

**INDIGENOUS EDUCATION AND THE ISSUE OF UNDER-DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*The paper examined indigenous education and the issue of under-development in South South Nigeria. It was guided by five research objectives which were to explore the concept of indigenous education, explore indigenous education in South South Nigeria, access its curriculum, investigate education and underdevelopment in the zone as well as consider the place of globalization and education in the area. The paper was anchored further on the system theory by Bertalanffy (1968) even as the nature of research design was purely descriptive. Findings showed that social vices have plagued the zone, causing numerous problems for the citizens despite Western education. Values have degenerated resulting in too much corruption, violence, ritualism, killings, examination malpractice, internet fraud, banditry, drug abuse, child abuse, and disrespect to constitutional authorities and so on. Ironically, western education has almost eroded the indigenous education merits instead of consolidating the Nigeria's cultural values displayed in truth-telling, respect, industry, obedience to constituted authorities, chastity, charity and the rest are almost extinct in our youths these days due to Westernization which is worrisome. The paper thus, canvasses for an integration and synergization of both indigenous and western forms of education in order to revive worthwhile Nigerian values as well as strengthen existing education systems in South-South Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *Indigenous Education, Under-development South South and Nigeria.*

**1. Introduction**

Education in current world system is an important tool that promotes the development and advancement of homo-sapiens. It facilitates individuals' wellbeing and opportunities for better living and is considered as a major social institution that contributes greatly toward the enhancement and maintenance of social order. It is seen as a process by which individuals develop their abilities, talents, skills and attitudes that bring positive value to the society they live in.

Fafunwa (1974) a renowned educationist described education as the sum of all the processes by which a child or a young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. He added that education enhances the acquisition of knowledge and skills that help individuals to increase their productivity and improve their quality of life. As a social institution, its form is got from the value of the society in which it exists. Okoli (2011: vii) went on to define education as, “the transmission of the culture of the people from one generation to another”. Through it, an individual becomes familiarized with societal values that are capable of making him a better matured and reliable person. Through education, individuals can become wise and mature; likewise, the society becomes a better place to live in (Amaele, 2015). Thus, major qualities such as truth-telling, respect, industry, loyalty, unity, chastity, creativity and charity among others are expected in graduates of education institutions whether secondary or tertiary. Sadly, the reverse is essentially almost the case in South-South Nigeria which comprises Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Cross-River and Akwa-Ibom States. Thus, cases of corruption, cultism, drug abuse, rape, child abuse, money laundry, money ritualism, kidnapping, banditry, killings, armed robbery, marital infidelity, hatred, etc. abound in the society which is not supposed to be (Bawa, 2021).

Likewise, Mahoso in Mutekwe (2015:1295) asserted that:

*Some children leave primary and secondary schools with scanty and incorrect knowledge of their history, heritage, pan-Africanism, integrity, commitment, strategic intelligence, strategic realignment with national priorities, moral and ethical values of unhu or Ubuntu and it is no surprise these are some of the candidates rogue politicians recruit and mobilize to carry out such atrocities as xenophobic attacks on citizens of other African nations resident in their country. This development certainly reduces the African philosophy of education to mere obedience and conformity not even with the Eurocentric conventional school.*

Also, many youths are roaming the streets today where they ought to be gainfully employed. These vices among have resulted in people wondering if western education has failed; particularly when one considers the gains of indigenous education. Some persons have out rightly suggested that indigenous education in Nigeria should be reconsidered.

Indigenous education (which is also known as traditional, endogenous or classical education) is the type of education that is resident within the people of a particular society (Bebebrafi, 2015). It is that education that has been in existence prior the advent of the Whites into the country. Such form of education is transmitted to people from generation to generation and may be exported through migration and globalization. According to Denen (2020), the elders of a given society were responsible for teaching the youths worthwhile societal values such as honesty, truth-telling, charity, cooperation, industry, unity and other valuable societal norms such as respect to elders and authorities; applying the tools of storytelling, family meetings, group teaching, events and festivals, e.t.c. The youth's were trained to be self-reliant as they learnt art and craft works such as weaving, fishing, sowing, hunting, farming and so on. Everybody lived happily and peacefully as there was no major reason to be jealous of the other person as a result of love and cooperation among them.

Some have thus suggested the need for the inclusion of indigenous education in the curriculum of schools, colleges and universities in order to help in strengthening present education systems. There are also social, psychological anthropological, intellectual and economic benefits in this arrangement (Emenu, 2015).

