

**Colonial Education and the State of Contemporary Socio-Cultural Relations in Africa**

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### ABSTRACT

Socio-cultural dignities of any community are normally embedded in their educational systems. African societies had their own educational parameters that reflected their socio-cultural being before colonial inception. This paper has surveyed literature on pre and colonial education in Africa in relation to their perseverations and disruptions of the African socio-cultural values respectively. Clearly, colonial knowledge outsmarted and overshadowed deep rooted traditional knowledge in the African setting. This results into wiping away the long term embraced social and cultural ties of the African hoods in educational teachings. Foreign Educational structures and contents are given priority in Contemporary African schooling systems has intensified socio-cultural fractures among Africans with the common ancestral backgrounds. This trajectory evokes debates among stakeholders on suitability of colonial education in relation to contemporary demands in African context despite the undisputed fact of the global village. This article recommends Africans to preserve and promote their traditional education regardless of its co-existence with the alien education to sustain and restore its self-respect since African indigenous education fits in moral, economic and physical developments of its generation.

**Key words:** Colonial Education, Pre-Colonia Education, Social Relations, Cultural Relations

### 1.0 Introduction

Africa was subjected to formal colonization by the western powers from the late 1800s to late 1900s following the end of scrambling for and partition of Africa (Okoth, 2006). This process was basically accomplished by the European powers to respond to the needs of industrial imperialism from 1870s (Rodney, 1973). One of the significant tools for African colonial exploitation was education (Mart, 2011). This paper has exposed the economic and socio-cultural legacies of colonial education on contemporary Africa. For the sake of understanding these parameters at convenience, the paper was organised on the following manner; firstly, the paper surveyed the historicity of education in Africa; social legacies of colonial education on contemporary Africa. Secondly; it deals with cultural legacies, finally, it presents conclusion and recommendations.

### 2.0 Historical Underpinnings of African Traditional Lives

In African communities, acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills and values were the core focus of traditional teachings (Nghoengo, 2016). The indigenous teachings were glued under the umbrella of moral and ethics of societies where education is undertaken. Under this view, in each society learners were introduced to the do and do not principle as defined and understood in such community (Swant, 1986). These principles created environment to divide teachings in relation to who should do what and what a certain group of people should not do. One of the great determinant factors in this regard was gender (Nchimbi, 2005, 2009).

Gender identities were important in providing education in African indigenous learning (Nchimbi, 2005). Being a boy or girl defined a kind of knowledge required to be acquired by an individual (Antonie, et.al. 1991). There was certain knowledge restricted to opposite gender although there were other acquired in common. Initiation teachings are one of the areas defining these educational relations. Mihanjo (1997), offers sounding evidences on his study of Kisi community, he explicitly presented the absence of overlapping learning where gender defined the learning processes in the Kisi community Mihanjo (1997).

According to Nchimbi (2009), initiations were done considering learners age and sex differences. In that regard, female children had some teachings different from the male ones. In Chagga societies in Tanzania for instance, when a girl enters puberty was to be sent to his grandmother whom instructed her how to take care of herself over the blood flow from her secret parts, and never to trust men including their biological fathers, and to cover their breasts as it is shame to be seen by men (Kay, S. (1979). Grandmother then has to take a look of the girl closely until she is able to take into practice what she has been taught over the new life that she is about to enter (Swantz,1986).

The so called ‘Unyago’ in pre-colonial Tanganyika involved special teachings which prepared women for marriage. They were taught how to take care of their husbands, mother woods and how to live with the society as whole (Nchimbi, 2009). Similar teachings have been reported in pre-colonial Zaramo where there was the so called “Unyago wa Adabu” in this kind of teachings, girls who were at puberty were taken to forests where they were taught respects in terms of how to salute elders, observing personal cleanness, being cooperative among many others (Raun, 1967). This takes place under the supervision of female elders who had the vast lives knowledge of the community (Marah, 2006).

