

VISIONS AND MISSIONS OF THE FAMILY INSTITUTION AS A LEARNING AGENCY IN THE SOCIETY AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Learning is a necessity for human survival and for the advancement of the society. To meet up with these demands, learning remains a continuous process that takes place at all the stages of human life, and at different fronts. Family is one of the prominent institutions that are relentless in promoting learning especially at the early part of human development. This study briefly defined the categories of family existing in Nigeria. The functions of the family as an educative institution are summarized as economic learning, moral education functions, history and citizen education, healthcare and morality through religious education. The processes enumerated and discussed are direct learning, story telling, meetings and occasions, observations, and participatory learning. The socio-economic and political implications of learning in the family to community development are equally presented as motivation, self-reliance, participation, and leadership in community development activities.

Introduction

Learning takes different forms, knows no boundary, and it's a continuous process. Different forms of learning take place within the society through different agencies. One of the prominent agencies that promote learning in the society is the family. As a matter of fact the premier social institution in any given society the world over is the family and as such learning starts from the family. Of course, every institution in the world is associated with one form of learning or the other, and family as an institution is not left out. The family offers a lot in educating her members. Although these forms of learning have some peculiarities stemming from customs, traditions, culture and civilization, but differences exist.

Because of over bearing influence of western culture, education and civilization, it appears as if no learning actually took place in the developing world pre-colonial era. Obviously the contributions of families in imparting what was considered worthwhile to the young ones and the adults alike, are wonderful, ad infinite. In this respect, this research tends to briefly identify the areas and processes adopted by the family institution in educating her members. Other areas covered by this research are the limitations of the family as a learning agency and, the implications for educational process in community development.

The Family Institution

Family in our society is seen as the most basic institution because it constitutes the blocks with which kinship systems and the society, at large, is built. Three types of families are commonly found in African society: the nuclear, the polygamous and the extended or joint families. The nuclear family is a group consisting of a father, a mother and children. The social relationship that exists among the members operates in such a way that any factor that strengthens the family lies between one member and another and may affect other members, and also points of disharmony may affect other members.

The polygamous family is where two or more wives are joined by marriage to a single man and the children born of these women are half brothers and sisters, the man being the link that unites them. The man is the center of authority and the genealogy of the family is traced after him or his ancestors.

The extended family system is where two or more nuclear and polygamous family affiliate through an extension of parent - child relationship rather than a husband - wife relationship. It embraces typically a patrilineage, an older man and his wives or wife, his children, his married sons

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and their wives and children of the later. Three generations including the nuclear family of the father and his sons, live under a single roof or in a cluster of adjacent dwellings. This is sometimes called a joint family and it is very common in the third world and Africa in particular.

Whichever form a family takes it is an educative institution that contributes a lot to community development and the society at large.

ii. **Functions of the Family as an Educative Institution**

Different scholars could classify the functions of the family in different ways, but in the final analysis the functions are the same or inter-related with great values and norms attached. Some functions of the family are primary, while others are secondary. Thomas, and Anderson, (1972:266- 268), classified the functions of the family as follows: Reproduction, Socialization, Conferring of scribed status, Providing companionship, Affection and Intimacy; the control of sexual relations, Providing social control, Promoting economy and Transmission of private property.

For the purpose of this research the functions of the family in the learning process can be classified or grouped into five broad headings: the Economics, Morality, History, Health care and Religion.

a. **Economic Learning**

Naturally the young ones and the adults continuously learn the people's economic pattern. To guarantee the survival of any group the process and the means of living must be passed on from one generation to another. Traditional family is an all embracing economic unit producing almost whatever the family needed for survival. The members of the family were all engaged in the family industry. The family is a unit of production and the center of economic activities. Because of the extended family system the socio-economic life of the people extends beyond the nuclear family circle to the wider groups, that is why there is a communalistic life.

Mode of production of goods and services and. division of labour and assignment of roles according to sex and age are learnt firstly from the family. Instantly by birth the child joins the economic organization of the family. For instance if the occupation of the family of a child is farming, black smiting, weaving and trading, by birth the child automatically gets involved in the profession.

