THE DEFENCE OF AFRICAN HUMANISTIC COMMUNALISM FOR AFRICAN PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT

Against the background of merely condemning Western paradigms for the African educational system, this paper integrates humanism and communalism as two concepts that can be combined to serve as a new orientation for an African pedagogy. African humanistic communalism would not be a celebration of a shattered past in the quest for an African meaning. Rather, it would be an attempt at going back to the root of all human efforts evidenced in the practice of togetherness and oneness where 'we ness' is greater than an exaggerated 'I'. Past Pan-African authors like Nkrumah (1970) and Nyerere (1974) had earlier expressed African unity in their respective consciencism and self-reliance doctrines but they did not anchor their ideas on an appropriate pedagogy that could sustain the ideas more tangibly in educational systems. This paper used a systematic and critical analysis to call for a change in thinking that can strengthen the African educational systems through deliberate expressions of care for one another representative of a belief system.

KEYWORDS: African humanistic communalism, African pedagogy, Communalism, Humanism

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INTRODUCTION

The earliest form of defence for African identity was to recognise some elements of history, arts, philosophy, science, and education in the cultures. So the earliest African scholars defended African history, philosophy, science, and education with unique characteristics that were absent in foreign educational practices. Ade Ajayi (1965) and Wiredu (1985) belonged to this group of scholars.Colonialism was blamed for most of the problems in Africa. Western education made Africans clerks, clergymen, and seekers of white-collar jobs. Monobe and Bhebhe (2021) even claimed that colonial domination deprived Africa of processes and benefits of education by excluding Africa's indigenous knowledge systems and traditions from formal education. They went further to argue that the education Africa inherited was mainly for making boys herders of cattle or farmers with their fathers while girls were made to help their mothers with household work and making clay and grass mats.
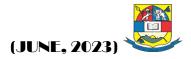
Following the advancement of economies, formal education expanded the roles of Africans initially but was no longer sufficient to provide ready employment for school leavers, governments and development agencies began to clamour for self-employment and entrepreneurship. Advancing the route of blaming the educational system inherited by African countries should not be the option in canvassing for African pedagogy. This paper identifies a more sustainable system that captures the underlying belief of Africans. The paper clarifies the concepts of humanism and communalism which combine into the humanistic communism of an African system. In the search for an idea that can be described as African, humanism and communalism were prominent as presented by Azenabor (2004) and Venter (2004). These authors presented humanism and communalism as of great importance in African educational discourse. It is from this foundation that this paper argues for a truly African pedagogy that can emerge as an alternative to the extreme Westernisation of education. The objective of the paper is to: identify African characteristics of humanism and communalism which have been identified as belief systems of Africans, and then, to unravel the ramifications of those beliefs on the teaching and learning process for Africans.

Humanism

Humanism as a concept refers to the ability of persons to live good lives and aspire to the betterment of others. It has been conceptualised as having both Western and African dimensions in response to human beings' desire to rely on their own resources to resolve social problems and answer the perennial question of how humans should live. This was the awakening brought by Socratic thinkers when the concern for philosophy shifted from the nature of things to the best way to conduct one's life and pursue the search for the nature of a just human society.

Western humanism has been distinguished from African humanism by Pieterson (2005). In Western humanism, the well-being of the individual is primary in that what is good for individual growth and development will eventually be good for the organisation and society. While African humanism states that the well-being of the group is primary and the assumption is that what is good for the community will

eventually be good for the individual. Western humanism does not highly value elders as wise men and women but African humanism highly values elders as wise leaders and sages. On the individual and collective aspect, Pieterson (2005) distinguished Western humanism from African communalism by saying that the Western task force is the achieving individual and African humanism focuses on the serving individual. However, African humanism has been criticised for having conceptual ambiguity and allowing individuals to depend on the community thereby inhibiting self-fulfilment while placing too much pressure on the benefits. For example, *Ubuntu* (humanity towards others) has become an open research question as to what *Ubuntu* actually means for the African workplace where western structure and rules are used.

