



## ***Mitigation of African Indigenous Knowledge***

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### ***Abstract***

*African indigenous knowledge is the life style of Africans, based on each community experiences in its wholeness to include their medicine, festivals, agriculture and social life. It comes in form of oral tradition and transmitted through folk tales, proverbs and idioms. This paper therefore identified colonization, modernization, and globalization as major mitigation of African indigenous knowledge. It then suggests that attention should be paid to method of teaching the African indigenous knowledge to fit in to the present age, adequacy of literature for posterity and educating today's African youths on the wise use of social media.*

***Keywords:*** *Mitigation, Africa and Indigenous Knowledge.*

## **Introduction**

African indigenous knowledge is related to African cultural values that they inculcate in their children from home right from infancy. It has a lot to do with their life style in all its totality. It is vivid in their norms, trade, belief, wisdom, knowledge, values, skill

acquisition, and teachings and practices of each community. Ugboma (2014) describes Indigenous knowledge as "central to Africa's development in all ramifications especially in the rural communities. Africans are endowed with special

knowledge with which human development is enhanced. The efficacy of this "special knowledge" cannot be over emphasized and this is best described as indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is traditional knowledge associated with African tradition or culture. It is largely inherent in man. It is not associated with any form of formal learning/training but transmitted or learnt orally. It is associated with oral tradition and highly rooted in African culture. African cultural heritage consists of different cultural values, indigenous knowledge and heritage materials. Indigenous knowledge resides in the heads and on the lips of the custodians and passed down from generation to generation orally from the elderly to the younger. This is different from common sense. Even with the advent of computers, oral tradition remains an important means of preserving and transmitting indigenous knowledge.” Magnus (1999) survey the system of education practiced in Africa in precolonial times and prefer to call it traditional education. In their minds, traditions are the sum total of the beliefs, opinions, customs, cultural patterns and other ways of life that a society passes from generation to generation through parents, age-grades and secret societies.

Most cases, it comes from what to do and how to behave well. For example, at rising, children are taught to greet elders, sweep the surroundings, they are also taught from time to time to respect elders, to have value of honesty, charity, industriousness, cleanness, humility, support- members helping themselves in developing someone’s project, as a group or people of the same trade helping themselves. Formation of children was even taught to be done collectively. Most Africans gain this knowledge ever before they grow up to form associations according to age groups and they begin to compete and use themselves as yardstick for success, development and progress. All these are taught through proverbs, songs, art, communal life, and folk tales/ lore during moonlight play.

Yusuf and Olusegun (2015) describe Indigenous knowledge as “home-grown knowledge that enables communities to make sense of who they are and to interact with their environment in ways that sustain life. It is knowledge that

arises from life experience and which is passed down from generation to generation through words of mouth in the form of folklore, idioms, proverbs, songs, rite of passage and rituals. It equally covers the broad spectrum of life and therefore there are different types of indigenous knowledge ranging from people's beliefs, medicine, arts and craft etc.” In relation with this, Magnus (1999) though quoting Fafunwa summarizes the aims, methods and contents of African education as follows: “African education emphasized social responsibility, job orientation, political participation and spiritual and moral values. Children learned by doing, that is to say, children and adolescents were engaged in participatory education through ceremonies, rituals, imitation, recitation and demonstration. They were involved in practical farming, fishing, weaving, cooking, carving, knitting, and so on. Recreational subjects included wrestling, dancing, drumming, acrobatic display, racing, etc., while intellectual training included the study of . . . history, poetry, reasoning, riddles, proverbs, storytelling, story-relays. Education in Africa . . . combined physical training with character-building, and manual activity with intellectual training.”

Ugboma (2014) in his research on “Availability and Use of Indigenous Knowledge Amongst Rural Women in Nigeria.” Approached the indigenous knowledge in line with how Nigerian women had used their knowledge of herbs to cure diseases in their given community. “In spite of the very small population of rural women who are herb sellers, majority of them possess and use Indigenous Knowledge of traditional medicine. This is an indication that they use herb as preventive medicine and as alternative means of treating diseases. The use of herbs as preventive medicine has contributed to reduction of infant mortality. Malaria and measles are the major diseases that kill infants especially in the rural areas.” In the same vain, Africa in general and Kenya in particular are facing climate change challenges. Since most Kenyan communities depend on agriculture as the backbone of the economy for sustenance. They used African traditional indigenous knowledge embedded in African religion to "pray for rain" by predicting, causing, redirecting, and controlling rain within their locality. He concluded that local communities need to integrate both indigenous knowledge and scientific knowledge to forecast and dispel rainfall

patterns to effectively predict weather patterns. Gumo (2017) Nevertheless, Yusuf and Olusegun (2015) researched on Management of Indigenous Knowledge (Ifa and Egungun) in Osun State, Nigeria and they approached the African indigenous knowledge in relation to 'Ifa and Egungun' festivals.

The above research works were done to establish the fact that indigenous knowledge is about the existence of Africans. This can be explored from many angles. Although whatever viewpoint with which one is looking at it, mitigation in this line will affect the entirety of the topic. For the purpose of this paper nonetheless, the writer will like to investigate this topic in the opinion of Mbiti (1969) which is in relation to indigenous knowledge at puberty stage. To him, learning the indigenous knowledge is in stages. By implication, what children gather at infancy level or before they become teens and what they learn at puberty stage are not the same. Also, puberty rites often marks the beginning of acquiring indigenous knowledge which is otherwise not accessible to those who have not been initiated. That is, those who are not up to that age. Therefore, Mbiti feels that "It is a period of awakening to many things, a period of dawn for the young. They learn to endure hardships, they learn to live with one another, they learn to obey, they learn the secrets and mystery of the man-woman relationships, and in some areas, especially in West Africa, and they join secret society each of which has its own secrets, activities and language." This indigenous knowledge is meant mainly for male child, and it is done during a moment of withdraw from the society. It is done in a secluded area with people of the same age.