Though the importance of the family as an economic unit has been lessened as most of the goods of consumption including water are purchased ready made from the market, still some family economic activities are still maintained by many families. Commenting on this changing pattern of economic life of the family, Maciver, and Page, (1959:264) emphasized, "That members of the modern family do not work together as they did in the old family, because they are engaged in different activities outside the home"

Because of technology and modernization there is a change or deflation in family economic organization making it possible for members of the family engaging in different professions.

b. **Moral Education Function**

Respect for elders, senior members of the lineage, family and the bilateral kinship, groups and the good conduct in the public are strictly taught in the family. It is the duty of the parent to teach their children to conform to the moral standard of the community. Okafor, et al (1987:31) writing on the essentiality of children's moral education emphasized that many scholars would definitely agree that an essential part of the education of the children and adolescents in promoting their development as moral being is by helping them to become more charitable, considerate, and responsible to the society which form important part of their general education. Every member of the family is known by his or her moral tone, children are taught by their parents and elderly persons to emulate the virtue of the group.

Inkless, (1964:35) writing on moral education of the children emphasized that even though their parents are likely to have slight different socialization experience yet there is no much fear of the . child being contaminated, considering the family influence.

In any case group life is very important and since this determines group morals, it is therefore an obligation of the family to guide their children from bad association. There is always spasmodic moral instruction in every family. Families refrain their children from what is generally regarded as "bad" or "forbidden conduct".

Okeem, (1982:28) summarized moral educational role of the family by saying that “the primary objective of traditional African Education for Children and adolescent is character molding, and moral qualities are constantly demanded, examined, adjudged and sanctioned.

c. **Historical and Citizenship Education**

Stories, norms and the customs of the people are taught to the children mostly by their parents, especially mothers with whom they spend most of their impressionistic years. Children always accompany their father to family meetings, village meetings, religious observance and or any of the many social ceremonies, in the communities. Through participation and involvement the children learn histories and observe different roles of the citizens.

Okeem (1982:27) writing on the role of the family in educating their children through stories explained that in traditional African society, there are evenings sessions of story-telling in which the adults and children had their memory exercised and learnt something of the accepted techniques of communication as well as absorbing the mythological or historical content of the stories. He further emphasized that learning in the family is not only through story-telling but through "various types of political council meetings whether of elders or of a large community and speeches in these meetings were often formal exposition of history, oral literature and political and social ideas".

The children who always stay with their elderly parents or relatives or who accompany them in a wider gathering learn more from these opportunities provided; and that is why the young ones who had these opportunities of staying with the elders always have proverbs in stock for their trade.

d. **Learning Health Care**

Health is said to be wealth, and a healthy society is a wealthy society. In recognition of this fact every family craves to maintain a healthy body and surroundings. The traditional African society maintains healthy body through the use of herbs, consultations of oracles, fortunetellers, witches and wizards and use of deco rants. Family health is paramount in every society. Customs and traditions emphasize need for decent and clean surroundings.

Along the line the children imitate these approaches to family health by their parents. Some local herbs are common to every household and the parents educate their children on how and when to use such herbs. Some children whose parents are herbalists take to their parent's profession through participatory learning. The children learn the causes and treatment of some ailments in the family.

Apart from personal health, community health is equally learned from the family particularly in the areas of sanitation and simple hygiene. Children are taught how to clean their teeth every morning, wash their faces and hand before leaving the compound in the morning. The children are taught to take the cooking utensil to the streams and riverbanks for washing, especially the girls, and sweeping of the compounds. These and lots more are learnt in the family.

e. **Religious Education**

Religion and the modes of worshiping are equally learnt in the family. A typical traditional African family is a religious unit and each member family having their own deity, worshipped by no other but by the members only, and they perform rites at home. Furthermore, the traditional family with its deity constitute educational unit where all knowledge and skills as well as techniques of worshiping and rituals are passed on children by their parents.

It is obvious that a member or members of the family initiate most of the children into a particular religious group. Initiation ceremony for boys into the masquerade cult for instance is a learning process spearheaded by the male member of the family, which is an extension of learning to a wider society.

In traditional African society where the father or a senior member of the family initiates his son into masquerade or any other cult is a manifestation of the aspiration of the parents to expose their child to greater learning's beyond the four walls of the family, hi the present day Nigeria, the religion of the parents automatically becomes the religion of the child at least at early parts of the child's life.

iii. **The Process of Learning in the Family**

Generally speaking most learning in the society is predominantly informal and non-formal. It is non-formal because according to Fafuwa, in Okeem, (1982:28), Children learned by doing, that is to say, the children and the adolescent were engaged in participatory education through ceremonies, rituals, initiation, recitation and demonstration.