Humanism in the workplace has been interpreted differently whereas Western management advocate eurocentrism, individualism, and modality, African management thought emphasized ethnocentricism, traditionism, communalism, and cooperative teamwork (Omoregie, 2011). Humanism has psychological, liberal, socialist, and evolutionary dimensions. Instead of abandoning it because of its varieties, it is better to state its core belief as the belief in the human capacity to solve problems by maximizing every constituent of human nature. The human capacity should not separate the physical constituents of humans from the spiritual.

Communalism

The reality of communalism is often referred to among Zulus in South Africa as *Ubuntu*. In the African belief system, there are many supernatural entities that are believed to be responsible for much of the good and evil done in society. These gods are the guardians of human conduct, punishing bad people and rewarding the good. They provide the sanction for human conduct, making sure that an individual's actions are in accordance with the values and the norms in society (Akinpelu. 2005). The African traditional society is an idealist one that holds that intellectual knowledge is derived from supernatural sources. Community shrines can be found in designated places, such as rivers, entrances to the community and family compound, the centre of the town, and markets. These deities are involved in the day-to-day living of the people. They are consulted for most individual and communal activities. A person in African society is not just an individual who happens to live in a society but a member of the community that has spiritual elements guiding the affairs of the living.

In the African world-view, as Busia (1972) sees it, the human being is only a link in the continuous chain of existence where the dead, the living, and the yet unborn form an unbroken family, and hence an individual is first and foremost a member of that group before being an individual. From the foregoing, living in traditional African society aims at transcendence. Transcendence means that human beings constantly strive to go beyond self in thinking, willing, and acting. Self-transcendence is that characteristic and exclusive movement of humans with which they constantly surpass self in all they are, wish, and have. It can be regarded as the most extraordinary and important aspect of life. Ehusani (1999) says that Western civilisation and technology cannot grasp the importance and transcendence of human persons and have often rejected the ideas of the almighty and considered absurd the notion of the interrelatedness, of cosmic reality.

With so much idealization of communalism, one shudders at the violence, tribal wars, and terrorism in Africa. The negative effects of this could mean that strong communalism could ostracise those who are not from the immediate community whereby Africa becomes too localised to contain citizens from other parts of the continent. Etta, Esowe, and Aseko (2016) adjudicate in this criticism that 'communalism should complement globalisation in its bid to make the world a global village rather than destroy the extended family system'.

African Humanistic Communalism
Life in the African traditional system is directed to the value of human life in relation to the physical, social, and spiritual environments. Akinpelu (2006) captures this; in the scale of African values, undoubtedly the most important is the value of human life. The continuity of the family depends entirely upon the living members, and hence all possible measures are taken to ensure the security of human tenure of life right from birth until old age The gods are worshipped when a child is born, to solicit their protection and favour, and all efforts are made to ward off any attempts by evil forces to cut short human lives. The death of a young man is a serious source of grief which is only mitigated if he leaves an offspring behind to continue his life. By proxy, the death of an old one is celebrated with joy as having been translated into the world of the ancestral spirits to assume the duty of guardian of the family (Akinpelu, 2006).

Livelihood in African traditional society can be inferred to be living to respect and preserve human life; living to keep the family united as one living to please the spiritual elements in human society (ancestors and gods), living to rear one's children, and living to care for the aged until death takes them away to join the ancestors. This seems like socialisation which is found in indigenous education. Ochitti (1994) believes it is wrong to equate indigenous education with child-rearing practices whereas child-rearing practices are directed essentially at the preparation of children for adult life.

Indigenous education is much more embracing since it covers the entire lifespan of every individual. Much more than child-rearing practices, indigenous education consists of cultural action (such as language and etiquette at home, and peer group in the community); informal education (spontaneous learning as individuals interact with their social and physical environments in the process of day-to-day living) which was made possible because in pre-colonial times everyone played more or less the triple roles of learners, educator (to those younger and less knowledgeable), and productive worker (Ochitti, 1994).

