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## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PHILOSOPHIES OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL EDUCATION AND ISLAMIC EDUCATION

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### **Abstract**

*This paper comparatively analyzed the philosophies of Africa traditional education and Islamic Education. The educational philosophy of each was examined. The education of the duo was based on their philosophy of education which gives prominence to preparationism, functionalism, communalism, perennialism and holicism. The two have a lot in common, especially in the intention (aim), to prepare the young into adult life; instill good norms and conduct in the society etc. In its content, physical, social and spiritual development of the human person were highlighted. Physical training was a process of initiation and induction into adulthood, hence communalism and respect for elders formed part of the social norms. Knowledge of the Supreme Being is the only true knowledge and strict obedience to this being is a dogma and remains sacrosanct. It is a determinant factor in decision making and dealing with members of the community. The strength of this type of education lies on its functionality and continuity within a given community. Weakness: it is exclusive in by nature, that is, meant for the clan, tribe, or sect and the recipients are not prepared for outside contact. The lack of literacy impedes preservation in writing of knowledge and skill acquired, consequently preventing the transfer of same from one locality to another. The method of transmission is undemocratic and it is more of indoctrination.*

Philosophy of education, as an applied philosophy, is the application of philosophical principles, concepts and methods of philosophy to the fields of Education. There are various philosophies of education based on culture, values and morals or simply put, philosophic outlook. These determine the heritage a particular people need to preserve and transmit to the younger generation.

The philosophy of education of a people would mean their ideals, values and morals translated into behavioural pattern or a way of life, which form the learning content, curriculum. The philosophies of African traditional education and that of Islamic education would mean thoughts that are spared for the ideas, values and morals by individuals and groups, knowledge and skills acquired for their sustenance, transformation and strategic transmission.

### **African Traditional Education**

The traditional or indigenous educational system existed in Africa before the advent of Islam and Christianity. There was no Islamic education in Nigeria until fourteenth century and Christian education came much later in Nineteenth century. In the early phase of Colonial administration, some missionaries who came to Africa thought they were bringing education to uneducated African people. This supposition would have been valid if educations were equated with literacy and formal schooling but traditional education persisted till today and no sign of its exiting from education arena. Infact, detail accounts of African peoples by anthropologists leave no one in doubt that African societies did possess a kind of indigenous education, a system which worked reasonably well, given limits imposed by the society within which it had to operate.

Mejiuni, was right when he said that traditional African education refers to the aims, objective, contents process, structures and knowledge production strategies through which pre-colonial Africans, as individuals and groups, acquired knowledge, skills and values needed for the sustenance and growth of the self, family and community.

The main aims of African indigenous education may be identified as follows:

1. To preserve the cultural heritage of the extended family, the clan and the tribe.  
2. To adapt members of the new generation to their physical environment and teach them how to control and use it.

3. To explain to them that their own future, and that of their community, depends on the understanding and perpetuation of the institutions, laws language and values inherited from the past (Fafunwa, 2004).

## **The Philosophy of African Traditional Education**

The philosophy of African traditional education is predicated on African concept of man. For Africans man is at center of the universe as everything revolves around him. He is imbued with intelligence and wisdom. Hence Mbiti (1969) in Kanu (2019) asserts that man is at the very centre of existence and African people see everything else in its relation to this central position of man... it is as if God for the sake of man, he is capable of being educated, hence education is his developmental process towards body and mental or intellectual maturity. In African beliefs it is also true that man is neither his own origin nor an end in himself. He has a creator and his finality is in that Supreme Being. Therefore his education is geared towards achieving human's ends which is the integral development of human person in view of his relation with his creator. This is buttressed by what Okoh (1998) asserted that the nature of man imposes triple responsibilities on him, namely to his God- Spiritual responsibilities to his neighbour – as a member of civil society he has social duties; to himself he must live so that the higher part of him is not made subordinate to the organic.

Wosu (2016:124) corroborated with this philosophical underpinning of traditional education when he opined that the philosophy of Nigerian traditional educational is tied or connected to the people's worldview. The belief in supreme deity and in chains of other subsidiary gods, Belief in life after death as earth is just a starting point".

