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Strategies for Educating African Children in the Face of Societal and Cultural Inhibitions

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Abstract

The paper examined the strategies for educating African children in the face of social and cultural inhibitions. It highlighted the philosophy and goals of education in Africa. It stressed the societal and cultural inhibitions on the education of African children, to include – the Nigerian value system, social class differences, gender inequality, societal emphasis on certificate, environmental inhibitions, superstitious beliefs, language differences, tribalism and cultural conflict and crises. The paper suggested socio-cultural strategies to enhance the education of African children among others, to include – the inculcation of right types of values and attitudes by government, parents, teachers and general public on the education of African children. The establishment of gender responsive pedagogy and environment to ensure equal access to education as well as social class difference should be addressed to ensure full utilization of potentials and capabilities as well as integration of African children into the wider society. Laws and policies addressing the issue of tribalism should be established to ensure functional and productive education for African children.

Keywords: Education, Society and Culture

Education is the process by which an individual acquires physical and social capabilities demanded by the society in which he/she is born into in order to function maximally (Uwadi, 2010). It is regarded as a tool for national development as well as a process by which the society instills in its members behavioural patterns that are deemed desirable for individual and societal development. According to Gbamanja

(2001), the primary function of education in a society is to preserve and transmit the cultural heritage to the young, transform the cultural heritage and develop in individuals the skills to enable them contribute meaningfully to the solutions of our daily problems and provide for the needs of the society. This implies that education is to a nation what the mind is to the body. Uwadi (2010) further stressed that just as a diseased mind is handicapped in the coordination and direction of bodily activities, so will the nation be affected without education. Thus, education inculcates adequate knowledge, skills, values, facts and attitudes for lifelong learning in an individual to enable him/her contribute effectively in the development of the society.

In a situation where African children are being denied opportunities to be educated as a result of societal and cultural inhibitions, it hinders the progress and development of the African society. It is through education that cultural heritage are transferred from generation to generation. That is why Ughamadu (2006:4) observed that;education is a process by which young people acquire the cultural heritage, knowledge, ideals and the civilization of the past in order to be able to take part in the civilization of the present and help build the civilization of the future.

Educating African children to overcome societal and cultural inhibitions will help them live effectively and efficiently in the present society and contribute immensely to the advancement and upliftment of the nation. In this regard, this paper examined the strategies for educating African children in the face of societal and cultural inhibitions under the following sub-headings;

- Philosophy and Goals of Education in Nigeria
- Societal Inhibitions on the Education of African Children
- Cultural Inhibitions on the Education of African Children
- Socio-Cultural Strategies to Enhance the Education of African Children
- Conclusion

Philosophy and Goals of Education in Nigeria

Education is an instrument for social change as well as a powerful tool for social, economical, political, moral, intellectual and technological development of a nation. It is regarded as the key investment in any country as it plays a vital role towards sustainable human development. It is crucial for every Nigerian child to benefit from every investment in education irrespective of society, culture, gender or location. The Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on the following set of beliefs according to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013:13).

- *Education is an instrument for national development and social change;*
- *Education is vital for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria;*
- *Education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society;*
- *Education is compulsory and is the right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, ethnic background and peculiar individual challenges; and*

- *Education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society.*

The goals of education in Nigeria according to FRN (2013:14) are the;

- *Development of the individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen;*

- *Total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigerian society and the world;*

- *Provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education within and outside the formal school system;*

- *Inculcation of national consciousness, value and national unity; and*

- *Development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society.*

In pursuance of these philosophies and goals, every Nigerian child requires adequate comprehensive and functional education that will be relevant to the needs and demands of the society. Thus, educating theAfrican children to overcome these societal and cultural inhibitions becomes imperative.

Societal Inhibitions on the Education of African Children

In an attempt to explain the societal inhibitions on the education of African children, there is need to examine the term "society". Society is a group of persons who hold a common worldwide or common cosmological framework for explaining the "hows" and "whys" of daily existence and for organizing their activities (Kanu, 2005). She further explained that worldwide is generally derived from customes, beliefs, arts, languages, science and total life idiom of the people which is internalized from childhood through system of living together in organized communities. Hornby (2000:1129) defined society as "people in general living together in communities". Society is thus a constituent of several institutions such as family, age-grades, peer group, school and outer communities. The society is dynamic in nature. As the societal needs and demands change, so its expectation, values, beliefs**:**and aspirations. All these changes in the society inhibit the education of the African children. Societal inhibitions on the education of African children include;

- **African Value System:** The term "value" means worth or importance which is attached to something. Value is a belief about what is desirable or not, as well as principle or standard of a society. This implies a society's judgment of what is desirable and important. According to Esu, Ukpebi and Ndifon (2009), values are general guides to behaviour which give direction to life and they are end products of individual's experiences. Values are the building blocks of the society. In a situation where the society's value system is porous, there is bound to be chaos and strife among the people. It could also be seen as belief, attitude, ideas, orientation, practice and principles that a society considers right and desirable.

