

Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Philosophy of Education

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Abstract—One of the most powerful instruments for stinging a person or a group to awareness, civilization and development is education. This would mean that wherever it is denied or compromised, it would have a direct bearing on the quality of development. A cursory glance at the history of Africa reveals that the age of colonialism introduced a system of education that made the student a passive actor in the transformation and humanization of society. Students were taught how to read and write, with little emphasis on reasoning. Students, therefore, became narrators rather than thinkers. As a solution to this problem, this paper argues for the need of a method of education that is African in nature. It adopts the concept 'Igwebuike' as a descriptive word for an African philosophy of education which is based on the African worldview, and which perceives the teacher and the student, though as individual thinkers, as a community of inquiry. The historic-analytic method is employed for collection and analysis of data. This philosophy of education is aimed at helping the African put on an ever enlarging escalator toward a bigger, better and richer Africa.

Keywords— Igwebuike, Igwebuikology, Education, Philosophy, Igbo, African.

I. INTRODUCTION

HERACLITUS of Ephesus is popular in Ancient philosophy because of his view that change is the law of nature and the condition of all things. He says that "All things are in the state of flux. You cannot step twice into the same river" (Cited by Omoregbe 1991). Powers rise and fall, and so do empires and emperors. The Roman Empire of hundreds of years ago looked so permanent to many spectators of the time, but it collapsed and the world went on. However, in every process of change, the human person according to Okafor (1981) with all his/her weakness and strength, constitute the instrument of social change. He writes that human beings:

Must make mistakes and learn from them, make more mistakes and learn anew; but learn, they must, to remain rational and, therefore, human. They do taste defeat as well as success and discover how to live with each other. The lesson of history is the lesson of trial and error. But the lesson must be learned and the error corrected. (pp. 339-340).

This paper is written to sound a warning of history in the educational system of Africa. It is anchored on the philosophy that society must learn from the history of the yesteryears: a history though human, is inundated with new directions. This work, therefore, argues that Africa must break away from the

educational system instituted by colonial masters and move on to a system that would advance an ever enlarging escalator towards a bigger, better and richer future for Africa. Onweh (1991), Adarafegbe (1992) and Nwangwu (2003) observe that the need for change when they aver that the system of education inherited from colonial masters was inadequate and irrelevant to the developmental needs of the African society. It is in this regard that *Igwebuike* is proposed as an Igbo-African philosophy of education for the transformation and humanization of Africa.

II. COLONIAL ECHOES IN AFRICAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

In Africa, following the colonial standard, Knowles (1984) posits that the teacher is understood as having the full responsibility for making decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, when it will be learned, and if the material has been learned. This is based on the assumption that learners need to know only what the teacher teaches them and that the teacher has nothing to learn from the student. Hiemstra and Sisco (1990) argue that the result, is a scenario that actively promotes dependency on the instructor: dependency of the colonized on the colonizer. The teacher-student relationship is one of 'a narrating subject (the teacher) and patient, listening object (the student); the contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified'. The student is charged with the primary responsibility of memorizing mechanically the narrated content.

In this process, Freire (1972) argues that the student who is supposed to be a receiver, an observer, a synthesizer and an internalizer is turned into a mere container. Like a tunnel which is less affected by the fluid, the content passes through him and he does not pass through it. Thus, the more completely the teacher fills the receptacle, the better a teacher he is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better student they are. Words are transmitted without any reflection on them, and since creativity is born out of reflection, this kind of knowledge has no place for creativity. The consequence is a master-servant relationship that perpetually moulds the African to conform to the ideals of white supremacy.

With the teacher as the narrator in the narration process, Anih (2004) opines that the child is thrown into a kind of ecstasy detached from reality. Students are mainly good at patiently receiving, memorizing and repeating what they have memorized. Many graduates, in the contention of Ojakaminor

(2004), cannot practically defend the certificates they are parading. There are graduates of computer science with strong theoretical foundation but without much practical import. Many of our literature students pass through the university, cramming poems and beautiful lines from prose writings, but with no knowledge of creative writing. The result is an intellectual schizophrenia.