### **Mitigation Of African Indigenous Knowledge**

Mitigation of indigenous knowledge is mainly the problem of colonization, modernization, and globalization. These come inform of formal education; the arrival of the colonial masters caused African knowledge to be weakened. This is because the methodology introduced was far superior to that of African people. Kreitzer (2012) report a comment of social work students when asked if they wish to Africanize their social work curriculum as "Western social work knowledge is the best knowledge and we deserve the best knowledge, therefore

we want western social work taught to us. If we learn western social work knowledge then it will give us the opportunity to go to the U.K., USA and Canada to practice social work. ” Africans even prefer western education since African indigenous knowledge seems to be inadequate and lacks prospect.

The idea of oral traditions was no longer popular to foster African indigenous knowledge, and the welcome idea that brought about enlightenment caused Africa indigenous knowledge to gradually form the things of the past. This has led to individualistic life and self-centeredness which is gradually killing the sense of communal life that was the bond of Africans. The feeling of Tedla (1996) has relevance to this when he claims that traditional African thought or interpretation of cosmic life is the bedrock of indigenous education. Consequently, such concepts as affirmation of life, creation, community, person and work have been pivotal in shaping African concepts of learning. Thus learning is conceived as boundless fused with all aspects of life. Because of this integrative thinking, Africans do not speak of education as a separate process or institution from everything else in life. No distinction is drawn between formal, non- formal or informal education. In fact, the Western concept of education does not speak to the traditional African notion of learning which prioritizes community living and the development of virtue and character. Neither does it speak to the traditional African reality in relation to common life.

Another problem in African knowledge in relation to the above is documentation. In the traditional African life, people lived together. They grow up to settle around their family members. This made traditional education to be possible and easily transmitted through their regular moon night play. Today, the influence of formal education on Africans has made them to move beyond their environments where continuous learning of traditional knowledge would be difficult. How can we teach children that are not born in African environment the African indigenous knowledge? In many cases they claim to be citizens of where they are born or leave their countries to become citizens of another country. This can be examined in line with the content of what was being taught without regularities concerning timing, educator, methodology and

assessment. Indigenous African education is false when we examined it in connection with: “its foundation, its aims and core values, the period of learning, the subjects taught, the methods of teaching and learning, female education, responsibility for education, and what constitutes knowledge.” Tedla (1996)

Another factor of mitigation is the social media. Although, it has its values in the sense that, most of the time it makes life easy and you reach wherever you wish within a moment without necessarily travelling. Also, information can be kept and saved using the social media and many other benefits. But if we take a lead from the Mbiti’s understanding of African indigenous Knowledge, none of the mentioned points can now be taught using the African method which is oral tradition, folktales, proverbs and the like. All the African indigenous knowledge are now being taught in formal schools officially or unofficially. Like the virtues of learning how to endure hardships and obedience may be part of learning during the morning assemblies, they learn to live with one another in most boarding houses, they learn the secrets and mystery of the man-woman relationships through peer group interactions and watching pornographic films and reading on the internet, and they can even join secret society in the schools without the knowledge of parents and guardians.

Apart from interested individual, how many young Africans will be available to learn the local medicine as Ugboma (2014) presented? Children of today will prefer to become medical doctors instead. In the same vein, how many Africans are interested in learning and promoting African medicine that the popular Fr Anselm Adodo, OSB is propagating? If this has to be embraced, it must come in form of formal school setting, have certificate in mind. This age is certificate oriented. Or can any parent allow her children to embrace “ifa and Egungun” (oracle and masquerades) as a life style like the fore fathers as Yusuf and Olusegun (2015) represented. Youth of today will rather opt for other lucrative jobs of white collar jobs than to become experts in “making rains” as Gumo (2017) asserts. If indigenous knowledge is being introduced to Africans children, they quickly term it ‘old skool’ to drive home the point that these primitive ideas are no longer meant for them and their age.

Therefore, it is important to use today's language to transmit and interpret the Africans ideas and cultural values, this should include availability of more literature for posterity. There should be a link between its relevance to the present age if truly it must thrive. If much attention is not paid to it, it may be portrayed as a thing of the past, stagnant and limited. Consequently the view of Tedla (1996) may be relevant here that in order to empower Africa and its youth with the wisdom teachings of the ancestors, it is important to use a language that does not depreciate African experiences. This means abandoning disempowering words or terminologies that negatively portray traditional African life. The viewing and measuring of African ways in terms of other people's cultures must stop. New educational frameworks that are grounded in the positive aspects of Africa's cultural heritage should be created.

### **Conclusion**

African Indigenous knowledge is unique to every culture and society and it is embedded in community practices, institutions, relationships and rituals coming out from their day to experiences. African people have been able to transfer smoothly, their indigenous knowledge from one generation to another until the arrival of the colonial masters, who through civilization and modernization reduced the consideration for African indigenous knowledge. African indigenous knowledge is full of merits as it defines every member of the community and also identifies them as a group. However, Africans should not forget their cultural practices. While enjoying the beauty and attractive education that civilization brought to Africa, Western-educated Africans should use the opportunity and prospect of it to develop and adopt new ideas and policies that will recognize the relevance and benefit of Africa's cultural and historical roots, and translate it into attractive package that will preserve and promote African indigenous knowledge.

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