### **1.1 Pre- Colonial Education as a Basis for Socio-Cultural Relations in African Communities**

Education has been the most potent tool for human survival since the evolution of mankind (Burkholder, 2012). It has been a bucket for accumulating useful knowledge, skills and experiences relevant to the environment and development of human beings (Cortese, 2003). In Africa, scholars tend to divide the history of education into three major phases namely; pre-colonial education, colonial education and post-colonial education (Saiboko, 1996). Educational has to be developed sensibly to serve the interests of the communities while maintaining their socio-cultural norms (Rodney, 1973).

African societies like other human societies engaged in the enterprise of education long before the inception of colonization (Farriss, 1984). The educational system known as a traditional indigenous education existed. In African perspective, this was a native education particularly for African ethnic groups (Owuor, 2007). This justifies that, absence of western formal education in pre-colonial African societies did not mean that education was not existing among the African societies (Adeyinka, et, al. 2003). Africans had their own educational systems based on religious, social, political, economic and cultural context of the given community (Mangia, 2003). Kenyatta (1968) who presents the same argument that, there were educational systems that existed in African societies prior to the coming of Europeans. Such education was acquired from birth to adulthood. This is also supported by UNESCO which puts clear how the roles of African education were:

“...inter-connectedness of that was, that is and that will be, and it encompasses all what can be known as traditional indigenous education...”  
(UNESCO, 2004:7).

It is indeed argued that, traditional indigenous education varied from one society to another depending on the physical environment and cultural norms prevailed (UNESCO, 2004). For example, in coastal areas, fishing skills were emphasized, while in pastoral areas, herding skills were emphasized as well as in agricultural areas, farming skills were emphasized (Mangia, 2003). One can argue that such kind of education inculcated the sense of social responsibility to individuals in their community so that they became productive members of that society. It was certain that, pre-colonial education was essentially designed to enable individuals play a useful roles in their societies (Kenyatta, 1968). Education was based on the

philosophy of functionalism and productivity wherever the teachings were accomplished (Adeyinka, et al. 2003)

One thing that should be noted here is that, the accumulated useful knowledge, skills and experiences were passed to succeeding generations for preservation, development and onward transmission through storytelling, legends and real practices (Lawuo, 1978). Thus, traditional indigenous education enabled its beneficiaries to fulfill their responsibilities in such a way that children and adults developed a sense of obligations towards their community in which they lived (Lauo, 1978).

Traditional indigenous education was therefore not and is homogenous, and not all knowledge was necessarily shared by everyone in the traditional community, but rather, depended on age, gender and specific roles according to that community (UNESCO, 2004). For example, basing on gender, girls were socialized to effectively learn the roles of motherhood, wife, and other sex-appropriate skills while boys were socialized to be hunters, herders, agriculturalists, blacksmiths, etc., depending on how the particular ethnic group, clan or family derived its livelihood.

The curriculum content though not documented embraced all aspects of human development in African communities. It ranged from mental broadening, physical fitness, moral uprightness, religious, good social adjustment and interaction. Members of that particular society also learned different aspects like military techniques, medicine, sex education, health education, child rearing, social roles, leadership, laws, rituals and ceremonies (Mushi, 2009). Even though, in most cases, there were no structured schools in terms of buildings and professional teachers, there were certain centers for initiation whereby adult members of society served as teachers (Mushi, 2009). For example, in respect to vocational knowledge, children were taught farming, fishing, weaving, cooking, hunting, carving, knitting, building of houses, mat-making and forging of local farm implements (Lawuo, 1978). Moreover, in some societies issues regarding leadership were taught as Mangia (2003) revealed that, African youth were taught rules and regulations that governed their societies.

Intellectual training included the study of local history, poetry, reasoning, riddles and proverbs were also transmitted among the generations (ibid). Those who excelled in these areas were highly respected in the society as their knowledge was of great benefits to society (Mangia, 2003). An individual's intellect in these directions was developed to enable him fit into such professional groups as rainmakers, herbalists, hunters and priests (Ocitti, 1967). This is also in the same line with a study by Marah (2006) in Nupe and Ashanti in West Africa which revealed that, in traditional education, teaching methods includes that of repetition, imitation and internalization, therefore, the learning process included teaching from the adults where both theoretical and practical approaches were used in processes (see Adeyinka and Adeyemi, 2003).

