *Inu bu mmanu eji esuli okwu* (proverbs are the oil for eating speech), say the Ibos. Hence the uninitiated could be present when the hoary-headed discuss important matters, and yet understand absolutely nothing.

---

<sup>55</sup> FAFUNWA, A.B., op. cit., 14.

<sup>56</sup> EDEH, E.M.P., *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics*, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985, 48.

<sup>57</sup> OBIEFUNA, A.K., "Some Aspects of Traditional Moral Heritage with Particular Reference to the Igbo People of Nigeria" in: *Lucerna*, vol 1, No 1, Enugu, 1978, 20.

<sup>58</sup> IGWEGBE, I.O.O., *Sacramental theological Thinking in the African Symbolic Universe*, 1995, 57.

*Atualu oka, omata, ma atualu ofeke, ofenye isi n'ofia* (the wise man catches the point of a proverb, but the untutored commits blunders). ... Proverbs crystallized the accumulated wisdom handed down by the ancients. They reveal profound thoughts, the real soul of the people. This field is often closed to strangers.”<sup>59</sup> Anozie Onyema further added that: “Without proverbs, speeches would be dry, boring and uninteresting. Proverbs can play the role of support in speech and in some form, act as basis of argument. It is enough to ground one’s argument from proverbs and any Igbo would accept such as valid. Especially when these refer to ancestors, one would begin his speech in the form: “*Dika mmanma anyi ha si kwue...*” (according to our forefathers...), this method of putting words into the mouth of the forefathers is still operative in Igboland and is valid in settling matters.”<sup>60</sup> This is an appeal to authority.

In actual fact, young people require intensive training and a certain amount of intellectual skills to be able to come into this level of discussing, because different situations and circumstances could give different meanings to the same proverb. One must apply proverbs correctly, otherwise their meanings and uses would be distorted. And the hearer must fully take into consideration the circumstance in which the proverb is used before one can make a correct interpretation and an understanding. Three levels of meaning are possible in the use of proverbs: the literal meaning, its philosophical content and expression, and the contextual relevance. The last two are where the wisdom lies. For example, a young man has experienced some adventures, but has not met his expected successes. His friend asked him if he would still like to join him in a fresh undertaking, he answered: “*Anaghi aso mgbagbu ghara ugu*”. Literally, one shouldn’t shy away from war simply because people are being shot. Philosophically, courage is an art that one always requires despite all odds. Contextual relevance: that I am confronted with obstacles is not enough reason to give up my goal. This mentality is a wonderful source of inspiration for a growing young man/woman.

Proverbs perform ideological functions by making available the ideas and values of the people in a very concise and encapsulated manner memorable to the people. Proverbs have the capability of summarizing a whole length of history and experience in a few phrases. As Oliver Onwubiko puts it, speaking a language does not in the African sense depend on the peripheral knowledge of the language; but on the ability to express oneself in the proverbs and idioms of the language community. These proverbs and idioms are based and determined by the culture of the community – being drawn from its environment, social order, and norms of action and behaviour of the people living in the community.<sup>61</sup> The use and understanding of proverbs marks out the adult and shows maturity in a

<sup>59</sup> ARINZE, F., *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, Ibadan, 1970, 3.

<sup>60</sup> ONYEMA, A., *The Igbo Culture and the Formation of Conscience*, Owerri, 1999, 285.

<sup>61</sup> ONWUBIKO, O.A., *African Thought, Religion and Culture*, Enugu, 1991, 30.

language. Ikenga Metuh<sup>62</sup> emphasizes the fact that Igbo proverbs (like all proverbs) originate spontaneously from the people, and as such could be called the voice of the people – *Vox populi*. They are the products of the people within time and as such serve their voice. They may also act as the expositor of the people's belief, principles of life and conduct. In fact they are "the wisdom of many and the wit of one"; the experience and wisdom of several ages gathered and summed up in one expression. The use of proverbs is cultivated as an art, and cherished as an index of good oratory and acquaintance with traditional knowledge and ancestral wisdom. In the absence of written records, proverbs are one of the most reliable forms of oral tradition; they are ancient wisdom and beliefs and the accumulated experiences of past generations enshrined in words so concise for every generation to remember and use. That is to say, proverbs are 'the edged tools of speech'. In all its senses, the importance of proverbs is concentrated on its economy of words and the fact of its being a vehicle of traditional wisdom. Through proverbs, the child learns his history, the worldview and philosophy of his race and culture.