The philosophy of African traditional Education is based on principles of preparationism, functionalism, communalism, perennialism and holism.

### **Preparationism**

The young people are trained for a specific purpose. They are equipped with the skills required to carry out particular responsibilities or role. The preparation was targeted at different areas of life in a particular society. Was gender sensitive in that boy child was trained in art of farming, fishing, palm wine tapping, hunting, wrestling and dancing etc while boys were equipped with skills to play masculine roles, the girl child was groomed to perform famine duties like house chores, sewing, baby care and a lot more. The preparation was aimed at equipping them with knowledge and skills required for them to be self-reliant, responsible and resourceful to the community.

### ***The Intuition* Functionalism**

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Traditional African education is, by its nature, practical and participatory. Kosemani and Okorosaye – Orubite (2002:7) assert “despite the dissimilarities in content and method of traditional education from one ethnic group to the other, the aims are still geared towards

functionalism. Children learn the occupation or trade of their parents through working with them. For instance tilling the ground for farming, planting crops, weeding and harvesting. Some others are engaged in apprenticeship, working with and observing their master. The learner is fully integrated into a particular occupation from the moment he begins learning by practising.

### **Communalism**

In African tradition education, the child is for everyone in the community. Parents are not the sole owner of the child, therefore the upbringing of the child is the business of everyone. Teaching responsibility does not solely rest on the parents rather there is co-responsibility. The parents, family, the community and the society are involved in the training of a child. In the absence of a father, an uncle can teach or correct a child (Kanu, 2018). Any member of the village community can correct a child who acts contrary to the norms of the society. This is predicated on the fact that if the child out a good fellow in the society it will be for the benefit of all, so also it will inimical to the entire society if the child turns out a nuisance as a result of negligence in his upbringing. This is explains why teaching the young is a collectivity. In communalism education is community oriented. While it is directed towards solving community problem, its aim is to introduce the young into social life of the community the live in.

### **Perennialism**

This principle, in African context, implies the conservation and continuity of the values and achievements of the cultural heritage through her education system. Whatever is good in the culture and tradition of a people is preserved and transmitted to the generation. In this way the values endure and ethical standards are maintained.

### **Holisticism**

In this principle, is meant that the education in traditional African society is versatile. While one may be specially trained to acquire skill in a specific area of life, nevertheless he will be aided to acquire working knowledge in other areas. This will make him productive. A palm wine tapper can as well engage in farming, just as a good wrestler can build and be a bone setter.

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Holisticism is an integral development of human person; spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical are all taken into consideration in African traditional education.

According to Kosemani and Okorosaye- Orubite (2002:7) “despite the dissimilarities in content and method of traditional education from one ethnic group to the other, the aims are still geared towards functionalism”.

In keeping to these objectives, the content of African traditional education grew out of the physical and social situation. The methods, both formal and informal processes were utilized for the transmission of knowledge, skills, ideas, attitudes and patterns of behavior. Thus tribal legends and proverbs were told and retold by the evening fireside, and through them much of the culture heritage of the tribe was kept alive and passed on to the children.

There were riddles to test children’s judgment and myths to explain the origin of the tribe and the genesis of man. Such oral traditions, narrated with care and repetition, additionally constituted the African child’s training in what was often a complicated linguistic system without a script. Children learn names and the usefulness of trees, plants, animals and insects, as well as the dangers and uses of each were learnt as boys herded cattle or farmed land with their fathers, and girls helped their mothers in household work. Imitative play, too, formed an important part of informal education. Boys staged mock battles and made model huts and cattle pens; girls made dolls, plays at husband and wife and cooked imaginary meals. The importance of play in traditional African people was transmitted to children and adolescents through these informal activities. These activities buttress the fact that education is for the induction into society and preparation for adulthood. African education laid emphasis on social responsibility, job orientation, political participation, spiritual and moral values.

### **Islamic Philosophy of Education**

Islamic Education began on the prophetic advice which, according to Fafunwa (1991) states that the best man among you is one who learns the Qur’an and then cares to teach it. This made it obligatory on every Muslim to teach the religion without expecting any reward. Reinforced in Okafor, Prophet Mohammed who himself enjoined his followers to respect those who are learned, further reinforced it in the Holy book (Qur’an), in Okafor (1992:357) which states that .

