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The significance of traditional African education of the Koo-Mende: (A case study of five selected communities in Kenema city- Eastern region- Sierra Leone)

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to establish the Significance of Traditional African Education of the Koo-Mende in the Eastern Region of Sierra Leone, with specific reference to five selected communities in Kenema City, with the objective of identifying how knowledge is acquired traditionally among the Koo-Mende in the Eastern Region of Sierra Leone.

The study adopted mixed research methods that combined both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data was collected through interviews while quantitative data was collected through self-administered questionnaires. The study focused on 60 participants from five selected communities in Kenema City who were purposively and randomly selected.

A sample size of sixty (60) respondents was distributed among five randomly selected communities in Kenema City. Sixty respondents including men, women, youth, elders, and opinion leaders were investigated in finding out the significance of traditional African education among the Koo-Mende communities in the Eastern Region of Sierra Leone today; the impacts of cultural change on the institution of Traditional African education among the Mende of Sierra Leone; finally the steps which the elders of the Mende take to reawaking the relevance of traditional African education system in their communities.

Fundamentally, the main objective of traditional African education system is to make the individual to be matured holistically: ethical considerations, one to be responsible in the community, one to be strong in terms of difficulties, and finally maturity in handling the challenges of life. The study recommended the integration of both the traditional African education system with the Western education system so that they can enrich and complement each other for the holistic development of the human person.

In all African cultures, indigenous education plays a key role in the development of every members of the community. The education begins in the family, which is the first school of socialization. The community was highly based on communal cohesion, where the elders, the prosperous and wise ones served as examples to the children and the youth. Hence, indigenous education was very significant for all. However, the white men came with their system of education and imposed it on Africa. During this time, they colonized the minds of Africans to think, act, and dress like them. As a result of this, the rich African heritage was left at the mercy of the 'strangers' who had no idea about the African way of life.

Therefore, this research sought to find out the significance of traditional African education of the Koo-Mende in the Eastern region of Sierra Leone: A case study of five randomly selected communities in Kenema City. By identifying the significance of traditional African education among the Koo-Mende of Sierra Leone, the result of this research should be popularized among the youths of Africa in general and Sierra Leone in particular. This will be done by providing recommendations and suggestions on how to translate the rich traditional African educational values into the African child.

Keywords: African education, Koo-Mende, five selected communities

Introduction

It is believed that education is the backbone of development of any society. For any society to develop there must be a system of education whether formal or informal. For education to take place there must be a teacher and the student (s). It is the responsibility of the teacher to transfer knowledge, skills, values and beliefs into the students and this is done through demonstration, lecture mode, teaching, or storytelling, proverbs, myths, legends, songs, to name but a few. Sometimes, it could be through research. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 7th Edition defines education as a "process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools or colleges, to improve knowledge and develop skills."

Africa, as the largest continent in the world experienced its own form of education (training and learning) before its scramble and partition by her colonial masters and the advent of the missionaries. Many traditional schools were in existence where teaching was taking place. It is worth noting that the instructions were mainly focused on the holistic development and orientation of members in the community. Their symbols, language, beliefs, values, and artifacts were part of their studies. Hence, their culture. In this regard, Anthony Godden's et-al succinctly put it that: "Culture consists of the values the members of a given group hold, the languages they speak, the symbol they revere, the norms they follow and the material

goods they create from tools.”¹ On the other hand, Richard T. Schaefer, in his book titled ‘Sociology’ opined that: “Culture is the totality of learned, socially transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects, and behaviour. It includes the ideas, values, customs, and artifacts (for examples, CDs, comic books, and birth control devices) of groups of people.”

