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Effective Integration of African Traditional Education (ATE) Into the Nigerian School System as Basis for Artificial Intelligence and Digital Education

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Abstract

The African Traditional Education (ATE) is indigenous to Africa. Hence, this educational system is also termed, indigenous education. It was a socio-cultural, practical, moral functional and transformational education based on the peoples' world-view and life situation. On the other hand, Western education came into colonial Nigeria through the Christian Missionaries who structured it into school system of: primary, secondary and tertiary schools. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Digital education have been adopted without adaptation in the present Nigerian school system. The paper is of the opinion that effective integration of the ATE into the Nigerian school system will provide the socio-cultural background upon which AI and Digital education will be adopted and adapted for an effective functional education.

Keywords: Education, effective integration, efficiency, functionality, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Digital Education

Introduction

This paper advocates for the effective integrating of African Traditional Education (ATE) as basis into the current Nigerian school system as basis for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Digital Education. It is the opinion of the paper that effective integrating of the ATE in the

current Nigerian school system will create the socio-cultural background for artificial intelligence and digital education. Education is presented here in two folds, the broader view and the narrow perspective. In the broader view, it is a process of learning that spans from birth to death. In this broad sense it covers all the learning processes a person acquires right from infancy till death. Education is culturally bound. This means that every human person lives in a certain cultural milieu, and the culture influences the type of education. It is within this cultural viewpoint that the African Traditional Education (ATE) situates. ATE is a kind of education particular to a people. This type of education carries out teaching and learning right from the family to the larger society, from birth to death. From the narrow perspective, however, education is tied to the school system. School system here means the organized and structured manner of teaching and learning done within a designated facility run by professional teachers. Such a facility could either be primary, secondary or tertiary school. The purpose of education, in the broader or narrow perspective, is transformation of both the individual and the society. Any educational or school system that is not transformational is not effective. That is the reason why it is the opinion of this paper that effective integrating of ATE into the school system is a necessity.

Effective integration here refers here to the deliberate infusion of the contents of the ATE into the Nigerian school system for purposes of efficiency and functionality. It also means the conscious and deliberate putting of the contents of a system into another in order to form a unified whole for efficiency and functionality. Integration could be (1) eclectic--jumbling contents, (2) specific--that is with precision and (3) integral approach--that is, with modification of contents. This paper recommends the specific approach for efficiency and functionality.

Efficiency refers here to the level and quality of service that can be realized, in this context, the Nigerian school system. Functionality, on the other hand, means workability or the relevance of the school system within the Nigerian society. Artificial Intelligence (A) refers to the computer related devices that can perform task typically to humans. These tasks include reasoning, learning, problem-solving, understanding languages, recognizing patterns and decision-making. Digital Education involves the use of AI technologies in teaching and learning. Could artificial intelligence and digital education operate effectively in a school system that is not very much embedded in the socio-cultural heritage of its society?

Statement of the problem

How can artificial intelligence and digital education function effectively in the present Nigerian school system with effective integrating of African Traditional Education (ATE)? This problem was what triggered the interest of this work. What sort of education could be rendered in a school system that de-emphasizes the relevance of its socio-cultural heritage?

Objective

The objective of this paper is to integrate African Traditional Education (ATE) into the present Nigerian school system for an effective adoption of artificial intelligence and digital learning in present day Nigerian school scheme. This will ensure, to a great extent, efficiency and functionality in the Nigerian school system. It is on this basis that a socio-cultural conditioning of AI and Digital education by the integration of ATE into the Nigerian school

system becomes a necessity. The aim is to preserve the African culture and tradition and also to prevent the alienation of the education products from their culture.

Methodology

The method adopted here is historical, analytical and critical approach. The historical, analytical approach guides the discussion for a clearer understanding of the problem and the attempts to proffer solutions and further suggestions.

African Traditional Education (ATE)

Historically, like every other society, there was a system of education in Nigeria prior to the coming of Christianity and Islam. Africans had a way of training their youth different from other ancient civilisations. While the Africans emphasised intelligence, proper conduct and vocation; the Greek emphasised physical and mental prowess; the Romans, oratory and military skills, and the British and French emphasised valour and wits. Each and every one of these cultures evolved its own system of education that worked for it. Fafunwa (1974, pp. 16 – 17) listed four characteristics of African Traditional Education. They are:

1. The collective and social nature.
2. The intimate tie with social life, both in material and spiritual sense.
3. Its multivalent character, both in terms of its goal and the means employed.
4. Its gradual and progressive achievements, in conformity with the successive stages of physical, emotional and mental development of the child.

