

The Social Relevance of Indigenous Education as a Panacea to Communal Development and Transformation among the Indigenous Iruokpen People of Esan Society in Edo State, Nigeria

Dr. Enato, Lucky Success Ehimeme (PhD)

Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Department of History & International Studies, Faculty of Arts, Edo State, Nigeria

Field Of Specialty: Socio-Economic History and History of Change and Development

Puffycolly@gmail.com

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Abstract

Iruokpen community stands among other communities in Esan society. Before the coming of the Christian missionaries and colonial officials, Iruokpens had their own workable education, which was indigenized and productive in meeting all round needs of the community. The educational system prevalent at the time was it that every member of the community placed high value and emphasis. Thus, patriotism, communalism, respect, honesty, communalism, industriousness, creativity, innovation, inventiveness and spirit of neighborliness and so forth become the characteristic hallmarks of every member of the community. This paper, therefore, examines the social relevance of Iruokpen indigenous education as a panacea to her development and transformation in the period. Again, it examines how the aim of indigenous Iruokpen education is to produce an individual who is skilled, supportive, respectable, and honest and conforms to the social norms of the community. The education structure taught the Iruokpen child to have a sense of belongingness, which thus patterns a child toward an effective and desirable life in the community. It depicts the peace and harmony prevalent at the time whereby unemployment, laziness and corruption were never visible all because every child was educationally equipped in his/her career and vocation. It concluded by recommending that value developments education should be included in all curriculum of education at all levels. Likewise, parents should be role models for their children. The methodology adopted in the writing of this paper is the historical method. The main sources for this study will be primary and secondary sources. The primary sources constitute documents, oral traditions, and field notes. The secondary source is a work of historical reconstruction based on the interpretation of primary sources. Examples of secondary sources include scholarly journal article, encyclopedia, dictionaries, interpretation of a diary, biographies, newspapers, published dissertations etc.

Key words: *Social Relevance, Education, Panacea, Communal Development, Transformation, Indigenous Iruokpen, Esan Society*

Introduction

In a bid to have better understanding of the indigenous educational system of the people of Iruokpen before the Europeans conventional style education was introduced, it is succinct and imperative to examine its geographical location, climate, and pattern of settlement and at least a version of its numerous origins.

Iruokpen is an Esan society, which is located along the Southern tip of Ekpoma chiefdom where it shares boundaries with Ehor in Uhumwonde Local Government Area. Iruokpen from the geographical view is bounded in the West of Ozalla in Owan West Local Government Area, and in the East by Uhumwonde River, called '*Ede Ibiekumah*', the deliverer of *Ekunma* now known as Ekpoma (Esene's Personal Diary 5). To the North of Iruokpen are her sisters and friendly neighbours in the nomenclatures of Ujemen, Idumebo, Uke and Ihumudumu.

Iruokpen since ages are hospital and generous people, harmonious and industrious in their pursuit for growth and development (Odiagbe, Personal Communication). This was why the first British European Christian missionary to set foot on the land, Father Clement Barnwarth asserts that:

The people of Iruokpen among her Ishan neighbours are people bequeathed with great and large hearts filled with kindness of spirits, love and honesty. In them, you could never find hate and bitterness. They are peaceful and easy going in the pursuant of their socio-cultural, religious and economic life. One thing I found in them was that restless zeal and quest for education, their own model of indigenous learning which visibly radiates in them. The children are ready to learn and obey ethical norms and morals because the drive and yearnings to learn deeply imbibed in them. The elders are tireless in teaching them new innovative ideas so far it adds positively in aiding them to be better fellows. The girl child education was not left out, as from my much deepest research and understanding, I found out that mothers played role which our women [Britons] back home could not play on their female child social and moral welfare (Intelligence Reports on Ishan Division of Iruokpen Community; Esene's Personal Diary 6).

This harmonious, flourishing and prosperous community of people is situated seventy kilometers north of Benin City in present day Edo State of Nigeria. It is the first part of Esan West Local Government Area as well as first Esan speaking community along the Benin-Auchi highway from the East. It is situated on a plateau with an altitude of 200 feet above sea level. It is a community assumed to have been founded prior the Oba Ewuare's the Great era in the fifteenth century. This happened, according to historical deduction after the Mass Exodus of Esan people from the Benin Kingdom (Egharevba 23).

Iruokpen like every other society in Esan and other climes has two major climatic seasons, as is the case throughout the rain forest belt. These are the Wet (rainy) and the Dry Harmattan (*Okhuakhua*) seasons; the former normally last from the month of March to October in the same year (Akinbode 3). There is, however, a brief spell, which normally occurs about the month of August, known as ‘August Break’. The dry season, on the other hand begins roughly in November (though there occurs intermittent drizzling throughout the month) until February or early March. In the mid-dry season, a harsh dry dust and cold wind called the harmattan ‘*Okhuakhua*’ in Iruokpen sets in. a dry effect is felt throughout and during the dry season while the chill sets in at dusk and throughout the night to late morning (Akinbode 5).