*To seek knowledge is a duty for every Muslim man.*

*Seek knowledge even though it is in China*

*The servants are the heirs of the Prophets.*

*The Intuition*

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This call to learning was responded to with overwhelming enthusiasm in the early centuries of Islam. And the beneficent effects of that response are the many contributions Islam has made to education world over.

Islamic philosophy of Education is based on its definition of Philosophy as rational study of the nature of existence. The foundation of Islamic philosophy, like the foundation of Islamic science, is Allah, the Supreme Being. That is, Islamic philosophy starts from an acceptance of the premise that existence, or reality, actually and already exists, external to and independent from ourselves as human beings, and it names the very Being of Existence itself as Allah. In practice, it meant that all knowledge, with Qur'an as its base, should be fought with Tawheed (the belief in the oneness of Allah) as it pivots. It is obvious that the creation should speak of the creator for it is only them that the ultimate purpose of creation is realized.

There are three other important elements that are necessary ingredients in the formulation of Islamic philosophy namely; learner, knowledge and means of instruction. The learner, being human, is made up of a dual nature of spirit and body. The spiritual faculty is known as the **ruh** (soul), **'aql** (mind or intellect), **b** (emotion), or **nafs** (self) according to the function that is ascribed to it. **'Aql** (the faculty of reason), unique to human beings, elevates them above the rest creation. According to Hashim (1999) the soul could be elevated to the noblest of positions but it could also be debased to the lowest of the low. The body consists of several faculties corresponding to the physical senses.

He opined that it is common knowledge that the learner is inquisitive and flexible and can be molded especially at a tender age. The learner has physical needs for food, activity and sex, social needs for affection, belonging and status within a social group; and spiritual needs relating to something larger and beyond one's self, that is, the need to reach for God.

Islam believes in the possibility of obtaining knowledge of Truth and Reality. In Islam there has not been much debate on this matter, unlike in the Western philosophical tradition where there has been constant debate since Greek philosophy, as demonstrated by Plato's Theatetus. We know that man is equipped with a soul and physical senses and prepared by Allah to acquire knowledge.

Al-Attas in Hashim (1999) contends that **ilm** (knowledge) is the arrival of the **ma'na** (meaning) of an object in the soul or the arrival of the soul at the meaning of an object of knowledge. Thus the soul is not merely passive but active too. For Him, **wahy** (Revelation) and intuition are received by the soul. The five physical senses are the windows of the mind, particularly for obtaining empirical and the rational knowledge. In the Islamic worldview, there exists a hierarchical structure to knowledge, and just as there exist a dual nature in mankind, there exists two categories of knowledge, the **ilm alnaqliyah** (revealed)- some of which is **fard 'ayn**, individual duty and the **ilm alnaqliyah** – which is **fard kifayah**, which is a communal duty.

These correspond to the different degrees of certainty of knowledge and the means of procuring it. Fard ‘ayn knowledge is finite, certain, and obligatory for every individual Muslim to acquire. It concludes the knowledge about the pillars of the religion, the articles of faith and the shariah. On the other hand, fard Kifayah knowledge is obligatory upon the community. Each community should ensure that there are some people who are knowledgeable in the acquired or intellectual knowledge essential for the survival of the society, such as medicine, mathematics natural and applied sciences, and social sciences. In this manner, Islam ensures that every individual is anchored to his faith while exploring new horizons. Hashim (1999) used the analogy of flying a kite to describe the relationship between faith and reason, where faith is the sting and reason is the kite itself. There is always tension between faith and reason just as there is between the kite and the string; if for some reason the string is broken, the kite will fly off in any direction. Similarly, if reason is not grounded in faith, then it will wander in all directions without knowing its limit.

Knowledge is integral or holistic as suggested by the “tawhidic” worldview. There is no compartmentalization of knowledge into religious and secular spheres. Both fard ‘ayn and fard kifayah knowledge have the purpose of strengthening faith, the former through one full study of the words of Allah in the Holy Qur’an and the latter through a meticulous, systematic study of the world of man and nature. Knowledge is integral to action, spirituality and ethics. The nature of the knowledge that provides the content of education is the major concern of the curriculum, and these views of man and knowledge have a great bearing upon Islamic education.