According to Asuquo (2002), African Traditional Education is also termed “community-based education.” The reason being that, this kind of education benefits the entire community. Education is not done here for just personal capacity development rather the person’s capacity is being developed because of the community. It is a corporate type of education. Everything done in this kind of education is done for the community one belongs. Every aspect of the community’s life such as skills, speech, dancing and sports, attitudes and etiquettes, marriage and religious practices, name them, are taught with precision and communal perspective. Thus African traditional educational system was effective, efficient, functional and transformational. It took care of the needs of the pre-colonial Africans. This system of education was ingrained in the life-system of the people, their *sits-in-lebem*—life situation.

Criticism of African Traditional Education (ATE)

Critics of African Traditional Education accuse it of being informal. For instance, Asuquo, *et al* (2005) remarked:

Most indigenous learning took place outside the walls of the classroom. It is classified learning by imitation and observation. Children were to watch, hear and see how certain things are done by elders and just needed only to follow suit.

According to them, learning not taking place in the classroom, and learning by ‘imitation and observation’ are determinants of informal education. Their argument is that formal education must be conducted in a classroom. Looking at this conclusion, critically, one would

ask: does formal education consist only in having structures like the classroom, school building and graded learning? Asuquo (2002) has this to say:

It must be stated that traditional education is both formal and informal. A society that formally initiates its young children into adulthood, a black-smith who formally designs his apprenticeship programme and a mother who teaches her daughter the various processes involved in preparing a soup are all involved in educating others formally.

In other words, the classroom ought not to be the determinant of formal education. Neither must formal education be associated, only, with a facility called school. Formal education ought to be seen more in the systematic application of teaching of contents to learners. Characteristics of formal education include: a learning centre, curriculum contents, class room, time, orderliness, stages, teachers and learners. Interestingly, the initiation rites of some African cultures have all these features. From the foregoing, it is obvious that opinions vary on whether ATE is either formal or informal. What is not contestable is that ATE is both formal and informal.

Another criticism against ATE is the monopoly of knowledge. Proponents of this criticism hold that in such fields such as African Traditional Medicine, knowledge is hoarded and monopolised by a few. Now, before the industrial revolution in Europe similar situation pervaded. The guild societies guarded and hoarded their skills and admit members through thorough screening. Such was evident in the practice of the Freemasons that built the magnificent cathedrals, towers and castles of Europe. Even today, knowledge is being hoarded and monopolized by almost every sector of the economy, be it engineering and construction, manufacturing, marketing, culinary, name it; they all hoard or monopolise knowledge for survival and uniqueness.

ATE does not monopolise knowledge. The instance cited by critics is typical of any professional career. Traditional Medicine is a professional career. What happens today in the so-called ‘trade secret’, a euphemism for hoarding knowledge is actually the hoarding and monopoly of knowledge. Other criticisms such as: absence of documentation, lack of content compartmentalisation, conservatism, and narrow scope, such that it serves the basic needs of the “individual within the immediate community” (Asquo, 2002, pp. 36 – 37) are flimsy and irrelevant. Why? This is because education itself is done within the context of one’s socio-cultural and environmental space. It is a response of the individual to his/her personal experiences and environmental challenges. On the other hand, that ATE is narrow in scope is an indictment on the inheritors of ATE that they neglected their inheritance unlike their peers such as the Greeks, the Romans, the British and the French who constructively built upon what they received. In spite of all these criticisms, the African Traditional Education has more merits than demerits.

Merits and features of African Traditional Education (ATE)

First, it is pragmatic. Being pragmatic, it means that African Traditional Education conditions teaching and learning for practical application to address given problems. It does not wonder on ontological speculations. It is context based. Any content taught in ATE addresses a particular problem. The pragmatic nature of African Traditional Education is that “reality is whatever idea or experience that works at a particular time”, (Obot, 2015, p. 62). People are

trained in a particular field to address a particular need of the society. Knowledge according to this system of education has to do with practicability.

Second, it is social and communitarian. ATE is a means of introducing the child into the mainstream of the society. It begins from the home where the child is being instructed in basic manners expected in the society to the playground and kith and kin where the child interacts with the peers and significant adults who instruct the child in ethics and values of the community. Everyone is involved in the responsibility of bringing up the child, from the parents to the kith and kin and even passersby. The education of the child is important for the sustainability of the society. It is the responsibility of everyone.

Third, it is professional and practice oriented. Professional of various skills teach their learners, unlike in modern pedagogy where a history graduate teaches English language or the engineer teaching mathematics because each of them are acquainted with the subject they teach, however, neither of them specialises in the imparting of the subjects to the learners. Such aberrations cannot be seen in ATE. It is the fisherman that teaches fishery and fishing, the farmer teaching farming, the blacksmith, blacksmithing, and the hunter, hunting. There is quality control and professionalism in ATE.