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

The increasing vices in South South Nigeria have confused and confounded many people despite Western education. Such education was expected to bless citizens with worthwhile moral values such as moral autonomy, critical thinking mind, self-reliant spirit, industry, creativity, accountability, honesty, chastity, charity, cooperation, unity, etc. Little wonder, the nation's education objectives in Federal Government of Nigeria (2014) are to inculcate national consciousness and unity, to inculcate the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society, the training the mind in the understanding of the world around; and the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society.

Unfortunately, instead of the above worthwhile values to be seen in present society, what are commonly seen are worthless vices such corruption, killings, inter and intra communal wars/conflicts, kidnappings, back and internet fraud, human and drug trafficking, hatred, election malpractice and violence, examination malpractice, cultism, ritualism, rape, armed robbery, banditry, etc. These vices have made the South South zone and the whole of Nigeria in extension unconducive to live in.

Many have blamed this trend on Western education despite its level of success in the society; arguing that the citizens had a more peaceful and quiet lives before the advent of the Colonial Masters with their education. They also claim that indigenous education offered better approach to human and societal developments since it taught citizens the need for peaceful coexistence, industry / self-reliance (hence, everyone practically learnt a trade e.g. hunting, fishing, tailoring / fashion design, weaving, pottery, medicine, etc), honesty, truth-telling, charity, etc.

On the other hand, some persons have argued that the synergization of both the Western education and indigenous form of education would best suit the zone in times like this since it is practically impossible to discard Western education in present society. This becomes a problem. The statement of the problem therefore, is to assess the relevance of indigenous education in present South South Nigeria.

## **3. Aim and Objectives**

The aim of the paper is to appraise carefully indigenous education and the issue of underdevelopment in South South Nigeria. In specific terms, the objectives are to:

- i. Explore the concept of indigenous education*
- ii. Examine indigenous education in South South Nigeria*
- iii. Access the curriculum of indigenous education in South South Nigeria*
- iv. Investigate education and underdevelopment in South South Nigeria*
- v. Consider the place of globalization and education in South South Nigeria*

## **4. Conceptual Reviews**

- **Indigenous Education in Nigeria**

Education has been in existence in Nigeria before the country was colonized and even before the slave trade (Okafor, 2014). Knowledge, skills and attitudes were transmitted from generation to generation mostly through word of mouth and storytelling in the Nigerian societies. This is due to the fact that Nigerian societies, just like any other society, have common ancestry, making its inhabitants adapt easily to the environment. For instance, the use of tools, the construction of huts, the design of clothes among others suggest that human societies including South-South Nigeria became complicated during the past centuries. This was necessitated by the ever changing societal exigencies and the need to adapt to emerging changes. It is this understanding that gives enough evidence that Nigerian societies through interacting with their environments learnt skills that they needed to survive (Obanubi, 2015). Likewise, the making of hunting tools, for example, characterized most Nigerian societies; especially, during the nomadic period (Okafor, 2014). The frequent movement enabled the citizens to learn their immediate surroundings such as river systems, the forests and hills, the type of flora and fauna and other characteristics (Onuchie, 2017). This connotes that knowledge and skills pertaining to resource management were clearly obligatory. Also, the knowledge that the indigenes had was scientific and as intricate as any other from other parts of the world (Osagie, 2016). This is because, while playing with their environment and transforming various raw materials overtime, the citizens arrived at different hypotheses about nature and the natural world. The fabrication of metallic tools and implements, textile, traditional medicine, production or food processing involved the application of various techniques, propositions and principles arrived at through careful observation of the environment and experimentation at various levels (Mbagwe, 2018).

Again, the knowledge and skills were shared with new members, such as those who were captured during fights/war or those from birth and marriage. The learning of the environment equally passed information about the measures that were used by the Nigerian societies in conservation of resources. An example is how taboos were used as a conservation strategy. In such places, for instance, certain animals were not killed or eaten because they were respected as totems (Njoku, 2015).

Also, the traditional schools supported in the provision of necessary skills and knowledge that Nigerian societies needed for their survival. Likewise, the production of tools required skills for sudden use and their modification, which was determined by two major challenges. First, the need for Nigerian societies to guard themselves against predators meant that tools had to be improved as new techniques and strategies of killing were devised. Second, the annexation of members of a tribe and other resources such as land elicited tribal conflicts. The tribal conflicts meant that strategies in battle were important if the tribe was to maintain its identity and protect its resources (Mosweunyane, 2013). Hence, South-South Nigeria always had small communities which migrated quite frequently, sometimes conflicting with each other. This situation frequently necessitated the mastery of the necessary strategies for societies to survive, which promoted the learning of such strategies using demonstrations by the elderly to the young.