In addition, from a geographical view, Iruokpen is the largest of all the Eguare-Ekpoma community in terms of its landscape and landmark, including population density. Out of the 22, 193 people in Ekpoma Chiefdom by the 1953 and 1963 Population Census figures (Okojie 76), Iruokpen was 5, 200 (Okojie 67). In the 1991 and 2006 Population Census figures, Iruokpen was rated on the high side (Population Censuses 1991 and 2006). The influx of foreigners from other climes has inflated the figures in the listed communities of Emaudo, Uke and Ujemen campuses due to the bustling and booming Ambrose Alli University established campuses.

As regards settlement patterns, there are twelve quarters in Iruokpen and these until the present day include Idumeke, Idumebo, Abia, Idumehonle, Ebokpe, Idumegbede, Idumoza, Idumogo, Idumemalua, Ogbomoide, Ughodin and Ikhin. Ever since the early times, the people of Iruokpen have lived and still lives in a harmonious accord with mutual understanding in their pursuits. They ancestrally believed to have evolved from the same ancestral parentage (Odiagbe, “The Early Iruokpen History” 12). Within these quarters, there exist sub-divisions, which could be referred to as mini-quarters, the origin of each quarters is often traced to highly venerated ancestors who the people accept as the intermediaries between them and *Osenobulua* (God) (Odiagbe, “The Mythical Power of Iruokpen Ancestors” 44). These ancestors act as the spiritual protectors and guidance of the people and they (ancestors) occupies permanent place in the religious lives of the people. The evolution and development of these twelve quarters though not well analyze by historians and researchers, hopefully, subsequent researchers will deal with it.

Iruokpen Theory of Origin

On a large scale, there are numerous versions about the origin of Iruokpen whom the Benin version deduced that the people directly or indirectly emigrated from Benin Kingdom. Often times the claim has been based principally on some observed similarities in language and customs of the Esan and Benin (Bini) people. This is where the concept of interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary methodology comes to play. Enato and Oseghale’s rigorous research findings and field works asserts that; “the Esan people, whom Iruokpen as a homogenous community of people emerged from had always been in existence prior the 15th century, and that the Oba Ewuare’s version of Iruokpen migrating from Benin in the period of his reign was fallacious and subjective (11-12).

People had existed in the Esan geographical area of which Iruokpen society is inclusive, and that these people have had deep knowledge of themselves according to Esan extant traditions. Moreover, when the exodus occurred, Bini immigrants fled or moved to various

places in what was Edo land and therefore the eventual settlement of these Bini immigrants was not peculiar to Esan (Esene Esene's Diary 11). The Oba Ewuare's version of Iruẹkpen origin of Esan society from Benin may mean the origin of organized political institution in the area and a phase of radical societal restructuring, due strongly and largely to increased migrations from Benin into the already existing area. It still does not qualify it appropriate viewing it in terms of the origin of all that is the Iruẹkpen entity (Esene Esene's Diary 12). It is in this wise that Odiagbe asserts that, "Iruẹkpen, a community grouped under the Esan society is said to have lived in organized polity in the area from about half a millennium years ago before the assumed Oba Ewuare's theory of fleeing theory from Benin" ("We Are Our Own Origin" 3).

In spite of the above analysis, several traditions of origins had been postulated to account for how the Iruẹkpen inhabitants came to their aboriginal and present abode. How the aboriginal inhabitants did coin the name 'Iruẹkpen' they now bear? Who were their aboriginal parents? How and when Iruẹkpen did become established as organized community? Was their evolution theory interwove to that of Ekpoma and other Esan communities or they simply evolved on their own without outside interference? These are pertinent questions scholars and socio-cultural researchers of Esan history should put into cognizance when investigating about the history of the Iruẹkpen people. However, due to time and space factor, this is how brief this segment can say about the origin of the Iruẹkpen people.

Conceptual Clarifications

For the purpose of clarification, it is deemed necessary to define briefly some of the terms used here. The term *education* is a universal process, an instrument of social change occurring in all human societies involving how a society passed on its culture be it social, ethical, moral, intellectual, artistic, industrial, spiritual and economic attainments of the group by which it can be differentiated from another group (Enato "Western Education and Social Change" 4). It therefore goes on informally and has deep roots in the environment in which it takes place (Enato "Educational Imperativeness in a Changing" 9). Education since time immemorial has been a channel of transmitting one's culture from one generation to another. It is a process of bringing about a relatively permanent and fundamental change in human attitude and behavior (Enato "The Social Relevance of History Education" 111).