In the African Traditional Education system, teaching and learning begin in the family, where parents serve as the first teachers. Kisémbó et-al put it that: “The family is the basic of community. It is both the efficient cause of community and also the community’s primary care and concern. “The communal life of the family makes it possible for the provision of food, clothing, shelter, basic education, play and recreation, protection from danger, provision of good health care, religious atmosphere, and care for the older members of the family one can say that the schools the European missionaries established for Africans were not in the interest of Africans, but rather in their own interest. To making sure that Africans always remained the ‘Yes Sir’ men and women to cooperate with their colonial rules. Therefore, Edward Berman pointed out that: “Missionaries, Africans as well as their European mentors, disseminated education neither for its own sake nor to enable Africans to challenge colonial rule. Missionaries established schools because education was deemed indispensable to the main purpose of the Christian

Denominations-spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.... The school was used as an inducement to lure Africans into the missionary orbit. Africans were no less averse to using missionaries for their own purposes than the missionaries were for theirs.”^[2] Irrespective of the threats posed on African traditional education system by colonialism and missionary activities, the African continent can still boast of dynamic and formidable education system therein cultural values, skills, knowledge can be transferred from the teacher to the students or from the elders to the youth, most especially among the Kɔɔ-Mende in the study area. As a result of this, there is need for this research to be conducted to find out the significance of African Traditional Education in order to popularize them to Africans most especially to the young educated Africans to appreciate their rich cultural heritage. Because, if they know where they came from, they will know where to go.

Short History of the Kɔɔ-Mende in Sierra Leone

The Mende people (also spelled Mende) are one of the major ethnic groups in Sierra Leone. The Mende are mostly found in the Southern Province and the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone. According to a renowned historian and educator of Sierra Leone, Professor Joe A. D. Alie, “The Mende, who are believed to be descendants of the Mane, were originally in the Liberian hinterland. The Mende began moving into Sierra Leone slowly and peacefully in the eighteenth century. They established small groups of settlements based on hunting and subsistence agriculture”

The Mende people are divided into Kpah-n-Mende who are predominantly in the South - found in Bo, Bonthe, Moyamba and Pujehun districts, the Golah-Mende, mostly farmers and

hunters from the Gola forest between Kenema and Pujehun districts into Liberia, Sewa-Mende, who settled along the Sewa River, their main occupations are fishing, mining, and farming, Vai-Mende also in Liberia and Pujehun district, Sierra Leone and finally the Kɔɔ-Mende, this research focused on who are the dominant tribe in Kemena and Kailahun. The Kɔɔ-Mende are predominantly cash crops farmers (rice, coffee, cacao, and oil palm). It is worth noting that the Mende word ‘Kɔɔ’ means ‘East’, hence, Kɔɔ-Mende means the Mende from the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone. “Some of the major cities with significant Mende populations include Bo, Kenema, Kailahun, Pujehun and Moyamba.

Statement of the Problem

Before the coming of Western education in Africa, African traditional education was the information base for a society, which facilitates communication and decision-making. This communication was pertinent to the development of the society. African traditional education was part of the lives of its people; their livelihood depends almost entirely on specific skills and knowledge essential for their survival.

However, the advent of Western education system and missionary activities in Africa have posed threat on the rich traditional African education in which boys became men, and girls became women. This has even contributed to a greater extent the decline in morality and accountability in the Africans mentality, most especially the youth who have taking the Western ideologies as a gospel truth, ignoring the African way of life, prominently its education system. Indeed, this is a big problem for this generation and the future generation. Because to destroy a whole generation, just take away their culture, that is, their way of life and introduce a foreign ones.

Consequently, the above problems have to be properly handled and proffer solutions to them. Rather in the long run, Africa will loss her identity and her rich cultural heritage will go into extinction. As a result of this, there is need for this research to be conducted to highlight the significance of traditional African education in Africa, most especially among the Kɔɔ Mende of the Eastern region of Sierra Leone.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research were:

1. To explore the significance of traditional African education among the Kɔɔ Mende community of Kenema City in Sierra Leone.
2. To examine the role of elders, community people, and family members in Traditional African education
3. To investigate ways knowledge is acquired traditionally among the Kɔɔ Mende
4. To identify institutions responsible for passing on cultural values among the Kɔɔ Mende
5. To identify the threats on traditional African education among the Kɔɔ Mende of Kenema City in Sierra Leone.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, 23 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents as follows: 5 to men, 6 to women, 5 to opinion leaders, and 7 to the youths. The questionnaires contained both open-ended and close-ended

questions whereby each question further probed in the subsequent questions.