Learning in the family, whether informal or non-formal takes the following processes

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a. *Direct Instruction:* Commonest way of teaching and learning in the family is through direct instruction. Direct instruction consist mainly verbal instructions by the family members directing the child on what to do and what not to do at any point in time.

This direct instructional means of learning starts from infancy, through adolescent to adulthood. The parents are always guiding and directing their child throughout their life. Though more of discursive than instructive at adulthood.

b. *Story Telling:* Story Telling is a common practice in traditional African society where knowledge is imparted to the young ones by the members of the family and beyond. Some stories are real while others are fictions by the wise men in the society to convey morality, bravery, wisdom and values embedded in the community. The laws and norms, fears, greatness, aspiration, traditions, values and history of the family and the community at large are relayed through story telling.

Story telling always takes place .at the leisure hours especially at night. The elders, parents, the senior members of the family and the children usually tell and listen to stories.

c. *Meeting and Occasions:* There are certain traditional occasions, which warrant the companies of some children such as Ozo title taking in Igbo Communities of South Eastern Nigeria, the children seize the opportunities to learn from the wider society. Children also learn accidentally from discussion in the family.

d. *Observations:* Children are very imitative. They are always very observant of what takes place in the family. More so, they have a retentive memory. They learn by what they see and they carry it along through adulthood. Through observation the child copies the attitudes and behaviors of me members of the family. They are always watchful and would always demonstrate what they observed on their parents in the house.

e. *Participatory' Learning:* Closely related to observation is participatory learning. It is generally accepted that we learn more by doing. The females in the family perform some domestic activities with their mother, and through participation they learn faster. In the same vain the male counterparts learn a lot too by accompanying their father to the farm building huts, black- smiting, trading and other masculine activities. All these constitute the process in which child learns from the family institution

iv. **The Implications of Family Education to community Development**

Precisely, the teachings and learning in the community is for the general well being of the community where the family is located. It therefore, implies that learning in the family is a transmission of what is worthwhile for the survival of society from generation to generation. Development of any society depends on the level of unity and cooperation, economic standard, education attainment and the entire social relationship existing in the community. All these have implication to community development, in the following ways:-

1. Motivation

The Parents at home commonly apply motivational strategies, in different forms like praises and gifts. The children are used to it and they grow up to adulthood with this habit. The community development workers should adopt the. motivational strategies while working with individuals and groups in community development activities.

All the levels of Government should equally realize that by assisting communities in any form like technical, financial and material resources will motivate these communities to engage in more developmental activities.

2. Self Reliant Activities

It was pointed up earlier in the preceding discussions that family is an economic unit. Each family strives for self-reliance and the children are groomed along this line of family survival strategies. The children are oriented towards contributing to the survival of the family through division of labour and role assignments.

Community development policy-makers and the development workers should formulate development policies, which emphasizes and encourages self-reliance. When the major programmes and policies of government on community development activities is self- reliance most of the communities should endeavour to be less dependent.

3. Participatory Development

Family encourages the participation of every member of the family in both economic and social

matters. Every activity by and for the family is shared amongst them. In the same vain community development practitioners should adopt participatory approach as the gospel of community development. Members of the community should be given equal opportunity in policy formulation, planning, implementation, research, monitoring and evaluation. It is only when the members of the community are given a fairly good opportunity to participate that they can contribute substantially in the development programmes.

4. Leadership in Community Development Programmes

Respect for the elders, senior members of the family lineage, leaders, groups and general good conduct are taught in the family. It is also believed that morality such as charity, considerate, tolerant, honest, and impartiality are taught in the family.

These great virtues taught in the family are very necessary for general support, submissiveness and cooperation with the leaders in community development activities.

Conclusion

The background of the family has a great effect on the child's learning. More so, the structure of the family is a factor that contributes in shaping the learning process in the family.

Nonetheless, the limitation not with standing family is a very important medium of learning, considering the relationship between the parents and the children and the duration of the learning, which extends from infancy to adulthood. Learning in the family is motivational, self-reliant, and participatory, which forms parts of community development principles that community development workers should not overlook.

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