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Revamping Indigenous Education and Afrocentric Curriculum for Effective Knowledge Economy in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Africa's significant problem is economic. While this seems to ostensibly be only in terms of finance, it rather extends beyond that and permeates the process of knowledge generation. Globalization and the infusion of Western culture through Western education has afflicted Africa's economy with a seemingly incurable malady. However, there is the neglect of localization, whereas, in the real sense, localization breeds globalization, because there can be no globalization without localization. The African present condition undermines the complementariness of localization and globalization. African indigenous knowledge seems to be pivotal and thus necessary to play a significant (positive) role in securing Africa's participation in the knowledge economy of the twenty-first century. Considering that education is critically oriented and Africa is replete with rich cultural values; Afrocentric curriculum and decolonized pedagogy will eventually facilitate the accomplishment of the stated aim (knowledge economy) since it is critically based; and Africa is endowed with rich cultural values that suffice its aplomb stature such that if the decoloniality of western education is embraced and Afrocentric curriculum is engaged and integrated, Africa will key into the knowledge economy in this 21st Century.

Keywords: Localization, Globalization, AIE (Africa Indigenous Knowledge), Afrocentric Curriculum, Decoloniality, Decolonial Pedagogy, Knowledge Economy.

Introduction

It is interesting to observe that human societies have gone through many phases of production and economies such as the primitive mode, communal mode, slave holding mode, capitalism, communism and socialism as prescribed in Marxism.¹ In the quest of mankind striving for better economy, these different economies have emerged. It is comforting to know that no one culture has experienced the aforementioned forms of economies. Only that all human communities have experienced at least one of them at some point. The 18th century individual revolution was defined by capitalism, which is well-known for its survival of the fittest – syndrome. The concept of a knowledge economy came from Fritz Machlu, an Australian born economist, who, in 1962, published a study that assessed the creation and dissemination of (many types of) knowledge in the United States².

Today, many authors, think tanks, governments and international organisations, claim we now live in a knowledge- based economy and that knowledge is reputed to be the basis for many, if not all decisions, and as asset to individuals and firms. Certainly, the role of knowledge in the economy is not new, hence, knowledge is said to have taken increased importance in recent years, both quantitatively and qualitatively, partly because of information and communication technologies.³ Technology, most especially the international network, (internet) now facilitates economic transaction that were hitherto not possible. Suffice to state that there can be no complete and meaningful economic transaction among nations if the internet is excluded. Therefore, as important as knowledge economy is in this 21st Century, can we exempt our dear continent or society?

What is education and indigenous education especially the African indigenous education?

To Snelson, education is a condition of human survival, the means whereby one generation transmits the wisdom, knowledge and experience which prepares the next generation for life's duties and pleasures.⁴ Some major issues are identifiable from the foregoing definition namely: a condition of human survival, the means whereby one generation transmits the wisdom, values and knowledge which prepares the next generation for duties and pleasures. Importantly, all forms of education are culturally related be it indigenous, western, missionary (Christian or Islamic) probably the reason why Western Education serves Eurocentric interest of westernizing the recipients. The type of education practiced in a locality determines the pace of that locality's development and progress. This seems to explain the reason ASUU, (Academic Staff Union of Universities) NUT (National Union of Teachers) and other organized associations and bodies legally and politely remind the Federal Government of Nigeria on their responsibility of ensuring quality education being made available and accessible to all Nigerians. The United Nations has recommended that 26% of the annual national budget should be set apart for education (funding) and where this is done, the quality of education will be far better especially for the public schools.

¹ Any reference on Marxism – please fix

² F. Machlup (1962). *The Production and Distribution of Knowledge in the United States*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

³ D Foray (2004), *Economics of Knowledge*, Cambridge (Mass): MIT, Press.

⁴ Snelson P (1974) *Educational Development in Northern Rhodesia 1883 – 1945* Lusaka, Kenneth Kawnda Foundation.

The quality of education determines the quality of development in term of human resources (skills) infrastructural facilities and research, and research implementation. Hence, Obanya⁵ posited that whatever the questions, education is the answer. Therefore, if education is concerned with the condition of human survival, then education is vital to the continuity of human existence.