Fourth, ATE is ethical and value oriented. “Value is importance, significance, worth or usefulness of an item that is real like stone or abstract like air. Value is a construct man places on an item”, (Magaji, 2014, p. 1). Concomitant in every aspect of African Traditional Education is ethics. Ethics is concerned with right and wrong, good and bad behaviour. Education consists in both character and learning so that the products of an educational system sill not constitute nuisance in the society. ATE is intertwined with religious practices such that morality constitutes, to a great extent, part of teaching and learning.

Fifth, ATE is employment oriented. The African Traditional Education system is organised in such a manner that learning is geared towards employability. All apprenticeship is a preparation for employment. To this extent, traditional education could be said to be vocational. Younger people are trained to acquire “vocational skill that made them self-reliant, honest, loyal, diligent, patriotic and functional individuals,” (Asquo, *et al* p. 135). There are other merits and features of ATE such as team work, preservation of culture and tradition, citizenship education, which, for the sake of brevity, will not be elaborated. Such a buoyant educational system as the ATE is required to form a socio-cultural background for the adoption of an effective educational base for artificial intelligence in education. The present Nigerian school system is inadequate for the adoption and adaptation of artificial intelligence in education. It needs an effective integration of the African Traditional Education (ATE) system.

Present Nigerian school system

The present Nigerian school system had a sort of incubation, gestation and delivery. In 1842, the first European (Western) type of education was introduced in Badagry by the Methodist Missionaries (Asquo, *et al*, 2005). It was formal in nature because it was school based, made use of stationeries and had teachers and pupils (Aguba, 2006, p. 6). Later on, different Christian bodies such as the Anglicans, the Baptists, the Presbyterians, and the Roman Catholics opened up their different schools. Aguba (2006, p. 104) asks the why questions, namely: 1. Why did the white man come to Africa? 2. Why did the white man introduce this type of education to Africa? He poetically answered: Glory, Gold and God. These metamorphosed

into the three ‘Cs’, of: Colonialism, Commerce and Christianity, or the three ‘Bs’ of: Bullet, Business and Bible. The colonial government cared little about the educational need of the people. They left the educational sector to the missionaries who were fast and competitively expanding southward of Nigeria, but slowed down their pace northward. The colonial government left the function of establishing school for the colony to the Christian missionaries. Each missionary group introduced its own kind of school, drew up its curriculum, enrolled and trained its own teachers (Ani, 2007).

In 1922, the Phelps-Stokes Fund of the United States of America, according to Ocho in Nwangwu, *et al*, (2005), was critical of the British colonial system of education in their West African colonies. Fafunwa (1974, p. 121) stated that the Phelps-Stoke Fund made a report that:

1. The record of the colonial government in Africa is a mixture of the good and the bad, the effective and the ineffective, the wise and the unwise.
2. Although the educational facilities in Africa were largely credited to mission, and although a great service has been rendered by them, many of the missions did not realise the full significance of education in the development of the African people.
3. The adaptation of education to the needs of the people was urged as the first requisite of school activities. Much of the indifference and even opposition to education in Africa was due to failure to adapt school work to African conditions, and school methods which have been discarded in America and Europe were still in vogue in Africa.
4. Many of the failure of educational systems in the past were due to lack of organization and supervision. Governments and missions in Africa failed to apply sound principles administration to their educational work.
5. The education of the masses and of native leadership had been neglected.
6. There was an obvious lack of co-operation among the three groups representing ‘European and American Civilization’—government officials, missionaries and traders. Worse still, ‘the participation of the native has naturally been even less than that of any of the other groups.’

Subsequent commissions such as: the Elliot Commission (1943), the Asquith Commission (1943), and the Ashby Commission (1960) gave recommendations. Among the three commissions it was only the Ashby Commission that talked about “Nigerianization”, (Asquo, *et al*, 2005). However, this ‘Nigerianization’ was concerned with higher education—indigenous universities. In 1969, there was a conference on education held in Ayetoro in present day Ogun State. It was called National Curriculum Conference. The Conference reviewed the colonial educational system and was pivotal to the adoption of the first National Policy in 1977.

Primary education

In 1976, however, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme was established. This programme faced many difficulties and was subsequently revised in 1981 and 1990. The Universal Basic Education, *UBE*, came as a replacement of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) and intended to enhance the success of the first nine years of schooling. The *UBE* involves 6 years of Primary School education and 3 years of Junior Secondary School education, culminating in 9 years of uninterrupted schooling, and transition from one class to another is automatic but determined through continuous assessment. The school is monitored by the

Universal Basic Education Commission, *UBEC*, and has made it “free”, “compulsory” and a right of every child. Therefore, the *UBEC* law section 15 defines early childhood care and education. The law stipulates a 9-year formal schooling, adult literacy and non-formal education skill acquisition programmes, and the education of special groups such as nomads and migrants, girl child and women, *Al-majiri*, street children, and physically challenged people.