Moreover, the Nigerian societies that were defeated were mainly conquered, subjugated and integrated into those that triumphed. This meant that new members

mastered new values, cultures, strategies, and skills. Children were required to possess knowledge, attitudes and skills of societies in which they were born. There was no clear distinction between educational activities and socialization. The knowledge, skills and attitudes in addition to social values and norms peculiar to a given group were acquired by the children, which ensured progress, peace and unity. In addition, the tribal battles meant that divine intervention was always relevant as defeat was interpreted as a curse that is cast upon a society by its ancestors (Denen, 2020). This implies that the Nigerian societies in South-South Nigeria valued worship even before the advent of westernization which ushered in Christianity to the country. It is thus palpable that these societies mastered essential facets to execute their acts of worship. These and many other evidence prove that schools offered well-arranged training including religious practices for the learners.

- **Indigenous Education in South-South Nigeria**

The elders were teachers in the South-South Nigerian settings such as in the training of regiments for mastery of survival skills. Indigenous education in earliest times covered several areas such as knowledge, morals, leadership and religion (Bawa, 2021). Hence, the traditional schools systematically taught young adults a number of secret formulae and songs in their local dialect, admonishing them to honour, obey and support their leaders, to be ready to endure hardships and even death for the sake of the tribe (Abioluwodi, 2012). They were also taught to be united as a group and help one another in times of need/difficulties; to attend public decision making meetings regularly, and to preserve religious practices. Also, knowledge, customs and laws through tribal institutions were conveyed to the young by the elders using storytelling, songs, myths and proverbs which were properly and adequately explained. The young were informed of their past and their cultural heritage with the aim of stimulating pride in cultural institutions which formed the basis of community survival (Okoh, 2012). It becomes very apparent that learning did take place within South-South Nigerian societies in early times, even before colonization in Nigeria by the British.

- **Curriculum of Indigenous Education in South-South Nigeria**

There was indeed a curriculum for indigenous education in South-South Nigerian though, not in the manner that it is today. Consequently, the trainings given were not done haphazardly but through some strategies that did not always conform to Western standards (Amadi, 2015). This is the reason many indigenes understood metallurgy and manufactured spears from iron and copper, Artisans wove fine clothes, baskets and furniture, beer was brewed from bananas and grain, soap was got from palm fruit, communication between villages and kingdoms was accomplished using a relay of swift runners, etc (Asobie, 2012; Ebo, 2012). Processing information and conveying it through the word of mouth is unrealizable without learning and this was achieved in these societies. The Western powers changed how the indigenes transmitted knowledge which led Boateng in Mosweunyane (2013) to claim that the increasing deterioration of intergenerational communication in Africa has been attributed to systems of education orchestrated by Western colonial system. Again, the scientific experiments though, not conducted in laboratories as it is done today, also took place in South-South Nigerian. An instance is in the fermentation of grains in the brewing of beer which accorded its societies an opportunity to learn

through observation and experimentation (Ebo, 2012). These processes were repeated for mastery and were then conveyed verbally for utilization by future generations. Similarly, knowledge was shared amongst communities and between generations, to enable its beneficiaries to understand the realities of the world; to live in and become skilled at solving their problems. One can thus assert that pedagogically, South-South Nigerian education comprised both instructional and non-instructional models of learning, which may be termed formal, informal and unconscious (Okoh, 2012).

- **Education and Underdevelopment in South South Nigeria**

Development is a multi-functional process that includes re-organization and re-orientation of the entire economic and social systems which incorporate utilitarian, institutional, behavioural and structural dimensions. It implies increased skill and capacity to earn income, self-discipline, creativity, freedom of action, responsibility and the general material and psychological well-being of an individual; realizable in relation to the welfare of the society (Ugwu, 2015). It equally connotes an attempt to reduce poverty and world inequalities in a bid to direct the world to a level of betterment and improvement over a course of time.