Pre-colonial education had as well various formal components of disseminating knowledge among its members available at later stages in life, such as on passing from one age grade to another or of joining a new brotherhood. Specialized functions such as hunting, organizing religious rituals and the practice of medicine definitely involved formal trainings at the family or clan levels. Such educational practices dated back to communal times in Africa (Eboah and Oba, 2011). This argument is supported by Rodney (1973) who observed that, formal literacy rate was high to the extent that there were universities in Egypt, Morocco and Mali and all these testimonies indicated that, the standard of education achieved in Africa before the colonial intrusion.

## **1.2 Colonial education in Africa**

Colonial education influenced Africans socio-cultural conditions (Kay, 1979). Western education was just a tool for colonization and colonizers structured it to be a good tool that enabled them to get assistants who would make their targeted goal of exploitation in the continent possible Falola (2007). Omolewa (2006) wrote with the same tune that, colonizers used Western education to train Africans as catechists, messengers and other positions needed to assist them in realizing their social and economic development and transformations desired by the European missionaries and their agents, moreover, merchants and traders also required qualified personnel to handle their business transactions.

This is similarly observed by Samuelsson (2008), where he asserts that, one of the underlying goals of colonial education was to expose Africans to a superior culture so as to make them more inferior and thus; make it easy to manage and exploit them. Likewise, it was grounded as an instrument of control to protect power and privilege so that the whites would keep on dominating the blacks and most of its contents were too westernized to meet their social, economic, and political administrative demands.

Likewise, Hartshorne (1986) found that, the education system during the apartheid politics in South Africa was structured as an instrument to control and protect power and privilege so that the whites would keep dominating the blacks. Moreover, this is in line to what Mafela (2010) found in Botswana's colonial syllabus. In his study, he found that, most of the contents in the history syllabus were too westernized with a focus on the history of Britain and church history, with an emphasis on bible lands and the colonial process, including colonization and the functioning of the colonial administrative structure from a purely Euro-centric perspective.

Colonial education has been blamed in literature on the ground that it was introduced to favor the interests of colonizers and in order to serve their purposes. It was structured in the way that would suit the targeted interests, Mart (2011). Post independent African states are characterized by western models in terms of their educational content, philosophy and the methodologies (Ngohengo, 2016). This alien education played a decisive role in the process of exploiting and oppressing Africans by the colonial masters and it has been blamed in literature on the ground that it was structured in favor of the colonial interests on the expenses of majority Africans (Rodney, 1973).

### **1.2.1 The Operational of Colonial Education and the state of Africans Social Relations**

The practice of colonial education was fully grounded on segregation and racial bias. This is justified by (Mushi, 2009) as quoted in Ngohengo, (2016), who argues that, racial and gender imbalances are sorts of inequality faces that emerged as a result of colonial education in Africa. In these kinds of imbalances, students' access to education was largely influenced by both students' race and sex. As far as race is concerned, few African children were able to secure the place in colonial schools compared to Asians and European children. The situation was not only limited to quantitative aspect of education but also in terms of quality where African schools had poor services in comparison to other races.

This argument is in the same line with Nyerere's speech in (1956) as quoted in Mushi (2009) justifies the situation:

“In Tanganyika education is racial; there are separate schools for the children of the different racial groups. All Europeans children and all Asians children receive primary education. Only 40% of the African children go to school. We are told that this is because there is no enough money in the country to give education to every child and that unless European can be sure that their

children can receive education they will not come to Tanganyika and the Africans will suffer. So this apparent injustice to the Africans like so many others is done for the good of the Africans.....”(Mushi, 2009: 86).

To justify the existence of social segregation in education for Africans children, Rodney (1973) clarifies the matter as by arguing that it was amazing for colonial administration to state that they had no enough money to educate African children while the continent had much wealth such as minerals and cash crops that could fulfill that objective. He provides an example of the country like Northern Rhodesia which had much copper but did not have enough money to educate African children.