When the child is introduced into the level of using proverbs in speeches, he has qualified to belong to the class who can discuss intellectual issues for his society. And there is still a higher level of this intellectual competence – the use of idioms. Idioms, though not very much different from proverbs, can on their part be defined as "an expression the meaning of which is not predictable from the usual meanings of its constituent elements or from the general grammatical rules of a language."<sup>63</sup> It follows the same levels of meaning like proverbs: literal, philosophical and contextual, but with greater complication. For instance, the Idiom – "*Obi awunye m n'afọ*" literally means 'my heart pours into my stomach', and this says nothing. It neither explains the philosophical content – *expressing a sudden feeling of fear*, nor the situation relevant for its use – *like, when a gun is pointed at someone*. The child needs here to task his intelligence extra in order to catch what is said. Some Idioms also make literal use of negative expressions to offer figurative or positive philosophy. Some describe in bad terms what is naturally good: *O mara ajo mma* (literally means he is badly beautiful) but figuratively means, he/she is extremely beautiful/handsome. Some Idioms describe excellent and successful performances in terms of destructive action: *O kpara ego n'mgbawwa isi* (literal, he broke his head in making money) figuratively means he is absolutely very rich. *O bu agu* (literal, he is a lion) figuratively means he is a brave, strong, and great man. Some Idioms describe virtues in terms of physical or moral defect: *O bughi nti* (literal, he has no ears) figuratively means he is indefatigable, dauntless, daring, and capable. *Akwukwo riri ya isi* (literal, book(s) ate his head) figuratively means he

<sup>62</sup> METUH, E.I., *African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation*, Jos, 1985; See also *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, Onitsha, 1987.

<sup>63</sup> NWOGA, D.I., "Appraisal of Igbo Proverbs and Idioms" in *Igbo Language and Culture*, vol.1 (eds, F.C.Ogbalu/E.N.Emenanjo), Ibadan: Oxford University Press 1975, 186.

studies much, brilliant, an intelligent academician. When the young person reaches this height in his use of the Igbo language, for instance, he is respected in the traditional society and looked upon like a graduate of philosophy.

The negative dimension of idiomatic expressions generates a higher degree of indirection and forces the imagination to go into an extra (opposite) direction for purposes of deeper understanding and fuller appreciation. They are ways of placing more emphasis on the issue at stake. The positive-negative expression, therefore, has more potentiality than the straightforward idiom for aesthetic appeal. It operates on the same basis as the figurative usage, especially in respect of metaphor, personification, and oxymoron. The positive-negative expression resembles wit, or has some elements of witticism.<sup>64</sup> “The witticism depends on three elements: that the wit has *keen perception* and that he gives *clearly apt expression* to ideas or situations which *awaken amusement and pleasure*. While Idiom uses established expressions to give force to description, wit affords new expressions and therefore new perceptions of situations. Indeed there are many proverbs which owe their popularity in relaxed situations to their witty form and might have started as witticism and turned into proverbs.<sup>65</sup> In short, proverbs are used for many purposes, the most important being to bring out clearly the meaning of obscure points in conversation and argument. They are also used to avoid giving direct answers to direct questions.

