

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Holistic Education and the Paradox of Inability of Kenyan Schools to Promote Kenyan Values

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Abstract:

Chapter six of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) is devoted to the issue of leadership and integrity. In the chapter, factors that underpin responsible leadership are highlighted as, among others, respect for the people, honour to the country, integrity, dignity, impartiality in execution of public duties, accountability to the public, discipline and commitment in serving the people.

Chapter two of the same constitution denotes national values, among others, as patriotism, national unity, good governance, inclusiveness, social equity, integrity, transparency and accountability, sustainable development.

Since independence, the Kenyan school curriculum has been reviewed several times with the aim making the students to undergo holistic education that would enable them to be well adjusted individuals in the society. The attainment of this objective has often fallen short as far as the inculcation of Kenyan values.

Keywords: Education, holistic, curriculum, values.

1. Introduction

There has been a general outcry in Kenya about the need to protect and promote Kenyan cultural values. Political and community leaders have castigated the youth in Kenya for readily accepting foreign values at the expense of Kenyan cultural values. Foreign values have significantly manifested themselves in such social aspects as the types of food, music, dress, hair styles, speech and social interactions.

The electronic media especially the television and radio and such telephony platforms as WhatsApp, twitter and instagram have come under attack as some of the agencies responsible for promoting foreign values, especially among the youth. The internet is also replete with unsavoury and incompatible content.

The Kenya Government cultural policy indicates that the government has an obligation to ensure that valuable cultural assets are not irretrievably lost and that the resources of the past are protected and preserved in order that the people may keep in sight their rich heritage and maintain ties with those cultural values that are meaningful in the contemporary world. Apart from the need to protect and preserve Kenyan values, the part played by culture in national consolidation is recognized as one of its fundamental significances since culture is a symbol of nationhood.

Thus culture is seen as a vital factor that creates national consciousness and unity. According to the late President of Tanzania, Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the present challenges in African cultural practice can be traced down to the influence of colonialism. The colonial governments in various African countries, through their educational systems, disrupted the foundations of African traditional culture and deliberately tried to replace it with their own culture. This was the colonialists' idea of "civilizing" the African people. Nyerere asserts that "culture is the essence and spirit of any nation. A country which lacks its own culture is no more than a collection of people without the spirit which makes them a nation.

Although the challenges that we have about the neglect of our cultural values are deeply rooted in the colonial system of government, there is a danger that in spite of several years after political independence, most of Kenyans still cling to foreign cultural values. The various cultural agencies such as the media, family, church, school and peer groups still promote negative attitudes about Kenyan culture. Bearing in mind that culture gives one an identity, we can say that a nation without a culture is like a person without an identity. Without an identity, one is reduced to the level of a non-being.

In Song of Lawino, Okot P' Bitek highlights the same point when Lawino describes the educated African woman who tries to copy the white values. She states that:-

"Her lips red hot
 Like glowing charcoal
 She resembles the wild cat
 That has dipped its mouth in blood
 It looks like an open ulcer
 Like the mouth of field!
 Tina dusts powder on her face
 And it looks so pale
 She resembles the wizard
 Getting ready for the midnight dance
sometimes she wears
 The hair of some dead woman
 Of some white woman
 Who died long ago
 And she goes with it
 To the dance
 What witchcraft!

The poem touches on the problem of borrowing and blindly imitating foreign cultures. Although there is a lot advantages in learning from foreign cultures, it should not mean that a community abandons its own cultural values. Thus, having outlined the urgency and need to promote Kenyan cultural values, it is necessary to address ourselves to the question of what culture is? There is quite some disagreement among academics as to what really constitutes culture. Various assumptions about culture may put them culture in proper perspective. In addition there is need to consider whether education can transmit our cultural values?

The term culture has been defined by E.B. Tylor as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society. Another sociologist by the name of Talcott Parsons, suggests that culture is transmitted, it constitutes a heritage or a social tradition: secondly it is learned, it is not a manifestation, in particular content, of man's genetic constitution, and thirdly it is shared.

Generally, culture can be seen as a way of life experienced by a given society. It comprises of all the various aspects of life that have been evolved by the people of a particular society. Culture includes such aspects as the way people sleep, eat, dance, think and feel in a particular society. These factors can be expressed for instance in religion, law, language, art, custom as well as material products such as houses, clothes and tools.

Samuel Koenig suggests that culture consists of two aspects i.e. material and nonmaterial culture. Material culture consists of concrete objects like houses, articles of clothing, utensils, tools and concrete presentations of ideas such as books and paintings. Nonmaterial culture includes the ideas, concepts and techniques behind those objects as well as modes of thinking and acting, values and emotional reactions and in general the abstract creations of man such as language, literature, science, law and religion.

We must recognize that societies are unique and therefore culture will in turn be unique in relation to societies. We must strive to understand the internal dynamics operating in a given society to understand the culture of the society. It is important to note that human biological needs are basically the same. We all need air, water, food, sleep and escape from pain. But how we satisfy these needs would depend on the type of culture we come from.

Even within the same culture, there are bound to be differences within the sub-cultures of that group. A.K.C. Ottaway lists several factors that can be taken in consideration in determining a social grouping or cultural groups.

