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INDIGENOUS AFRICAN VALUE SYSTEM AND THE QUEST FOR CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION: THE *UBUNTU* PERSPECTIVE.

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Abstract
In this research, we examined the suitability of Ubuntu, a concept of the indigenous Value system in Africa, in the light of the quest for a better and contemporary education that is founded and grounded in African values. This becomes pertinent since the idea of decolonization and articulation of new ideas that will improve the existential condition of contemporary Africans have become urgent due to sustained development challenges that education could help dissolve. Through the method of philosophical speculation, analysis and prescription, this study argues that an authentic African contemporary education can be built on value a system that is nurtured by Ubuntu. From this orient, this study strongly argues that the spirit of community, togetherness, interdependence, mutuality, caring and inclusion, which are deeply enshrined as indigenous values and admitted by Ubuntu, can serve as a philosophical basis upon which a new contemporary curriculum and pedagogy can function. This study, therefore, submits that the quest for a developed and improved Africa can only be attained if authentic cultural measures are integrated into an educational system consisting in indigenous existential ideas that are built on African ideas.

Keywords: African Philosophy, Indigenous Values, Culture, *Ubuntu*, Pedagogy.

Introduction

There exist debates as to the possibility and reality of African Philosophy. Africans were regarded by Western thinkers to be primitive, reflectively uncivilized and anthropologically fully un-evolved. Philosophers like Thomas Hobbes, Baron De Montesquieu, Jean Jacque Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, and Thomas Jefferson, to name a few have opined that Africans cannot think; they have no philosophy (Oluwole, 2006:10-1). The basic idea among these scholars is that the European mindset is higher than not only Africans but any other on the planet. In the face of the foregoing derogation of black intellect "torrent of scholars, both of

African and non-African roots have, in our opinion successfully argued that Eurocentrism is an error in reasoning" (Ofuasia, 2016: 186). However, it should be stated that toward the end of the 20th century, late Kenyan erudite scholar Henry Oruka (1990) identified some trends under what has come to be labeled as 'African Philosophy'. Barry Hallen argued that "African philosophy, as an autochthonous and important area of research in its own right, definitely has arrived, and it deserves far more attention from international academics than it is presently receiving" (Hallen, 2002:48).

Ethno-philosophy is one of the trends proposed by Oruka (1990) and it is adopted as the framework for this study for it accommodates the African value system which is the concern of this essay. Taking the challenge of Barry Hallen as axiomatic, we show that there is a link between indigenous African Philosophy and modern education in terms of pedagogy, curriculum and culture in search for an improved society with the benefit of hindsight that commendable efforts and success stories are now adducible to African philosophy in Music, Fine Art, Literature, Fashion and Arts generally.

It is in the light of the foregoing that this study provides the ontological and pedagogical underpinning of *Ubuntu* to serve as a viable alternative through which positive and plausible indigenous knowledge systems can assist the ideal of a suitable contemporary African education that is home-driven. In the second section, this study articulates the main idea of *Ubuntu* as an indigenous knowledge system with values implicit for contemporary African scholarship. In the third section, effort is made to disclose how this indigenous ideal can assist with the goals, objectives, pedagogy, curriculum and cultural awareness that tend to lacking in present Africa education systems. The fourth section is the conclusion.

Ubuntu: An African Values and Thought System

Ubuntu, a Zulu word, is a term meaning 'humanity' which is often translated as 'I am because we are' or humanity towards others. In its philosophical sense, it projects the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects humanity; it is an African humanism relating to how persons are connected (Gade,2012: 488).The word *Ubuntu* is derived from a *Nguni* (*isiZulu*) aphorism: '*Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu'*, which can be translated as 'a person is a person because of or through others'. *Ubuntu* can be described as the capacity to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring. Thus, the traditional understanding that one is truly human only as a member of a community is expressed in terms of *Ubuntu*. For Mogobe Ramose, '*Ubuntu* is simultaneously the foundation and the edifice of African philosophy' (Ramose 1999: 49). On a similar note, Jabulani Sithole (2001) writes: '*Ubuntu* functions as a unifying factor, bringing people together regardless of their background or access to wealth'. It in this same vein that Wendy Luhabe stressed that:

> Our own African culture taught us concepts such as respect, trust, compassion and, above all, that we are a collective with the success of one person depending very much on the success of all. This is a concept widely referred to as "*Ubuntu*" or "umntungumntungabanye" (what makes us human is our recognition of the humanity in others) (Luhabe 2002: 103).