As the child grows into adulthood, he is exposed to a more advanced intellectual training. At a certain age, he is ripe for the secret societies. The secret societies have complex training programs, which must be mastered before the initiation ceremony; these serve as qualifying entrance examinations. Also, most professional groups, for example, herbalists, hunters, chiefs, cult leaders and priests, have elaborate and often very complicated systems of pre-initiation training. As this constitutes the higher education level for the younger adults, admission is restricted to those who have demonstrated the capacity for further growth and ability to keep secrets. Here the neophyte learns the secret of power (real and imaginary); native philosophy and science as well as the theology of animism, depending on the profession the young wishes to pursue. The young one must show and prove a definite and higher sense of intellectual development and maturity before he is admitted into any of those higher groups.

#### 4.2.7 Technological Training

Technological know-how has its roots in geometry and mathematics. And what we today call mathematics has its origin in the human nature and its

<sup>64</sup> EGUDU, R.N., “Negative Expression for Positive Attribute in Igbo Language: An Aspect of Igbo Idiom” in *Igbo Language and Culture*, vol.1 (eds, F.C.Ogbalu/E.N.Emenanjo), Ibadan: Oxford University Press 1975, 182.

<sup>65</sup> NWOGA, D.I., op cit, 202.

ways of quantifying objects and calculating numbers. The Africans developed a system of counting and have used a variety of experiences to promote dexterity in enumeration. Every ethnic group in African developed its own form of mathematics. The child is introduced to counting “by means of concrete objects, counting rhymes, folklore, plays and games at home and in the farm. The use of the cowry as currency offered effective practice in enumeration.”<sup>66</sup> With this art of currency, calculations were made easy for everybody. The Igbo, for example, have numerous indigenous plays and games that require skill in counting. The game called “*Ncho*”, for instance, requires the knowledge of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Every player must plan ahead and anticipate every move of his opponent. He must calculate in his head what to play next, and reckon with the numbers in every pot in his planning towards outwitting his opponent. With such a game, the Igbo introduce the child into and train his mathematical thinking ability. There are also mathematical signs and numerals which assist them in constructing and building things in their native technology. The Igbo identified every aspect in the calculating strategy with a name; and these names were, as time went on, gradually synchronized with the modern mathematical signs, numeral, symbols.

*Mathematical Signs:*

|                |   |                 |
|----------------|---|-----------------|
| Addition:      | + | <i>Mgbako</i> , |
| Subtraction:   | - | <i>Nwepu</i> .  |
| Multiplication | x | <i>Nmuba</i> ,  |
| Division       | ÷ | <i>Okike</i>    |

*Mathematical numerals:*

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| ½        | <i>Okara</i> ,   |
| 1-9      | <i>Otu, Ibuo, Ito, Ino, Ise, Isii, Isaa, Isato, Iteolu</i> |
| 10       | <i>Iri</i>   |
| 100      | <i>Nari</i>  |
| 1000     | <i>Puku</i>  |
| 1Million | <i>Nderi</i>   |
| 1Billion | <i>Njeri</i>   |

The words *Puku*, *Nderi* and *Njeri* are relatively new in the Igbo language. The original and old way of calculating money with the cowries begins from two hundred to count in bags. There were no currency notes. That means, 200 cowries is called “*Otu akpa ego*” – one bag of money, 400 cowries = “*Akpa ego abuo*” – two bags of money, etc.

Calendar-Week (*Izu*): The Igbo had only four days in their calendar-week (*Izu*), which could not be balanced with the modern week days of Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc:

<sup>66</sup> TAIWO, C.O., *Yoruba Mathematics*, London, 1968, 9.



*Eke,*  
*Orie,*  
*Afo,*  
*Nkwo.*

Time (*Oge*): There were no clocks. Time was calculated with the rising and setting of the sun.

*Ututu* Morning, (*Uzo ututu* – very early morning)  
*Ebihe* Noon,  
*Mgbede* Evening,  
*Anyasi* Night (*Ime nde-eri* – very late in the night)

*Navigational Poles:*

*Owura-anyanwu* East,  
*Odida-anyanwu* West,  
*Ugwu* North,  
*Ndida* South

The sense of time and navigational poles depends much on the movement of the sun, and this knowledge arising from natural experience has remained the same till today in every part of the world. The traditional Africans applied this natural science to find their direction in the bush while hunting and in the waters while fishing to know when they should retire before it got late, and how to find their way back home.

