

**NON-LITERARY EDUCATION IN HAUSALAND: AN ATTEMPT TOWARDS
COMPREHENDING A CONCEPT OF A SOCIETY'S SYSTEM OF EDUCATION
FOR LIFE***

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to help us to build a conceptual framework for analysis in educational system of the Hausa people, as well as raise specific and general issues of socio-historical significance. Considering such aim, the article also hopes to further contribute information on the processes or patterns in which Non-Literary education was and is still being disseminated for practical use by the Hausa society, hitherto, not a fully explored area.

Introduction

Every society, whether simple or complex, has its own system for training and educating its youth, and education for the good life has been one of the most persistent concerns of men throughout history. However, the goal of education and the method of approach may differ from place to place, nation to nation and people to people (Fafunwa, 1974).

To reconstruct the history of Non-Literary education in Hausaland is to be involved in the rigorous study of the complex system of training youth, methods of approach as well as the desired goals meant to be achieved. The term "non-literary" is what in many respects could be referred to as "traditional", "indigenous" or "informal" system of education in Hausaland and Africa in general. Non-literary education therefore, does not conform to the written method type of Islam or colonial West, which are relatively recent phenomena

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introduced into Hausaland and other parts of Africa. Its nature therefore, made it to be labeled with several criticisms by writers. Fafunwa (1974), stated that because of its non-conformity with the Westernized system, some less well-informed writers considered it "primitive", even "savage and barbaric". For instance, the Christian Missionaries' inability to comprehend the concept of non-literary education with the traditional way of life of African peoples made them to term it "primitive" and "barbaric" (Brown and Hiskett, 1975). In their usual stereo-type, Brown and Hiskett, referred to non-literary education as being concerned mainly with "coherence and the maintenance of the community" as opposed to the Western type, which according to them is solely for the "development of the community" (Brown and Hiskett, 1975). At this juncture one begins to contemplate that at what level or point of comprehension does "education for development" on the one hand, and education for coherence and maintenance of the community" on the other meet or separate, as long as the conceptual and practical aspect of it all applies to development, and in more respects applicable only to human society and not animals. Thus, it is no wonder then when Adams (1974) wittingly observed that in whatever form, system, method or otherwise one perceives education (i.e. literary or non-literary), it should be seen to mean nothing other than for "development" in any society in so far it is human as is reflected in the analysis on Hausaland following the description of its geographical setting.

Hausaland – The Geographical Setting

The geographical description covers the *Kasar Hausa* (i.e. Hausaland). Simply it refers to the area which has the largest concentration of Hausa who speak the language as their mother tongue. In other words, the emphasis is on the area covered historically by the former or pre-Jihad Hausa States (or some of the Emirates of former Northern Nigeria). A considerable portion of Hausa speakers are also found in present-day Republic of Niger in West Africa. The boundary of this region has approximately been defined as starting from "River Ka in the south Turunku (Old Zazzau) and Bimin Kudu in the south-east, Garun Gabas near Hadejia and Damagaram (Zinder) in the east, Azelik mountains well to the north of Niger-Rima confluence in the west" (Adamu, 1980-81; 1976). Except the differences in the naming of points, Smith's (1976) approximate description of Hausa territory also agrees with the one defined by Adamu (1976). This territory has in fact, remained down to the present except some adjustments to its frontiers, which was occasioned by the intrusion of European colonial enterprises in Africa.

Hausaland extends roughly from Latitude 10° South to 20° North and from Longitude 10° West to 4° East. High temperature is experienced almost throughout the year because of the latitudinal position of the region between the Equator and the Tropic of Cancer. Two

air masses form over the territory (i) a cold, dry and dusty wind from the Sahara Desert known as Harmattan, which reaches extent in January and goes as far as the Atlantic Ocean, and (ii) a warm and humid air bringing rain from the southern Atlantic Ocean. Rainfall is experienced in one season varying from seven to four months while the dry season becomes severe. The total annual rainfall decreases from roughly 40" in the south to less than 10" in the north at the Sahara borders (Mabogunje, 1976). The vegetation is that of the Sudan and Sahel Savannah which is characterized by open grassland, short grasses and sparse bushes with an almost absence of trees at the Sahara borders in the north. This Sudan-Sahel Savanna has significantly an historical role in West Africa especially in the movement and fusion of ideas, which characterized the human activities (Mabogunje, 1976; Udo, 1980). The openness of the region as well affords an intensive agricultural activity, such as the cultivation of cereals (corn, millet, wheat, maize etc), cotton, groundnut, tubers and rearing of beasts of burden (donkey, horses) and livestock (cattle, goats, sheep and chicken). Another significant feature is trade, manufacturing, as well as extraction of minerals such as iron-ore, which is widely distributed, salt in the Kebbi Valley and alluvial gold. Similarly, centralized political structures (i.e. the old Hausa States) with a high level of sophistication had emerged and played major roles in the region. It is within this geographical setting that Non-Literary education (*Sanin gargajiya*) continued to be given for a considerable period of antiquity to the present as analysed below.