Upon completion of the questionnaires, responses were collected and analyzed. These questionnaires helped to describe and compare the demographic variables (age, gender, income, education, and religion)

Result and Discussion

Result

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents of Five Selected Communities in Kenema City

Town	Men	Women	Elders	Opinion Leaders	Youth	Total
Nyadeyama	3	2	3	3	2	13
Lambayama	2	2	2	3	3	12
Kpeteima	2	2	2	2	3	11
Gombu	2	2	2	2	2	10
Kenema central	2	2	3	4	3	14
Total	11	10	12	14	13	60

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents N: 60

Age Bracket (Year)	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
11-20	2	3.3%
21-30	4	6.7%
31-40	8	13.3%
41-50	9	15%
51-60	25	41.7%
61-Above	12	20%
Total	60	100%

Source: Data Collected, 2019.

This study sought to establish the age of the respondents. Table 1 above represents those findings. From this table, respondents in the age bracket of 51-60 years were found to be 25, that is 41.7%, those between 60 years and above were 12 constituting 20%, and those between 41-50 years' bracket were 9 amounting to 15%, also, respondents in the age bracket of 31-40 were 8 which was 13.3%, 6.7% were respondents between the age bracket of 21-30 years while those in 11-20 years' bracket were 2 constituting 3.3% of the respondents. This implies that majority of the respondents were in the age bracket of 51-60 years.

Table 3: Gender Distribution of the Respondents N: 60

Gender	Frequency(F)	Percentage (%)
Male	38	63.3%
Female	22	36.7%
Total	60	100

Source: Data Collected 2019.

The respondents were asked to show their gender and they responded as shown in Table 2 above. From Table 2 above, 38 participants were males which accounted for 63.3% while 22 people constituting 36.7% of those who received the questionnaires were females. This implies that male participants outnumbered their female counterparts by 26.6%. However, this disparity had no negative effect on the outcome of the study. Hence, one can say that both genders were well represented.

Table 4: Educational Levels of the Respondents N: 60

Level of Education	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Traditional Education	35	58.3%
Primary	15	25%
Secondary	8	13.3%
Tertiary / Vocational	2	3.3%
Total	60	100%

Source: Data Collected 2019

The study sought to establish the educational level attained by the respondents. Their responses were represented in Table 4 above: Table 4 above shows that majority, which is 35 people constituting 58.53% of the respondents had acquired Traditional African education while 15 people forming 25% had attained primary education. Those with secondary education were 8 that make 13.3% while those who had tertiary/vocational level of education were 2, which mean 3.3%. This implies that the majority of the respondents were not able to read and write. This made the researcher to do self-administered questionnaires to them.

Table 5: Marital Status of the Respondents N: 60

Marital Status	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Single	10	16.7%
Married	25	41.7%
Separated	6	10%
Divorced	4	6.7%
Widow /Widower	15	25%
Total	60	100%

Source: Data Collected 2019

The study sought to establish the marital status of the respondents. The results are presented in Table 5. The number of respondents that indicated were married was 25 that amounted to 41.7% of all the respondents, those widows and widowers were 15 that meant 25%, 10 respondents indicated that they were single, this accounted for 16.7%, those people who were separated from the spouses were 6 of them which constituted 10% while those divorced were 4 that is 6.7%. This implies that the majority of the respondents were married.

Table 6: Significance of Traditional African Education in the Study Area N: 60

Importance	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Acquires traditional indigenous skills.	12	20%
Ethical values.	10	16.7%
Maturity in handling challenges of life.	8	13.3%
Promote African Traditional Religion.	5	8.3%
Enhances life skills for survival (farming, fishing, hunting).	25	41.7%
Total	60	100%

Source: Data Collected, 2019.