Again, education involves the means whereby one generation transmits the wisdom, knowledge and experience. Evidently, the best language for instruction when wisdom knowledge and experience are being transmitted is the mother tongue. This is almost unconsciously learnt at least in indigenous education and indigenous knowledge transmission. Ngugi postulates that ‘in the realm of culture, Africa has been robbed of languages in the most internal and figurative sense so that even today, Africa is still defining itself in terms of Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone linguistics zones.’⁶ The practice of discouraging the use of mother tongue either as a language of instruction in the learning and teaching activities or as means of interpersonal communication is not in tandem with promotion of seamless transmission of knowledge, wisdom and experience. If truly we need education that will guide us to operate knowledge economy in the 21st century, we also need to revisit this area:

Given that education prepares the next generation for duties and pleasures, the hallmark of indigenous education is apprenticeship. The period and pattern of teaching practice seems far from what can prepare the learners and the teachers, especially the in-training teachers so also is a semester too short for teachers to impart on the learners meaningfully, and the learners alike cannot truly learn so much in that less time. We will therefore suggest a semester each from each academic session if we will be more practical than theoretical.

More importantly, it seems that since education is culturally relative, integrating the apprenticeship and other vital elements of indigenous education into the curriculum design as well as complementation stage will yield desirable fruits. It becomes imperative to ask at this stage what is knowledge economy?

The knowledge economy or the knowledge based economy is an economic system in which the production of goods and services is based principally on knowledge – intensive activities that contribute to a rapid pace of advancement in technical and scientific innovation.⁷ The key element of value is the greater dependence on human capital and intellectual property for the source of the innovative ideas, information and practices.⁸

To Powel et al., in knowledge economy, production of goods and services is based principally on knowledge. In fact, production is based on knowledge – intensive activities. In this case it is not just knowledge but knowledge backed by intensive activities. This is another corroborating fact to the indispensability of African indigenous knowledge if Africa must develop and run knowledge economy. This notion thus lends more credence to the utility of

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⁶ Thiong O.N., (2000) African language and Global cultural in the twenty first century in African visions: Literary tongues. Political change and social change in contemporary Africa eds. Chery/B Mwari, Silvia Federakl and Joseph Maclaven Westoport, C.T. Praeger Publishers

⁷ Powell, et al (2004) The knowledge economy” Annual Review of Sociology,, 30(1), 199-220.

Doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.29.010202.100037

⁸ Hayes, Adam (2020) “Knowledge economy” investopedia. Retrieved 16 Oct. 2020

knowledge and that for anything to count as a knowledge claim, it must have the utility status. This utility breaks the gap that can exist between theory and practical and as such takes a praxis outlook. According to Hayes, the key elements on a knowledge economy is the greater dependence on human capital and intellectual property for the source of innovative ideas, information and practices.

African indigenous education emphasizes the humanness that promotes communalism as observable on “Ubuntu” (the South African perception of education) Ujamaa (i.e. brotherhood, being one’s brother’s keeper as upheld in East Africa, Tanzania founded by Julius Nyerere; Omoluwabi as emphasized in indigenous education among the Yoruba of West Africa.⁹

Therefore, since education is necessary for our relevance as a people in this 21st Century, the fact that we are distinct from other people establish that we possess certain knowledge, skills essential for our survival and needed by other nations of the world, therefore Haye posits that we need to organise and synthesis such knowledge in accordance with the globally acceptable guidelines so that we earn the intellectual property and become more relevant globally. How did Africa survive before the advent of colonialism? How did we dress? How did we entertain ourselves in terms of music? What of sports? And how did we feed?

The fact that Africans that were trained in African nations, despite the taunted poor standard sometimes ascribed to it succeed in other climes is a confirmation that truly we have knowledge to show case to the world. Worthy of note is the fact that the production and distribution of knowledge is a work of synthesis and this involves synthesizing knowledge with action. In fact synthesis of ideas from four disciplines or fields of research: philosophy (epistemology) mathematics (cybernetics) economics (information) and national accounting.¹⁰

Having considered the meaning of education and having established that indigenous education is the type of education that is purely cultural and devoid of interruption or infiltration from outside the locality such as the type of education practiced in Kanem-Bornu empire before the advent of Islamic education to the Kamari people and the type practiced in Arochukwu Kingdom before the advent of the missionary and the colonial masters. Whatever the question, education is the answer says Obanya, but what aspect of education or what ingredient in education qualifies education for having or being the answer to every question or whatever question for that matter?

