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INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION IN AFRICA

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Abstract:

Education is one of the major tools for socio-economic, political and cultural development of the human society. Whether formal or informal, education prepares the individual to live a meaningful life and contribute to the development the society. Consequently, for education to achieve the desired purpose, it must be one that springs from the lived experience of the people. However, Africa's educational system is hampered by the challenge of a single worldview and this I think is responsible for the slow progress in the development of her society. Much of the indigenous African knowledge systems such as initiation schools, indigenous games, agricultural systems, dance songs, storytelling, proverbs, etcetera that could help us to deal with our peculiar challenges as African remain untapped. The educational system in Africa and Nigeria in particular is too speculative and distant from the developmental challenges that are much desired for development of her society. We live in a fast-globalizing world where we have continuous interaction with different cultures of the world, yet most of our learning does not reflect this global culture but dominated by a single worldview or what I might call Eurocentric mentality. It is therefore imperative that we expand our knowledge and understanding of realities and learn from the diverse histories, cultures, and traditions of the world especially within the African domain. This is the task of intercultural philosophy. Through the method of textual and critical analysis, this study suggests that the integration of African indigenous knowledge system into the African educational system could be a panacea to the educational gap. It argues that the educational curricula should be more expansive to tackle the challenges of the insular and singular nature of the structure of education in Africa.

Keywords: *Education, Intercultural Philosophy, Western Educational System, Indigenous Knowledge System, African.*

Introduction

In the history of contemporary African philosophical speculations, scholars and African philosophers in particular, have tried to develop indigenous knowledge system geared towards authentic African development. These scholars believe that it is only an educational system that is rooted in the culture and live experience of the people that

can bridge the gap to authentic African development for sustainable community livelihood. This is however predicated on the *ceteris paribus* condition that for education to achieve its purpose, the educational system must be culturally relevant. That is, it must take into consideration the factors and culture operative in the individual's society. This fact is captured by Okpilike as he maintains that "there can be no meaningful and effective education [and by extension philosophy] in the absence of culture."¹ Therefore, the educational and philosophical processes that contributed to the transformation of different societies of the world are culturally delineated. Janis Ozolins makes this point more succinct:

Although philosophical antecedents are likely to have been more significant, there is no doubt that culture, values, language, and traditions influence the mature thought of philosophers. If this is so, then a more complete understanding of a particular philosopher demands immersion not only in his or her language, but also in his or her culture. Without this, it will not be possible to fully understand him or her.²

Hence, the philosophical and educational theories that constitute and contribute to the development of the human person and by extension, the human society carries with it the cultural framework of that particular society.

However, the European missionaries who introduced formal education into Africa had wished out of existence the cultures of the Africans even before they set their feet on the African soil. Western Education commonly referred to as the Whiteman's education has failed to integrate African cultural values into its curricula. Contrary to the ideal which expects education to transmit the cultural heritage of a society to successive generation, Western education has completely alienated Africans from their traditional values. The perceived superiority of the western culture which the Whiteman and the agents of western education claim, point to the fact that the non-integration of the African cultural values into western education in Africa was a deliberate attempt to disregard the identity of the people.

The Western worldview of "knowledge" according to them has, since its introduction in Africa, lacked an understanding of the holistic nature and approach of non-western ways of knowing and knowledge production, and as such cannot act as

¹ J. Ozolins. 'What in the World is Intercultural Philosophy? A Reflection.' In William Sweet (ed.) *What is Intercultural Philosophy? Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series I. Culture and Values, Volume 44*. The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy: (Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication, 2014), 29.

² J. Ozolins. 'What in the World is Intercultural Philosophy?' A Reflection. 19.

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catalyst to the authentic development that is much desired in the continent. The basic problem is that educational structures inherited from colonialism are based on cultural values different from those existing in most of the African indigenous societies. Even though some scholars have argued that there is no distinctive knowledge system that is peculiar to the African society, proponents of African indigenous knowledge (IKS) system have vowed to defend this. African scholars have in various degrees and intensity proffered one education system or the other as a viable means to authentic African development. For his part, Nkoondo (2012)³ argues that the western perception of African indigenous knowledge as mere repetition of practices without any theory to explain them is a depiction of western cultural and intellectual arrogance. The indigenous African knowledge system, according to these scholars, is community based. By African indigenous knowledge systems, these scholars mean non-western beliefs, practices, customs, worldviews, including informal forms of education. These knowledge systems, according to Hassan Kaya and Yonah Seleti have been contrasted with global dominant western knowledge systems produced in research and academic institutions.⁴ They point to the indigenous knowledge system like initiation schools, indigenous games, agricultural systems, dance songs, storytelling, proverbs, etcetera. Consequently, Kaya and Seleti identified the problems of integrating Africa's indigenous knowledge system to the African perception of reality thus:

The lack of relevance is perpetuated by the continued social, economic and technological ties between African countries and their former colonizing powers. Higher education in Africa is one of the main tools used to foster this bond, rather than reduce it. Reforms in African education are still conceived and implemented within the framework of this relationship, by marginalizing the integration of African cultural values and indigenous languages into the education system at all levels.⁵

Kaya and Seleti went further to affirm that the situation is compounded by the fact that links between African institutions themselves are largely neglected in favour of

³M. Nkondo. 'Indigenous African Knowledge Systems in a Poly epistemic World: The Capabilities Approach and the Translatability of Knowledge Systems.' Paper presented at the Southern African Regional Colloquium on Indigenous African Knowledge Systems: Methodologies and Epistemologies for Research, Teaching, Learning and Community Engagement in Higher Education. Howard College Campus: University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2012.

⁴H. Kaya, & Y. Seleti. 'African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Relevance of Higher Education in South Africa.' *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 12(1): 2013, 32.

⁵H. Kaya, & Y. Seleti. 'African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Relevance of Higher Education in South Africa.', 32.

partnerships with the western countries. This is manifested in the academic and research partnership between African and western institutions than among African institutions themselves. Besides the unhealthy partnership between African institutions and their Western counterparts, these scholars bemoan the fact that the language of the African researchers is still saddled with Western hegemony. They recommend the use and appreciation of the local languages to the call for authentic education through Indigenous knowledge system.

Therefore, this essay argues that there is an urgent need to re-evaluate African educational system and expand her curricula offered in schools especially in Nigeria, if we must remain as a people and if we must advance and assert ourselves distinctively in the world for meaningful development. It went further argue that intercultural philosophy of education can contribute to the integration of Africa's Indigenous knowledge system to her education curricula and endeavours.

Intercultural Philosophy and Education

I will begin this section by acknowledging the assertion of John Ozolins who maintains that "philosophers are shameless in borrowing ideas from not just their own philosophical antecedents, but also from cultures and traditions not their own."⁶ He argues that Arthur Schopenhauer was influenced by Buddhism and that Ludwig Wittgenstein, who was influenced by Schopenhauer, was also influenced by Buddhism. According to him, that Buddhism is an Eastern religion not practiced by very many Germans in the time of Schopenhauer or Wittgenstein indicates quite obviously that they borrowed ideas from a culture and a religion not their own. Thus, human beings have been borrowing ideas, technology, values, and sometimes entire systems of thought from each other since different cultures first came in contact with each other.

There has been attempt by scholars and philosophers from different cultures or traditions to systematically and actively engage one another in dialogue. This is because of the contact, at least, a mutual awareness among cultures. This contact has led to the different encounters people have had with a wide range of practices, cultures, religions, and, particularly, of wisdom or philosophical traditions. This has led to the proposal of the project of intercultural philosophy - A philosophy that attempts to have philosophers from different cultures or traditions actively engage one another – "and to do so in a way that shows not only mutual respect, but also the recognition that one's own philosophical views are not complete, that there are other, legitimate philosophical

⁶J. Ozolins. 'What in the World is Intercultural Philosophy? A Reflection.', 21.

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views, and that one's own views may need a re-articulation or even revision.”⁷ This project of intercultural or comparative philosophy, at least, has precedent in religious, literary and, of course, political studies.