Freire (1972) avers that this method of transmitting knowledge turns the African student into a depository and the teacher a depositor and an issuer of communiqués rather than a communicator. Most times, the teacher expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the student. His task is to fill the student with the content of his narration-contents which are detached from the totality that engender the student. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated and alienating verbosity. This process of receiving, filling, and storing the deposits limits the entire process of education. The student is turned into a robot or an automaton and denied his right to the ontological vocation of being human, since the automation of the human person is irreconcilable with the vocation to be fully human. The end result of this misguided system is a galaxy of impotent literate men and women filed away through lack of creativity and transformation. They cannot be said to be truly knowledgeable since true knowledge comes about through intervention and re-intervention. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted them, the less they develop the crucial consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. In the face of these, there is the need for a dialogue of education and culture.

III. DIALOGUE BETWEEN EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Education as a concept points to the universal, however, culture points to the particular. Culture on the one hand, is a social heritage that encompasses a people's way of life, which includes knowledge, beliefs, customs, laws, arts, morals etc., that a group of people build up and expect members to acquire, share and live by. Culture does not come from human genes, but rather it is learnt and taught. This bears with the etymology of the word culture as *colere*, which means "to cultivate" or "to practice". Kanu (2010), therefore posits that the human person is, therefore, the author and architect of culture. Education on the other hand, is the process of transmitting cultural heritage for the development of individuals spiritually, intellectually, physically and morally for his/her own personal good and for the good of the society. While education transmits culture, culture provides the locus and the instruments for education. Akagbogu (1999), therefore, writes on the dynamics of education and culture:

All over the world, people in every society take pains, devote time and attention to educate the young ones to be functional adults. In most cases, these pains, devotion of time and attention to the rearing of young ones are geared

towards impacting and transmitting of cultural and social knowledge that would enable the young ones fit in well into the social and physical environment of the society in which they live. In the process of impacting this social and cultural knowledge to the young ones, different socio-cultural values and norms are used. (p. 70).

This notwithstanding, education is not just a process of transmitting culture, it is culture, because its methods and principles are determined by cultural contexts. Therefore, for education to be relevant and achieve its basic aims among peoples, localities and times, it must be inculturated. When education is done in such a way that it finds a home in a particular cultural context, and finds expression through elements proper to the culture of particular peoples, it would become a principle that animates, directs and unifies cultures, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation. It is from this understanding that Igwebuiké is developed as an Igbo-African philosophy of education.

IV. IGWEBUIKÉ AS A DIALOGUE BETWEEN EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Igwebuiké in Igbo-African philosophy is the modality of being. It is an Igbo word, which is a combination of three words. It can be understood as a word and as a sentence: as a word, it is written as Igwebuiké, and as a sentence, it could be written thus Igwe bu ike, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space. Let us try to understand the three words involved: Igwe is a noun which means number or population, usually a huge number or population. Bu is a verb, which means is. Ike is another verb, which means strength or power. Put together, it means number is strength or number is power. Kanu (2015) avers that it rests on the philosophy of solidarity and complementarity; thus, to be is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. Igwebuiké is based on the African cosmology, which according to Iroegbu (1994) is characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny. Igwebuiké is the underlining principle of African philosophy and religion. It is the unity of the African philosophical experience. It is in fact, the fundamental category of African philosophy and religion. It is the substratum of African traditional values, philosophy and religion. Its centrality is illustrated in the diagram below.