Non-Literary Education: A Conceptual Framework for Analysis

Surveying the Literature

It seems not much has been written on this subject of Non-Literary education in Hausaland. Most of the works so far done on Hausaland seemed to have paid attention more to describing and analyzing the social, political, religious and economic issues of the people. This attitude consequently resulted into neglecting the history of Non-Literary education in the area which is the sum-total aspect of development that had kept the society moving from time immemorial to the present. Where, however, something on education is written in Hausaland it is often found to be on the colonial rather than pre-colonial period (Fafunwa, 1980; Brown and Hiskett, 1975; Ozigi and Ocho, 1981). The general dearth is seen however, not to have resulted from lack of materials, but assumingly from the antique nature of the subject and the period involved. The situation has however, not stopped some scholars to touch on the significance of non-literary education in Hausaland and other parts of Africa (Fafunwa, 1974; Callaway, 1975; Bartels, 1975). The work that immediately comes to our mind is that of Tibenderana (1980) titled "Some Aspects of Traditional Education in Northern Nigeria" and this study

reasonably provides a good starting point to any major work on traditional education. The work of Jaggar (1973) on Kano City Blacksmith though has indirectly raised issues on non-literary education, nevertheless, has concentrated mainly on distribution, structure and organization. Furthermore, it throws light on some aspects of economic education such as the apprenticeship system. The article by Leoni and Prichett (1978) also dealt with the traditional Hausa pottery industry in Zaria City. Though limited in scope, the article incorporated trends of production, commercialization of the product and apprenticeship system generally found in many parts of Hausaland (Leoni and Prichett, *ibid.*) Another book written in Hausa language titled *Labaru Na Da Da Na Yanzu*, published by N.N.P.C., also contains a Chapter devoted to the description of several economic activities in Hausaland. As regards how the education is transmitted the accounts remained silent (NNPC, 1970). A considerable insight could also be drawn from a study by Ferguson based on the Imam Umaru's Description of Hausaland in the 19th Century (Ferguson, 1978). The Chapter by Smith is also a good preamble in understanding some aspects of non-literary education in Hausaland, especially on economy, the theory of government and society (Smith, 1976). The two works by Smith namely, *Government in Zazzau* (1960) and *The Affairs of Daira* (1978) had dealt with the role of government in the Hausa society and therefore, have provided us with some insight into the political education, theories of government and its practice in pre-colonial and colonial Hausaland. Most recently, a study has been concluded on the "State and the Economy" of Kano by Mahadi (1982). In this study, considerable information are found on agriculture, commerce and manufacturing industries in Kasar Kano. The information on non-literary education is however, indirectly reflected through description of some crafts. The work of Greenberg (1966) and Barkow (1970) on the other hand, discusses a lot on the social and religious education which prevails among the Maguzawa of Kasar Kano and Zazzau respectively. The Maguzawa are a non-Islamised Hausa-speaking population widely distributed throughout Hausaland. In the case of Republique du Niger the works of Djibo Hamani titled *Contribution a L'Etude de L'Histoire des Etudes Hausa L'Adar Precoloniale (Republique du Niger)* and that of Nicole Echard, *L'Experience du Passe: Histoire de la Societe Paysanne Hausa de L'Adar*, are important. These works discussed series of historical activities of the Hausa-speaking population in the region of Adar in the Republique du Niger. With this brief literature survey and more extensive research it is hoped that a significant conceptual picture as attempted herein would emerge and continue to be build upon by others.