The project of intercultural philosophy has its roots in the philosophy and project of Masson-Oursel who proposed the development of a comparative philosophy – “the general examination of the ways in which human beings of all races and cultures reflect upon their actions and act upon their reflections.” While Masson-Oursel argues, perhaps paradoxically, that “there is no truth that is not relative,” he went further to insist that it is by following a comparative approach or what he calls analogical approach that one can have a more “securely founded” scientific view. Thus, comparative philosophy is said to offer a “pure and universal positive science of analogy.”⁸ The project of intercultural philosophy according to Ram Adhar Mall stands for a process of emancipation from all types of centrism, whether European or non-European,” and that it seeks to exhibit “a philosophical attitude, a philosophical conviction that no one philosophy is the philosophy for the whole of humankind.”⁹ Even though Mall insists that the project or task of intercultural philosophy is not the same with comparative philosophy as portrayed by Masson-Oursel, he argues that the task of intercultural philosophy is to mediate between two ends as it can be found in different cultures and the universal philosophy which is not culturally bound itself.¹⁰ Intercultural philosophy becomes “the endeavour to give expression to the many and often marginalized voices of philosophy in their respective cultural contexts and thereby to generate a shared, fruitful discussion granting equal rights to all,” and its aim is to facilitate and develop a new and timely culture of a plurality of philosophical dialogues between thinkers from around the world”, what Wimmer called a “polylog.”¹¹

What nourishes the project of an intercultural philosophy according to Sweet is the fact of the existence (or – what he have called the “migration”) of ideas, texts, and

⁷W. Sweet. ‘The Project of Intercultural Philosophy’. In William Sweet (ed.) *What is Intercultural Philosophy? Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series I. Culture and Values, Volume 44*. The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, (Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication, 2014), 1.

⁸ L. Scorf. ‘Pragmatism and Social Ethics: An Intercultural and Phenomenological Approach.’ *Contemporary Pragmatism*, 5, 2005, 123.

⁹ R. A. Mall. *Intercultural Philosophy*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p. xii.

¹⁰R. A. Mall. *Intercultural Philosophy*, xii.

¹¹ F. M. Wimmer. ‘Intercultural Philosophy – An Overview.’, In *Satya Nilayam Chennai Journal of Intercultural Philosophy*, 1 (2002), 5.

the like, that have moved *from* one culture *into* another. According to him, we can think of the presence of Buddhist philosophy in China, Korea, and Japan – and more recently in North America and Europe. Thus, from an ‘original’ Buddhism in India, there has been a ‘migration’ – the development of ‘schools’ of Buddhism in different cultures. Many philosophies originating in the West seem similarly to have ‘migrated’ east and south; they have been introduced and, it would seem, have often been integrated and appropriated, into non-western cultures and traditions (e.g., in Africa, in the Indian sub-continent, and in China and Japan). We can think of the pragmatic effect that happened as a result of the introduction of British philosophy like empiricism, utilitarianism and idealism in the 19th and 20th centuries into India and the introduction of hermeneutics and postmodern thought into Asia.

The question is: What role can intercultural philosophy play in our theory of education? What is intercultural philosophy of education? In most of our university today, education is mostly focused on Western thought. This means that much of the available knowledge that could help us to deal with global challenges remain unused. And is not precisely education that should prepare us for the future or at least for its unpredictability? Trying to understand and master plural viewpoints is more democratic than applying the mainstream western perspective and offers a broader range of possible options to deal with an unpredictable future. This is why Renate Schepen maintains that “our classroom should be a reflection of this and prepare students for a society in which they will have to deal with different and sometimes conflicting worldviews. One needs to be educated not only about other cultures, therefore, but also about the accompanying attitude in which we can open ourselves to the other.”¹² Education not only reflects society but also influences its development. As such, schools have a role to play in the development of an intercultural society. While education cannot bear the sole responsibility for challenging racism and promoting intercultural competence, it has an important contribution to make in facilitating the development of the child’s intercultural skills, attitudes, values and knowledge. An intercultural education is valuable to all children in equipping them to participate in an increasingly diverse society. Equally, an education which is based on only one culture will be less likely to develop these capacities in children. This is why the Department of Education and Science Guidelines on Traveller Education in Primary Schools maintains that “young people should be enabled to appreciate the richness of a diversity of cultures and be

¹² R. Schepen. ‘Intercultural Philosophy and Education in a Global Society: Philosophical Divides are Dotted Lines.’ *Ethics and Education*. 1(12):2017, 97.