In relation to gender, colonial education was gender biased since more boys than girls had access to education. Another undesirable social impact of colonial education legacy as explained by Mushi (2009) is religious inequality, this happened due the fact that, colonial education benefited mostly Christians than the Muslim followers. Mushi (2009) asserts that, uneven provision of western education was among other factors influenced by unwillingness of Muslim parents and spiritual leaders to send their children to school as were afraid of being converted into Christianity since western education was mostly provided by missionary schools (Njozi,2010). According to Mushi (2009), colonial education was on the line to produce less competent individuals for fulfilling certain colonial goals at each level and more specific to prepare Young Africans for white-collar jobs. Colonial education was provided out of the social needs and realities of the indigenous African population contrary to pre-colonial education as the latter reflected the social realities of the people. Commenting on this view, Mushi (2009) observes that, education in pre-colonial societies in Tanganyika responded to the existing socio-economic, political and cultural practices of the community. The content grew naturally from the environment and it reflected the demands and requirements of the community it served. This is commented by Mwalongo (2008) as observed in Mushi (2009) who asserts that:

“Education in pre-colonial societies in Tanganyika responded to the existing socio-economic, political and cultural practices of the community. The content grew naturally from the environment and reflected the demands and requirements of the community it served”.

Therefore, it was certain that, African indigenous education prepared the individuals for life in their societies and the way it was structured ensured production of complete individuals, and lifelong learners who were cultured, integrated, sensitive and responsible for the needs of the family and society at large.

### **1.2.2 The Operational of Colonial Education and the State of African Cultural Relations**

Deculturalisation of Africans was legacy impact that colonial education had to the continent. As observed by Eboah et.al (2011), the implementation of a new educational systems left those who were colonized with lack of identity and a limited sense of their past. The indigenous history and customs once practiced and observed slowly slipped away and the colonized became hybrids of two vastly different cultural systems (Nwanosike et, al.2011). Colonial education created a blurred African cultural practices that made it difficult to differentiate between the new enforced ideas of the colonizers and formerly accepted in native practices (Eboah, et.al. 2011).

Rodney (1973) illustrates the cultural alienation of Africans through the words of Dr. Kofi Busia who proclaims that:

“At the end of my first year at secondary school (Mfantsipim, Cape Coast, Ghana); I went home to Wench for the Christmas vacation. I had not been home for four years, and on that visit, I became painfully aware of my isolation. I

understood our community far less than the boys of my own age who had never been to school. Over the years, as I went through college and university, I felt increasingly that the education I received taught me more and more about Europe and less and less about my own society”(P.389).

Colonial education also affected the chance for provision of indigenous educations in Africa. This was because the missionaries were after formal training of the mind, for this reason they encouraged boarding accommodation so as to supervise, control and direct the learner along proper lines (Garba, 2012). This deprived African children from learning morals and other forms of education they were used to. Furthermore the cultural impact of colonial education is lamented by Semali as he was quoted by McGarvey in his article “Conquest of the Mind”. In this article, McGarvey quotes Semali saying:

...While I was growing up in what was then called Tanganyika, we had already been under colonization for nearly a century – first by the Germans, and then the British after the First World War. The colonial school I attended did not teach me to be a member of Chagga society. Although I had certain knowledge system as a member of the village, I read, wrote, and spoke things at school that did not fit into village life. I always wore two different hats. I developed this double-consciousness so well that I did not realize it. In order for the colonizers to exploit the Chagga for labor they first needed to establish themselves as the authority. Since authority traditionally rested in the hands of the Chagga elders, the colonizers needed to begin dismantling Chagga cultural traditions. The main tool for doing this was the colonial school. The colonial school was set up to instill the values and practices of the colonizers on the indigenous people so that the indigenous people would open up their land and their minds to market economies. In order to establish control over these economies, the colonizers had to first establish control over the socialization of the people. As a result, the colonial schools began socializing the children in ways that conflicted with their traditions. The children began to lose faith and respect for the elders as authority figures, and began to see the colonizers as the authority... (McGarvey, 1997 quoted in Mart, 2011: 93).