Building up the Concept

The word “education” eventhough subject to various definitions by writers carries one central pointer with it, which is “development”. This term “development” if never mentioned at least the idea implied by it is always present (Adams, 1974) irrespective of curriculum, methods or organization, by any group of people in the world. In another contribution the term education, “can be viewed as including all communicating of knowledge and shaping of values; in this sense it is synonymous with socialization” (Anderson, 1968)). As for Barrow and Milburn (1990) however, the word education should not be reduced to the name of a particular activity or process that it should be “applied generically to a number of different activities and processes”. Their argument rests with the opinion that education as it exists in concept and practice does not actually have to take place in compartmentalized situations and nor should it necessarily require teachers as critics would want us to believe. In the case of Bennaars et al. (1994), their concept of education also was one that “does not ‘pick out’ any specific process simply involving imparting of information, presentation of knowledge or engagement of interest. Neither is it tied to the acquisition of specific trade skills. Rather, it is a process which ‘picks out’ general conditions or guiding criteria to which all particular processes and activities of teaching and learning out to conform”. So, when the aggregation of all these activities and processes of general application are taking place for the purpose of development and within given various historical settings, then, History itself is for development of such arena of education. This is because History is the collective responsibility of people’s actions in their given society as inherited from past to the present whose awareness serve as guide-posts for development of present and the future of the society. In this light both “history” and “education” are concerned with the development of the human society since it is not static. Therefore, to reconstruct the history of non-literary education in Hausaland is to talk about social, political, religious and economic experiences of the people. The phrase “non-literary education” refers to what is sometimes called “traditional”, “indigenous” or “informal” education by some writers. Whatever phrase is applied the meaning is the same, because the concept is employed not to mean “timelessness” or “static” nature of the Hausa society but rather to qualify an educational system that has not been involved in the art of reading or writing during the past centuries to the present. If this is so, non-literary education then could be defined as a prime form of education that is systematically devised by not only the Hausa and the rest of African society, but by all other human societies in order to impart knowledge in all its facets for the development of (i) its members and (ii) realization of some common goals of the community.

In Hausaland, non-literary education in general has some common features that can be distinguished as its set of aims and objectives. These include socialization of the young as a member of the community; development of character; inculcation of respect for elders and those in position of authority; development of intellectual skills; acquisition of specific vocational training and management of practical task of day-to-day living; development of sense of belonging and active participation in all family and community affairs and finally, full comprehension, appreciation, defending and promotion of the cultural heritage of the community in its totality (Tibenderana, 1981; Forde, 1975; Dzobo, 1975; Ottaway, 1966).

The methodology employed to realize the social objectives is through child socialization, utilization of age-grades, game playing, observation of adults and assumption of adult activities with more and more autonomy being exercised by the member (Tibenderana, 1981; Dzobo, 1975, Callaway, 1975; Bartels, 1975). It is a process that keeps recurring but with modifications in some aspects as one traditional society comes into contact with another. The nett result of the contact will be the reception of ideas by one or both, thereby effecting modification and adaptation. The foregoing discussion is however, not without working definitions such as social, religious, political and economic (vocational) education which undoubtedly are meant to fit in as specific analysis to the general concept defined. They are as follows:

- i. **Social Education:** By saying social education, we meant that process of socialization in which a member of a given community is internalized with the norms, codes of behaviour and all other aspects of the society's culture right from childhood to adult stage. In Hausaland and as in any other parts of Africa, social education was effectively implemented in real life situations. In the home, at the farm and during ceremonial occasions, the child is constantly being made aware of the relationships which cement the family or the community together. The child is also able to define his/her own relationship with the older members of the family or community. Specific role tasks within the family and the community are closely defined to each and every member for execution and continuous function of the wider community.
- ii. **Religious Education:** As regards religious education it simply refers to imparting of knowledge of spiritual nature to both the less and the more concerned members of the community. In other words, it is the inculcation of the set of beliefs, taboos, appeasement practices as well as initiation rites of the community's religion in the minds of its members. It involves identification of the communal god or gods and giving each its right place in the spiritual hierarchy. In traditional

Hausa setting and even in other African communities, this is essentially an aspect of socialization right from childhood stage. Where the education becomes more intense, detailed and arduous, is when it concerns the shaping of the young specifically to priesthood. In this case symbols, signs, verbal incantations, sacred rites and esoteric meanings of the religion are all rigorously taught to the young so as to follow the right footpath of the reigning priest(s). In Hausaland when Islam and its influences are kept aside, the religion practiced even before and throughout the period of our study has been paganism.