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supported in practical ways to recognize and to challenge prejudice and discrimination where they exist.”¹³ Thus, intercultural education is the education

... which respects, celebrates and recognizes the normality of diversity in all areas of human life. It sensitizes the learner to the idea that humans have naturally developed a range of different ways of life, customs and worldviews, and that this breadth of human life enriches all of us.¹⁴

The guidelines further stress that intercultural education aims to foster conditions conducive to pluralism in society, raise children’s awareness of their own culture and attune them to the fact that there are other ways of behaving and other value systems; develop respect for life-styles different from their own so that children can understand and appreciate each other. Intercultural education is a synthesis of the learning from multicultural and anti-racist education approaches. Renate Schepen further emphasizes the importance of intercultural education when he argues that “if classrooms would be plural spaces, people from different backgrounds could meet and learn from each other’s culture without placing one culture or philosophy higher than the other. This difference should be valued and reflected in the curricula by including philosophies from different cultures.”¹⁵ Thus, intercultural philosophy could be a meaningful antidote to the measure of singularity and insularity prevalent in Africa’s educational system and in particular Nigeria’s educational system as it helps us develop a sense of uniqueness and identity for optimal development.

Intercultural Philosophy: Implications for Education in Africa

There is this general tendency to believe that or pretend that all creativity and value originate from the European provenance. Every genuine and meaningful development is credited to the intellectual minds of the European continent. Africa and indeed other parts of the world have battled ceaselessly to project and self-assert themselves to the world only to be considered appendages to their European counterparts. This has been borne out of the fact that much of the history of Africa has been dominated by colonial occupation. This assertion is in line with the argument of Kwasi Wiredu in his 1980

¹³ ‘Intercultural Education in the Primary School. Enabling Children to respect and celebrate diversity, to promote equality and to challenge unfair discrimination. Produced by The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.’³

¹⁴ Intercultural education in the Primary School, 3

¹⁵ R. Schepen. ‘Intercultural Philosophy and Education in a Global Society: Philosophical Divides are Dotted Lines.’ 97.

essay, *Philosophy and African Culture*¹⁶ and in Mogobe Ramose's 1980 essay, *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*.¹⁷ These scholars argued that colonialism in Africa provided the framework for the organized subjugation of the cultural, scientific and economic life of many on the African continent. According to them, this subjugation impacted on African people's way of seeing and acting in the world and by extension their mode of knowing and doing. In fact, African identity, to all intents and purposes, became an inverted mirror of Western Eurocentric identity. This state of affairs gave birth to numerous attempts to reassert distinctively African ways of thinking and of relating to the world, and is expressed in more recent days in the call for an 'African Renaissance' in education. In the thoughts of Philip Higgs:

What is meant by the African Renaissance in education is, therefore, founded on the perception that the overall character of much of educational theory, practice and research in Africa is overwhelmingly either European or Eurocentric. In other words, it is argued by advocates of an African Renaissance in education such as Teffo (2000), Vilakazi (2002), and Seepe (2001b), that much of what is taken for education in Africa is in fact not African, but rather a reflection of Europe in Africa.¹⁸

The African Renaissance has also taken on a much greater significance in recent days with the call for the recognition of indigenous African knowledge systems. According to Higgs, the inference here is the distorted view that Africans possess little or no indigenous knowledge of value that can be utilized in the process of educational transformation. This same inference also presupposes, as is argued by protagonists of African Renaissance in education, that the norm for educational achievement and success for African children and students is that of Western European capitalist elitist culture, where the English language is sacralized, and the internalization of bourgeois European values is seen as the index of progress. Felix Okpilike demonstrated that if African wants to reassert herself distinctively for authentic development, she must recall back the cherished value system that was the hallmark of her identity which has been wiped off by European occupation of the African continent. In his essay entitled 'Western Education and the Neglect of African Cultural Values in the Nigerian School System', Okpilike outlined some of these values that have been undermined by western education to include: language, African names, African virtues such as honesty,

¹⁶ W. Kwasi. *Philosophy and African Culture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

¹⁷ M. Ramose, *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*. (Harare: Mond Books Publishers, 1980).

¹⁸ P. Higgs. 'African Philosophy and the Decolonization of Education in Africa: Some Critical Reflections.' 2.

