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Reviving the African Culture of 'Omoluabi' in the Yoruba Race as a Means of Adding Value to Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper focuses on reviving the African culture of 'Omoluabi' in the Yoruba race as a means of adding value to education in Nigeria. It defines the concept of 'Omoluabi' as a morally sound and upright person, and also, 'Omoluabi' as the standard which determines the morality and the immorality of an act in Yoruba society in Africa. It examines how some of those virtues that make an 'Omoluabi' got gradually deemphasised as western education spread while other practically 'strange' ones are being emphasised especially as technology advances. Regrettably, this neglect, in part, is responsible for various challenges facing Africa, especially Nigeria; ethnic and religious violence, terrorism, kidnapping, rape, political mugging, corruption and other social vices which are making education irrelevant in terms of moral values. This paper therefore advocates what 'Omoluabi' stands for as a leeway to restoring several virtues through Civics, History, Citizenship Education and Social Studies in the school curriculum. This becomes necessary and should be emphasised in our educational policies and practices in the process of value added education and value reorientation in Nigeria. The paper therefore recommended among others that the values held in high esteem as a Nation should be spelt out and encouraged to be internalized by students, and teachers should be role models. The need for man-making and character-making education as essential for the purpose of achieving material progress for the benefit of the citizens should be looked into.

1. Introduction

As regards the social virtues, Johnson (1921: 101), described the Yoruba as "virtuous, loving and kind", and the concept of 'Omoluabi' is the standard which determines the morality and the immorality of an act in Yoruba society in Africa. You could advertise your goods for sale by the road side without being there, all you needed to do was just to place a sample price on top or beside the goods, and nobody dared steal it or take it without paying. But some of those virtues that make an 'Omoluabi' got gradually deemphasised as western education spread while other practically 'strange' ones are being emphasised especially as technology advances. Regrettably, this neglect, in part, is responsible for various challenges facing Africa, especially Nigeria; ethnic and religious

violence, terrorism, kidnapping, rape, political mugging, corruption, indifference to duty, disrespect for the rule of law, bullying and other social vices which are making education irrelevant in terms of moral values. In the conceptual framework of value-added policy of education in the 21st century, 'Omoluabi', like mores and folkways in some societies, is now being recognised and advocated today as a leeway to restoring several virtues that have been lost in the unguided process of introducing and accepting western education in Nigeria. This reflects what Mahatma Gandhi once said that:

I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave. Nothing can be farther from my thought than that we should become exclusive or erect barriers. But I do respectfully contend that an appreciation of other cultures can fitly follow, never precede, an appreciation and assimilation of our own.

(<http://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/chap90.htm>)

Spinoza, B. (1632 – 1671) also said, "If you want the present to be different from the past, study the past". This is why subjects like Social Studies, Citizenship Education and especially Civics, that has been dropped as a school subject since the early 1970s and that could actually help us as a nation to trace our steps back to the real virtues that are characteristics of Africans are now being emphasised in the school curriculum. This paper will therefore focus its discussion on:

1. What is "Omoluabi"?
2. What are the virtues emphasised by "Omoluabi"?
3. How did western education erode what "Omoluabi" stands for and what are the effects?
4. How far can Civics, History and Social Studies go in reviving the "Omoluabi" virtues?

These questions and any other that may arise will be answered in this research. It is hoped that this study will sensitize all the stakeholders in education in Nigeria to the need to revive the culture and make western education worthwhile.

2. Statement of the Problem

In the traditional Nigerian society, cultural values were held in high esteem and good character was more important than any other thing. In fact, a person without it (good character), was as good as dead. The National Policy on Education also prescribed that the educational system should bring about positive change in our value system and our attitude, but there is also the problem of implementation, hence, evident moral rotteness in almost all facets of life in Nigeria. The effects of this has reached an embarrassing

stage, to the extent that you are almost ashamed that you are carrying the green passport when travelling outside Nigeria. Moral education has been relegated to the background and we are almost not relevant morally in the committee of nations. This paper therefore is a call for the need to look back and revive the culture of 'Omoluabi' of the Yoruba race so as to have sound and enduring education that would make the society vibrant again.