Indigenous education also includes prolonged non-formal aspects of education. Membership in secret cults lasts for a lifetime while the acquisition of specialised skills through an apprenticeship system lasts for years. In the apprenticeship system, the trainee is attached to the trainers for life. Livelihood in African culture can be seen in cultural events, proverbs, folktales, and songs of the people. Both writing and orature - the term is used by East African School of Literacy critics to mean African oral tradition and cultural activities have contributed greatly to African history and philosophy.

When studying African thought and cultural patterns, one can rely on cultural events, proverbs, folktales, and songs of the people. In all of these, there are moral values in the living pattern of individuals and the community at large. This means that all programmes and activities can be organised to respect the culture of the immediate environment and still operate comfortably with kin dynamism as citizens of a technological age (Majasan, 1969).
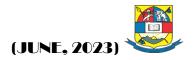
In the context of learning in contemporary society, education should not be a preparation for sharing national wealth at the expense of the vast majority of the people who do not have access to costly private institutions of learning springing up daily in African countries. These institutions from nursery schools to tertiary education are either owned or patronised by the political class who have looted the public treasury and deliberately shared public funds to the detriment of the common good. Yet the educational system that produced this political class only had public schools which were based on merit allowing children of the rich and the poor to interact and grow together. Such interaction that educational systems promoted in the past are far from being realised in present-day Africa.

Communalism and commercialisation of education

If privately owned educational institutions continue to enjoy more patronage by the rich in Africa while the public educational institutions are left for the low-income earners, such education would no longer serve as an integrating instrument but rather would be confirming and reinforcing wrong attitudes of corruption and moral ineptitude that are already existing in Africa. These are the wrong attitudes that the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and rebranding programmes of the federal government of Nigeria sought to address when it became obvious that the country was on the verge of collapse owing to corruption. This means that these programmes may not achieve their goals because the educational foundation on which they should rest is faulty.

Looking up to other countries and development agencies for what Africans can do for themselves cannot help the continent. According to Thompson (1981), development can only come from within. It must be endogenous, thought out by people for themselves, springing from the soil on which they live and attuned to their disposal and the particular genius of their culture. Education should accordingly contribute to the promotion of such endogenous development. Nyerere (1974) corroborated that people cannot be developed by others, they can only develop themselves. While it is possible for an outsider to build someone's house, an outsider cannot give an individual pride, and self-confidence as human values are what human beings really are. The concept that could make self-reliance happen in the African continent is a lifelong education as conceptualised by educational agenda since the late twentieth century. Though lifelong education has been adopted by development organisations, policy formulators need to examine its advantages alongside the peculiarities of their people. It is in this sense that an African pedagogy is proposed.
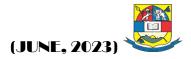
An African Pedagogy

This paper prefers the usage of African pedagogy to the continental pedagogy suggested by Friesen and Kenklies (2022) as a way of thinking about the influence that educational practice have on educator, educand (the person to be educated), and the world. As against the triangular relationship among the educator, educand, and the world, African pedagogy proposes a rectangular relationship in the learning environment where the educator is separated from the elders who also have the capacity to educate. The educand is also separated from learning experiences. Learning experiences are those things and events that persons have undergone and have been able to express either in verbal or written form. This rectangular relationship allows the educator and educand to change roles in the learning environment in order to make their experiences inclusive. The educand through different forms of sharing experiences places experiences as learning tools for others.

The learning environment of both educators and those who are educated is not an imaginary or metaphysical world as pointed out by Friesen & Kenklies (2022) in their continental pedagogy. Instead, the learning environment of both educators and those who are educated can be situated as a geographical area of Africa which has been denigrated with so many eurocentric beliefs. These beliefs are even perpetuated by African scholars at times, who do not see much good in the belief systems of the African people. There is no doubt that 21st-century society allows for lifelong education with an African pedagogy, but then it has to be authentic. It has to be a lifelong education programme that is not just a government slogan for free, compulsory, basic, and universal education for children, holiday classes for students, evening classes for adults, skill acquisition for the unemployed, or recreational education as hobbies. Lifelong learning, especially, for African countries should be committed to making people realise that learning is an instrument for every human development, and make it possible for every interested learner to take up any type of education on their own for their organisation and community.