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humility, loyalty, hard work, truth and respect, Warfare, marriage institutions and general moral values of the African continent.¹⁹ These are cherished indigenous African value systems that can portray the identity of the African persons and re-engineer the African minds to authentic African development. It is in response to this state of affairs that the call for an African Renaissance in education goes out, a call which insists that all critical and transformative educators in Africa embrace indigenous African world views and root their nation's educational paradigms in indigenous African socio-cultural and epistemological frameworks. This implies, according to Higgs, that 'all educational curricula in Africa should have Africa as their focus, and as a result be indigenous-grounded and orientated. Failure to do so, it is argued, will mean that education becomes alien, oppressive and irrelevant, as is seen to be the case with the legacy of colonial and neo-colonial education systems in Africa.'²⁰

The question that begs for answer at this juncture is: what are these cherished indigenous African educational systems that need to be engineered for authentic African development? African philosophers are confronted with the problem of establishing its own unique African order of knowledge. This appropriation of African identity in education theory and practice with reference to indigenous African knowledge systems is given voice by a number of scholars. This is the major demand of the struggle for a distinctive African system or philosophy by African philosopher that carries with it the seed of authentic African development. Or as Nabudere states, '[T]he struggle for African authentic development is about an epistemological revolution and struggle for knowledge production that satisfies the demands for cultural identity.'²¹ (12) A number of African scholars have identified these indigenous knowledge systems. Kaya and Seliti maintained that 'the unfortunate history of the continent which range from slavery, colonization to Apartheid has not completely wiped away the African intellectual, cultural and spiritual heritage.' According to them:

Indigenous institutions of knowledge production, conservation and sharing such as initiation schools, indigenous games, agricultural systems, dances and songs, storytelling, proverbs, et cetera, still remain pillars of indigenous African ways of knowing. The wealth of knowledge that still exists among the elders and other knowledge holders in African local communities

¹⁹ F. Okpilike. 'Western Education and the neglect of African Cultural values in the Nigerian School System.' *Journal of Education and Practice*, 3(14): 2012, 33.

²⁰ P. Higgs. 'African Philosophy and the Decolonization of Education in Africa.', 4

²¹ D. W. Nabudere. 'Imperialism, Knowledge Production and its Use in Africa.' *Global Security and Cooperation Quarterly*, 14, 2005, 12.

demonstrates the vibrant intellectualism to which African researchers and intellectuals should turn. It needs to be documented and shared with the youth for sustainability.²²

The above assertion is always the general mindset of the African ethno philosophers who maintain that the seed of African authentic existence and by extension, indigenous African knowledge system can only be sown in their cultural heritage. For example, M. P. Eboh argues that African proverbs are didactic and ethical in nature and they are preserved and served by the elders and other knowledge holders in African local communities. As an African, she believes that the Igbo proverbs as an embodiment of Igbo-African philosophy are precise and incisive, and if appropriately applied to the intellectual and moral developments of a child can serve as a tool to reprimand, discourage, instruct and correct or praise the growing child's derailing tendencies more intricately.²³ She defines Igbo proverb as "the wealth of knowledge which our forebears accumulated over the centuries."²⁴ Thus, proverb is one the African mode of knowing and conceptualizing reality.

Another African indigenous knowledge system is the initiation school. The initiation school is a cultural educational institution where initiates are taught the values inherent in social responsibility, discipline and acceptable conduct as well as more about their culture. According to Mabatho Sedibe, initiation school is a secret rite "where teenage boys are taught certain conducts and cultural beliefs, leading them to adulthood."²⁵ In terms of African religion and culture, initiation has a legal, spiritual and psychological significance. According to Elliot initiation school is known as "traditional education", "sex education", "education for life", "bush education", "secret societies" or "indigenous education."²⁶ Therefore, as one of the African indigenous system, initiation schools assist young boys to be responsible adults in their communities. Storytelling is also another most basic instrument to which the traditional African uses as a medium to expressively communicate an idea, relate a message or describe an event to one another. In African traditional setting, stories are told the youngsters to raise a high moral

²²H. Kaya, & Y. Seleti. 'African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Relevance of Higher Education in South Africa.', 33.

²³ M. P. Eboh. Eboh, M. P. *Witty Tales & Proverbs for Moral Renewal*. Port Harcourt: Pearl Publishers, 2015.

²⁴M. P. Eboh. *A Tapestry of Folklores, Insight and Proverbs*. Port Harcourt: Pearl Publishers, 2013, xvii.

²⁵ M. Mabatho. 'Exploring Traditional Male Initiates at An Initiation School in Limpopo Province, South Africa: Cultural Health Practices.' *Advances in Higher Education*, 3(1):2019.

²⁶ A. Elliot. *The Ndebele Art and Culture*. Unibook: Pretoria, 1989.