3. What Is 'Omoluabi'

The word, "Omoluabi", according to Oyerinde (1991), is a derived noun, realisable after the process of assimilation, contraction or vowel coalescence and vowel elision from the longer form nominal phrases having 'Omo' as their head nouns and 'ti oni iwa bi', 'ti oni uwa bi', 'ti olu iwa bi' as the relative qualifier. The detailed derivational process/exercise is considered unnecessary here because that is not our focus, however, there are two key words in "Omoluabi" - *Omọ* and *iwà*.

Omọ, means child or offspring, and is extremely important to the Yoruba race, because it assures continuity of a family while childlessness is an extinction signal. Therefore, the importance of children is reflected in several Yoruba sayings and songs; e.g.

"Olomo lo laye" - he who has children owns the world

"Omo ni ade ori" - Child is crown

"Omo bori owo" - Child takes precedence over money

"Omo laso aye" - Child is the cloth of the world, to mention but, a few.

Iwà, on the other hand, means character, and to Abraham Lincoln: "Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing" (www.slideshare.net/venkoos/sum-12-u3). Abimbola (1977), also sees *iwà* as the essence of being, and that a man's character is what can be used to characterise his life especially in ethical terms. Rao (2008) also defines character as "the inherent complex of attributes that determine a person's moral and ethical actions and reactions". He (Rao), expatiated further by giving a list of the characteristics of character as consisting: honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, respect, caring, inspiring, responsibility, integrity, confidence, courage, loyalty, unselfish, citizenship, competence and tact. Incidentally these characteristics are what defines "Omoluabi", however, most of these characteristics are actually missing in the society today thereby undermining the Yoruba sayings that:

"Iwa lewa"- character is beauty

"Iwa rere lesu eniyan" - good character is the adornment of people and reflecting the saying that:

"Bi Iwa ba nu eniyan" - If a person loses his good character

"Eyin o mo pe aye re lo nu un" - Don't you know he has lost his life?

Who then is an "Omoluabi"? Awoniyi's (1983) definition puts it succinctly when he says, "an "Omoluabi" is one who

combines all virtues". It is important to note here that, virtue, helps in the acquisition and proper utilisation of skills and knowledge to better the lot of the society, when applied wisely, everybody benefits. While Adagbada (2014), defines "Omoluabi" as a good and dependable person, who stands above board at all times. Sourcing from Majasan (1958), Oyerinde (1991), therefore, states the attributes of "Omoluabi" as including: "... respect for old age, loyalty to one's parents and local traditions, honesty in all public and private dealings, sociability, courage and itching desire for work and many other qualities necessary for keeping together the large centers of population, characteristic of Yoruba people".

4. What Are the Virtues Emphasised by "Omoluabi"

The virtues emphasised by the Yoruba in the concept of "Omoluabi" are varied and many, in fact the list is endless and the process continuous. This is because the society is not static and human beings are dynamic, the most important thing, however, is for a person to be above board always in regard of the acceptable virtues despite the rottenness around the person. Avoseh (2001) and Akintunde (2003), quoted by Management Association Information Resources (MAIR), use the Yoruba concept "Omoluabi" to capture the absolute objective of indigenous African traditional education.

"Omoluabi" is an individual endowed with Iwa (character) and who is guided by the pursuit of summum bonum (the highest good). Because character development is at the heart of the indigenous African education, the Yoruba weave the process of education - vocational and liberal - around the development of "Omoluabi". The education that takes care of the building of this individual combines the intellectual, vocational, spiritual, cultural and physical elements using various media. The nature and focus of indigenous African education therefore compels blending across the length and breadth of the learning process and outcome. (p. 1597)

The general aim is to produce individuals with behaviour patterns, abilities and skills necessary for effective citizenship in the community, ("Omoluabi") which is in line with the four pillars of education – learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be – identified in the UNESCO Report titled; *Learning the Treasure Within*. Methods, as well as the contents of the traditional education were intricately interwoven, and were not divided into separate compartments as is the case with the westernized system of education. Method of teaching was very practical. It included participation at ceremonies and rituals. Imitation, recitation and demonstration were used. Educational activities included practical farming, fishing, weaving, carving, cooking, knitting, and so on. Recreational subjects included wrestling, dancing, drumming, display and racing. Intellectual training included the study of local history, legends, local geography, plants and animals, poetry,

reasoning, riddles, proverbs, story-telling and so on. Thus, the curriculum is loaded to achieve the set aims.