Moumouni views education as a process by which the society assists the younger generation to understand the heritage of their past, participate productively in the society of the past as well as contribute to the future. Based on these reasons, education draws inspiration and nourishment from a society, but in turn, it contributes to the growth, transformation and development of that society (32). Sometimes, rather than informal, society has ways of assisting the younger generations to comprehend the past and often exposing them to the various values, ideals, aspirations of the society. They may be informal/traditional or formal/conventional. No study of the history of education in a society is complete without adequate knowledge of the traditional or indigenous educational system prevalent in the community before the advent of Islam and Christianity (Moumouni 33). In Africa, Islam predated Christianity by well over three hundred years, but these two important religions, which have influenced Nigerian education in no small measure, are of recent development compared with the indigenous system of education, which is as old as Man himself in Africa (Moumouni 34).

In all human societies, education in whichever form is meant to pass onto the new generations the existing knowledge of their physical environment, to introduce individuals to the organization of society, give skills for performing their daily jobs and for enjoying their leisure, as well as inculcate sound morals in them for their own benefit and that of the society. In other words, education is a process by which the society assists the younger generation to comprehend the heritage of their past, participate affirmatively in the society of the past as well as contribute to the future. Based on these reasons, education draws inspiration and nourishment from a society, but in turn, it contributes to the growth, renewal and development of that society (Enato “The Social Relevance of History Education” 112)

National development here refers to the ability of a nation or society to improve the lives of its citizens. Measures of improvement may be material such as an increase in the gross domestic products, or social, such as literacy rates and availability of healthcare.

Transformation is a term used to express a change or alteration, especially a radical one positively and negatively affecting human events. Transformation is profound, fundamental change, altering the very nature of something. Transformational change is both radical and sustainable. Something that is transformed can never go back to exactly what it was before. Human, as a society, were brought here to this point in time by the way the world has transformed and how humans have transformed it to suit themselves. Socio-economic and cultural changes continue to happen every day as humans progress and record history. A transformation by dictionary definition is simply a thorough or dramatic change in form or appearance. A transformation’s definition in the historical context however can have a whole variety of connotations. Transformation throughout history have taken place in the forms of grand technological innovation that greatly improved lives, as well as large scale domino effects with consequences that generally worsened them. The decimation of the Africans population due to the horrible slave trade, for example, brought by the Europeans on the Africans was only the first of many consequences that would shape the Africans and its indigenous survivors.

Having explained the concepts of the key terms, it is in this light that the paper becomes highly timely as part of the ongoing efforts towards the historical reawakening of the social relevance of Iruokpen indigenous educational system examining and weighing it in the eyes of the present. This paper will inter alia, focus on the unbreakable nexus between the social relevance of education as a panacea to Iruokpen communal development and transformation in the period before the conventional Western or European style education was introduced in the society. It will examine and analyze the operational system of Iruokpen indigenous education and explained how it helped engendered growth, development and transformation in technological, industrial, educational, economic, moral and socio-political lives of the people. Lastly, the paper will conclude by encouraging the Nigerian government to recapture the ideas of the past indigenous educational systems of the Iruokpen people and incorporate it into the present conventional system if the country is to have a sound moral base as it used to be before the European model of Western education became entrenched.

***Note** – In the description of this work, the use of the present tense is often adopted because these ideas are still held and the practices being carried out in Iruokpen community*

Education for Development and Transformation in Iruokpen Indigenous Society

Arguably, development is a complex issue, amenable to many different and sometimes contentious definitions. At the level of the individual, it implies multiplied skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, innovation, self-discipline, responsibility, self-control, moral control and material well-being. Development therefore, is empowerment: it is about indigenous people taking control of their problems (Ojo 43). At the national level, development will naturally mean the pulling together of the above stated personal virtues for the benefit and well-being of people. Walter Rodney once contended that development is used in an exclusive economic sense, the justification being that the type of economy is itself an index of other social features (39-44). A society develops economically as its members jointly engage their capacity for dealing with the environment, which of course depends on the extent to which they comprehend laws of nature (science), the extent to which they put that understanding into practice by devising tools (technology), and the manner in which work is organized (David 212-215). The United Nations Development Programme uses a more detailed definition, according to which development is 'to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community' (Lucian 118).

It is in this wise that the researcher contended that for any nation to develop effectively, uniformly and harmoniously, the collective spirit of the people must be well nurtured and propagated, and one channel through which this could be achieved is via the applications of sound, pragmatic and functional education. In addition, the historical antecedents of the people via their own education are needed in other to create a functional community. Herein lays the imperative nature and social relevance of education in Iruokpen's indigenous society.