On this question we need to focus on curriculum what is curriculum in education?

As vital as education seems, curriculum is the soul of it. In fact, it is the engine that determines the functionality or otherwise of education, therefore, an integral part of education. Curriculum can be described as the laid down activities and learning experiences that students are expected to cover within a specified period of time. Ogunyemi defines curriculum as the planned and unplanned experiences which learners receive in the process of their formal or semi-formal

⁹ Adedotun Ogundeji & Adeniyi Akangbe (2009) Omoluabi – its concept and Education in Yorubaland. Published by Ibadan Central Studies Group, Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

¹⁰ G. Godwin (2008) The information Economy: The History of a concept through its measurement or how to make politically relevant indicators 1949 – 2005, project on the history and sociology of S & T statistics, Monreal: INRS, forthcoming

education for the purpose of becoming rounded person who can make meaningful contributions to the betterment of the society and the world.¹¹

Moronkola et al., observed that “curriculum is always designed to represent the needs and values of a society, it is constantly overhauled at all levels to meet national goals and aspirations. They further see curriculum as the reconstruction of knowledge and experience systematically developed with the guidance of the school or relevant agencies which will enable the learner to have a better mastery of learning experiences for both the learners and the society’s wellbeing. They further emphasize that curriculum must be regarded as the reconstruction of knowledge and experience systematically designed with the direction of a school and curriculum experts and planners which will enhance mastery of those experiences by learners for the betterment of the society. Curriculum in Nigeria is designed and developed at different levels. Curriculum Agencies like National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB), The West African Examination (WAEC) The National Teachers Institute (NTI), The Nigerian Education and Research Institute (NERDC) among others. From the foregoing, it is safe to assert that curriculum is the systematized and organized guide on how to transmit the needed knowledge from the teacher to the learner through teaching and learning activities within the regulated period of time allotted therefore. How then do we define knowledge?

The first aspect of Machlup’s concept of knowledge was including all kinds of knowledge, not only scientific knowledge but ordinary knowledge as well. Until then most writings on knowledge were philosophical¹², and were of a positivistic nature and as such, knowledge was true knowledge.¹³ As a consequence, the philosophy of practical or ordinary action “intellectualized” human action. Action was defined as a matter of rationality and logic: actions start with deliberation, then intention, then decision.¹⁴ Similarly, writings on decision making were conducted under the assumption of strict rationality (rational choice theory).¹⁵ The above represents the philosophical paradigm of knowledge definition and again so was knowledge defined before the advent of Machlup in 1962. How else can knowledge be defined today?

The term knowledge can refer to a theoretical or practical understanding of a subject, it can be implicit (as with practical skill or expertise) or explicit (as with the theoretical understanding of a subject): formal or informal, systematic or particular.¹⁶

Knowledge is the foundation of every action. The ‘know how’, that is, action can only be carried out fruitfully when the knowledge is possessed. For instance, a farmer that does not know what to do with seed cannot be honoured as a farmer, for he will not be able to discern if the seed is wrongly planted even if he has money to hire the labour of sowers.

¹¹ Ogunyemi – please search, or replace with any other.

¹² Moronkola et al., Please search or replace with any other one.

¹³ A. J. Ayer (1956), *The Problem of knowledge*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

¹⁴ R.J. Bernstein (1971) *Praxis and Action*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

¹⁵ S.M. Amadae (2003), *Rationalizing Capitalist Democracy: The Cold War Origins of Rational Choice Liberalism*, Chicago University of Chicago Press.

¹⁶ Oxforddictionaries.com Archived from the original on 14 July 2010

How do we measure knowledge in a knowledge-based economy or determine whether our society is viable to operate knowledge economy? It is good to know that the economic analysis of science was just beginning when Machlup published the production and distribution of knowledge. However, the importance of knowledge necessitates the need for every society to look inward, be devoted to reach so that intellectual property can be earned. Just as it is in the production of goods, that nations that cannot manufacture a needed goods such as automobiles and need it definitely purchase from the nations that manufacture it. The same thing applies to services. As we demonstrate ingenuity and originality in our intellectual activities, it will reflect in our activities both in theory and in practice.