Values are important determinants of action, which guides, modify, direct, influence and shape an individual's line of action in any given situation.

The National policy on Education (2013:16) stated that the quality of instruction at all levels of education shall be oriented towards inculcating the following values;

- Respect for the worth and dignity of the individual;
- Faith in man's ability to make rational decision;
- Moral and spiritual principles in inter-personal and human relations;
- Shared responsibility for the common good of the society;
- Promote the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children; and
- Acquisition of functional skills and competencies necessary for self reliance.

These values are expected to be internalized by African children (learners) through education. But the African value system is dynamic in nature. It changes from time to time. As it changes, African children are faced with the challenges of adapting to the changing situation of the society. The school curriculum has to be modified and revised to accommodate the changes in the value system. African children that are able to adapt to the changing value system will be successful, while those who are not able to cope with the changes will be left out. This is why African value system constitutes some societal inhibitions on the education of its children.

- **Social Class Differences:** Social class difference is one of the inhibitions on the education of African children. Social class is a social stratification in which people are grouped into a set of hierarchical social categories. According to Olulube (2011), social class is regarded as social stratification which means the hierarchical arrangement of social classes within a society. Ekeng (2017) maintains that the implication of social stratification is that members of the society are placed in a rank that is hierarchically based on a lot of factors, such as political power, wealth, educational qualification, occupation, etc. It is the structure of inequality that persists across generation and also a pattern of structured inequality that creates a hierarchy similar to steps in a ladder or layers of rock. To this view, it is a structure whereby members of the same society are categorized based on their socio-economic status or class. In African context, it is classified into upper, middle and lower classes.

A gifted and talented child born into a lower socio-economic class, where parents cannot afford to train orprovide necessary materials for school would be affected educationally. The society has fashioned that children from upper or elite class flock together, while those from lower class interact. Social class differences among members of the society hinder the full utilization of the potentials and capabilities of African children thereby limiting their progress in education.

- **Gender Inequality:** Gender inequality is an inhibition on the education of African children. Gender is a social attribute used to designate an individual as male or female (Onuoha-Chidiebere, Obi and Igbokwe, 2016). It is the social construction of female and male identity which is more than biological differences between men and women (Nzewi, 2016). In fact, it is a social construct that distinguishes the status and roles between men and women, particularly in the manner they contribute or participate in, as well as, rewarded in the society. Gender inequality is a situation where men and

women are not given equal opportunities to participate and contribute effectivelyand to actualize their full potentials and capabilities in the society.

It is a situation when women do not have the same right and enlightenment as men do; to social, economic and cultural development. Gender inequality in the education of African children means uneven or differences in treatment of males and females as regards to education. In many parts of the world, females are the victim of education inequalities. Education develops male and female physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, morally, economically and politically (Ughamadu, 2006). When someindividuals are deprived of this opportunity, their development is equally hampered in the society. Gender inequality should be fully addressed to ensure equal access to education for males and females in the society.

• **Societal Emphasis on Certification:**Emphasis on certificate is another inhibition on the education of African children. Societal emphasis on certificate instead of skill acquisition and knowledge has limited the education of African children. According to Onyeachu (2005:50), "the desire to get certificate mostly noticed in our society adversely affect the education of the African child". Children in desperate moods to acquire very good certificate engage in all sort of examination malpractices which will turn them out as half-baked graduates because of the quest for certification not on skill acquisition. There is need to place emphasis on skillfulness and competency. Anything contrary to this should be treated as counter-productive in this era of transformation.

• **Environmental Inhibition:** environment is the natural world in which people, animals and plants live (Wehmerer and Ashby, 2000). Environment has greater influences on the education of African children. This is why one of the goals of education in Nigeria according to FRN (2013:14) stated that "total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the African society and the world". In a situation where a child is being educated in a remote environment where he/she is limited to some environmentalexposures, it hinders the educational progress of that child. There is need for proper development and provision of social amenities in the society irrespective of rural or urban settings. Environmental inhibitions also include erosion, flooding and pollution which threaten the education of African children in several ways.

Cultural Inhibitions on the Education of African Children

In an attempt to look at cultural inhibitions on the education of African children, there is need to examine culture and its characteristics. Culture is a way of life of a group of people and a collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the member of one group or category of people from another. According to Onuoha-Chidiebere, Nwokocha and Nwokoro (2015:193) "culture is a set of attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours shared by a group of people but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next". It is different and dynamic from one society to another depending on the period. Elements of culture are learnt through

interaction and not inherited. It varies from one society to another and even within the same group of people, depending on the period in time. Culture occurs in layers. People even within the same culture carry several layers of mental programming within themselves. Different layers of culture exist at the following levels;

- **The National Level:** It associates with ethnic, linguistic or religious differences that exist within a nation.
- **The Gender Level:**It associates with gender differences (male and female).
- **The Generation Level:** it associates with the differences between grandparents and parents, parents and children.
- **The Social Class Level**: It associates with educational opportunities and differences in occupations.
- **The Corporate Level**:*it* associates with the particular culture of an organization. Applicable to those who are employed.