Fafunwa (1974), then identified roughly seven cardinal aims or goals of indigenous education which focused on building a total man - "Omoluabi"

1. To develop the child's latent physical skills.
2. To develop character.
3. To inculcate respect for elders and those in position of authority.
4. To develop intellectual skills.
5. To acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour.
6. To develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs.
7. To understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large.

According to Akinyemi (2015:231), the principles of Yoruba traditional education are based on the concept of "Omoluabi" translated loosely as an "ideal being". In other words, the end of Yoruba traditional education is to make every individual "Omoluabi". To be "Omoluabi" is to be of good character. That is why the goal of Yoruba traditional education has always been to foster strong character in the individual and to prepare each person to become a useful member of the community. Akinyemi's submission is in consonance with the characteristics of character listed by Rao (2008) as earlier mentioned.

Character training is the corner-stone or most paramount in the upbringing of an "Omoluabi". The absence of any other aspect of education is tolerable as long as good character prevails, any child with bad character is regarded as a social misfit and, proverbs in daily and frequent use are generally employed to drive home some practical truths. For example:

a. "Iyawo so iwa nu, o ni oun o mori oko waye", translated literally as; *a woman lacks good character and attribute her unstable marriage to bad luck.*

b. "Omo o gbon, a ni ko sa ma ku, ki nii pa ni to ju ago lo", translated literally as; *A child is foolish and we are saying he should not die, what kills more than foolishness?*

In a message from Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the late Premier of Western Region (Nigeria) on the take off of free Universal Primary Education (UPE) on 18 January, 1955, he also reiterated the issue of good character (Iwa "Omoluabi") as a factor in educational achievement thus:

The free universal primary education introduced by the Western Regional Government of Nigeria offers a unique opportunity to the children of the Western region. But it is an opportunity which can only be seized and made the best use of if parents and guardians will cooperate with the government and all education authorities in order to make the scheme a success. In this connection, government expect that all parents and guardians will loyally and readily discharge their civic obligations, and that they will see to it that their children develop a habit of obedience, honesty and industry, without which all their learning will be in vain. May God prosper the scheme so that it may truly benefit all

those for whom it is intended. (Fashola 2014:30)

In short, 'Omoluabi' stands for all the virtue that you can think of, regardless of background, environment and leaning.

5. How Did Western Education Erode What "Omoluabi" Stands for and What Are the Effects

In the traditional Nigerian society, before 1842, when western education was introduced, the education of the child basically focused on the transmission and internalization of the socio-cultural values, it started from infancy and it was a continuous process till maturity. Like in every other society, with little differences, depending on culture, the curriculum was loaded to achieve the set aims, making the children to become functional citizens able to blend with the community. Functionalism and communalism were the underlining principles with the aim of making everybody to work together to promote solidarity and stability of the community they found themselves in. However, with the introduction and acquisition of western education, especially with the introduction of alphabets and numbers, there started emerging classes and statuses. This makes some people feel superior to others; especially, those who do not have western education are regarded as inferior which is detrimental to the principles of 'Omoluabi'. The process also led to the spirit of individualism as against communalism. Individuals started looking at how to succeed alone without taking into consideration the larger society.

Subsequently, various sectors in the society started having one issue or the other with the 'education of the missionaries'. The traders were critical of the narrow, shallow and extremely religious education given by the missions. The Government was equally critical of small denominational schools whose pupils were not fit to become clerks who were much needed for the growing administration and expanding commercial enterprises. The Africans were critical of the denationalizing tendencies of mission education. The Negro (1873), a News Journal quoted by Taiwo (1980: 11), states:

In the work of elevating Africans, foreign teachers have always proceeded with their work on the assumption that the Negro or the African is in every one of his normal susceptibilities an inferior race, and that it is needful in everything to give him a foreign model to copy; no account has been made of our peculiarities; our language enriched with traditions of centuries; our parables, many of them the quintessence of family and national histories; our modes of thoughts influenced more or less by local circumstances; our poetry and manufactures, which though crude, had their own tales to tell... The result has been that we, as a people... have lost our self respect and our love for our own race,...