From the foregoing exploration, we can possibly infer that *Ubuntu* is characterized by communal bonding as being more fundamental than objective individuality. Positive and mutually beneficial behaviour is of essence to the *Ubuntu* philosophy. *Ubuntu* communitarism cultivates a team spirit towards a greater good. *Ubuntu* philosophy involves recognising an individual's socio-cultural values within an existential context. Respect is shown to one's elders under the *Ubuntu* philosophy. Respect for the community and corporate social responsibility are part of the *Ubuntu* philosophy. It is, therefore, possible to deduce the cultural, religious, political, axiological and philosophical impressions of *Ubuntu*.

While Africans may belong to different societies and have different traditions and rituals, the idea of *Ubuntu* usually infers a strong cultural, moral and spiritual meaning. There lies a strong religious basis as to the connective relationship between people and their ancestors who form as links to the Divine Spirit. A good person is not identified primarily by successful material acquisition or by biological make up but by his quality of inter-personal relationship and positive communal roles. This relation does not end at death as the quality of his relation while alive determines his elevation to ancestor after death which further extends relation beyond the living to the afterworld. For this, persons are motivated to respect the community's rules; they undergo initiation to establish formal ties with both the current community members and those that have passed on, and they ensure harmony by adhering to the *Ubuntu* principles in the course of life.

This idea is captured by the South African Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu as he describes *Ubuntu* "as the essence of being human" (Tutu 1999: 31-2). It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in others'. I am human because I belong. It speaks about wholesomeness, it speaks about compassion. Persons with *Ubuntu* are welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, as well as willing to share. They know that they are reduced when others are humiliated, diminished when others are oppressed, lessened when others are treated as if they were lesser than who they are. In the words of Desmond Tutu: 'The quality of *Ubuntu* gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them' (Tutu 1999: 31-2). These characteristics stated by Desmond Tutu as the attitude of the one who follows the ideals of *Ubuntu*, emphasizes the ethically derived religious link between members of the society who are all part of a greater life. The ethical values therein, make for the morality that is home grown and well integrated into community shorn of intruding externalities. Its moral ideals seek to strengthen the link and bond between men so much so that one becomes conscious of his actions on the wellbeing of those around him.

Ubuntu has its socio- political dimension. In this sense, *Ubuntu* is often mentioned to bring about a stronger sense of unity. The principle of caring for each other's well-being is promoted, and a spirit of mutual support fostered. Each individual's humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through recognition of the individual's humanity. It also acknowledges both the rights and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being though it is not perfect per se. *Ubuntu* that stresses allowing every individual to have their equal say in any discussion and in ultimately reaching an agreement acceptable to all may lead to conformist behaviour in order to achieve group solidarity. Recently Edwin Etieyibo confirms that *Ubuntu* could be

'…construed as a form of cosmopolitan theory' (Etieyibo 2017:139). This for him is possible because of the 'duty or obligation that humans owe other humans… in virtue of humanity or the notion of *human-ness'* (Etieyibo 2017: 139).

In an objectified community, the individual does not pursue the common good instead of his or her own good, but rather pursues his or her own good by pursuing the common good. The ethics of such a collective does not ask persons to sacrifice their own good in order to promote the good of others, but instead, to recognise that they can attain their own true good only by promoting the good of others (Lutz 2009). This is not the political underpinning of *Ubuntu.*

The Philosophical aspect of *Ubuntu* links up closely with its respect for individuality. But, be it noted that the individuality which *Ubuntu* respects, is not of Cartesian making. On the contrary, *Ubuntu* directly contradicts the Cartesian conception of individuality in terms of which the individual or self can be conceived without thereby necessarily conceiving the other. The Cartesian individual exists prior to, or separately and independently from the rest of the community or society. And by implication, the rest of society is nothing but an added extra to a pre-existent and self-sufficient being. The '*Cogito ergo sum*' is not the opposite of '*Ubuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu'*, because the Cartesian individuality finds its opponent in collectivism whereby the individual vanishes and only becomes a part of community without any strong relevance. The *Ubuntu* individuality encompasses the centrality of individual but with the framework of the society betterment. In other words, *Ubuntu* goes far away from collectivism or a pure Cartesian individuality. It starts from the individual capacitation, promotion and self-creativity to his or her relation with the others. The solitaire individual or the collective individual is transformed in an individual filled with sense of solidarity towards the community.