#### 4.2.8 Vocational Training

This is an oriented but more comprehensive form of *human and technological development* – however in specified aspects. When we talk of vocational training, we are talking about such education that has to do with one's vocation; or a training relating to applied educational courses concerned with skills needed for an occupation, trade or profession. Vocation as a word is derived from the Latin word '*vocatio*' – a calling (from '*vocare*' – to call). Concretely, vocation is defined as "a specified occupation, profession or trade; a special urge, inclination, or predisposition to a particular calling or career".<sup>67</sup> Vocation is often seen as a religious call. And bearing in mind that in the African worldview, no aspect of life is rid of the religious influence, whatever profession or career one therefore takes is seen to be a religious call for one to serve God and mankind. Success in one's vocation or profession is seen as a blessing of the gods, and a confirmation that one has chosen the right vocation destined for him. And a failure is the opposite. Therefore, serious and reasonable considerations are made before one decides to learn any profession.

---

<sup>67</sup> TREFFRY, D.(ed.), *Dictionary of the English Language* (HarperCollins), Glasgow, 1998.



Normally the decision for a child to learn any profession is taken by the parents – based often on family history and connections as well as the talents of the child. It is fair to say here that the two major aims of education in the traditional African society are character-training and job-orientation. There is a great variety of vocations reflecting the variety of aspects of life in the African society. Babs Fafunwa divided the various traditional vocations into three groups:

a) **Agricultural education**: for example farming, fishing and veterinary science (animal care and animal rearing).

b) **Trades and crafts**: for example weaving (baskets and cloth), smithing (iron, silver, gold, etc.), hunting, carving (wood and bronze), sculpturing, painting and decorating, carpentry, building, barbing, singing and drumming, dancing and acrobatics, hair plaiting, dyeing, dress-making, boat-making, leather-works, soap-making, singing, pottery, mat-making, bed-working, gold-washing, iron-ore working, glass-making, brass-working, catering (frying, baking, grinding) food-selling, wine-selling, wine-tapping and trading in all kinds of organized or local merchandise (manufactured goods and agricultural products).

c) **Professions**: for example doctors, priests, witchdoctors, civil servants, village heads, chiefs and kings, tax-collectors, heralds, judges, councilors, police and messengers, shrine-keepers, soldiers, etc.<sup>68</sup>

Usually the children are not trained by their parents but by relatives, master craftsmen in particular fields or friends in order to ensure discipline and concentration. Vocational training in traditional society is largely run on the apprenticeship system and is a time-honoured device for educating millions of African youths and adults. This vast apprenticeship training system began as part of a wider education process in which the indigenous societies passed on their cultural heritage from one generation to the next. The skills “owned” by a family were highly valued and in some lines such as native medicine, secrets were zealously guarded, as they are indeed today. Evidence of the passing on of skills from one generation to the next within families is still strong.<sup>69</sup> Usually, learning a craft, trade or profession often began with personal service to the master. Young boys or girls would become house servants to a close relative, who would house, feed and clothe them and after some years of promising usefulness they would then gradually be introduced to the craft or trade of the guardian. Vocations varied according to the different needs of different areas; as well as the opportunities available.

**Agricultural education**: Fundamentally, since agriculture was the primary occupation and the mainstay of the economy in most African nations, serious attention was paid to teaching the children how to produce good crops. Unlike a specific trade or craft, agriculture is a household business. What we today in the

---

<sup>68</sup> FAFUNWA, A.B., op. cit., 19ff.