Paganism has simply been described as the belief and practices of the heathen. The religion involves a more elaborate worship and the ancestral cults of the dead. The souls of the dead human take the shape of spirits known as *iskoki* (sing. *iska*). According to the belief, the *iskoki* are nearer and quicker in approach and serve as a better medium with the supernatural as far as the affairs of men are concerned. The *iskoki* are said to be numerous and each bestowed with its special powers i.e., of good and evil) and each operates within its own grade (of *iskoki*). The spirit Inna, also known as *Uwa* (the mother) represented the spirit of the earth and is central figure of the *iskoki* pantheon (Usman, 1981). Inna is often referred to with a phrase "Inna Uwa, Doguwa mai bada mama" (mother, the tall one who provides milk) to all and sundry. The *iskoki* are believed to inhabit animate and inanimate objects (Opoku, 1978). The method of invocation of the *iskoki* is through divination process called *bori* during which a human being becomes possessed by spirits in succession (Greenberg, 1966; Barkow, 1970). The *bori* constituted a cult of itself with the Chief Overseer known as *Sarkin Bori* (Chief of *Bori*). Each family head (*maigida*) is said to function as a priest of his own compound. The question of separate totems or taboos (*kangida*) is therefore tied to these individual family religious peculiarities. Each clan also has its own overall priest within the traditional religious set-up.

- iii. **Political Education:** In every community political education is very important in so far as law and order and general development of the community are desirable at all times. Political education is hereby defined as a process of political socialization whereby a member of the community is taught to give his/her loyalty to the political system they belonged to by accepting the authority of those in power. Among the Hausa and other African communities political education is imparted to the young indirectly at home, when they first learn to obey and accept the authority of their parents. By the time they become adults they generalize this learning from parental to political authority figures chosen by the society.

Politics centred around the *Sarki* (king). In other words it found expression in the institutionalized authority of the *Sarki*. The basis of authority and power then was the *Sarki's* control and use of instrument of force, distribution of offices as well as land. The extent of the authority and power depend on the circumstances in which any particular *Sarki* found himself. All state officials at least in theory derived their powers from the *Sarki* and exercised them on his behalf for the community. Exercising the power and authority of the *Sarki* involves the administration of the land. Hence, the day-to-day running of the central court, provinces and other satellites of the state came to be vested in the hands of several state functionaries with specialized skills (Usman 1981). It is in the course of executing these specialized duties for control of the resources that a lot of politicking is done. Example of such state functionaries were the tax collectors, occupational heads, messengers, etc. Even by the last half of the 15th century this administrative phenomenon was found to have developed a sophisticated system in some Hausa states of Katsina, Kano (Mahadi, 1982) Zazzau (Smith, 1960 and other parts later.

- iv. **Vocational Education:** On a general observation, the traditional Hausa economy from the earliest times to the present is found to be based on a "elaborate system of agriculture and manually operated industrial production geared to both home consumption and export (Adamu, 1978). It is this type of economy that the individual Hausa had been receiving technical education on for practical needs of the community. Hence, vocational education simply will be defined as the technical training which a traditional society gives to its members for control and share of its resources as well as production of goods and services. Vocational training in Hausaland as in many African communities was largely run on the apprenticeship system. The theoretical and the practical are all fused into the system during the period of training. Usually the youth are trained by their parents, relatives or master-craftsmen in some fields of friends in order to ensure discipline and concentration.

In agriculture, the training is strictly on the cultivation of the various crops planted, discrimination between fertile and non-fertile soil, explanation of climatic conditions, ridging, harvesting, storage; clearing of waste and production of manure (Fafunwa, 1974). The industry on the other hands refers to the application of labour services for (i) production, and (ii) improvement of the quality and life of the people on commercial basis. The first deals with iron-working, dyeing, weaving, pottery, smithing and other forms of mining technology. The second of course, includes mat-weaving, barbing, sewing dress-making and production of articles for religious services.

Conclusion

The relevance or success of a system of education is in the ways it serves the goals of the particular society. Therefore, the conceptualization of Non-Literary education as done above, is none other than an attempt to understand the type of artistic and technical education that produced the manpower which developed and sustained one of the advanced economies in pre-colonial Africa, that of Hausaland. And if, we are to believe that the production of manpower and sustenance of a particular community is by any measure controlled by its form of education, then the assertions (shown above) that absence of writing in any educational system does not indicate "closeness", "narrowness", or lack of development of the society as some scholars would want us to believe. The analysis provided is not in disregard to either the literary Islamic or Western education, but rather a stride to put the non-literary type in proper perspective. This is considered important especially where the making of policy-decisions and their execution by the government and other agencies concerned with the progress of education in general in Nigeria are involved. The overall discussion therefore, is a homage to African originality which we could not afford to neglect. If by this presentation, more questions than answers have been raised, then the article has succeeded in provoking more thoughts which stimulates further inquiries.

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