Education (ta’did, disciplining, some still prefer tarbiyah, upbringing) is adab (proper way or untue), progressive instilled in man. Adab refers to the discipline of the body, mind and spirit. It endows the possessor with the knowledge of the proper places of things or objects (hikmah) in the scheme of creation and subsequently to act in a just manner (‘adl). Education, therefore, in Islamic perspective is defined according to Al Atlas in Hashim as the progressive instilling or “the recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence” of mankind. The primary goal of education is to lead man to recognize and acknowledge his creator. This acknowledgement is manifested in obedience and adherence to His commandments. In other words, the primary goal of Islamic education is to produce the good being, who, by developing all his/ her potentials accordingly, ensures him or her to be the servant (‘abd) and the vicegerent (Khalifah) of Allah who has undertaken the amanah (trust) of maintaining prosperity on earth. To this effect education is designed to produce the God-fearing (taqwa) servant of Allah who is aware of his individual vertical relations with Allah (hablun min

Allah) and his social horizontal relations with his fellow man (*hablun min al-nas*). Thus, in effect the primary goals of education include spiritual, moral, social, intellectual and physical development with specific goals. There is no conflict between societal and individual aims because there is unity of purpose.

For Islam, just as knowledge is a reflection of man, ideally the curricular framework or an Islamic educational institution, particularly at the tertiary level, should reflect knowledge. Just as man is of a dual nature- body and spirit – so also the curriculum should possess a centre or a core consisting of revealed knowledge, which fulfills the spiritual needs of the individual and acquired knowledge which fulfills the physical and intellectual needs necessary for societal development radiating from it. Both knowledge's, *fard'ayn* and *far Kifayah*, are essential for happiness in this world and the next. The balance between them must be preserved. Being the core of the curriculum, *fard 'ayn* (revealed knowledge) will be required of all students. To fulfill the requirement of *fard Kifayah* (acquired knowledge), however, students will choose to specialize in at least one field of study. For Ahmad (1986) Islam is the underlying knowledge that is to be applied to each and every walk of life. Education for Muslims must be based on Allah's guidance, in all fields of knowledge. This is Islamization of knowledge rather than the mere isolated learning of Islam. Islam, according to Ahmad (1986) does not allow any demarcation of 'sacred' from 'secular' 'transcendental' from 'mundance' or 'material' from 'spiritual'. The material world is as much a part as is the spiritual world of the one reality which man has to relate. The reality is that everything belongs to Allah and Allah is everywhere supreme.

The philosophy of Islamic education should be the philosophy of unity. There is not only divine unity, but of all creation, of mankind and of human personality. Islamic education should produce the whole human being – the rational, moral, aesthetic, spiritual and social being. No part can be sacrificed for another and no dimension of human personality should be neglected in imparting Islamic education.

Islamic education should enhance wisdom, the highest and most authentic knowledge that leads to wisdom. Wisdom is attained by the thinking and development of personality illumined by the Nur (light of the Qur'an and the multi-dimensional personality of prophet Mohammad(s).

Morality is another area where philosophical roots explain the different reasoning. D'Onofrio (1992) tries to clarify the Islamic translation of Aristotelian moral reasoning.. He insists that is helpful to distinguish Islamic ethics from fundamentalist Christian ethics. The former has its philosophical roots in the neo-platonic tradition in which the choice of virtue is realized in correct impulses, choosing good because God affords this choice. The recognition of goodness is the recognition of an ideal order through personal intuitions.

Islamic Education in Nigeria maintained the early child education. As early as the third year of life, Muslim children are expected to start the first stage of Qur'anic education. At this stage the children are limited to shorter chapters of the Qur'an in their learning programme, which is done by repetition, and rote learning. According to Wan Dund (1989) the Qur'an uses repetition in order to imbibe certain key concepts deeply in the consciousness of its listeners. Hence, the words Allah (God and Rabb (Lord Sustainer) are repeated 2,800 and 950 times respectively. The derivations of the root -i-m, excluding the unrelated alam (word) occur 750 times, thus ranking it third in numerical tabulation and importance. The next stage is learning to write Arabic characters though some may start this at the first stage. The primary level ends with learning the alphabet. This is a painstaking and tedious process for it is the period the pupil learns to memorize the verse of Qur'an. Even though the learning of the meaning is reserved to a later period some pupils may pick up some meaning during sermons called Waaz or other ceremonies.