According to Semali’s observation, colonial schools were introduced for the purpose of enabling the colonial powers to establish their control over the colonized. Using colonial education colonizers were able to dismantle African culture and establish theirs. Since such education was not introduced for the sake of African children, it was therefore irrelevant to African day to day life and therefore. Colonial education and its cultural hangovers was also explained by Rodney (1973) who clearly cement the argument as he illustrates the cultural alienation of Africans through the words of Dr. Kofi Busia who proclaims that:

“At the end of my first year at secondary school (Mfantshipim, Cape Coast, Ghana); I went home to Wench for the Christmas vacation. I had not been home for four years, and on that visit, I became painfully aware of my isolation. I understood our community far less than the boys of my own age who had never been to school. Over the years, as I went through college and university, I felt increasingly that the education I received taught me more and more about Europe and less and less about my own society”(P.389).

Therefore, it can be concluded that, colonial education in Africa was introduced by colonial for the purpose of disintegrating African culture so as to set suitable environments for establishment of colonial rule and preparation of few assistants who would help white men in colonial exploitative projects. However, despite the same mission colonial education had, the policies that guided the provision of education were different depending on the colonial power. Therefore, while in the British colonial missionaries and other agents were free to run education in the French colonies all education activities were centralized to the government. Uchendu (1979) concluded that, the purpose of all colonial education was “subordination of Africans.

### **1.2.3 Colonial Education Genocides on the Contemporary Socio-Cultural Values in Africa**

The discussions above evidenced the transformations and experiences of African socio-cultural relations since the inception of alien capitalist powers. Findings from the discussions reveal a serious impact of the colonial education systems on the contemporary African generations. This could extensively be seen on the socio-cultural relations of the African communities.

### **1.2.4 Social Genocide**

The situation of post independent racial line in the provision of education has its origin from colonial times Mart (1971). This racially provided education finally reflects on social, political and privileges of the contemporary graduates, this has resulted to the presence different schools and universities in Africa providing different levels of education in terms of the quality of the content, learning environment and facilities and hence sustaining racial gaps among the Africans. This segregation in education bring in socio-psychological stigma of the society, it harms social relationship among the Africans, Branson et al (2012).

Youth rural – urban migration is one of the social genocides that was identified as an impact of colonial education. Studies show that, rural – urban migration among the youths is partly linked to lack of knowledge, skills and attitude of exploiting the resources available in villages such as fishing, agriculture and animal husbandry (Robinson-Pant, 2016). The views seem to suggest that both curriculum and methods of teaching have failed to equip youths with the necessary required knowledge, skills and attitude which would enable them to remain in their villages and employ themselves (Borgi, 2018).

Similarly the social genocide of colonial education is reflected on the mindsets of the graduates of different educational levels in Africa, where their main concern upon the completion being securing official collar jobs in different government sectors and hence run away from manual works (Lin, et.al, 2005). This situation is compatible with colonial education outputs in Africa as confessed by Mushi (2009), he condemned colonial education being centered on preparing individuals for fulfilling certain colonial goals at each level and more specific for white collar jobs (Kay, 1971). This situation persists on post independent African education syllabi taught most of the irrelevant contents drawn out of the socio-economic realities of the learners (Woolman, 2001). Despite the strong measures taken to Africanize education system so as to reflect the actual needs of the communities’ post-colonial graduates are socially alienated from their rural communities as they totally dislike manual labour (Rodney, 1973)

### **1.2.5 Cultural Genocide**

Cultural genocide on the use of foreign language is shown on contemporary education system in Africa which has its genesis from colonial system where the minds and perceptions of teachers, students and parents are situated on the former colonial mentalities. Studies in Tanzania have shown that, most students and the



majority of teachers are seriously handicapped when it comes to using English as the language of instruction (see Qorro 2006 and Brock-Utne 2005). The use of English as a medium of instruction on contemporary education system for both private primary schools and post primary levels continues to be a legacy of colonialism, (URT, 1995). The use of English language as the medium of instruction was inherited from colonial masters and still embraced on African education system (Woolman, 2001). In pre-colonial education, all skills, values, norms and knowledge were imparted among the youth through local languages which were clearly understood by the African children as it reflects their social realities.

