

EDUCATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF IFE ORACLE LITERATURE IN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This piece of work looks at Ife or Ifa Oracle Literature as the home of education that can develop Nigerian educational system because of the teachings derived from this fascinating monument. Education is meant to develop human character and mental exposition and to develop his environment. The principles and directions provided from the teachings of Ifa or Ife oracle in the traditional setting are well organized to lead a country positively in its growth and the development of peace and tranquility. Ife or Ifa oracle is a compendium of knowledge that every discipline found in the formal educational system can draw various topics from for a research purpose. This paper therefore suggests its inclusion in the Nigerian curriculum to teach the literature of African studies in both oral and written forms throughout Nigeria so as to create uniformity that will serve as an integral aspect of the compendium of knowledge in Nigerian culture.

Education is the development in character and mental exposition of a man and his country. It is the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted, facilities trained and skills developed. Education is therefore the sum total of various processes geared towards developing the individual and his society. The products of education therefore are the abilities, skills and other forms of positive behaviour built into people for well living.

The Nigerian Education was founded on the 1977 National Policy on Education to integrate the individual with a sound and effective society that would help in the building of the Nigerian Nation for development. There is no doubt that the national Policy on Education was very bold with quite an ambitious effort to give Nigeria as a heterogeneous country, the very first indigenous national system of education regardless of Nigeria's various ethnic, religious, socio-culturally, political and secular nature. The experiences of Islamic religion in the Northern Nigeria are predominant in all ways before and after amalgamation with the Southern Region and the remarkable differences from that of the Christians and the ethical of southern Nigeria. The multifarious differences bestriding the Nigerian country is indeed remarkable, bold and ambitious step on the part of government to have a Nigerian policy on education that gives Nigeria a national system of education.

The policy is quite amendable in that it defines an overriding philosophy of ensuring equal accessibility to education for all Nigerians who need education. This policy motivated various states and federal governments to declare free education at all levels but the policy conferred on the federal government to assume all financial responsibilities for all educational enterprises in Nigeria. The implication was that the quality and quantity of Nigerian education was at the mercy of the available fund of the federal government. The issue before us today is that of the crises and various contractions in the educational system of Nigeria at all levels that had been traceable to the dynamics of government's entire control over education without enough fund. For this integration to hold, Nigeria

had her own type of education before which was neglected, now if they can go back for it, it is a source that can still bring them together.

Education in Nigeria

Nigeria in spite of her philosophy of education has moved away from a free and democratic society, with the military intervention in the affairs of governance and the installation of persons in power. According to Arowolo (1995), the nation's economy has been battered by self-serving leaders. The Ethnic diversity which ought to serve as a source of strength has been turned into a tool of weakness and disunity. The Nigerian school system where Nigeria operation is supposed to be solidly on a sound Nigerian philosophy of education, has become a place of unbridled adoption of science and technology. African literature/poetry that was characterized by delight in language not only made life interesting but also sharpened awareness and thus enhanced effectiveness in productivity was not the priority again. Ifa or Ife Oracle as an African Literature according to Finnegan (1970) is a major school that is found in all Nigerian communities, although the Nigerian modern society does not want to hear about it because of the Christian and Islamic faith that came into existence in Nigeria. Abimbola (1977) acknowledges the wisdom found in Ifa Oracle and proffers that it is a compendium of knowledge, meaning that Ifa Oracle is the center or home of African cosmology where African religious studies and other areas of study can be drawn. Abimbola also noticed that the traces of this fascinating system could be found in several cultures of West Africa including Nigeria. Tamuno (1983) termed Ifa Oracle as the police in Africa and Nigeria before the coming of the missionaries. Tamuno also confirms that Ifa Oracle is a practice found throughout Nigeria, from the northern to Eastern region and from Western down the Southern region in Nigeria. The names and practices may differ but the intension is the same. Ifa Oracle is the literature that can be taught in Nigerian schools because it is the umbrella for all Nigerian culture that can improve the beauty in culture around Nigerian world. As a compendium, Ifa Oracle literature is a source of inspiration; it has creative power and can identify some basic similarities in computer sciences according to Longe (1983) who discusses eight of the basic concepts of computer science to illustrate the ancient system of Ifa divination. Longe further explains the numeric value in Ifa Oracle system based on (2) two Ogbe expressed in binary form.

Assistant Bishop C. Phillips in West Cost African (1897) in his advice to Nigerian Christians that was translated by Abosede (2010) mentions that:

No army neglects to study its opponents' secrets. In other words we cannot engage on opponent with success unless we first study his strategy. If we Christians do not study the tenets of our traditional religion or of Islam we cannot preach Christ and win converts. God gave us an example of the truth of this statement in the Bible's story of Moses. Before being chosen as the deliverer of the Israelites from Egyptians bondage, Moses had to be instructed in all wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts VIII:22). The same applies to Paul. If he had not studied Judaism deeply at the feet of Gamaliel, had he not learnt Greek philosophy in the school of Tarsus, his world would not have known such resounding success.

Bishop Phillips according to Abimbola concluded his words by saying that "the language of Ifa itself is profound." These are confirming words about Ifa as an African Literature that has to be studied to develop the moral value system in the Nigerian education.