An important social relevance of Iruokpen Indigenous Education System (IIES) was the basic acceptance of the existence of a Supreme Being called *Osenobulua* (Okojie 55), who co-ordinate all natural phenomena as they affected man. This was in fact the origin of religion everywhere (Odiagbe, Personal Communication). It cannot therefore be lumped up with a characteristic like communalism because it was universal in essence. The Iruokpen believed that through natural knowledge and education, God was all-powerful, perfect, just and without his approval and blessings all requests to any of the divinities could not be granted. In addition, belief in divinities as they had learnt through the family unit (*Uelen*) and community learning was a major feature of Iruokpen Indigenous Religion (IIR) (Eboigbe, Personal Communication, Ocitti 33-35).

In Iruokpen communal society, divinities stand next in relation to God in the hierarchy of powers. In addition, these divinities are relevant in the sense that they are the power behind the development and growth of the society. These divinities have spiritual, supernatural and educative role in the lives of the people thereby making them honourable and reliable in the community. In Iruokpen various quarters, the shrines with divinities are; *Ohanibhie*, *Ovia*, *Ohanmhen*, *Ojoli*, *Iserumun*, *Okpe*, *Oghonokpo*, *Ibiekumah*, *Ekpen* among others (Enato, "The Functional Roles of Divinities" 5-9). The people are aware of the majesty and the mightiness of God, whom many a time they approach through these lesser functionaries. Long before the advent of Christianity, the Iruokpen people had a spiritual outlook of life. The young and young adults were taught that the universe belongs to a superior and supernatural power that should be

worshipped and revered because their entire safety, peace and progress are connected to Him (*Osenobulua*) (Eboigbe, Personal Communication). Therefore, the duty of anyone educating children for the society is to lay emphasis on the fact that religion affects relationship and social interaction.

Another social relevance of education in the indigenous Iruokpen was clear, and these were functionalism and practicality. Functionality and practicality were the main guiding principle in the educational programme of the people. Iruokpen regarded their education as a means to an end and not as an end in itself. Education was generally for an immediate induction into society and a preparation for adulthood. Iruokpen education emphasized social responsibility, jobs orientation, political participation, spirit, and moral values. Children learnt by doing, that is to say, children and adolescents were engaged in participatory education through ceremonies (*Iluemin*), initiation (*Eberelu*), and demonstration (*Orema*). They were involved in practical farming (*Ugbo namu/Umugbo*), fishing weaving (*Igbehenlen*), weaving (*Ido/Inenenolenluele*), cooking (*Iyienbhai*), carving (Cano), knitting (Usemin), and so on. Recreational subjects included wrestling (*Odan*), dancing (*Ikhelen*), drumming (*Okhelemin*), acrobatic display (*Igbabonelimni*), tree climbing (*Okhunnahen*), acing (Une), while intellectual training included the study of local history (*Ebakamien-bhiagbon*), legends (*Okutu*), the environment (*Ejadia*) (local geography, plants and animals), poetry (*Ugbo-elamen*), reasoning (*Eria*), riddles (*Agbido-ane*), proverbs (*Itan*), story-telling (*Ikha-Okha*) (Eboigbe, Personal Communication; Odiagbe, Personal Communication; Oare, Personal Communication)

The social relevance of education in Old Iruokpen was that characterized with an integrated experience. It combined physical training with character building and manual activity with intellectual training. At the end of each stage, demarcated by either age level or years of exposure, the child was given a practical test relevant to his experience and level of development and in terms of the job to be done. This was a continuous assessment that eventually culminated in a 'passing out' ceremony, or initiation into adulthood. For the select or the elect, secret cults (for example, *egbomaduhe*) in Iruokpen and Ekpoma served as institutions of higher or further education. It was at this level that the secret of power (real and imaginary), profound native philosophy of science and religion were transferred irrespective of the level of education and training given during the pre-colonial days in Iruokpen. It was functional, practical, dynamic, dramatic and participatory because the curriculum was relevant to the needs of the people (Enato "Educational Imperativeness in a Changing" 12). Unemployment if existed at all was minimal and very few young men roamed the community (Fafunwa 35).

The aim, content and the methods of traditional education are intricately interwoven; they are not divided into separate compartment, as is the case with the Westernized system of education. The characteristics of indigenous education in Iruokpen are that which attracted revolutionary and transformational changes thereby meeting with the needs of everyone. Abdou Moumouni aptly summarizes the attributes of education in Africa, as applicable to Iruokpen community in his book, *Education in Africa*:

- a. the great importance attached to it, and its collective and social nature;
- b. its intimate tie with social life, both in a material and a spiritual sense;
- c. its multivalent character, both in terms of its goals and the means employed; and,

- d. its gradual and progressive achievements, in conformity with the successive stages of physical, emotional and mental development of the child (17).