One of the famous known cultural identities grinded down in Africa is the extended structures of families. Traditionally African families structures calls for strong bond and goodwill among the family members (Moller, et. al, 1995). In Both the Matrilineal and matrilineal communities relatives were important resource in the survival of each individual in the communities (Lauras-Lecoh; 1990, *Therborn*, 2006). In this regard, children were well taught to associate themselves with others and that their closeness to other relatives is significance as it built their identities in the societies (Cattell, 1997). This system was gradually destructed when youth generations acquired colonial education which brought the so called detachments and alienation of those who received the foreign n education from those who did not (Moller, et al. 1995).

This has been a result of the fact that colonial education was a product of capitalist ideologies which shunned selflessness and cultivated individualistic ways of life therefore those who received colonial education found themselves unfit into the future prosperity of their communities (Falola, 2007). It is from this individualistic perspective, most if not all of the so called formal educational teachings in contemporary Africa have been evolved from. In this sense it can be concluded that the changing face of families relations I African communities has been catalyzed much by the ideas that the children have been and are still equipped with from formal the so called schools in Africa.

Another dominant genocide that colonial education has left in Africa as an outcome of its operation is inferiority complex that prevails among Africans to date. It is unchallenged fact that colonial education was a conspiracy to colonize Africans (Eboah and Oba, 2011). In this regard, they were structured in a way that its contents despised whatever has to be of Africans with a common reference of primitive and whatever comes from the white men continent as modern good and appropriate hence fit to be used for human survival (Omolewa, 2006). This was a stepping-stone into the so called mental colonization. Among the areas that westerners have succeeded over Africans during colonial rule is to shape its population in way they must be submissive (Rodney, 1972).

This has been much accomplished by the educational contents taught at schools. first, the content touched nothing about what is around African environment in a positive approach but just critics and pessimist commends over them and finally African children started to feel as if whatever is available into their environment worthless helping them into the future survival of their communities. Secondly, contents were filled with western concepts that had no practicality in Africa and praising westerners (Rodney, *Ibid*). all these culminated in producing man power which cannot think and act like Africans but African Europeans who lived in Africa.

Besides, the post independence African states have succeeded to change ideas that have been used to teach students in colonial area but have never thought to destroy ideas used to construct ideas that could be

used to feed children at schools (Falola, 2007). Therefore, Africans still use the same thinking approach similar to colonizers in creating contents to feed the children at schools. An outcome to this is to produce scholars that think going to work in Europe and America is the great success in life; having generation that have lost their tongue by thinking even to speak their vernacular languages is sinful and therefore speaking English is proper to them; producing man power which think of westerners approach to solve their African problems; despising whatever the pride of Africa by a single however a polished word “local”( Ferraro,1991; Adams, & Mburugu,1994 ; Meekers, et. al.,1995 ). This has culminated into the sense that modern days African children who received western education deem fit to be westerners than Africans.

### **3.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

Discussions from this paper depicts that, the impact of colonial education still linger in contemporary Africa decades after the end of colonialism. While some of these impacts are good and desirable, others are in conflict with the African socio-cultural and economic relations. Since colonial education was a crucial tool in accelerating colonial exploitation, its impact to socio-economic and cultural setting in Africa is widely felt. Taking into account of the globalised world, African states are still obliged to Africanize their education systems to realize full potentials of their developments. This Africanization in education should not be devoted into reforming of the curriculum but also the ideas and mindset used to educate the young African generations for the betterment of Africa. This is because, no matter the significance that colonial education considered to have Africans, it extensively focused to meet economic interests of the colonial masters, and such paved the way for the post-independence decadence of the African socio-cultural relations.

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