- Miscellaneous Factors: income, occupation, education, language habits, (speech, accent and vocabulary), types of residence, spending habits.
- Living habits: clothes and dress, eating and diet, physical habits and means of keeping healthy, attitudes to marriage and sex, techniques of bringing up children, patterns of family life.
- Leisure Pursuits: reading (including newspapers) radio and television programs preferred, sports (played and watched), entertainments favoured, means of artistic expression, ways of spending holidays.
- Belief and Value Systems: moral attitudes and standards, religious belief, political views, social ambitions, aims in life.

Thus to describe a person in terms of the above factors may give a fairly good indication of the culture to which he belongs.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of culture is not static but dynamic. This means that culture is not just talking about traditional values but looking at the value of a given society from various dimensions, such the past, present and future. Culture is not just talking about an aspect of culture such as traditional music and customs; it means looking at a whole set of values in a changing sense. George F. Kneeler suggests that some aspects of cultural values like language and law, may persist without major changes for some time, but changing in that all its elements, however gradually and subtly are undergoing a continuous metamorphosis. Cultural change includes three main processes:

- Origination – the discovery of invention of new elements within the culture.
- Diffusion – the borrowing of new elements from other cultures.
- Reinterpretation – the modification of an existing element to meet fresh circumstances.

The term cultural lag is used to refer to the tendency of some areas of a culture to change more slowly than others.

Culture thus consists of a complex of shared understanding which serves as a medium through which individual human minds interact in communication with one another. It enables us to recognize as familiar the way other people think and feel and thus to share their feelings. It also enables us to predict and thus to anticipate the actions of others so that we can know how to accommodate them. Nevertheless each society tries to defend and at times propagate its cultural values.

Societies try to organize and selectively transmit to the young what they consider to be appropriate values. Education has become the leading agency in the process of cultural transmission. Other agencies include the family, church, peer groups, mass media and electronic media. As such, every society has established appropriate mechanisms through which it supervises the education of its members.

Broadly, education includes every process, except the solely genetic, that helps to form a person's mind, character or physical capacity. Within such a framework, education can be seen as a life long process, for we must learn new ways of thought and action with every major change in our ways of thought and action. Specifically, education is the inculcation in each generation of certain knowledge, skills and attitudes by means of institutions such as schools, deliberately created to achieve that end. This means that education belongs to the process known as enculturation, whereby a growing person is initiated into the way of life of his society.

The school is thus the medium of selective cultural transmission. This is carried out through the programs that are outlined in the school curriculum. The curriculum can then be seen as a set of content through which the values of given society are transmitted in a school setting. Lawrence Stenhor states that this then translates itself into a social process in which learning takes place, discoveries are made and pupils come to terms with culture and learn to think independently within a culture. The teacher then is entrusted with the responsibility of supervising and controlling this social process as it takes place within the classroom.

But in contemporary Kenya, one may raise several issues. Are schools really equipped to transmit our cultural values? What are these Kenyan values that schools should be transmitting? Should they transmit those values that are theoretically described or should we be concerned with the practical realities in our society? When we talk of transmitting cultural values, should we be concerned with the past, present or future?

In order to discern how education can transmit our cultural values, it is essential to look at the aims of education in Kenya. These are some of the educational aims we emphasize in Kenya.

- Education should enable the individual to fit into our culture.
- To pass on the heritage of our society
- To promote good citizenship
- To develop critical thought
- To aid in social change
- To promote equality and cooperation
- To promote national unity

The Kenya Government regards education as a necessary condition in cultural continuity. Through this process, educators are able to reinterpret old knowledge and values with a view of making them suitable to new situations. An educational institution like the University is not just meant to transmit the cultural heritage of a society but to add some new values to it, probably through research, innovation and outreach. The University is expected to critically interrogate existing values and educate the society, through outreach programs, about the relevant and irrelevant values at a particular time.

However schools are faced with some challenges in the task of cultural transmission. For example considering the goal of enabling the individual to fit in his/her culture we find that there are other powerful agencies contradicting this goal. Some of the content in the electronic and social media promote values that are diametrically opposed to what the educational institutions promote as acceptable values. Often these media promote foreign music, food, fashion and other lifestyles that are deemed foreign to typical Kenyan cultural values.

Secondly while our educational institutions try to inculcate African principles of cooperation, the society in which they operate encourages competition in order to succeed.

Thirdly, we talk of schools promoting equality yet one finds that the social structure has led the establishment of different "states" such as high cost schools, low cost schools, urban schools, and rural schools. More so the essence of equality is made even more difficult due to the fact that our society is divided into the rich and the poor each of which have different value systems. Children from rich homes come to schools with a different set of values and so are those from poor homes.

Fourthly, in our traditional society, children were brought up through a series of steps towards maturity. The homes were crucial acculturation places with parents and the extended families forming a critical pillar in the process. However, with the new challenges brought by technology and other social demands, our social set up has taken on a new dimension. Parents are too preoccupied with the world of work to perform their traditional functions of socializing the youth in their social functions. Instead they have passed them to schools which find it difficult to fully socialize and integrate every child in the society.

In conclusion, the nature of contemporary Kenyan society places a lot of demands on the schools, some of which the schools are not capable of fulfilling. It must be realized that in the process of cultural transmission, the school has to compete with other agencies such as the family, church, T.V., radio and cinema. Some of these agencies tend to command a more powerful influence on the pupils than the schools. To a great extent these agencies work against the

governments cultural policies. It is therefore necessary the government to adopt more strict measures to ensure that these agencies do not continue to promote foreign cultural values at the expense of Kenyan values.

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