According to Machlup, a mathematical exercise such as production function was only an abstract construction designed to characterize some quantitative relationships which are regarded as empirically relevant.¹⁷ For measuring knowledge, Machlup chose another method than econometrics and the production function, namely national accounting goes back to the 18th century and what was then called political arithmetic. But national accounting really developed after World War II with the establishment of a standardized system of National Accounts, which allowed a national bureau of statistics to collect data on the production of economic goods and services in a country on a systematic way.¹⁸ Unfortunately, for Machlup, knowledge was not and is still not a category of the National System of Accounts.

There arise some pertinent questions at this juncture: What practical knowledge does Africa possess that may be of benefits to Africa and possibly to the world?

The following areas shall be considered in an attempt to respond to the questions above.

Medically, especially in the specialty of Gynaecology and obstetrics, in precolonial Africa, a medical condition that predisposes married women to constant miscarriages is tamed with one of African indigenous knowledge's (AIEs). Secondly, there was nothing like Caesarian Section as introduced and practiced in Western medicine today. Again, precolonial African indigenous knowledge exist that certain ointment would be robbed on the women in – labour that would ease the arrival and safe delivery of the foetus.

Where are the African therapeutic musicians? Western/missionary education have sacked them and the remnant are ashamed to practice since globalization and digitalization emphasizes literary (ability to sing in English language, or any of the lingua franca of the 1st world and the super power nations. Where are the African indigenous orthopaedic who prevented untimely death of those that fell from palm trees while tapping the wine or harvesting the palm nuts. With the advent of western education came orthopaedic surgeons and surgery, which in some cases are unsuccessful leading to deaths through preventable but unpreventable because indigenous medicine is labelled fetish, satanic and occultic.

In Africa, there were rain-makers in the event of drought, but western education and westernization introduced irrigation that is capital –intensive thereby forcing us to seek the

¹⁷ Machlup F (1962), The Supply of investors and inventions, in national bureau of Economic Research, the Rate and Direction of Inventive Activity, op cit pp. 143 – 169, p. 155

¹⁸ Machlup, F (1962) The Production and distribution of knowledge on the United States op cit. p. 44

knowledge (come for training) buy the equipment (an enrich them financially). Even the cost of maintenance of such equipment place the buyer at the mercy of the seller.

It is noteworthy here to mention that the soul of knowledge economy is greater commitment of government and other stakeholders on education to making the teaching and learning environment more conducive than it is at the moment especially in Nigeria. Why is it that Nigerian tertiary education have not enjoyed smooth and uninterrupted academic session for up to 10 years? Poor funding, dilapidated infrastructures, salary indebtedness among others should be prevented at all cost. If all these are achieved, what then would be the indicators of knowledge or that would characterize an economy that is knowledge based in the 21st century? There would be massive investment in the enterprise of education, since the product of a good education is good knowledge, practical or theoretical. There will be good representation of R & D (Research and Development) on government and other corporate organization's offices. This is popularly known as Research Planning and Statistics (RPS). Again, there would be more funding for research in the Universities and specialized research institutes.

There will also be symbiotic relationship between the government, society at large and the research institution as well as relevant department and faculties in tertiary institutions. Advanced technology that will depend on quality research and implementation will ultimately beget infrastructural development. International mobility of students, more scientific publications and massive creation and diffusion of knowledge resulting in collaborative efforts between business and the public sector.

Conclusion

Education and knowledge economy will enhance speedy progress and development of Africa and Nigeria in particular. Whatever the question is, education is the answer, efforts need to be put into deconstructing the present western education, by engaging the indigenous education and integrating the missing link between what education ought to be and what it is. Such missing ink include the humanness which Africa cherish and which seems missing. While Africa cherish communalism, westernized lifestyle embrace individualism. Considering the importance of mother tongue, if education must benefit the recipients, then the practice that frowns at "vernacular" should be annulled. Those knowledge peculiar to Africans yet beneficial to mankind should be identified and be properly documented, organized and integrated into our knowledge system. Therefore, some knowledge can be helpful in this era that there is global security threat to humanity.

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