From the foregoing analysis, it is not improper to infer that *Ubuntu* is a multi-faceted philosophical system that involves logic, metaphysics, epistemology and ethics; it is a philosophy of life that is concerned with the reinforcement of unity, oneness and solidarity among the Bantu people. It is the distinctive elasticity and practical nature that makes *Ubuntu* applicable in almost all facets of human life. As such, the concept has been wisely exported as an underlying philosophy or code of conduct into business, legal system, education, theology/religion, health and disciplines such as African philosophy and ethics (Munyaradzi 2012).

Ubuntu and Contemporary African Scholarship

It is clear from our examination thus far that *Ubuntu* as a value system is indigenous to Africa, specifically, from the foray into the meaning and nature of *Ubuntu,* the following deductions are plausible:

(1) *Ubuntu* as a philosophic, socio-political and axiological concept underscores interpersonal relations among parts for the progress and sustenance of the whole. This necessarily goes contrary to the notion of independence and self-reliance replete in Substance philosophy;
(2) *Ubuntu* in the religious sphere for Africans hint at the interpenetration between the past and the present in terms of the connectivity between the living and their ancestors. This linkage no doubt shapes character and well-being of future progeny; and

(3) *Ubuntu* makes no distinction between the self and others as it views the entire universe as an interconnected whole. God has not been given undue and exaggerated qualities to be the perfect Substance as derived from Aristotle and prominent Church scholars like St. Aquinas (Ofuasia 2017: 149-53).

The implications of each of these if accepted to be case would easily be seen. But critically, it needs to be made palpable at this juncture, that *Ubuntu* finds a parallel in discussions of the *Yoruba* concepts of *Eniyan* and *Omoluwabi*; the *Igbo* concept of *Umu-nna*; the *Akan* notion of *Onipa;* the *kiSwahili* words *Ujamaa* ("familyhood") and *Harambee* ("pulling together"). For each of these terms, the similarity includes an appeal to a similar body of philosophy and ontology; and extrapolation of some conceptions of human beings as interdependent as well as deriving value claims from this interdependence. It uncovers that even in the face of apparent differences in geography and linguistics, African societies share some levels of semblances and attitudes to reality.

Implications of Ubuntu for Curriculum, Pedagogy and Culture in Education

It is the case that *Ubuntu* does not endorse the idea of objectified individualism. It speaks the language of solidarity and cooperation and this is an essential tool that is missing in contemporary African scholarship that is Western-driven with its underlining philosophical thrust of idealism and realism directed towards the creation of pseudo European society which stands in contrast to an existentially anthropological philosophy like *Ubuntu.* This has had a negative impact on the formulation of suitable philosophical direction on education in Africa. A re-orientation towards African thought and values system would lead to a re-awakening of educational goals and objectives that directly address African challenges that could be better dissolved by the application of indigenous values and thought that are well-grounded in culture and environment. It is in this that the required epistemological and axiological necessities and gaps could be located. Through *Ubuntu*, the goals and objectives of education are well identified as the need for mutuality, respect for self and Others, existential considerations of individuals and communitarism. To this end, the goals of education become specific with reference to locale instead of copying western generalized goals that lead Africans to societal alienation. Furthermore, these goals and objectives are to be synchronized with applicable western technologies and science in the pursuance and identification of indigenous knowledge and related epistemic experiences. Education should accessible to all to care for all cadres of capabilities and individuals.

Knowledge should be subjective, people oriented rather than being abstract and too objective which tends to breed extreme individualism and collectives. Knowledge and educational system built on *Ubuntu* tends more to easy self-appropriation, practice and relevance. The epistemic derivatives of Ubuntu morality could be used to guide and drive educational systems as every education is morally driven. In this wise, African education systems should reinforce the existential values of mutuality, respect for self and Others, good character, tolerance, individualism and good community development and relation in the formulation of policies and management of education. Thus, education would become effective in driving both indigenous and modern technological and scientific development, economic sustainability and political stability.