Development incorporates every aspect of the human life and that of the society in terms of reconstruction and improvement. This includes the growth and expansion of a society's industries, agriculture, social, education, religious and cultural institutions. (United Nations Decade Report, 2020). It is also includes improvement in human resources including knowledge and skills. Likewise, development shows improvements in incomes and output; and accommodates radical changes institutional, social and administrative structures including people's attitudes, customs and beliefs (Salami, Tilakasimi & Ahmed, 2017). A major factor in development is change which is not only demonstrated in the infrastructure that could be described as replacement, addition or growth but that which is intended to also show in attitude, beliefs and cultures. Development can equally be expressed as increased skills and capacity as well as more freedom, responsibility, self-discipline and material well-being of citizens. In line with this, Ugwu (2015) described development as verifiable growth plus change. Also, industrialization is noticed as a major source of development in a society; not due to its ability to influence science, technology, infrastructure and even food but because it is able to positively create change in all the sectors.

Salami, Tilakasiri and Ahmed (2017) noted that development is got from biological understanding or growth, which serves to naturalize it and give it an air of inevitability. Likewise, the Tsung (2016) opined that the tendency to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have a better standard of living connotes development. Thus, development assists in improving the life conditions of the citizens in a given society.

One of the reasons for development is that there is a poor world just as there is a rich world; and it is imperative for the former to close the gap. Also, the latter can help in this process in whatever capacity. Thus, development issues involve both the poor and rich societies; the poor and rich people/groups; and the need to move the former in each case to a better and advantageous situation. Using these descriptions, it is deduced that development connotes ensuring that people have the essential things they need such as food, housing, clothes, school, jobs, health care, e.t.c.

(Salami, Tilakadiri & Ahmed, 2017). It shows improvements in the social, political economic and technological prosperity of a society; leading to improvements in the human condition and social wellbeing of the society. It is further considered a process of moving the whole social system upward in order to promote the capacity of its members, realize man's inherent potential and to effectively cope with the changing circumstances of his life (Ugwu, 2015).

The opposite of development is underdevelopment. That is, underdevelopment exists in places that are not developed or where development has been suppressed by human factors such as poor government policies. (Okoh, 2012). As noted in earlier paragraphs, the South-South region of Nigeria is still suffering from underdevelopment in all spheres; be it in economy, education, health, government, e.t.c.

Underdevelopment shows in education such as poor access to school, poor school infrastructure, lack of or limited ICT facilities in schools which hinder digital education, limited number of teachers to avoidable students, poorly equipped classrooms and libraries, quality of teachers, quality of school products, school administration, government education policies, etc. It also shows in economy such as high cost of living, low per capita income, low Gross National Product (GNP) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), high cost of goods and services, unemployment and underemployment, delayed/belated payment of salaries to workers, etc. Likewise, it shows in politic as in poor governance, low credible elections/election malpractice, poor representations in government, nepotism, abuse of rule of law, poor infrastructure development e.g. education, power, health and security, (Soken-Huberty, 2021; structure and strangeness, 2020).

In view of these, many persons are tempted to think that the indigenous education is better than western education; especially having tested the two systems over the years; while some persons including these writers suggest a combination of both in present society.

- **Globalization and Education in South-South Nigeria**

The present societies in South-South Nigeria are submerged in Westernization which makes it difficult to reconstruct their pre-historical identities; especially in the face of globalization. Osagie(2016) noted that globalization as a secular historical process has occurred in three distinctive waves. The first wave was the age of discovery between 1450–1850 when **it** was shaped by European expansion and conquest. Second wave happened between 1850 and 1945 which evidenced great expansion and entrenchment of European empires while the third wave commenced 1960 and is stillon, with regards to human affairs characterized by microchip and satellite icons. These happenings imply that it will be difficult to return to the world of one's ancestors. It is also evident that the Nigeriah has immensely benefited from contemporary technological changes that have occurred in the world. Similarly, contact with European civilization and the gradual spread of education, has created new thoughts and ways of life different from what they used to be, which has made education and social reality institutionalized (Corradetti, 2021).

Furthermore, schools as channels of knowledge, guide lives and worldview and define what is legitimate and what is not in contemporary realities (Okoh, 2012). Thus, with continual development in science and technology, with new means of

communication such as radio and television, with major alterations in political institutions and integration of world societies through globalization, western education will continue to thrive. However, in South-South Nigeria, such education can be blended with indigenous education in order to regain our positive cultural values which have almost been eroded.

The realization is that western education which implies colonization, has gained much ground in Nigeria as a result of globalization; and this, instead of improving values among the people (especially the youths) has ended up corrupting them (Denen, 2020). This is displayed in so many juvenile delinquencies in the society such as cultism, examination malpractice, drug abuse, sexual assault, internet fraud, corruption, killings, idleness, banditry, disrespect for elders and institutional authorities, etc. It is hoped that civic education in present school curriculum can be strengthened with indigenous education so as to review worthwhile values such as industry, truth-telling, honesty, cooperation, chastity, respect for elders and authorities, etc.