Among the importance of Traditional African Education in the study area, Table 6 indicates that 25 respondents were with the view that it enhances life skills for survival such as fishing, hunting, farming, setting of traps, construction of 'Kiki wee' (rounded hut) etc. accounted for 41.7%, 12 respondents stated

that one acquires traditional indigenous skills that amounted to 20%, 10 respondents were with the same opinion that when a person pass through traditional African education, that person must exhibits ethical values such as respecting of human life, respecting of elders, judging between right or wrong to name

but few constitute d 16.7%, 8 respondents stated that learners acquired maturity in handling the challenges of life and this comprises 13.3% while 5 respondents were with the view that traditional African education promotes African Traditional Religion and this make up 8.3%.

Table 7: Roles of Elders, Community Members and Family Members in Traditional African Education in the Study Area N: 60

Roles	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Transfers of ethical values from generations to generations.	12	20%
Passing on of vital livelihood skills.	7	11.7%
Maintenance of peace and fostering reconciliation among the community people.	8	13.3%
Give advice on critical issues in the community.	6	10%
Presides over worship practices.	5	8.3%
Custodians of traditions and customs of the community.	10	16.7%
Presides over distribution of property.	8	13.3%
Punishing and fining of offenders.	4	6.7%
Total	60	100%

Source: Data Collected, 2019.

From Table 7 above, it indicates that among the roles played by elders, community members, and family members, transfer of ethical values from one generation to another accounted for 20%, custodians of traditions and customs of the community constituted 16.7%, presides over distribution of property make up of 13.3%, maintenance of peace and fostering reconciliation among the community people composed of 13.3% also, passing on of vital livelihood skills represented 11.7%, giving advice on critical issues in the community comprised of 10%, presides over worship practices added up to 8.3% while punishing and fining of offenders constituted 6.7%.

Table 8: Ways/Methods through Which Knowledge is Acquired Traditionally in the Study Area N: 60

Ways	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Songs	8	13.3%
Proverbs	4	6.7%
Secret Societies	30	50%
Riddles	3	5%
Apprenticeship	15	25%
Total	60	100%

Source: Data Collected, 2019.

Many areas were identified by the respondents through which knowledge was acquired in the study area. These included secret societies which accounted 50%, apprenticeship represented 25%, songs accounted for 13.3%, proverbs represented 6.7% while riddles comprised of 5%.

Table 9: Institutions Responsible for the Passing on of Traditional African Education in the Study Area N: 60

Institutions	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Family	20	33.3%
Secret Societies	25	41.7%
Traditional Religion	3	5%
Community	10	16.7%
Peer Group	2	3.3%
Total	60	100%

Source: Data Collected, 2019.

The study sought to establish the institutions responsible for

passing on of Traditional African education. The results are presented in Table 9 above. The number of respondents that indicated secret societies was 25, this amounted to 41.7% of all the respondents, 20 people wrote family members and this represented 33.3%. Those who wrote community members were 10 that make 16.7%, those who mentioned African Traditional Religion were 3, which mean 5% while 2 respondents stated peer group and this added up to 3.3%.

Table 10: Threats on Traditional African Education in the Study Area N: 60

Threats	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Western Education	30	50%
Foreign Religions (Christianity and Islam)	8	13.3%
Urbanization	2	3.3%
Secret Societies	15	25%
Modernization	5	8.3%
Total	60	100%

Source: Data Collected, 2019.

Table 10 highlighted the various forms of threat on Traditional African education. Western education accounted the highest with 50%, science and technology recorded 25%, Christianity and Islam represented 13.3%, modernization composed of 8.3% while urbanization accounted 3.3%.

Discussion

The results of the research based on he set objectives were analyzed and crucial findings were made. These results or findings are discussed as thus:

In the study area of the research, the age distribution of respondents range from 11-60 years and above. The age range between 51-60 and above years accounted for 41.7%. The lowest age distribution ranged between 11-20 years. The reason being for the highest age range was that the research targeted more elders than youth due to the fact that the elders are the custodians and guardians of traditional African culture. Gender (Male/Female) can greatly influence the way the respondents perceived the important of traditional African

education. From Table 2 above, the sex distribution of the respondents, it was noticed that the male proportion claimed the highest percentage, 63.3%. Reason being that, most of the elders and opinion leaders in the study area were men.