According to Fafunwa (1991:61) this is the level every Moslem must pass through if he is to be able to pray and perform other religious duties since the slat, birth, death, marriage, and other religious ceremonies are usually performed in Arabic.

At the secondary level the pupil begins to learn the meaning of the verses of Qur'an that he has memorized. It is also at this stage that the pupil is introduced to other writings such as the Hadith (the traditions of the prophet). The next stage follows with the learning of grammar. This is regarded as post secondary level. The learner is taught new grammatical patterns and vocabulary. This level also will include according to Fafunwa (1991) as- sarf (grammatical inflexions); annahw (synatac); al-mantiq (logic); al-hisab (arithmetic); al-jabr wa I muqbalah (algebra); al-ma-nwa wa j-baya (rhetoric and versification); al-figh (jurisprudence); al-'aqa'id (scholastic theology); ae-tafsir (commentaries on the Qur'an); ilum 'I' usul (treatises on exegesis, and the principles and rules of interpretation of the laws of Islam); and al-Hadith (The traditions of the prophet and commentaries thereon). These are different branches of learning. The student decides what area he wishes to specialize .

From the foregoing one can observe that with the intense learning process in Islamic Education it lacked the modern knowledge in education. The Muslim students in higher education were not measuring up with their counterparts in secular and Christian institutions because of their lack of knowledge in English language and modern school subjects.

This denied them job opportunities. Many of them who wanted white-collar job could not get since they could not communicate in English. This pitiable situation necessitated reform in Islamic educational system. The new educational arrangement had to include English and Arithmetic in their curriculum.

Islamic scholars developed and applied the method of experimentation and observation – the scientific method of investigation. According to Okafor (1992) this was the origin of unprejudiced scientific method. For the first time in academic history laboratories and clinics were used. They also developed the practical science and mechanical arts and, by and large, bent science to the immediate service of human life.

The development of scientific spirit by the Arabic scholars produced marvelous results. It led to the invention of manner's compass by the Moors of Spain, gunpowder, cannon and other types of artillery. The Arabs invented the pendulum clock and with the progressive transformation of ancient alchemy into chemistry. They also discovered some chemical substances, including alcohol, nitric acid, sulphuric acid, nitrate of silver and corrosive sublimate. They applied chemistry in the working of metal and also in agriculture was started by them so also the introduction of fertilizer into agriculture.

They made a lot of outstanding contribution to mathematics and medical science. They replaced the clumsy Roman numerals with Arabic figures, which they borrowed from the Hindus. The configuration of algebra was by them. Further in Mathematics they invented the tangent, the cotangent and sine. They were pioneers in mathematics, physics and chemistry.

The versatility of Muslim scholars and their contribution to science and technology made Yousif in Hirsén T. & Postlethwaite N (eds) 1991:2713) to say

*Moslem learning is a product of a rich and powerful culture that came about as a result of integration of Arabic, Persian, Roman, Greek and to a lesser extent, Chinese culture. It was the Moslem culture that conveyed to the West the full spectrum of human knowledge in science, medicine, architecture, art agriculture, philosophy, education and commerce.*

Islamic education has contributed a lot to the development of science and technology. In Nigeria, after the intercultural relationship of Islam with other cultures no doubt brought conflict of chance in Islam. Their openness this time to venture into Western Education brought some changes in Islamic education and positively affected their worldview. There was reform in Islam and one of the first high- priority areas of reform was education. Consequently, in 1992 the administration and control of religious schools and all their means of support were taken over by the ministry of education, and the teaching of religious was prescribed in all state schools. Subsequently, other dramatic changes took effect. One of the most far-reaching for pedagogy and culture was the Romanization of the alphabet (changing the alphabet from the Arabic to the Latin script). The revolutionary

nature of this act can be perceived in its magnitude if one understood that Arabic was the language of the Qur'an and that the Arabic script was the symbol, which united the Islamic world and distinguished it from the world of "infidels".