However, the harm done to our culture and education is better expressed in the words of Gandhi that:

It is my firm opinion that no culture has treasures so rich as ours has. We have not known it, we have been made even to deprecate its study and depreciate its value. We have almost ceased to live it. An academic grasp without practice behind it is like an embalmed corpse, perhaps lovely to look at, but nothing to inspire or ennoble. My religion forbids me to belittle or disregard other cultures, as it insists under pain of civil suicide upon imbibing and living my own.

(<http://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/chap90.htm>)

To crown it all, the introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), made people to learn a lot of vices through the internet which has shaken Nigeria to its very foundation. The effects of these according to Olufowobi and Quadri (2013) are that our educational system and the 'educated' people are facing challenges which are traceable:

to the sparingly functionality (sic) of the epistemological content of the educational system. To this extent, the selection and impartation of knowledge has been faulty in an attempt to follow 'global best practices' by deliberately or ignorantly excluding such nuggets of knowledge that are peculiar, relevant and unique to the society and which carry high socio-cultural forces that are deemed to be anti modern or western practices. This tends to devalue our value system. Thus, our educated men find it difficult to apply themselves in properly redefining our value system in an undisruptive manner while they also become hindrances to positive development... The teaching of national history, geography, languages and other sociological based disciplines such as creative arts have met with steady decline for lack of proper epistemological orientations as such, our students find it easier to relate with foreign cultures and values as against ours. Also, the teaching of morals in our school system is subsumed under religious studies which make critical examination and meaning difficult and improbable, thus, national or regional moral and ethical consensus become a mirage.

Hence, the call to imbibe what 'Omoluabi' stands for to make education relevant and worthwhile through the (re)introduction of subjects like civics, social studies and citizenship education into the curriculum.

6. How Far Can Civics, History and Social Studies Go in Reviving the "Omoluabi" Virtues

The three-fold function of education according to Taneja (2013: 311), are:

- i. Preservation of worthwhile heritage.
- ii. Transmission of worthwhile culture.
- iii. Dissemination of new knowledge, thus motivating dynamism and stimulating progress.

Taneja states further that, we should not give up the old

because there are some aspect of it which are worth preserving and which have abiding values, just like the Yoruba concept of 'Omoluabi'.

It is in the light of this submission that the researchers are advocating for the virtues of "Omoluabi", which Rao (2003) called "man-making and character-making education", which pupils can get through the teaching of citizenship education, civics, history and social studies and which have been included in the school curriculum. It should be noted also that no society can make progress when the citizens are lawless, hostile, intolerant, dishonest, uncooperative and destructive. Rather, the society needs an atmosphere of discipline, security, peace, unity and tolerance to be able to plan and execute development projects (Iyamu & Obiunu, 2005). This makes the researchers to agree with Vivekananda's submission that, "education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library".

The former Ekiti State Governor, Dr. Kayode Fayemi also reiterated this during the launch of Ekiti State's New Signature on Sunday March 6, 2011 when he said that; Government's personality and social orientation programmes shall focus anew on age-old values, such as those encapsulated in the Yoruba concept of 'Omoluabi'. Mere greetings even goes a long way to identify yourself as "Omoluabi". There are special polite greetings for parents, elders, peers, chiefs etc. There are greetings for different periods of the day, for various situations – playing, dancing, drumming, sitting, standing, farming, fishing, weaving, swimming, walking, convalescing; and for different kinds of festivals and ceremonies which are often accompanied by physical gestures. There is no situation that does not attract its greetings, which goes a long way to make an individual an integral part of the society.

Kobiowu (2012: 133), observed that one of the stakes of education is preservation of cultural heritage and the process of societal continuity, and that, no society would consciously tolerate the systemic education of rebels and radicals that would radically alter the social institutions and structures upon which that society is based. Unfortunately, this is part of what we have to address because according to *The Tide* newspaper, civic values such as courtesy, respect, charity, tolerance, dialogue, are almost going into extinction and citizenship education could retract this. Jekayinfa, Mofoluwawo, & Oladiran (n.d.), quoting (Adeniran, 2010) also agreed with the necessity of re-introducing civic education in the Nigerian primary and secondary schools, and that it has become very obvious because of dwindling national consciousness, social harmony and patriotic zeal. Events of the recent past according to Jekayinfa et al, have indicated that Nigeria is facing the threat of losing its much cherished sense of nationhood, cultural identity and indeed, hospitable spirit. There is therefore need for urgent value re-orientation because of their far reaching impact on national development through citizenship education.