In the area of religious distribution of the respondents, it was noticed from the data above that 58.3% were Muslims. This clearly shows that the research area is a Muslim dominated area. The outcome of this was never influenced due to the fact that the questionnaires were distributed randomly.

The results for the educational levels of the respondents in Table 4 highlighted that majority of the respondents have passed through traditional African education. This accounted for 58.3%. The main factors for this were tied to poverty and ignorance. Poverty because it was expensive to go to the White man's school, ignorance because some of the respondents' parents thought that if they sent their children to White man's school they will slowly kill their rich traditional African culture as lamented by some of the respondents. (Cf. Questionnaires nos. 11, 18, 30, 45, 48, 50, 57, & 60)

In African culture, most especially among the Koo- Mende marriage is held in a high esteem. This is because traditional family has to be large in order to guarantee the material well-being of all its members, and members of the community have a moral obligation to marry and to contribute to the social reproduction of his kinship group. This most basic value, to beget or bear children, was instilled in all members of the society from early childhood onwards. Nobody was allowed to shirk this duty. In this regard, 41.7% of the respondents in the study area were married.

It is worth noting that in analysing Table 10 above, the threats on traditional African education, the two highest threats were Western education with 50%, and science and technology accounting for 25%. However, looking at the importance of the study in Table 6, the roles of elders, community members in Table 7, the methods through which knowledge is acquired traditionally in Table 8, and the institutions responsible for passing on traditional African education in Table 9 all supported the hypothesis of this research which clearly stated that:

'Despite the threats posed by Western education and missionary activities in Africa, traditional African education is still essential among the Koo Mende of Kenema City in Sierra Leone'.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that

Right through this research, it was hypothesized that despite the threats posed by Western education, modernization, and missionary activities in Africa, traditional African education is still essential today among the Koo Mende of Kenema City in Sierra Leone

Undoubtedly, the traditional African education has something to contribute, support and compliment the modern education system in its quest for transmitting knowledge and cultural values among people. The Koo Mende, like other African communities, had established and trustworthy educational methods in place, the reason why most of the instructions were given in songs, storytelling, folklores, signs and symbols, riddles and proverbs, and above all learning by experience

(practical aspects). Prior to the advent of western culture and its modern education system, the Koo Mende had a well laid down traditional process of acquiring knowledge.

African traditional education is the basis for the foundation of Education for Self-Reliance (ESR) in modern education. During the establishment of ESR in 1967, Nyerere recalled how the traditional education was relevant to the community life; especially learning by doing, that is, the practical aspects of education which must be included in modern education. Learners' participation in learning is highly encouraged by modern educators today.

Traditional African education exists in the community even before western education. The teaching method was inclusive and based on child-centered education in which the different needs of individual students were taken in to consideration. What was emphasized was the notion of collaboration in the education process among students, teachers, parents and a dialogue between the school and the community.

Moreover, traditional education was based on the experience of students. Student's involvement, questioning, and performance comprised traditional education although it appears conformist in character. Because of the transmission of cultural values it is quite innovative. It was not solely based on imitation. This is demonstrated in the results of apprenticeship. In connection to this, Bangura clearly stated that:

Graduates from traditional institutions were capable of composing new songs, riddles and proverbs... They could make new models of tools and military weapons. They could treat new diseases and handle effectively calamities ...Conformist education could not have trained the traditional scholar to deal effectively with new and sometimes very challenging situations.

Furthermore, it prepared its recipients for life duties in their societies; likewise modern education is no exceptional. It prepares the learners to enter the world of work, and more specifically it changes with time. For example the introduction of information and communication technology course in colleges and universities responds to the current demands of information and communication technology, traditional education also changed in response to societal problems, like how to battle the emerging diseases, wild animals, enemies etc. Traditional African education has also greatly influenced the need for development of more appropriate problem solving educational curriculum and the promotion of life-long education. Some aspects of Traditional African education have continued to feature in policy and practice of education. It is worth noting that Traditional African education basically provides education to all members of the community, although it was differed from tribe to tribe.