African society cannot be fully developed by foreign scholars, instead the Nigerian educational system should be reflected in the Nigerian curriculum to teach African Traditional

education in order to redirect the moral values into the lives of the new generation of Nigerians that will enable them understand the reality for intellectual moral freedom.

Issues in Education in Nigeria

A country that lack moral development cannot grow. A healthy growth in a nation must depend on the building of good morals and value system in the human consciousness. That is what each member needs in a society especially in this period of materialism and social political changes. Education in Nigeria was meant for development, hence Nigerian policy on education states its ideology for the benefit of good national development. The policy on Education states its ideology for the benefit development with hopes to inculcate the right attitude and to attain an egalitarian society that will give equal right to Nigerian citizens.

All of these failed because the Nigerian educational system was not founded on any philosophy in Africa or Nigeria. The policy makers aimed at the foreign society in their planning for African society. The right type of education needed in Nigeria must be based on teaching African morals and value system for possessing the right human society that is filled with feelings for one another and to be your brothers' keeper. African society and the foreign society vary in terms of individualism and living a co-operate life existence. African society cannot be developed by foreign scholars with the foreign thought system. Education in Nigeria should be based or reflected on the African traditional system of education in order to re-direct the moral values into the lives of Nigerians in this new generation to enable them see the reality and make a comparative analysis for intellectual and moral freedom.

The informal system of education in Africa before now was known to all Africans with its values before the missionaries brought a formal system of education which Africans felt was the best because it made the outside countries to see what happens in African societies and was important for Africans for the purpose of record keeping. This emotion dragged Nigerians into a new culture which was foreign to all African counties including Nigeria as a country.

The Nigerian system of education although informal, parents play a critical role in the upbringing of their children by providing the necessary skills that will catalyze the industrialization process in every African community and state. This system of education provides a good life structure through character building, the value system in African culture, social responsibilities and job opportunity for the individual for life. Each family does not fail to share equal responsibilities in the training of their offspring. In African education, the female are properly cared for by their mothers while the male children are attached to their father for proper orientation. Children were not left to roam outside the family system to be educated by peer groups as it is today in this modern society especially in Nigeria. So many Nigerian artists have seen this problem, and they have tried to make their own impact. Achebe in his essays quoted Mphahlele, a Ghanaian Professor of Philosophy, on what William Abraham said, that:

Just as African scientists undertake to solve some of the scientific problems of Africa, Africa historians go into the history of Africa, African political scientists concern themselves with the politics of Africa, why should African Literature creators be exempted from the services that they themselves recognize as genuine?

From the foregoing, Nigerians must go back to study what they have ignorantly left behind to embrace a separate culture which was not understood enough and which has placed Nigerians in confusion now. African literature should be planted into the Nigerian educational curriculum right

from the primary school to secondary and Tertiary institutions in Nigeria to present a better image of African Society to the young generation that they might grow into what and who they are. Ifa Oracle divination is the literature that holds each community in West Africa including Nigeria together, if well studied can rejuvenate the lost cultural values and languages that are facing extinction in Nigeria. Omordu and Amahele (2014) commented on the Nigerian educational system for development thus:

We shall uphold the obligation to teach our youths to define themselves as Africans and determine their essential characteristics as Africans and become conscious of the fact that they are Africans and to live, act with that consciousness. The Nigerian educational system should therefore involve a well-patterned curriculum based on the African world view of who man is, the type of society man should live and the type of things to be valued.

In the modern Nigeria now, there is the concern about moral decay in education faced by the country. Anti-social crime and corruption have taken over every section of life in Nigeria. This is what the Ife oracle forbids in its society. The Isekiri, Ijaw and Urhobo in Delta including other Nigerians as a people communicate with the spirit world through Ife Oracle. The literary corpus of Ife Oracle have distinct names with their oracular languages coupled with oracy and poetic expressions to detect evil and good behaviour of people in each society. Ife Oracle with its arranged literary corpus is anti-evil among Nigerians that can straighten and give corrections to areas of decay in Nigeria.

Ifa or Ife Oracle as a School

The training of Ife or Ifa oracle practice takes a long period. An elaborate system of training involving much time and patience is marked out for all who aspire to become one. The percentage of people who successfully complete the long term training is usually very small; hence this paper is suggesting that the government should include the teaching, to begin from the primary school to the tertiary level in Nigerian schools. In most cases among the Yoruba, the trainees remain with their master who is the teacher for some fifteen to twenty years before their training is completed and at the end of the course, a test is given to check the student's level of understanding (Abimbola 1977). Although among the Itsekiri in Delta State, it takes a different shape, the learning of Ife Oracle first: it is hereditary from father to son over a long period of practice. Secondly, elderly men with interest go to any of the priests to learn the divination processes. The teaching consists of inculcating in the novice the skill of how to manipulate the divining chain and palm nut, the signature and names of each of the 256 verses before learning step by step the reading of each poem that belongs to each stanza. Ife or Ifa Oracle has a learning process that qualifies it as a school. It is something people can learn to draw out the ideology for self-improvement as a conscious being, to understand Nigerian environment, to see the reality of life that will enable man acknowledge God in his infinity and accept his neighbor as his brother and to finally remove selfishness from the Nigerian society.