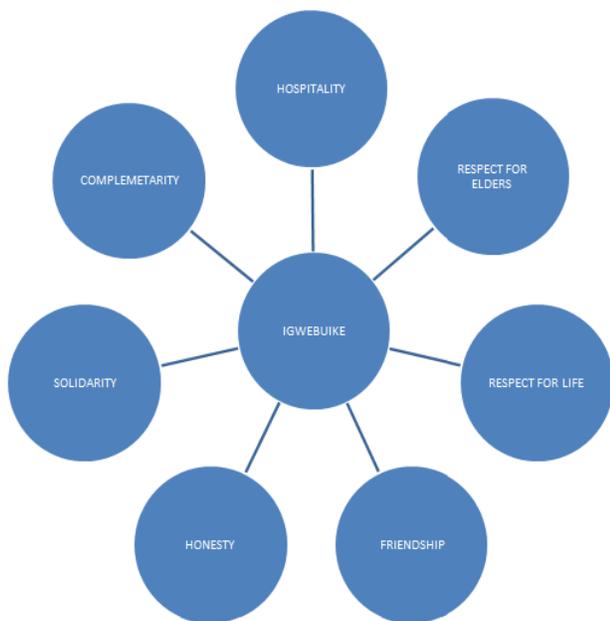


Fig.1. A Diagram Illustrating The Centrality Of Igwebuiké In African Ontology

Because of the centrality of Igwebuiké in African philosophy, the development of a philosophy of education that is hinged on it is aimed at developing a philosophy of education that is in tandem with the African ontology. As a philosophy of education, Igwebuiké stands for a dialogical pedagogy that gives proportionate places to the teacher and the student. It is inculturated to fit into the African category which is realistically oriented to qualitative humanism. It sees the teacher and the student as a community of inquiry; a community in the search for knowledge. Education and the educator are understood as mid-wife who is humane, self-effacing, caring, non-authoritative, collaborative and academically unassuming. It recognizes the rights of the human person in their proper perspective. Taking from Anih (2004), it allows for the free interplay of the values of critical thinking, creative thinking, caring thinking, lateral thinking, higher order thinking, systemic thinking and synergic thinking in the entire process of learning. Thus, the teacher becomes the educator (facilitator-learner), and the student educandi (student-learner). In this dialogical process, both parties are learners, however, with a facilitator of the process. Dialogue is, here, an educational existential necessity. Igwebuiké can be described as an interactive approach to learning, based on the interactive nature of the African universe. As Freire (1972) avers, without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education.

Igwebuiké provides the basic atmosphere for free high extension capacity thinking. The teacher is not placed at an intimidating ivory tower; he is part of this community of inquiry, and they work together for the overall good of the whole through a critical and creative thinking that eliminates biased, distorted, provocative and prejudiced reasoning. As Conner (2004) observes, people learn best when they have control over their learning.

For this to be actualized, facilitators must learn to place new knowledge for students into a context that they already understand and appreciate. This could be done in such a way that what is of relevance to their lives is linked with their personal experience. In this regard, the programme content of education is elaborated not according to what the teacher thinks best for his students but by taking into account the people-in-situation. In African traditional societies, no education was abstract. There was always a reason for the communication of knowledge: for handling particular circumstances and solving particular problems. Pupils were taught hunting because they were going to be hunters; they were taught fishing because they were going to fisher men or women; they were taught how to take care of men and women because they were going to be married.

There is eagerness in every living person to learn, and facilitators must nurture this by putting into consideration and also respecting the individual differences, self-image and emotional states of their students. Thus, Russell (1912) and Okafor (1974) think that education should inculcate among other things, tolerance and understanding in relation to the those who are different from ourselves. If these are assured, Freire (1972) opines that students will respond positively because they find in their facilitator one who they believe sincerely cares for them personally, and who values interest and talents. Thus, at the point of encounter, there are neither utter ignoramus nor perfect sages; there are only men who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know. The complementary character of everyone in the community of inquiry is necessary and, therefore, important.

V. CONCLUSION

The foregoing has studied the reality of change which characterizes being. Within this context, it looked into the echoes of the colonial government in the educational system of Africa and called for the need for change. The model provided for this change is Igwebuiké. It understands the human being as a special being: a being with the other and which relates with the divine. This, according to Basden (1983) explains why human persons in ages past have always tried to maintain a good relationship with the divine. It sees the training of the young in the values of the society as a communal responsibility. Its conception of education is wholistic: it covers the physical training, moral training, character training, intellectual training, vocational training, etc., of the individual.

This piece, therefore, argues that to save Africa from any emergent cataclysm and conflagration, there must be a conscious policy of education that puts into consideration the local context of the African people, and which connects to the African ontology. In this case, the education syllabus in Africa must be critically analyzed, and the philosophies behind them looked into with a judicious discrimination. Traditional educational system should not be overlooked, but should serve as a fundamental basis when borrowing from other people.

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