Curriculum contents are to reflect the goals and objectives of education in material and philosophic interpretations by encapsulating the culture, the people and the environment. In the spirit of Ubuntu, individual basic developmental needs, not as in herd mentality, are to be reflected if mutuality and sense of reciprocity to community is upheld. So, the rate and storage on the power of individuals to receive, store, retrieve and process information on their own without error or distortion must be central to curriculum (Wilson, 2014:6). Such basic competencies must revolve around basic literacy and knowledge of society, phenomenon of interest (persons, events or environment), computational skills, healthy good living, history and application of science and technology to solve problems. These could be limited by lack of commensurate literacy so that persons can self –appropriate, process information, become more clear-headed and critical, and contributory to community development. The language of literacy may limit and increase inability to identify, appropriate and articulate knowledge in an intelligible and practical manner as often experienced in the use of foreign languages which also engenders alienation. In this wise, the use of indigenous languages is advocated to dissolve these challenges in order to maximize individual development in his ability to communicate with Others and in community building; in this mutuality, responsibility, care and participation is increased. Curriculum should consist in harnessing both individual and community development through subjects like Civic and Moral education, traditional religion, science and technology, Mathematics, Humanities; all well directed towards dissolving basic and general challenges of society in a critical, practical and transformative manner in terms of ethics, sharing, reciprocity, responsibility, caring, self and communal development.

In pedagogy, both teachers and learners are open to learn and be learned. This is in line with the thrust of the Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire. For him, "authentic education is not carried out by 'A' for 'B' or by 'A' about 'B', but rather by 'A' with 'A' mediated by the world – a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it" (Freire, 1997). Indigenous knowledge systems and African folklores' methods as we have explored from traditional *Ubuntu* dimension has a lot of philosophic insights to offer for moral development among the budding minds in Africa's pre and tertiary institutions. However, it needs to be promoted vigorously in addition to and adaptations in educational technology. Essentially, an existential approach to teaching is necessary as dictated by caring, inclusion and subjectivity. The African age-group system, an inclusive approach, could be used in peer-mentoring, knowledge sharing, less competition driven assessment and examination, peer-review and peer teaching. Teachers as elders in African environment are expected to attend to learner's needs and still treat and attend to him as a member of class community. Classes are to be managed in accordance with intensive African moral perspectives of Ubuntu's ethics with active parental and significant Others' active participation in moral development and learners' well-being to make learning more pleasant. Teaching and instruction should reflect substantial local examples and illustration for ease of knowledge acquisition and adaptation while the natural growth path of learners are taken into due consideration. Language of teaching and instruction should be in indigenous languages; an international language may be included in the curriculum as a subject. Scientific nomenclatures are to be adapted to indigenous languages, where not possible they could be retained in their original forms as common in other international languages.

Culturally, an *Ubuntu* underpinned curriculum or pedagogy has the potential to speak to the several ills that currently plagues the contemporary African society. For this to happen, the deliberate push and assistance from governments cannot be undermined. Hence, the first step is the need for government to lay stress and emphasis on the urgency to embrace tradition and culture as fundamental to policy formulation. Government will need to use her power to sensitize parents on the need to allow their children to learn and appreciate culture in the real sense of the word. Government may publicise the rhetoric that lack of proper parenthood and emphasis on irrelevant contents and approaches of Western education as the norm, has led to the emergence of fickle-minded children with no respect for family and country. It is important to revive the aspect of traditional and cultural values that has positive implications for human development and government may allow the public understand that this may be attained through the philosophic underpinning of traditional folklores. Ideas of good parenthood and the expectation of the truly educated person are replete in traditional folklore but need to be tapped for utility. Balogun shares this position when he argued that "many of the causes of the problems of social degeneration and decay could be avoided if there are good fatherhood and motherhood in place to nurture, protect and guide the child for moral goodness and positive greatness" (Balogun, 2013: 40).