<sup>69</sup> CALLAWAY, A., “Nigeria’s Indigenous Education: The Apprenticeship System”, in: *University of Ife Journal of African Studies*, 1, 1, 1964, 63.

school sciences call geography and agricultural science and biological chemistry were simply natural household daily exercise in those days. The parents, uncles and aunts are responsible for teaching their younger ones. In subsistence agriculture, there was very strict training in the cultivation of the various crops. In the first place, children were taught how to distinguish between fertile and non-fertile soil. At the same time the soil that was declared unsuitable for one type of crop was also declared good for another type of crop. In the second place, the children were shown how suitable or unsuitable the land was by dipping the cutlass into the soil. If in the course of dipping the cutlass into the soil it touched some stones, immediate verdict was given that such a type of soil would never be suitable for deep-rooted crops such as yams. If it was porous then it was suitable for groundnuts and all other creeping crops such as melons or beans.

There were as many methods of planting the seeds as there were crops. Yam (one of the major staple foods) was usually cut into sets. Before the father, who was also the teacher, began to cut the yam, he instructed the children to observe very keenly. Some sets were small while others were big. In each case the teacher explained why certain types were small while others were big. Like a good teacher, he let the children practice with the cutting knives (learning by doing). Anyone who did it very well was praised and those who did not were reprimanded for their failure. Before the real planting of the yam sets began, knowledge of arithmetic was again brought into play. The children were made to count the yam sets, usually in groups of two-hundred. Although the father pretended to be talking with other adults present in the farm and less interested in the counting, he set his watchful eye on the children, who were abruptly reprimanded in case they made a mistake. The young ones were always convinced that their parents noticed everything they were doing. When planting cassava (another major staple food), children were instructed not to turn the buds downwards while planting the cassava stems for to do so would mean the end of that plant. In this learning by doing method, children were adequately accompanied and supervised by the adults. The boys were made to work between the father and the elder brother; and the girls worked between the mother and the elder sister. They must imitate how the adults went about the work. Children were also given separate instructions on how to weed in farms where seeds had already been planted. The instruments used, such as hoes and cutlasses, were small in size so that the boys and girls could easily handle them.

Another important stage in the agricultural education was the need to understand the different planting and harvesting seasons. There were only two seasons apparently known to the people: the rainy and dry seasons. Despite the fact that no calendar was in use at that time the knowledge of different months of the year was still essential. The lunar months were used and still there were ways of knowing what to plant in each of the seasons. For example the appearance of certain butterflies in the area was an indication that the rainy season was ap-

proaching and it was time to plant the early maize. The planting of some other crops was patterned on the appearance of new leaves on certain types of trees. The immigration of some birds indicated the beginning of a certain season. For example, the arrival of the cattle egrets indicated the beginning of the dry season when the harvesting of some crops began. The early men relied so much on the signs offered by nature.

When the time came for planting, two methods were chiefly used (for the testing of seeds before planting). The first method was by putting some seeds in water; those that sank were good while those that floated were bad. The second method was by planting some seeds for the purpose of experimentation. Decisions were usually based on the results. The young ones must be educated in all these processes. Veterinary farming has also its own systems. Almost every family has some domestic animals like goats, cocks and hens. The children are taught what types of plant-leaves they have to fetch for feeding the goats. Some of these animals are eaten during festivities or sold when the family needed money for something else. Although there was no animal husbandry carried out on any large scale, boys were taught how to fish in the rivers and rivulets around their district and to hunt some animals in their vicinity, especially when there was very little work in the farm. In this area of farming, and at a certain stage in the lives of the boys, age-grouping became predominantly important. What was of educational value in this grouping as far as agricultural education was concerned was the high degree of informal education that the children received from moving or working together. Children move out in peer-groups, play together or go hunting or fishing together. Through these means they influence and educate one another. They are often confronted with more difficult challenges among themselves which they try to master than when they are learning from their parents. In this way they are challenged to prove their strength before their peers; and this facilitates their maturity.