Yusuf, quoting, Iyamu (1999) defines citizenship education as a conscious effort to inculcate in the youth, a set of values and attitude contingent on the need and problems of the society. He submitted further that, Citizenship Education which is the major focus of Social Studies has been used in many countries like the United States of America for solving political problems.

In consonance with the above submission, Adesina and Adeyemi (n.d.) gave reasons why it is necessary for pupils to study Social Studies in Nigeria, and they reflect to a large extent what "Omoluabi" stands for:

1. Social Studies is meant to teach and train Nigerians to be good citizens and nation builders.
2. It enables Nigerians to know the resources of their physical environment very well.
3. It helps young people and adults to understand the modern world.
4. Social Studies trains people to be effective leaders and good followers.
5. Through Social Studies, we learn about our inheritance and our past and present experiences and how to use these to solve our present problems.
6. It makes people understand their own culture and the culture of other Nigerians. Thus, Nigerians can appreciate their differences and the need to live together as one society.
7. Social Studies helps develop a good sense of moral and social responsibility.
8. Through Social Studies, we develop a curiosity about our environment.
9. The subject makes people realize the need for honesty, hard work and cooperation with others in society.
10. Social Studies is one of the subjects by which the Nigerian national objectives in education can be achieved.
11. It helps people to acquire different kinds of skills, for example, reading, listening, observation and analysis.
12. It provides a good means of achieving the pledge to Nigeria as one country: to be faithful, loyal and honest, to serve the nation and to defend and uphold its unity, honour and glory.
13. Through Social Studies, students learn to work with people and not for people at all levels, be it a local community, local government council, state government or the federal government.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Before the introduction of Western education in Nigeria, there existed a traditional education that had functionalism and moral uprightness. However, the wholesale acceptance of the education and the culture of those who introduced it, with the emergence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), spelt doom to some useful cultural elements that could enhance the survival and continuity of the useful cultural elements. There is no gain saying the fact that, the Nigerian society is now ripe for value overhaul through value added

educational policies and value reorientation of her citizens. The prevalent moral decadence has undermined the cardinal aims of traditional education in Nigeria without which it may be difficult for her to survive as a nation. There is the need to look at the Yoruba concept of 'Omoluabi' and what it stands for through the teaching of Civics, Citizenship Education, Social Studies and other relevant subjects that could help Nigerians especially the youths to have sound character.

It is therefore recommended among others that, apart from Civics, Citizenship Education and Social Studies, moral education should be made compulsory in the educational policy and should be taught at all levels with proper monitoring. The level of corruption in Nigeria is partly due to lack of proper moral education and misconstrued idea that you can always get away with it if you are highly connected. The value-added education would eliminate this mindset.

The values held in high esteem as a nation should be spelt out and encouraged to be internalized by students and teachers should be role models. Rao's (2003) emphasize the need for man-making and character-making education as essential for the purpose of achieving material progress for the benefit of the citizens should be looked into. There is also the need for continuing and reinforcing value-oriented curriculum at all educational levels, especially all that 'Omoluabi' represents.

Vices like examination malpractice and certificate racketeering could be curbed if less emphasis is placed on paper qualification and more on practical performance, just like the traditional education with the principle of functionalism.

The advice of Iyamu and Obiunu (2005) to the youths that they must try at all times to be ruled by desirable values by resisting all the temptation to go the wrong way, is also worth emphasizing in schools and colleges in the course of teaching relevant subjects. They enjoined them to:

- a. Avoid keeping bad company,
- b. Avoid reading corrupt books and magazines that contain criminal and wrong/destructive sexual information.
- c. Avoid viewing corrupt television programmes.
- d. Always remind themselves of the need to display good values and social attributes at all times.
- e. Always use their time wisely and for things that are positive to their lives.
- f. Always correct their friends when they go the wrong way.
- g. Avoid taking drugs or alcohol.

As simple as this advice may look it carries eternal value in the process of positive redirection of Nigerian society.

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