Although strict secularization in Turkey has since been challenged, it has not been possible to completely reverse the wheels of change. Another in the female Muslims attends public schools and competes with their fellow women in other religious educational sector. They have equal opportunity to public office and also occupy high positions in educational institutions.

It, therefore, must be acknowledged that Islam and its educational system through the scholars have made great contribution to the world scholarship and to academic. Further, there is an important lesson in this panorama; namely, the variegated ideals of Arabic education demonstrate a classical example of the relationship between freedom and creativity in education. When the pursuit of scholarship is untrammelled by other social agencies- religious or civil –creativity and progress are enhanced.

### **Similarities in Strengths and Weaknesses**

The philosophies of African traditional Education and Islamic Education were based on the belief on Supreme Being, creator of man and he is answerable to. Man is endowed with Soul and physical senses and so could acquire knowledge. Education prepares one to function well in the community. It is geared towards functionalism. Values imbibed and knowledge acquired are perennial and transmittable through education. They start early to educate their young as it is aimed at induction into the society and preparation for adulthood, they have to be molded especially at tender age. Education is the integral development of the human person, spiritual, intellectual and physical. There is character formation as children imbibe the value of honesty. Morality was the watch word as anyone found wanting in that will incur the wrath of the gods or Allah.

The methods are the same as stated earlier, both formal and informal processes were utilized for the transmission of knowledge, skills, ideas, attitudes and behavioural patterns. Rote memorization, recital and repetition were used to transmit cultural heritage and for learning and retention of the prescription of the Holy Book, Qur'an. The fear and obedience to Supreme Being properly instilled in the children. For traditional African, there exists the Supreme Being, the creator and there are small gods, the vicegerents directly responsible for areas of life while Islam has Allah as the only Supreme Being and prophet who enforces his laws.

Knowledge is a function of man, as it is his reflection in both Africa tradition and Islam. For them man is of two nature body and spirit. The revealed knowledge is spiritual

and takes care of man's spiritual needs while acquired knowledge fulfills his physical and intellectual needs.

Islam maintains that the learner, knowledge and means of instruction are only ingredients in the formulation of Islamic philosophy while Allah, the Supreme Being is the foundation. It agrees that acquisition of knowledge of truth possible, like the sophists in Western philosophy but while the sophists who held that knowledge is subjective and relative and debatable among some Greek philosophers. Islam opined that man is equipped with soul and senses thereby prepared in God natural acquire knowledge. Intellectual knowledge is acquired for the survival of the society. This agrees with Traditional African Education which states that knowledge, skills and values are acquire for sustenance and growth of the self, family and community.

There were some shortcomings which were inherent in the two philosophies. A major one is, according to Adeyemi & Adeyinka, (2002) the focus almost exclusively on their tribe or sect, and hardly prepared their recipients for outside contact. Absence of literacy was another obstacle that hindered transmission of knowledge since the knowledge acquired cannot be preserved in writing.

## **Conclusion**

This study was carried out to critically analyze the educational system of traditional African and Islam. The people's worldview propelled their educational strides. Their educational philosophies were based on the belief on Supreme Being and their concepts of man. Man was created by God (Allah) and endowed with soul and physical senses. He is educable since he is a rational being. The philosophies of traditional African education and Islamic education were pragmatic in nature, as it was geared towards functionalism. The young people were trained to function well in the society. There was inculcation of values, morals and the culture of the community to the young. The adult members of the society were all involved in the all-round training of the young.

Obedience to Supreme Being and respect for elders were essentially embedded in the curriculum. There was emphasis on acquisition of skill and knowledge geared towards self-reliance, and usefulness to the community. All these were taken into the consideration in educative process into adulthood. Their type of education responds to situations and combat ready to conquer the environment.

Though illiteracy, that is, not able to read and write, constituted a major obstacle to proper documentation in writing, thereby preventing transmission of knowledge, values, and skills acquired. Nevertheless, it proffered solution to the problem of the moment for the immediate community.

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