Before European arrival in Iruokpen, the people have a well-balanced and workable indigenous system of education, which conformed to the nature and attitude of their respective environment. Foreign or Western education later introduced was incompatible to the yearning and aspirations of the people. In addition, because indigenous education failed to conform to the ways of the westernized system, some less informed writers have considered it primitive, even savage and barbaric. However, such contentions are the product of ignorance and due to a total misunderstanding and misconception of the inherent value of informal education (Enato and Oseghale 34). After all, education, according to Archibald is the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behavior which are of positive value to the society in which he live; that is to say. It is a process for transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth and for disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both (47). All educational systems, whether indigenous or western-oriented seek to achieve these goals irrespective of the curriculum. Methods and organization designed for the purposes (Archibald).

When evaluating any educational system, one must determine the extent to which it is meeting the needs of a particular society at any given time. As for the Iruokpen Indigenous Educational System (IIES), it must be judged not by any extraneous consideration or some foreign yardstick, but by its performance within a given social context. Many European observers tend to ignore this important factor.

The childhood education was an imperative social relevance to the growth and development of the people's entirety. It was one vehement aspect of indigenous training and learning, which the community really holds onto, as it is to them regarded as that part of education, which starts from the cradle of human growth and development. In Iruokpen, the arrival of a child symbolizes social transformation and the beginning of another radical phase in terms of increase growth and development in the home, family and community. At the birth of a child, the head of the family perform special rites and the child may be given as many as half a dozen names. In Iruokpen, all names have special significance in terms of a social event, period or special circumstances surrounding the birth of the child. It was the Iruokpen custom to give monetary presents by those wishing to give names; this obviously is a borrowed custom probably from the Yorubas (Okojie 112).

The education of the child in Iruokpen community starts from infancy as applicable to the Yorubas and other African and Nigerian societies. The baby is fed regularly, mostly through breast-feeding, and weaned at the appropriate time. All the quarters (*Idumus*), train their children in toileting, eating, socialization and general behavior. The child at this initial stage is more intimately involved with his mother than his father (Okojie 49; Odiagbe, Personal Communication; Aibanegbe, Personal Communication). This intimacy of the child to his mother from birth to the age of five (5) to six (6) is universal because it is the mother (*Nene/Iyiomen/Inenen*) and not the family who rears the child at this early stage of his development. In a polygamous family, there are other mothers called *Ikhuo Abame* (Stepmothers), *Ikhuo Egbe* (Wives from married quarters). *Nenem-Nokhua* (Grand-mother),

Ikhuo Idumu (Community aged mothers) etc., who take it as part of their duty to minister to the needs of the child; but even then, the real mother (*Nene Nobiemmen*) carries the final responsibility.

As the child grows older, he becomes socially inquisitive about his environment, and more curious about himself as he gradually realizes that there are other worlds outside his mother's own. He notices others around him and watches their activities. He learns to manipulate things, play with toys or any other objects that is easily accessible to him. To restrain him from doing certain things, the parents or siblings may introduce outright threats or taboos (Ighodalo 19). In the families, between the ages of 4 and 6 and sometimes earlier, the grandparents, uncles and aunts though not identified as these appellation all involved in the education of the child. They send him on small errands, tell stories, and teach him obedience and respect for elders (a very imperative aspect of Iruokpen educational relevance), and code of behavior, history of the family or other indigenous tenets and codes of conducts (Ighodalo 13).

Another salient social relevance of Iruokpen indigenous education as involving her social system was the family. The family in Iruokpen played and still plays important roles in the education and all round social growth and development of the child (Enato and Oseghale 38). The parents popularly called father (*Abah, Abi, Baba*), grand-father (*Abanokhua*), mother (*Inenen, Iyiomen* or *Nenen*), grand-mother (*Nenennokhua*) all aid in the training of the child to develop and practicalize the different types of acceptable behaviour in the community. The norms are based on the culture and value system of the group. As for the mother, she was and still is the first and principal teacher for the first-five or six years in the life of the child. The young boys (*Ibhokin-Ikpia*), the young adults (*Imin-Ikpia*), the young girls (*Imin-Ikhuo*), and the young ladies (*Imanmen*) were the fulcrum through which knowledge is transmitted onto for the overall progress and development of the community (Enato and Oseghale 39).

The indigenous Iruokpen educational system finds expression in the age grade or group association. The importance of age group in the educational development and advancement of the people is still felt in the present dispensation, as it has become one instrument of community stability, social control and social transformation. In Iruokpen the classification into age-group is said to be uniformed and same in all the twelve quarters. A typical example of such a classification is that based on intervals of 2 to 5 years. In Iruokpen indigenous setting the respect for elders assumed a wider dimension as it was carried into the village group. The oldest man in the community age group was referred to as the *Odionwele* (head chief). *Edion's* (elders) counsels were sought before major divisions were taken concerning the education, socio-cultural and administrative duties of the youths, especially at the general village meetings (Ibhagbosoria, Personal Communication).