While the boys were receiving rigorous training on the farm under the instruction of their fathers, the girls were undergoing training at home. Under the strict supervision of their mothers, the girls were taught to take care of children, prepare food, make clothes, wash utensils and take care of the dwelling-place. All these tasks were taught by simple methods. Apart from these tasks, the girls had to assist their mothers in their different trades. Girls were also given a code of conduct in preparation for their future role as brides.<sup>70</sup> Regarding the length of the period that a boy had to be in the service of his father before he became of age to stay on his own, there was a unanimous, but unofficial agreement that the boys had to be in the service of their fathers until after they had married. Today's maturity age of 18 years did not exist at that time. One is only recognized as mature and independent when he proves through marriage that he can take the re-

---

<sup>70</sup> FAFUNWA, A.B., *op. cit.*, 23.

sponsibility for a family. From this stage one is considered a full-fledged man, capable of fending for himself and his own family. To reach this stage of life is the dream and goal of any young man – because it is only after marriage that a man begins to get his own share of land for cultivation. Before this time, he must attach himself to the hectares or acres of land belonging to his father.

**Education in Trades, Crafts and Professions:** These three terms are interconnected when we want to talk of human vocations. But for the purposes of accurate clarifications, the three terms have a little bit of difference in their meanings. By trades is meant “the acts or instances of buying and selling of goods and services either in the domestic (wholesale and retail) markets, or in the international (import, export, and entrepôt) markets.”<sup>71</sup> This is all about commerce and business in the exchange of goods. Crafts refer to skills or ability, especially in handiwork, an occupation or trade requiring special skill – manual dexterity: gold-smith or the mechanic for example. Profession refers to “an occupation requiring special training in the liberal arts or sciences, especially one of the three learned professions, law, theology, or medicine.”<sup>72</sup> In the traditional African scenario, a number of these professions were often combined in one person. For example, the traditional priest was often the diviner and in most cases also the medicine-man.

Originally, farming was undertaken as a way of providing food for the family. As time went on, the people realized that they needed other things besides food – other amenities had to be provided for. It was at this juncture that the idea of food and cash crops came into existence. This encouraged farmers to pay special attention to the cultivation of various crops; even the ones they did not need at home. Better methods of farming led to the better production of food, with the result that people had enough food to eat and some to spare. Eventually, the idea of getting rid of the surplus led to the development of local markets. Trade and business began. At the initial stage, prior to the origin of currencies, trade by barter (the method of changing one article which one has with another which one needs) was functional. Also certain types of businessmen and artisans sprang up, and these classes of people had no time to develop their own effective farming to satisfy their basic needs, consequently the exchange became comparatively important. The market then served as a place where farmers, traders or artisans could satisfy their needs.

With the gradual expansion of agricultural production and crafts, and the inability of the local markets to consume or use all the products, farmers and artisans began to send their products outside the district. With the upsurge in the export of crafts and professions, competence and proficiency was more than ever required. The young must be trained by the experts in the various hand-works,

---

<sup>71</sup> *Collins English Dictionary*, (ed. Treffry, D. et.al), England, 1998, 1619.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 1233.

professions and merchandize that were chosen. In fact, the children were not free to choose the trade of their liking, for they were bound to follow the guidance of their parents. With the decision of the parents, the young ones were given out to be trained under the apprenticeship system of education.

**Apprenticeship:** Here, in our discussion of the vocational training, we are confronted with another system of education added to the already mentioned traditional methods. For an effective training, parents always apprenticed their children to their relatives, friends or competent craftsmen. Apart from the reason of competence, parents had some other psychological reasons for sending their children to be trained by other hands rather than undertaking the education of their children themselves. Here, even if the parents were in the position to do that, they were not advised to train their own children in the craft or trade for the sake of better discipline of the child. A.B. Fafunwa summarized it thus: When the child is “old enough to learn a specific trade, particularly in the field that is not a hereditary profession, he is sent out as an apprentice to a master tradesman who may or may not be a friend of the family. Even in a trade that is his family’s specialty, he may be sent to another household in order to ensure that he takes his training seriously. African parents realized long ago that they are not necessarily the best teachers when it comes to specialized vocational skills. However, in fields such as agriculture, marketing and medicine, many parents prefer to train their own children.”<sup>73</sup>

One of the reasons which speak for giving out the child is that the child might be very slack and might not even take the job seriously if apprenticed to his own parents. The child might play truant, abusing the love of his parents and always finding some flimsy excuse to absent himself from duty. With different hands employed in the training of the children, sterner measures were more likely. The training and treatment of children by three categories of teachers differed considerably. For instance, the treatment of children by the master-craftsman was mild; the one by the friend was milder, while the one by the family or relative was the mildest. But the most successful of them all was the education given by the master-craftsman, since he will discharge his duty more objectively.