Lifelong education is not just a preparation for life but a substantial part of life. It makes life worth living. Learners cannot wait for institutional admission alone because lifelong learning is not limited to those who are in institutions of learning. The environment provided by the government, communities, and organisations should be such that individual learners can initiate and organise their own learning. To be able to do this, learners need teachers who should act as ready facilitators and providers of learning materials not only in the classroom but to everyone who has access to them. Lifelong education goes beyond what takes place in schools; it is based on the idea that adult education is a substantial part of education where parents, family members, and the community play their roles in educational activities. It is about creating a learning society where access to learning is made possible.

One of the potentials of the concept of a learning society is that it provides a framework for what education should be in the future and permits a connection between learning and the idea of a future society. The idea of a learning society cannot be separated from the idea of a good society where there is an ethical commitment to social justice by all those who govern. To promote good governance, they should be

committed to developing critical, creative, informed, caring, and democratically engaged citizens through working together with social, movements and grassroots organisations. This is what Schugurensky (2003) calls the 'pedagogy of engagement' when he suggests that people do acquire significant civic and political knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes through the very process of participation in deliberating and decision-making about issues that concern them. Learning should take place in the context of actual communities. For learning and development programmes to be meaningful and sustainable, the culture of the communities needs to be taken into consideration

The gap between the school curriculum, and the society it is supposed to serve, is more pronounced in African countries, where sometimes, learners learn what the society may not need. This was unlike the traditional form of education where the society set the goals and determined the mode and expectation of its citizens. A cultured person was the yardstick for the outcome of traditional African education (Obayan, 2007). In the intentional African pedagogy, education was meaningful only within the learners' life experiences. Quite often these experiences were embedded in the 'reservoir of culture' (Avoseh, 2000). Communities in African societies were the places for learning activities. In Knowles' vision, at the heart of such a community is a centre with specialists who are diagnosticians, prescribers, and facilitators of learning (Dickinson, 2000).
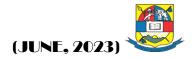
CONCLUSION

The well-being of the group should come first in organising educational activities while individuals may find their happiness in the group. The human capacity to solve problems, especially, when acting together as a group should include all the constituents of the human person which include the physical, mental and spiritual aspects. Living in African society aims at transcendence and this does not make the society primitive. The belief system supports public education for harnessing all the talents in the society hidden in individuals rather than giving undue advantage to the few in the society who can pay for the services of the school system. Campaigns for good citizenship should be based on the principle of the common good for the people which would help to give people the right orientation to participate in the development of the society. This attitude can best be expressed in lifelong learning programmes that would be committed to making people use every opportunity to learn and improve themselves.

A more holistic argument for the promotion of African pedagogy is to acknowledge what Western education has done for Africa. The most important is giving Africans a common language with which to relate among themselves. The effort to create a language with different alphabets or pick one of the many languages as a national language has not yielded many results. If success has been made through a unifying language, indigenous knowledge can be integrated into the languages for a better understanding of African reality.

African pedagogical system requires an educational system that puts the common good of the community first. This is because it is in the community's interests that individual goals can be achieved. It must be a transcendental education whereby the varieties of African religious belief systems are accommodated in the spirit of the community which shuns competition and commercialisation. The value of human life ought to be uppermost and the respect and preservation of human life are equally important. The educational system in
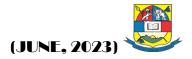
Africa should run an all-inclusive educational system that create access to everyone regardless of age, tribe, sex, deformity, or economic status. It is in this vein that educators in the African continent can practice an indigenous educational system. One expects that awareness creation and anticorruption agencies for rebranding the continent should have the above-stated African pedagogical elements for sustainability.

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