Furthermore, the view that traditional religion and folklore is barbaric and demonic needs to be critically reviewed and jettisoned as there is no conclusive argument to that effect. Christianity and Islam have merely used this as a formula to gain increased membership. It is pertinent for government to learn and share experiences from states like Japan, China, India, Korea who stuck to their indigenous languages, traditions and customs as models instead of copying Western blueprint which is rampant among African countries. India is renowned for herbal medicine, China, Japan and Korea are renown for technology. A critical look at these nations reveals that they keep to their cultural and philosophical roots. Government must be able to publicize the proposed gains from employing the positive aspect of the African roots pregnant with philosophic values that would inform human development. The spate or torrent of children disrespecting their parents in the name of having rights and privilege have rendered almost useless the influence of parents wrongful and uncontrolled influx of cultural externalities. When government sensitizes parents of the need to teach folklore to nurture human development, it must also make parents see that the job of raising children is not limited to the domestic sphere alone. In other words, the society where the child is born also plays a vital role in child development. The use of indigenous episteme, which may be promoted may then be seen as a viable platform for the development of positive moral values in communities.

So, regardless of the African indigenous system that is to be used, it is important to articulate that it will be necessarily underpinned by *Ubuntu*, and as this study has argued, the retrieval and application of ideas driven by African cultural perspectives is pertinent to assist in abating the needless social vices that are usually calamitous both for persons and community. This alone underscores how interdependent African societies are.

However, the success or failure of an *Ubuntu*-driven educational system is anchored on several factors. Many present African leaders are ill-informed and lack a good understanding of the reality of Africa's fundamental problems; the interpretations of which are western

paradigm based which tend to lead to more confusion. Colonialism aside, many African policy makers lack the will to properly face educational challenges. It may also be argued that many African nations are multi-ethnic, so, balancing the interests of all may be difficult, however, this study has shown that there are basic similarities that could be successfully explored.

The scope and delimitation of the study spring up from the fact that this work deals essentially, with the delineation of the connection between education and culture with a view that it can sustain as well as to ensuring sustainability and averting total collapse of education in Africa, nay Nigeria. Adalemo (2001:23) acknowledged that inadequacies of institutional system performance and sustainability in Nigeria education emanates as a result of the disconnection with culture. This view suggests that the different strata of profound education owe a duty call in anchoring of culture as its primary assignment which is in line with a bid to avert crisis in society. However, various educational crises in Africa, nay Nigeria may be adduced to significant lack of culture and history of the people in terms of their goals, objectives, curriculum and pedagogy. Being the ground or soil, as well as the collective consciousness of the people, culture becomes the focal point of education that should not be taken for granted. It is at this level of understanding that the future of education can be anticipated and made possible through the kind of knowledge generated and disseminated to other members of society.

One of the challenges of educational system in developing countries is its negative relationship with culture and tradition of the people. It has been established that meaningful education emanates from cultural practice. It is imperative to begin this segment by differentiating between education and schooling. This will clear the air of some dust from mere conception of education towards a re-direction of philosophy of education. In this study, we presented the view that profound education can be seen as a way of transmitting values or the acculturation process of a people. This can be formal or informal. It is formal when there is systematic procedure to achieving stated objectives. A means to achieve a formal education is the establishment of schools. The school is a social investment to serve a social need. It is a specialized institution charged with the responsibility of educating the young ones. Its emergence is as a result of a social division of labour. It is a truism that a child is born into a society which has a culture. Education is an attempt to develop the personality of the child and prepare him/her for the membership of the society. As earlier stated, the child is not a member of a society until he has learnt the culture. This is what education does and remains its primary duty. Education is an activity of the whole community and it is nothing other than the whole live of a community viewed from the particular standpoint of learning to live that life (cf. Ottaway, 1962: 18-26). He added that the whole life of a community is its culture. Culture determines education while education determines the personality of the individual. Man is influence by, and he influences his environment by continuous ethically based interaction. This helps in the development of the individual personality. Several studies carried out by psychologists have shown the influence of environment on the personality of the individual. The point we are making is that education is interwoven with culture. Therefore, it is difficult to separate one from the other.

4.0 Conclusion

In this essay, we have been able to show that there is a deep connection among all African indigenous knowledge system as reflected in *Ubuntu.* It has also been argued that the need to disassociate from the negative consequences of Western-induced curriculum is sacrosanct were Africa has to initiate for herself a development template that is home-driven. In the final part of the analyses, the scope and limitation of this quest are outlined and shown to be attainable with government's assistance and motivation. Unless these aspects of the African world-views are introduced into contemporary education, Africa and Nigeria will continue to produce minds mirrored after Frantz Fanon's (2008) black skin white masks.

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