In the time of apprenticeship, the education is holistic. The trainer or master-craftsman assumes the role of a parent or guardian. All aspects of the life of the child get adequate attention. All the children were required to perform services other than the trade they came to learn. The length of training varied considerably among trades and masters. As the children were learning the trades, they were also given some other education that would prepare them for the future. It was however observed that those children who had no relationship with the master usually did better than those who had; because the children of non-relatives always showed more seriousness for the extra fear of being punished by the master.

---

<sup>73</sup> FAFUNWA, A.B., *op. cit.*, 37.

As apprentices, the children always worked under the serious supervision of their master. And only the master determined when they were qualified to be independent – based on the amount of satisfaction he has regarding their learning and performance. There was a common factor among the different categories of trainers, and that was the method by which each apprentice was required to perform a certain ceremony at the end of the internship. Under the watchful eyes of every trainer, the performances of the apprentices were highly monitored and controlled. They lived under strict discipline. After the children had obtained their freedom, they were given permission and authority to go and establish and practice their own trade. The send-off ceremony was the equivalent of a certificate of qualification.

Girls were also apprenticed to certain trades, they had similar learning experiences. The only difference between them and the boys is that they were apprenticed to mistresses instead of masters. Just as there were certain occupations that were exclusively for men so were there some that were exclusively for women. In the traditional societies, most jobs requiring much physical strength were jobs for the men. And most jobs that have to do with aesthetics were often undertaken by women. For example, weaving and tailoring were very popular among the crafts undertaken by women. Dyeing was also prominent among the women-folk. They collected some locally manufactured chemicals to prepare the dye-water. It was not difficult to know those women who practiced dyeing. Their black fingers usually indicated the job of constant dyeing. Hair plaiting was another trade that was exclusive for women. Plaiting the hair of the African woman is not a new innovation. It has always been the way of decorating the heads of women. All men shaved their heads completely except certain men with *Isi-dada* (curled long hairs), who were believed to have been specially consecrated to the gods. The art of plaiting the hair was very much loved by the girls. This trade, too, needed some sort of training which had to be undergone before the learners began to practice on their own. In effect, most girls also learnt plaiting as hobby, so that they could beautify themselves or their sisters or friends.

There were however some crafts, trades or professions that were undertaken by people of both sexes. An example was the trade in palm-oil-making. The men had to climb the palm trees to cut down and collect the fruits (palm-nuts). Young boys were introduced into this craft beginning with smaller palm-trees which they could climb. After the collection of the cones, the remaining processes in the making of the oil became exclusively the job for women. On the whole, some recent researches have shown that there was no absolute rigidity regarding trades specifically reserved for men or women.<sup>74</sup> The only determining factor was the physical strength and energy required for a particular job. From this perspective, it was natural that the women had their limits.

---

<sup>74</sup> OGUNDIJO, M.I., *Indigenous Education in Ejigbo District of Osun Division in the Pre-colonial Days and the Coming of the Missionaries*, Ife, 1970, 11-12.

It is also significant to mention, as a credit to the African traditional educational system, the provision it made for the training of the handicapped persons in order to make them worthy and contributing members of the society. The lame and hunchback, for example, were taught sedentary occupations such as weaving, or carving, barbing or blacksmith. Some were also trained to be native doctors and things of the like, as long as they were inclined to such professions. Such people were from childhood allowed to take part in the life of the community in the areas where their handicap could permit. In some cases they were allowed to be trained by people of similar impediments, so that their life-experiences in overcoming their handicap could be transferred to the young handicapped.