Age grade is one important social institution in the community that every young child must involved in before been accepted as fully matured and socially relevant. The age grade system is also regarded an educational institution where the young men and women are trained to be responsible members of the society. Age is an important element in the life of the Iruokpens. Reverence for those who are older is particularly strong among the people (Itua, Personal Communication). Seniority confers socio-economic privileges, especially in the sharing of spoils, prizes and wealth. Age is such a vital factor among the Iruokpen that a man or woman

will overstate his/her age rather than understate it (Okojie 53). Moreover, a young man/woman who is well trained is not expected to look an elder straight in the face for this is considered a sign of disrespect (Aibanegbe, Personal Communication).

Girls (*Imamen*) do not belong to fixed age or playgroups but are taught to prepare meals, carry firewood and fetch water for domestic use until they are about eleven years of age when they are expected to have mastered the art of looking after siblings and know something of trading and farming. Before her monthly flows start (menstruation) starts, she would have learnt all the taboos connected with sleeping in special room, not touching cooking utensils, not entering any shrine. She receives sex education, which is often denied girls nowadays due to modernity and social change (Enato “Western Education and Social Change” 37). Furthermore, the girl child education (*Isikulu-Osi-Ikkhuo*) was another attribute of Iruokpen Indigenous Education (Aibanegbe, Personal Communication; Airoboman, Personal Communication).

Thus, women had self-recognized associations where every young rowing and grown up girls were taught how to be good wives and mothers and same time, economically empowered. The head sand chief instructors of the girl child education in Iruokpen were the *Ikhuo-Idumu* (Most elderly matured responsible educated homemakers) (Aibanegbe, Personal Communication; Airoboman, Personal Communication; Okaima, Personal Communication). The *Ikhuo-Idumu* is in charge of the girl child education. She instructs the young girls on how to socio-hygienically, economically and emotionally conduct themselves before the opposite sex, care for their monthly flow, respect and honour suitors and future husbands, be good cooks and caring wives and mothers, faithful wives to their spouses, be hygienically neat among others. The homesteads, according to Aibanegbe, where these young females were kept for the overall training of their youthful age was called *Uwa na Koki Imamen* (a home where young ladies were housed and trained to become responsible and good home manageress).

Another area in which the genius of Iruokpen adults succeeded in maintaining a high standard education was in the organization of indigenous art and craft. It was left in the hands of professional guilds that organized themselves in remarkably efficient ways. There were guilds of blacksmithing (*Agbede*), wood and ivory, bronze, leather works, drum makers, weavers of special embroidered cloth and bead decorators whose works still attest to high levels of civilization that could not have been successfully supported by the instrument of Western education, Western knowledge and Western Christianity (Odiagbe “The Early Iruokpen History” 22). From the foregoing, the traditional age grade system performed many educational and social functions, which helped, regulate and engineered the society for growth and development. The age group not only enforced discipline among themselves but they also guard public morality. The age group was thus a society of companionship and protection.

In traditional Iruokpen, the child intuitively jumps, climbs trees, dances or performs a balancing act because his siblings or his elders do the same. Every child discovers his limbs and in no time, at all he discovers their uses. The Iruokpen child has unlimited access to the stimulating world of Iruokpen and Esan music and dance. He needs no teacher or specialist to teach him the first steps. He observes the adults and other children and naturally falls in step. Iruokpen, like her other Esan counterparts had numerous dances like; *Ilo*, *Agbega*, *Aghenojie*, *Obodorhibhife* and *Igbabonelimin*. These different types of dances are for their social recreation

and relaxation (Olumese 58). The infinite variety of Iruokpen dance movements offer the child one of the best media for physical exercise. The dance and the music also serve as cultural vehicles, which encourages teamwork. Iruokpen, like other Esan communities had also used dance to teach the cherished societal virtues and to condemn vices, which are anti-social (Olumese 60; Airidu, Personal Communication). Promoting morality in the community was done through the *Ikhen Ikho* (women traditional dance and song). This was by young married women, the morally upright unmarried women, and the matured married women. Women used songs to satirize women and men with criminal tendencies in the community. The songs were meant to ridicule the ‘criminals’ and their families (Olumese 59).

Buttressing further, indigenous Iruokpen education places considerable emphasis on character training. Indigenous education in Iruokpen education was and is still the cornerstone of their community. This was why Sidney in his study ‘Personality Education’ asserts and identifies character- training and moral-religious education as the two main objectives of African education and showed that other objectives were pursued through the latter (63). Majasan himself asserts in his study of the Yoruba education that character-training and religious education are the two main objectives of the Yoruba education (21). In Iruokpen education was so relevant to the essence that parents sacrificed their time and resources to ensure the growth and development of their children and wards mental, social, spiritual, religious and economic abilities. Parents and other members of the community participate in the education of the child. Every parent wants their children to be sociable, honest, courageous, humble, preserving and of good reports at all times.