## **5. Theoretical Framework**

### **System Theory by Bertalanffy (1968)**

The system theory by Bertalanffy (1968) anchors this study. It recognizes that a system consists of four things. The first has to do with objects – the parts, elements, or variables within the system. These may be physical or abstract or both, depending on the nature of the system. Second, a system consists of attributes – the qualities or properties of the system and its objects. Third, a system has internal relationships among its objects. Fourth, systems exist in an environment. A system, then, is a set of things that affect one another within an environment and form a larger pattern which is different from any of the parts (Infante, Rancer & Womack, in Jessa, 2017).

The fundamental system interactive paradigm of organizational analysis features the continual stages of input, throughput (processing) and output. Also, several system characteristics are: wholeness and interdependence (the whole is more than the sum of all parts), correlations, perceiving causes, chain of influence, hierarchy, supra-systems and subsystems, goal-oriented, self-regulation and control, inputs/outputs, interchange with the environment, the need for balance/homeostasis, change and adaptability (morphogenesis) and equality.

This study was guided by the *system theory* because schools in the society (South South Nigeria) constitute a system where the teaching/learning process is observed as a throughput (process) used to transform inputs (students) and resources into outputs (graduates with different skills and attitudes). In schools, we also observe an interrelation between teachers, resources and students which constitute a sine qua non condition for the effectiveness of the teaching/learning process. Realistically, any school has objectives to achieve and achieving them requires it to treat all the elements involved in the process (inputs such as students, teachers and resources; throughput such as teaching methods and outputs such as graduates with different skills and attitudes) as interdependent.

This further shows that the school is a reflection of the society; that is, whatever affects the school affects the society. If the students are properly educated, the society benefits as there will be peace and development. However, where the



students are mis-educated or exposed to vices, the society suffers as there will be chaos and unrests. The students, teachers and other resources are the component parts of a greater whole, being the society. Whatever the society becomes therefore is dependent on these sub-units.

### **Implications for Nigeria's Development**

Emenu (2015) stated that Nigeria should maintain existing relations of production in the global economy for her development. The level of the financial, commercial and technological dependence of the Nigeria's economy on the West does not permit isolation. Likewise, the country is under siege by non-state actors such as multinational corporations. This is evidenced as the largest firms and transnational corporations gained the lead in expanding their global operations into more profitable areas. They competed to locate new avenues of raw materials and to pry for open markets for their growing surplus manufactured goods in the developing nations. Hence, the presence of transnational corporations in Nigeria has influenced its education systems. An example is Shell Corporation in Rivers and Bayelsa States which has trained citizens in various areas, including geology and mining engineering (Osagie, 2016).

It thus becomes difficult to alienate the country's education from the Western educational systems since education systems are reflected and shaped by ideological and organizational processes at the societal and world level. The world has experienced extraordinary expansion of education systems after the Second World War and this cannot be denied but the problem remains the impact on the populace and society. One can thus, take the suggestion by Opon and Edinyang (2014) that Nigeria and Africa at large should embrace both exogenous and endogenous technological activities for its advancement, which should be for realization of both cultural, scientific and technological growth in areas of moral values, metallurgy, medicine, mathematics, ceramics, textile, food processing and building technology.

### **6. Concluding Remarks**

Nigeria had its own form of education which survived its societies before the advent of western education. Subsequently, the coming of the colonial masters generated an agenda to make indigenous knowledge and skills to be inconsequential and engaged in an undertaking to replace them. Even where indigenous institutions were researched on and found to be credible, they were not accommodated in the education of Nigerians in the manner that would have generated pride and recognition in the entire world. To a large extent, the colonial powers did achieve their objective of an intrusion of a foreign education in the country.

The present argument is that the so called western education has not eliminated poverty, corruption, nepotism, hatred, drug trafficking, distrust, sexual abuse, juvenile delinquencies, banditry, abortions, crime etc. in the land; rather, they have increased in multiple proportions over the years. At best, it is sage that the exogenous and endogenous forms of education should be integrated and applied in South-South Nigeria for obvious advantages such as retention of African root, as demonstrated in industry, truth-telling, honesty, dressing, cooperation, chastity, self-reliance, love, etc.

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