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standard, promote public enlightenment and civilized behavior, as well as produce a healthy economic environment. These stories are often told at moonlight by the elder to inculcate moral values in them – a veritable means of education of the young in the traditional society.

In all intent and purpose, African indigenous knowledge system emphasized the method of participatory approach²⁷ which incorporate the knowledge and opinions of local people in the planning and management of research activities in their own settings. These techniques according to Kaya and Seleti “avoid writing wherever possible, relying instead on the tools of oral communication like pictures, symbols, physical objects and group discourses.”²⁸ Giving credence to this African indigenous knowledge system Higgs maintained that “the call for an African Renaissance in education, seeks to demonstrate, how indigenous African knowledge systems can be tapped as a foundational resource for the socio-educational transformation of the African continent, and also how these indigenous African knowledge systems can be politically and economically liberating.”²⁹

Consequently, these scholars have equally argued that there are numerous structures and indigenous epistemological processes in the African continent that can contribute to the nurturing of the African indigenous educational system. For example, Appiah argues that “despite the diversity and extraordinary dynamism of the African continent that there are commonalities that unite the African experience.”³⁰ In the words of Diop, ‘... there is a profound cultural unity still alive beneath the deceptive appearance of cultural heterogeneity present in Africa which gives rise to certain commonalities in indigenous African knowledge systems.’³¹ One such commonality which is highlighted by Letseka is *communalism*. According to Letseka, the importance

²⁷T. Kudakwashe. ‘The African Oral Tradition Paradigm of Storytelling as a Methodological Framework: Employment Experiences for African communities in New Zealand.’ *In African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP) Proceedings of the 38th AFSAAP Conference: 21st Century Tensions and Transformation in Africa*, Deakin University, 28th-30th October, 2015 (Published February 2016), 5.

²⁸H. Kaya, & Y. Seleti. ‘African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Relevance of Higher Education in South Africa.’, 32.

²⁹P. Higgs. ‘African Philosophy and the Decolonization of Education in Africa: Some Critical Reflections.’, 4.

³⁰K. A. Appiah. *Necessary Questions: An introduction to philosophy*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1989), 47.

³¹C. A. Diop, *Towards the African Renaissance: Essays in African Culture and Development*. (London: Karnak House, 1996), 7.

of communality to traditional African life cannot be overemphasized.³² This is because community and belonging to a community of people constitute the very fabric of traditional African life. Higgs argues that:

unlike the Western liberal notion of the individual as some sort of entity that is capable of existing and flourishing on its own, unconnected to any community of other individuals, not bound by any biological relationships or socioeconomic, political and cultural relationships, obligations, duties, responsibilities and conventions that frame and define any community of individuals, the communal conception of the individual is strongly emphasized in most traditional African settings.”³³

Mbiti portrays this communal African heritage thus: “Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say, ‘I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.’”³⁴ Menkiti re-echoed this assertion when he argues that:

A crucial distinction thus exists between the African view of man and the view of man found in Western thought: in the African view it is the community which defines the person as a person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory.³⁵

Higgs argues that the philosophical, sociological and political elements inherent in the discourse of community in Africa are directed at highlighting the role of community knowledge in educational research. He went on to argue that the significance of indigenous African knowledge systems in educational theory, practice and research is centred in the question of communalism. This is because the core characteristic then of African community-based research is participatory research, that is, a form of research that seeks to enhance the capacity of the community members to participate in the process that shapes research approaches and intervention strategies. The active cooperation and participation of members within the community are, therefore, the essential components of African community-based research. In African community-based research, the community is recognized as a primary stakeholder and actively participates in determining the ends to which research resources are dedicated. That is,

³² M. Letseka.. ‘African Philosophy and Educational Discourse.’, in: P. Higgs, N. C. G. Vakalisa, T.V. Mda& N.T. Assie-Lumumba (eds), *AfricanVoices in Education* (Cape Town, Juta),2000, 181.

³³ P. Higgs. ‘African Philosophy and the Decolonization of Education in Africa’, 4

³⁴ T. Mbeki. ‘Opening Speech, Conference on Education for African Renaissance in the Twenty-first Century.’ (Johannesburg, South Africa, 6 December, 1999), 108.

³⁵ I. A. Menkiti. ‘Person and Community in African Traditional Thought’, in: R. A. Wright (ed.), *African Philosophy: An introduction* (Washington DC, University Press of America, I. A. 1979, 156.