Moral education and instructions was one basic tenet of Iruokpen indigenous education. There are ‘very strict taboos about incest and adultery’ (Olumese) and stealing was considered very serious offences thereby making moral education as one basic tenets of Iruokpen indigenous education (Odiagbe, “Morality and Social Vices in Iruokpen” 12). Everyone was taught on how to conduct oneself and to shy away from vices and evil capable of endangering life and the community in general. Adultery with the head chief’s wife (*Odionwele*), carnal knowledge with a man’s mother-in-law, adultery with one’s own mother, sexual relationship between a brother and a sister or people of blood relationship up to second cousin was not permissible (Okojie 76). The act of rape was against the tenet of Iruokpen educational system as it was considered a crime in the community. Every growing and upcoming child was taught about morality and virtue. (Odiagbe, “Morality and Social Vices in Iruokpen” 12)

If by intellect is meant the power to integrate experience, and if intellectualization is the process of reasoning abstractedly (Raymond 87), indigenous Iruokpen education can be said to encourage intellectual growth and development (Odiagbe, Personal Communication; Eboigbe, Personal Communication). Observation, imitation and participation are some of the major learning processes in this modern dispensation. The Iruokpen child or adolescent learns the local geography and history of his community. He is very familiar with the hills and moats, the fertile and non-fertile areas; he knows the rainy season and when to expect a dry spell; he knows the time of the hunting and fishing seasons (Fafunwa 34). Local history is taught by the elders such as the *Odafen* (family head), *Edion* (elder), *Ikho-Idumu* (women leader), and the various priests and priestesses in each *Idumus* (quarters) and household, and the songs of praise which

accompany many of the historical events make the oral traditional history a stimulating experience which is hard to forget (Ighodalo 18).

In Iruokpen the sciences of plants and animals called Botany and Zoology are taught or comprehended through observation. Actual instruction is often accompanied by demonstration (Fafunwa 35). Animal behavior is an important subject both for protective reasons and for the rearing purposes. Proverbs and riddles constitute a formidable intellectual exercise. They are used as media for developing the child's reasoning power and skill in decision making. The Iruokpen are probably unsurpassed in the use of proverbs and riddles. Okojie estimates that the Iruokpens as her Esan counterparts have more than 2,000 proverbs and still applies in modern day communication skill (59).

The arithmetic of cowries and common values in Iruokpen is another good example of its indigenous educational system. Okojie the great Esan writer and educator observes that, "The Iruokpen, as her Esan counterparts have developed a system of arithmetical counting of cowries and have used a variety of human experiences to promote the practice and dexterity in enumeration" (139). The Iruokpen child is introduced early in life to counting by means of concrete objects, counting rhymes, folklore, plays and games at home and on the farms. The use of the cowry as currency offered effective practice in enumeration. In counting, the Iruokpen has a name for every counting number, however large (Okojie 140). In the use of the cowries, for the Iruokpens, no number is too large or too small to decipher. On cardinals and ordinals, Okojie observes, "The Iruokpen has the concepts of cardinal and ordinals, subtraction, multiplication and a division" (140). Cowries however ceased to have any monetary values in the early 30s after which it was mainly used at burial ceremonies, for the making of *Edai*, (certain traditional medicines) for sacrificial ceremonies etc.

It is fair to say that the aim of education in indigenous society was character training and job orientation. Indigenous education was systematically divided into three groups viz: (a) Agricultural education consisting of farming, fishing and veterinary science (animal care and animal rearing), (b) Trades and crafts consisting of weaving (baskets and cloth), smithing (iron, silver, gold etc), hunting, carving (wood and bronze), sculpturing, painting, sculpturing, painting, and decorating, carpentry, building, barbering, drumming, dancing and acrobatics, hair plaiting, dress making, soap making, singing, pottery making, mat making, bead making, gold washing among others; and (3) Professions consisting of doctors, priests, witch doctors, civil servants, village heads, chiefs and kings, tax collectors, heralds, judges, councilors, police and messengers, shrine keepers, soldiers etc (Fafunwa 21; Enato "Our Education, Our Heritage" 11).

Vocational training in indigenous society was largely run on the apprenticeship system, was a time-honoured device for educating thousands of Iruokpen youths, and matured adults. Usually the children were not trained by their parents but by relatives, master craft men in particular fields or friends in order to ensure discipline and concentration (Fafunwa 22). As Archibald Callaway, an authority on the Nigerian [Iruokpen] apprenticeship training system quoted by saying that, "it was a part of a wider education process in which the indigenous societies of Nigeria [Iruokpen] passed on their cultural heritage from one generation to the next" (63). The skills 'owned' by a family were highly valued, and in some lines such as native

medicine, secrets were zealously guarded as they are today. Evidence of the passing on of skills within families is still strong in Iruokpen community.