Culture has several distinguishing characteristics. These characteristics include;

- **Culture is learned:** People are not born with culture; they learn it. This means that culture is not biological. It is learned from families, peers, media and inhibitions. For instance, people learn to speak and understand language and to abide by rules of the society. They learn to produce and prepare food, making of hair style, ways of dressing as well as norms and values of the society. This process of cultural learning is known as enculturation or culture transmission.
- **Culture is Integrated:**this is holistic which means that various parts of a culture are being interconnected. All aspects of culture are related to one another and to understand a culture, one must learn all of its parts, not only a few.
- **Culture is Dynamic:** culture interacts and changes. This is because most cultures are in contact with other culture, they exchange ideas and symbols. All culture change, otherwise they would have problem adapting to changing environments. Cultures are integrated, if one component in the system changes, it is likely that the entire system must adjust.
- **Culture is Symbolic:** Symbols are abstract ways of referring to and understanding objects, ideas and feelings. Culture allows people to develop and interpret thoughts as well as exchange thoughts with one another. Language and other forms of symbolic communication such as art has meaning when people in a culture agree on their use and enable them to create, explain, transmit and record ideas and information.
- **Culture is Shared:** Culture is shared among people living in the same society. For instance a group of people in the South-South of Nigeria share Efik/Ibibio language, eat many of the same food, dress in similar styles, plant many of the same crops and are the same in their leadership style. Despite the shared nature of culture, that culture varies from community to community within a given geographical location. Culture has limitations on education of children. Some of the limitations of culture on education of African children include;
- **Superstitious Beliefs:**Every culture has common beliefs which are accepted as true. These beliefs are sometimes called superstitious beliefs because of lack of

empirical knowledge or lack of scientific proof. These beliefs are valued and accepted by majority of people in the community. For instance, in Ibibio land, when an owl perches on the roof of a house or around the building, it portrays danger or sign of impending death. Also some people believe that when your palm itches you, it means that you will receive a gift or some money. Based on the fact that traditional medicine can be taken without proper recommendation from a doctor, children from such community where they believe mostly on traditional medicine find it difficult to adjust to the new development in science. These beliefs are accepted by majority of people in the society or community but the basis of commitment on the beliefs varies from individual to individual. These beliefs have influenced the education of African children.

- **Cultural Values and Norms:** Values are those aspects of cultural practices, actions or objects that are held in high esteem among members of the society (Nakpodia, 2009). Values of a society are those aspects of culture which are needed in the society. Values are the worth of something or action which requires human attention. Values are collective conception of what is considered good, desirable and proper by a society and would therefore be transmitted to its young ones. In fact, values are those standard of behaviours, qualities of character, human relationships and lifestyles that are admired by a particular society. Familiar examples of values are wealth, loyalty, honesty, independence, equality, justice, friendships, love, good health, democracy, truth and wisdom. These examples of values can be categorized into individual and collective or general values. Values relate to norms. Norms provide rules for behaviour in specific situation, while values identity what should be judged as good or evil.
Values are indispensable in decision-making. This is why the right type of cultural values should be inculcated in children to enable them function and contribute effectively in the society. Differences in cultural values and norms limit the education of African children. Based on the fact that children come from different cultural backgrounds and they operate on different cultural values and norms, there is need for uniformity in cultural values and norms to enable them operate meaningfully in the society.

- **Language Differences:** Language is the means by which human beings communicate to one another. A language has no meaning unless one is able to understand it. It is a known fact that language is culture and culture is language. This is because when one can speak and understand the language of another group of people, then he/she would be able to understand their traditions, customs and problems better. Language is a vital instrument for effective teaching and learning to take place. Araromi (2005) stressed that language is the vehicle of communication per excellence and without it (language) homo sapiens will find it problematic to exist. It is only when an individual is able to send or receive message from others in oral, written or symbolic form that communication becomes effective. In view of the importance of language as

means of promoting social interaction and national unity, every child in Nigeria must learn one African language; Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba (FRN, 2013).