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the community becomes an active agenda setter for science and technology rather than just a passive data provider and consumer of research results.³⁶ This mindset has led some African intellectuals to deploying some themes that are capable of authentic African existence and identity. For example, the themes of ‘education for reliance and liberation’ underscore Julius Nyerere’s ideal of African education. According to Nyerere, Africa has distinctive epistemological and indigenous educational system capable of authentic and meaningful development of the African people. As such, education has to reflect and sustain national priorities, aim and aspiration of the people. Thus, his concept of *Ujamaa* is sufficient enough for authentic African identity. This is because *Ujamaa* is a political and cultural system which ensures that the people care for each other’s welfare. Therefore, by caring for each other’s welfare, authentic development by way of knowing and doing is assured.

The African concept of *Ubuntu* is another element of the philosophical, sociological and political elements inherent in the discourse of community for authentic African development. Letseka observes that traditional Africa morality is known for its concern with human welfare, and that this finds expression in the African ethic of *Ubuntu* which means humanness³⁷. Gyekye argues that:

... if one were to look for a pervasive and fundamental concept in African socio-ethical thought generally—a concept that animates other intellectual activities and forms of behaviour, including religious behaviour, and provides continuity, resilience, nourishment, and meaning to life—that concept would most probably be humanism.³⁸

Humanism according to Higgs refers to a philosophy that sees human needs, interests and dignity as of fundamental importance and concern. To be human is to affirm one’s humanity by recognizing the humanity of others. This is why Letseka argues that individuals who strive for and fully embrace the notion of *ubuntu* as their goal are driven by a humanist concern for treating others with fairness. While acknowledging the assertion of Ramose that in “trying to understand the concept of *Ubuntu* we should recognize that *ubuntu* is the root of African philosophy. The be-ing of an African in the

³⁶ P. Higgs. ‘African Philosophy and the Decolonization of Education in Africa: Some Critical Reflections.’, 9.

³⁷ M. Letseka.. ‘African Philosophy and Educational Discourse.’, 182–184.

³⁸ K. Gyekye. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 158.

universe is inseparably anchored upon *Ubuntu*.”³⁹ Higgs equally maintains that *Ubuntu* is the wellspring flowing with African ontology and epistemology.⁴⁰

To collaborate the project of African Renaissance in education and by extension intercultural philosophy of education for the production of a distinctive African indigenous educational system that is traditionally African, Higgs went on to argue that African community-based education research and practice acknowledges the validity of other non-African knowledge systems and the need to integrate indigenous knowledge systems with these. This is what he calls *trans-traditional vantage*⁴¹ which I will equally maintain that it is still within the project of intercultural philosophy. With the concept of ‘trans-traditional vantage the very core of African traditional values will be appreciated and intercultural philosophy of education is a panacea.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to use Tabo’s assertion to corroborate Mbeki’s position thus:

If the next century is going to be characterized as a truly African century, for social and economic progress of the African people, the century of durable peace and sustained development in Africa, then the success ... is dependent on the success of our education systems.⁴²

Therefore, the project of intercultural philosophy and by extension, the philosophy that truly recognizes the cherished indigenous ethical, socio-cultural and political knowledge system is the key to an authentic African educational system that we desire – the key to authentic African development and technological innovation.

Conclusion

The measure of singularity and insularity inherent in Africa’s educational system is one of the many challenges facing Africa’s educational system and by extension, authentic Africa’s development. The liberation of Africa and its peoples from centuries of racially discriminatory colonial rule and domination has far-reaching implications for educational thought and practice. The transformation of educational discourse in Africa requires a philosophical framework that respects diversity, acknowledges lived experience and challenges the hegemony of Western forms of universal knowledge.

³⁹ M. Ramose. *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*. 21.22.

⁴⁰ P. Higgs. ‘African Philosophy and the Decolonization of Education in Africa: Some Critical Reflections.’ 11.

⁴¹ P. Higgs. ‘African Philosophy and the Decolonization of Education in Africa: Some Critical Reflections.’ 9

⁴² M. Tabo. ‘Opening Speech, Conference on Education for African Renaissance in the Twenty-first Century.’

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This essay argues that intercultural philosophy of education and African philosophy in particular as a system of African knowledge(s), can provide a useful philosophical framework for the construction of empowering knowledge that will enable communities in Africa to participate in their own educational development, and bring meaningful development to Africa.

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