Since the knowledge concerning many professions remains undocumented, it is high time for Africans to document the cognitive aspect of their professions in black and white. A situation where a master in a profession dies with his knowledge should not be allowed to continue. A typical example is illustrated when a traditional doctor dies without documenting the various herbs used to heal the sick.

Also, a balance should be struck between the practice of the traditional and modern day education in a continuing to produce a well-rounded citizen. In other words, we are calling

for a merger of what is good in African traditional education with the good aspects of the formal education of the Western type. Integration of the two education systems would go a long way in complementing each other. Weaknesses of each system can be reduced by borrowing from the strengths of the other system. For instance, the traditional African education system would benefit from some of the attributes of the modern day education system. One way would be to document the traditional education methods and processes and be able to standardize them for future reference to avoid extinction at the death of 'teacher'.

It is obvious that the major goal of traditional education in Africa is to produce a complete individual, a lifelong learner who is cultured, respectful, integrated, sensitive and responsive to the needs of the family and neighbors. (Cf. Nikie` ma 2009) [19]. It is aimed at inculcating attitudes and values capable of integrating the individual into the wider society (Cf. Majasan 1967.) [15]. the ultimate objective is to produce a person guided by wisdom. The product is thus expected to be confident in spite of circumstances that emerge. At the end of the learning, the 'student' should be able to cope well with the problem and solve various problems as they occur. The personal satisfaction derived from this is expected to serve as a buffer against all temptations and trials.

One can say that African traditional education is focused on the attainment of quality education. It is worth noting that the traditional African systems of education are open to all the members of the society without discrimination. Unlike the contemporary systems of education is highly discriminatory because only the intelligent ones will proceed to the next level, and it is very much expensive in terms of fees. That is to say that even if someone is intelligent but the parents are poor, this will militate against the person not to be educated.

In conclusion, perhaps the best way to preserve traditional education would be to integrate it into the school curriculum. In teaching any school subject therefore, it is wise to start with the knowledge about the local area, which students are familiar with, and then gradually move to the knowledge about regional, national and global environments. This essentially follows the philosophy of embarking on teaching and learning "from the known to the unknown", which could be adopted if education is to be effective. It is therefore the conclusion of this study that traditional African education is an important aspect of the development of the human person in the society.

Recommendations

The study recommended that:

- It could be good to read other related works in the area of traditional African education, as this work only focused on one community, and one ethnic group (Kenema city, and Koo Mende respectively). This might only give a subjective view of how important traditional African education is to the holistic development of the human person to function well in the society.
- Integration of the traditional African education system and that of the Western education should also be explored, since other possible areas of contact and dialogue between the two education systems could be further explored.
- The study also recommended that studies involving more

Sierra Leoneans or other African communities need to be carried out to establish whether they had related traditional education systems with the Koo Mende community or not.

- Studies be carried out on the possible integration of Traditional African education system and that of the modern day system with the aim of finding possible points of connection that are useful for present- day African society in its quest for the development of the human persons.
- A comparative study of both Traditional African education system and the Western education system should also be carried out to establish the effectiveness of both of them in terms of providing educational services in Africa and beyond.
- The government should find a way of integrating the two systems, finding how the two could complement and mutually enrich each other towards effective and holistic learning process in the country.
- The government should empower and legalize the traditional African education traditional system (in our case in Sierra Leone, the Poro and the Bondo secret societies for men and women respectively) by ratifying them in the constitution so that their modes of teaching the young ones become acceptable within law. The young generation should be sensitized about the role of traditional African education system so that they can also benefit from the same.
- In connection with this, campaigns on re-appreciation of African culture should be canvassed. Africans should not view their culture as barbaric and inferior to European culture. Furthermore, African Traditional religious studies should be introduced into our school system where morals and taboos will be taught to curb social vices in our society.
- Lastly, the good and useful aspects of African indigenous history, philosophy, culture, customs and the traditions should be synthesized with valuable aspects of western culture and incorporated in African school curriculum.

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