One can notice that, in most African societies, there are many distinct languages. In Nigeria, we have more than two hundred and fifty (250) distinct languages such as Efik/Ibibio, Yoruba, Ijaw, Urhobo, Idoma, Igbo, Igala, Hausa, Fulani, Tiv, etc.A language difference is a serious cultural inhibition on education of the African children. For effective teaching and learning to take place, both the teacher and the learners must be grounded in the language of instruction. Language difference and inadequate knowledge of the language of instruction may generate inadequate attention, lack of interest, restlessness, poor classroom management, ineffective instruction and communication, lack of confidence on the part of the teacher and the learners indiscipline, disrespect of the teacher,tra_uncy, lack of motivation and boredom. These manifestations may lead to ineffectiveness of instruction which will in turn inhibit the education of African children. It is only when language differences in Africa is being tackled that teaching and learning will be most effective.

- **Tribalism:** This is another cultural inhibition on education of African children. Tribalism is a state of being organized in a tribe or tribes. It is the maintenance by a tribal society of its organization, ways and autonomy in the face of change. Tribalism means one supporting his people whether they are right or wrong; oppressing or oppressed. Belonging to the group could be by ethnicity, birth place, colour, citizenship, school of thought or a group of people with common interest (Samson, 2014). Tribalism also is the feeling of being better than others and others are of lower class.

In Africa, tribalism has become a force that hinders advancement and upliftment in economic, social, political, spiritual, moral, and intellectual outlooks. Tribalism has indirectly given birth to the present evils called "quota system" and "state of origin". These are direct products, consciously or unconsciously designed, out of mediocrity to model the ruin of Africa. They fueled the growth of national inequality and anger of perceived injustices. In the face of this, educating African children becomes difficult. Tribalism interferes and limits the realization of individual's potentials as well as sufficient development in a nation. For instance, in a situation where a child is qualified for admission into Nigerian institutions but because of quota system or state of origin, he/she will not be admitted. This situation can influence the academic development of that child.

- **Culture Conflict and Crises:**Culture conflict and crises is an inhibition on the education of African children. Conflict is a serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one. It is a serious disagreement and argument about something important. Conflict comes from different ideas or opinions among people from different background and with different skills and experiences. Culture conflict is a type of conflict that occurs when different cultural values and beliefs clash. Cultural conflict is the clash of behavioral patterns and values that result when different cultures are incompletely assimilated. In fact, cultural conflict is a situation where there is

disagreement or difference in opinion or ideas, values, knowledge and belief of people from different cultural and sub-cultural background. This may lead to crises. The situation can hinder the academic progress and development of the children. Parents may be afraid to send their children to school, children in schools are not secured in the midst of conflict; many children of school age may be victim of the conflict. Thus, there is need to address the issue of cultural conflict and crises to ensure quality education of African children.

Socio-Cultural Strategies to Enhance the Education of African Children
According to Onyeachu, J. A. E. (2005) socio-cultural strategies to enhance the education of African children include;

• The right type of values, norms, attitudes and beliefs which will help for the survival of individual in the African society should be inculcated into education of African children by government, curriculum planners and developers, parents, teachers and other stakeholders.

• Gender responsive pedagogy and environment should be created for African children in order to ensure equal access to education.

• The issue of social class differences should be addressed and wealth distributed evenly to ensure full utilization of the potentials and capabilities as well as integration of African children into the wider society.

• Emphasis should be placed on skillfulness and competence rather than certification in this era of science and technological development to avoid counter productive of African children.

• The issue of superstitious beliefs in African society should be addressed through public enlightenment and people made to verify information based on scientific conclusions. This will enable children to acquire the right type of knowledge, values, skills and attitude for advancement in the 21st century.

• Government, parents, teachers and the entire society should address the issue of tribalism that has hindered growth politically, socially, economicallyin African society, as well as the educational system by establishing laws and policies that will discourage people from involving in this act.

• Using language of the immediate environment to teach may bring the desired upliftment in African children. In Nigeria, the three major languages – Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa, could be used to unite the nation and bring oneness into the hearts of the school children.

• Cultural conflict and crises should be managed and tackled by government, leaders and parents to ensure smooth running of the educational system and maintenance of peace and unity in the society.There should be campaign against culture conflict and crises in the country.

• Environmental inhibitions such as flooding, erosion and pollution should be addressed through public enlightenment to make African children to be environmental friendly.

- Diversified curriculum that caters for socio-cultural issues in the society should be promoted.
- Adequate attention should be devoted by parents towards the education of their children irrespective of gender, family type and parents' socio-economic status.
- Quota system and state of origin syndrome should be de-emphasized as admission criteria to ensure that qualified children are admitted into schools to receive adequate education, at all levels.

Conclusion

In every society, education is the major instrument of change. Inculcating the right education to African children in the face of societal and cultural inhibitions becomes imperative. The issues of societal and cultural inhibitions such as value system, certification, gender inequality, social class differences, language differences, tribalism, superstitious beliefs and environmental issues should be addressed to ensure that the education given to them is qualitative and functional. Government, teachers, parents and every stakeholder should join their hands together to ensure that socio-cultural inhibitions are managed and addressed for adequate functioning of individuals and the society at large.

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