Abimbola notices these steps of knowledge in the teachings of Ifa Oracle hence, he pronounces it a compendium of knowledge where various topics can be drawn. From the above, Ifa should not be tied to the Yoruba religious and cultural studies alone. It should be seen as an avenue to learn philosophical ideas about human life that will enrich the Nigerian culture. Bascom (1969) acknowledges the processes of Ifa divination found in almost the whole Africa. The linguistic affinity on the divination shows how wide spread the Ifa type is in West Africa. The ethnic minorities of the middle belt in Northern and Southern region in Nigeria are related to one another in this purpose (Abdullahi 2006). Whether Yoruba Ifa or Isekiri Ife, divination might be cited as being the most comprehensive scheme of Africa oral literature. Ifa Oracle literature cannot be said to have a definite

fixed canon. The number of pieces associated with each other differ; there are regional differences found in the pieces themselves but they come out with similar results. Ifa divination is practiced by the Yoruba and Benin-Edo of Nigeria which gave birth to Ifa divination among the Urhobo, Isoko, Izon and Isekiri people of the Delta State in Nigeria. The Fon of Dahomey call it Fa, the Ewe of Togo know it as Afa and the Yoruba in Cuba name it Ifa, Isoko Evba, Urhobo Epha and Izon name it Agbraka. Among the regional variations of the Ifa Oracle divination as mentioned by Finnegan (1970), there are official priest and religious specialist who tend to be skilled and conservative men on the idea of preserving this ancient text. The process of oracle divination is found in almost all African worlds according to Bascom (1969).

Great literary languages have a heritage of oral tradition as observed by Finnegan (1970) which has influenced the forms of the earliest literary efforts. She also mentions that tones (pitch) as an element in the structure of the languages are almost universal in Africa and is particularly striking in several of the west African languages including Nigerian languages like Yoruba, Isekiri, Urhobo, Isoko and Izon amongst others, are tonal languages. Africa and Nigeria languages are neither simple in structure nor deficient in vocabulary. The language of Ifa or Ife Oracle is metaphoric, symbolic, figurative and analogical in nature. The consultation proceeds through poetic allusion and analogy rather than straight answers to a specific question and this quality confirms its status as a corpus of literature. In the nature of human consciousness, morality has consistently helped in shaping the course of human history. What is supposedly valued by man tends to strengthen his course of morality to the extent that certain preference is intrinsically and extrinsically attached to what is valued. What is valued is expressed in both restricted and common languages in order for the people to keep and sustain its value.

Conclusion

The issue of indiscipline in Nigerian society has crept into Nigerian system of education. Social crimes are now virtues but Nigerians display themselves as Christians everywhere without honesty. The few persons that are truthful are being killed unexpectedly. In a country where immorality becomes the order of every circle cannot develop. Example, Yoruba Ifa Oracle verse 6(a) from Eji-Ogbe has this to say:

Though evil men triumph on earth, there remains the reckoning here after, thus said Ifa-Oracle to Orunmila and Obatala in condemnation of false divination, who, for their own selfish ends, prevent the Gift of procreation bestowed upon mankind by the divinities. All evil acts including sacrificial offerings unjustly demanded from clients will be answered for in due time, so said Ifa-racle. (Abosede, 2010).

Among the Isekiri also the Ife Oracle is anti-evil. The Isekiri people communicate with the spirit world through Ife oracle. The 256 literature Corpus of Ife Oracle in Isekiri have distinct verses, names with their oracular language and they work with themes. African society according to Omordu and Amahele (2014) who revisited the seven aspects of Fafunwa's objectives in (1995) that were meant for the development of:

The child's latent physical skills, character and to inculcate respect for elders and those in position of authority. To develop intellectual skills and acquire specific vocational training that will develop healthy attitude towards labour and to develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in the

family and community affairs. To understand, appreciate and promote cultural heritage of the community at large.

Omordu and Amahele also mentioned that the Nigeria system of education has been functioning with the Western concepts of values. This paper is therefore suggesting African literature from the point of Ifa Oracle literature that is central to all African countries; to teach the culture of Africa to Nigerian children. The inculcation of this literature into Nigerian schools will enable Nigerians see themselves as one.

The Nigeria government should create or build in higher institutions schools and institutes for African studies especially in the south-south area of the Nigerian universities. Nigeria as a country lacks unity, the study of Ifa oracle literature that is found in all Nigerian communities will serve as a tie and medium of integration between the multi-ethnic nature in Nigeria. The study of Ifa oracle literature will serve the source of respect to Nigerian multi-cultural bodies in Nigeria and increase the value and fear Nigerians give to almighty God.

This will build a good moral value into Nigerians to develop the right attitude towards labour, moral and character development Literature should serve as a ready antidote to the deterioration of interpersonal relationship incorporating the readiness to be one's brother's keeper and to serve humanity. (Bukoye, 1995)

The generality of Ife Oracle knowledge throughout African countries including Nigeria will serve as an integration between cultural background and religion, in addition to its being a basis for religious growth and moral development.

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