Agricultural education is the oldest educational institution in Iruokpen community as everyone participated. One other aspect of traditional agricultural education was the need in educating and enlightening the younger ones about the key role land plays in the economic system of the society (Enato “Western Education and Socio-Economic Change” 221). The elders and teachers taught the children and students that the availability of suitable farmland was a crucial factor in the development of agriculture. Much respect was attached to its holding and usage in the economy (Ehimeme 29). No use of land was made without the offer of a sacrifice or an ablution to the earth goddess since land belonged to a vast family made up of the ancestors, living members, and members yet unborn (Esene’s Personal Diary 33). According to Okojie, “land in Ishan was strictly communal and held in trust by the Onojie (King) for his people, and that the youths were taught the relevance of communalism towards societal development of their various communities” (65). To this end, individual’s acquisition and private ownership were frowned at and discouraged in the community. Thus, the youths were taught that every agricultural season witnessed a complex process of electing suitable farmlands by the people (Enato “Western Education and Socio-Economic Change” 222)

The importance of the girl child education in Iruokpen cannot be undermined. Girls’ education was necessary as the educational practices and knowledge are accepted as being sacred gift from the Almighty God to the people. Girls were apprenticed to certain trades as the only difference between them and the boys being that they were apprenticed to mistresses and not masters (Fafunwa 54; Aibanegbe, Personal Communication; Airoboman, Personal; Communication). According to informal sources in Uromi, Ekpoma, Ewu, Ewohimi, Irrua, Ubiaja, there were certain trades in which both men and women participated on equal terms but there were minorities who held the opinion that there was no trade in which both men and women could participate on equal terms. Trades that were possible for both men and women were farming and weaving (Ehimeme 30). From information collected, it was obvious that the women also practiced some sorts of farming but this was not on such a large scale as men. However, in the weaving industry, the women did excellent job as men. The only difference was in the setting up of the weaving apparatus.

Education, whether indigenous or modern, aims at perpetuating the culture of the society. Indigenous education attaches considerable importance to this aspect of training; but this is done without elaborate equipment or complicated teaching methods. A true Iruokpen child grows into and within the cultural heritage of his people. He imbibes it. Culture in indigenous Iruokpen is not taught: it is caught. Iruokpen child observes, imitate, and mimics the actions of his elders and older siblings. He watches the naming ceremonies, religious services, marriage rituals, funeral obsequies. He witnesses the coronation of a king or chief, the annual yam festival (*Ihunlan*), the annual dance and acrobatic displays of guilds and age-sets, and often participates with his own group or his relations in the activities. The child in indigenous community cannot escape his cultural and physical environment unless he is deaf, dumb or blind (Mbiti 57).

The paper has depicted that the Iruokpens prior the advent of the Christian missionaries, colonial officials and its attendant style of Western education were literate enough to be relevant

in their community and world at large. Since they reason, wrote and read in their indigenous style, they were literate, developed and transformative. If literacy connotes the ability to remember memorized words, the writers are of the view that early Iruokpens were not far from the word literacy. However, many European and American writers had come to criticize the limited goals of indigenous education because it was geared to meeting the basic needs of the child within his restricted environment. The critics also contend that it was conservative and conforming in that it did not train the child to challenge or change those aspects that were considered unprogressive within the system. Equally, however, many modern systems of education pay lip service to education as a means of effecting desirable changes. Although political leaders prefer to maintain the *status quo* and retain their power, power which may be threatened once education has opened the eyes of the people (Mbiti 110; Enato “The Social Relevance of History Education” 119)

Recommendations

- ✓ Parents should be role models for their offspring’s;
- ✓ There should be value education website on the internet;
- ✓ Value development education should be included in the curriculum of education at all levels in Nigeria and in present Iruokpen community;
- ✓ Honesty, hard work, discipline, accountability, and integrity should always be renewed in schools and society;
- ✓ Teachers, lecturers, politicians, religious leaders in different professions must present themselves as role models; and,
- ✓ Self employment programmes should be introduced and established in the current school curriculum and syllabuses.

Conclusion

Although the indigenous education offered by the community was comprehensive such that it provided training in physical character, intellectual, social and vocational development, it however had its limitations. For one thing, in the absence of writing, people depended on the power of their memories to facilitate the retention and transmission of all learned ideas to future generations. However, memory could fail, and in the event of the death of a custodian of some useful information or skill, all was lost. There were, however, little or no cases of unemployment and economic crises (Enato and Oseghale 81). However, the advent of the Christian missionaries and the introduction of Western education via the Mission Schools changed in fundamental ways the dynamics of Iruokpen own indigenous education. Western education soon took the center stage in Iruokpen; debasing, challenging and attempting to supplant the indigenous/informal style education of the people. However, Iruokpen still benefitted greatly from the introduced brand of foreign and westernized learning system and skills acquisition of the European. This is because the introduction and Iruokpen acceptance of Western education has made them to read, write and document knowledge of their past though in fragment into written documentation.

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