Coming down gradually to our modern times, the apprenticeship system generally has become very popular in educating young Africans even into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. In many technical fields till date, this system of education – apprenticeship – is still to be found in every little hamlet, village or town anywhere in Nigeria. In Ibadan city alone Callaway<sup>75</sup> noted that there were at least 246 blacksmiths in 1963, and each with a good number of apprentices. Also McDowell in his study of educational forms and processes in Ile-Ife observed: Except for the formal school system, the largest program involving the education of youth in Ile-Ife is that of the apprenticeship schemes of small crafts and businesses. According to his survey of small businesses, there were in June 1968 a total of 1.407 apprentices learning a particular trade.<sup>76</sup> This research involved only a small group in a small corner of the nation. Today in many other parts of Nigeria, many years after, especially in Igboland for instance, every major street in every town and village is filled with business houses and workshops, and each harbouring a good number of apprentices.

Entry requirements into apprenticeship-training vary widely according to the type of trade, craft, or profession. The age of apprentices ranges between 9 and 40 years, although 96 % are between the ages of 12 and 25 years. The ages vary because some apprentices, prior to their enrollment, may have attained other basic qualifications from other fields resulting from the demands of our sophisticated modern age.

Even when formal education became inevitable, the entry requirements also varied widely, but were affected greatly by the type of vocation involved. It became obvious from interviews with masters and officials of the various craft unions and associations that the expansion of the formal school did not conflict with the apprenticeship system as a whole; on the contrary, most of the craft-masters sought to enroll as many highly educated apprentices as possible – particularly in those businesses which were more highly technical and which re-

---

<sup>75</sup> See CALLAWAY, A., "Nigeria's Indigenous Education: The Apprenticeship System", in: *University of Ife Journal of African Studies*, 1, 1, 1964.

<sup>76</sup> McDOWELL, D.W., *The varieties of Educational Forms and Processes in Ile-Ife Community*, Ife, 1969, 33.



quired literacy (for example, printing, photography, drafting). It was apparent that the educational content of modern apprenticeship-training at this level placed the onus of responsibility on the learning process and not on the teaching process. The master evaluated every candidate on the basis of his active performance in the specific tasks involved. The master was there only to give his corrective directives. The apprentice was on “probation” during the first few months, to determine how well he could learn. The master was often away from the business for appreciable lengths of time, giving responsibility to his foreman or his senior apprentice. He was thus unable and perhaps in certain cases unwilling to give much individual attention to the apprentices. He issued general directives and went. At this level there is more doing than learning. The apprentice must perfect himself in the act of doing the job. On the whole there was no universally available code, literature or printed instructions (like in the West) – and where this happened to be available, it was the property of the master and was never shown to the apprentice. It was guarded as the secret of the profession, to be made known to the apprentice only when he was certified as competent enough to be independent.

The truth of the matter today is: If it were not for this African traditional system of education which still absorbs till date millions of Nigerian youth, whether literate or non-literate, there would have been millions of unemployed young men and women in Nigeria today. We do not deny the fact of the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria, where many young people are jobless roaming the streets, and sometimes committing crimes. We only mean to say that the situation would have been worse, because the system of learning by doing or participation or apprenticeship has helped many (when we analyze the situation of the Igbo-experience for example) to find self-employment. Many of the successful self-employed men and women in Africa today testify that their journey to success was a long and an enduring adventure of trial and error, based on their early educational experiences. What the modern system of education needs is the integration of the African traditional methods of learning by doing in general participation in the early years; and then later, for better professionalism, the apprenticeship systems, into the overall educational process. This would go a long way in balancing the quality of education and thereby equipping the young with an “all-round-knowledge” that will enable them find jobs, even outside the government scheme of jobs, or at worst set themselves up (self-employment) with their learnt experiences.