Secondary education

With the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria, students now spend six years in primary school, three years in junior secondary school, three years in senior secondary school, and four years in tertiary institution. The six years spent in primary school and three years spent in junior secondary school are merged to form the 9-3-4 system, now, operative in Nigeria. According to Ocho in Nwangwu, *et al* (2005, p. 161), “the new policy was introduced in response to the criticism of the curriculum of Nigerian schools as being too narrow, colonial in mentality and irrelevant to the needs and culture of the country.” Emphasis was shifted from purely academic to vocational, technical and applied studies, requiring both the cognitive and psychomotor domains. Citizenship education was also enhanced.

Tertiary education

The government has majority control of university education. Tertiary education in Nigeria comprises of Universities (Public and Private), Polytechnics, Monotechnics, and Colleges of Education. Entrance into most universities, polytechnics and colleges of education in Nigeria is through the Joint Admission and Matriculation Examination conducted by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) termed the Universal Tertiary Matriculation Examination, *UTME*. The typical duration of undergraduate programme in Nigerian universities depends largely on the course of study.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Digital Education

Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Digital Education refers to the application of technologies, such as machine learning, natural language processing, and data analytics, to enhance and transform the way educational content is delivered, consumed and managed. AI in digital learning aims to provide more personalised, efficient, and effective learning experiences. AI in digital learning is reshaping education by making learning more personalised, engaging, and efficient while also empowering educators to focus on creative and human-centric aspects of teaching.

AI systems can tailor educational content to the needs, preferences, and learning styles of individual students. This implies the use of adaptive learning platforms. AI can act as a tutor for students outside the classroom by answering questions, explaining complete concepts, or guiding them through problems. There is concern that AI might replace teachers, but ideally, AI is a tool to enhance and complement human instruction, not replace it.

Effective integrating of ATE into the Nigerian school system

With AI in use in Nigerian school system by both teachers and learners, what is required at this moment is a platform that will adapt AI and Digital Education to the Nigerian socio-cultural space. Otherwise, there is a danger that the adoption without adaptation of AI and Digital Education in the Nigerian school system will greatly affect the Nigerian educational

products that might be well-informed in AI and Digital Education but bereft of his/her socio-cultural background. Hence, the advocacy for the effective integration of the African Traditional Education (ATE) into the present Nigerian school system is timely. For Ezeani (2013, p. 94):

A good number of people in Africa and other colonized parts of the world have had to live with the misconception that to be educated also means to live above one's culture, having nothing to do with it. Nowhere is this misconception so widespread and disruptive in the continents as it is in Africa.

It is on this basis that a socio-cultural conditioning of AI and Digital Education by the integration of ATE into the Nigerian school system becomes necessary. The aim is to preserve the African culture and tradition and also to prevent the alienation of the education products from their culture.

Recall that historically many attempts to distance the Nigerian educational system from the colonial structuring were made. The Ashby Commission (1960) advocated 'Nigerianisation' within the context of decolonization of Nigerian school system. It was the prominent socio-cultural challenge facing education then. Now, the school system is faced with another: AI and Digital education, which might erode the little gains of 'Nigerianisation' of Nigerian school system. Effective integrating of the ATE into the present Nigerian school system, this paper argues, is a probable solution that will make education in Nigeria efficient and functional.

Recommendations

The paper recommends:

1. The revision of primary and secondary school curricula to include induction rites to puberty for primary school and secondary school children who have attained twelve years of age. Here communal life and team work will constitute the content of the curricula.
2. The induction of secondary school students who are 18 years and above into adulthood. Here the curriculum content has to include marriage and family life.
3. The introduction of unique African crafts and technologies such as bead-making, basket-making, palm-wine-tapping, etc., as General Studies in tertiary schools to be taught by experts. Popular crafts and technologies of the local community that the tertiary school is domiciled should constitute part of the GSS.

Conclusion

The paper advocates for effective integrating of the African Traditional Education (ATE) into the Nigerian school system for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Digital Education to ensure efficiency and functionality. ATE is basically communitarian, pragmatic and ethically oriented. In ATE teaching and learning begin from the family. The education of the child was the duty of everyone. ATE is both formal and informal. The merits and features of ATE were extensively discussed. A historical development of the present school system was presented. It is Western education brought and spread by Christian Missionaries across the country during the colonial era. The school system suited and served the purposes of the colonial government and the missionaries who trained staff for their own need. In 1922, the Phelps-Stokes Fund of the United States of America was critical of the British colonial system of education in their West African

colonies. This triggered series of commissions for the improvement of education in Nigeria. With the coming of AI and Digital Education, the paper argues that the efficient integrating of ATE into the Nigeria school system will form a socio-cultural platform for the adoption and adaptation of AI and Digital learning for an efficient and functional education.

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