

THE EMERGENCE OF EDUCATION IN TRADITIONAL AKPOKU SOCIETY

EMMANUEL ECHEZOLOCHI AMADI, Ph.D
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Rivers State University
Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Email: emmanuel.amadi18@ust.edu.ng
Tel: +2348062942929

TIMOTHY KELECHI NWANGUMA, Ph.D
Department of Education Management
Rivers State University
Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Email: timsetch01@gmail.com
Tel: +2347088288442

&

UWOM KENOYE OPHAGHARANAN IGONIKO, Ph.D
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Rivers State University
Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Email: kenoye.uwom@ust.edu.ng
Tel: +2348064525982

Abstract

Before the introduction of western education (formal education) into indigenous Akpoku society; indigenous education (informal education) had been in existence. In this system, elders (i.e. custodians of the customs and traditions of Akpoku) are regarded as the instructors. Through this system, they taught the young ones indigenous Akpoku beliefs and practices, customs, traditions, values of hard work, respect for elders and constituted authorities; chastity before marriage, taboos of the land that forbids incest, sexual intercourse in the farm, killing and eating of sacred animals dedicated to the deities, desecration of sacred places that helped to maintain the equilibrium that exist between the living and the dead. As at that period, the indigenous Akpoku, not only emphasized so much on farming, but also believed Western education (formal education) to be for lazy children who had no strength to work in the farm. When western education was formally introduced, it exposed the people to the art of reading and writing which in turn changed their hitherto mentality that “education was only meant for lazy children who had no strength to work in the farm”. The methodology adopted was oral interviews (report of elders and handed down tradition from the custodians of customs and traditions of Akpoku) and secondary sources (published materials). Findings from the study reveal that western education is crucial and that it has helped in all round development of the people.

Keywords: Emergence, Education, Akpoku Traditional Society, Cultural Values.

Introduction

The emergence of education, be it western or formal often referred to as agents of modern change to indigenous Akpoku, is what the Akpoku people refers to as *olor-lor-ohu*. That is, civilization or development. This, for them, means the coming of something that was not originally there with the people. Before its emergence to the people of Akpoku, the people for certain had no knowledge of western education, that is, the people do not know “how to read and write”, that is, to say that the system of education then was indigenous which were deeply embedded in their cosmology through which the people conceived the world around them. In this system, the custodians of customs and traditions of Akpoku people were mainly the instructors. Through this system, they taught the young adults traditional values, systems of taboos, customs, traditions, beliefs and practices that has helped to maintain the relationship between man and nature and his fellow man.

Background of the Study

Akpoku is located at the North-East margin of Niger Delta, having boundaries with Umuoye Etche and Umuekwuene Ngor-Okapala in Imo State. On the East with Mba Etche, Okehi clan of Etche, Obite Etche, Opehi, Umuikoro and Orishieze Ngor-Okpala in Imo State, on the South with Odufor, Nihi, Opiroand Egwi Etche, and on the West with Ozuzu clan of Etche. The town itself is made up of six villages namely, Umuoria, Umuekwuene, Umuorde, Okomoko, Umudim and Umuaghara which are bounded by common ancestry (Amadi, 2022, p.33).

As for their economic life, the people of Akpoku are predominantly farmers. They engage in production of palm wine, fish, coco-yam, palm-oil, etc, but the most important are yam and cassava which are planted in large quantities. As a people located within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, they experience the normal Niger Delta climatic condition with two main seasons namely, the rainy season and dry season. The rainy season takes place between March and November, the dry season occurs between November and February (Amadi, 2015, p.209). With regards to their spiritual life, Akpoku people strongly believe in the existential reality of a Supreme Being to which the people refer to as Chineke (the God who created everything in the universe). Akpoku, like other traditional African societies, do not approach Him directly, rather He is approached and worshipped through the pantheon of divinities.

Statement of the Problem

The place of western education in the development of Akpoku people over the years cannot be overemphasized. Western education has helped to expose the people to the art of reading and writing especially in this contemporary society. However, as important as western education seems to be in Akpoku Etche, its impact on Akpoku people appears to have continued to escape the attention of scholars, leading to a dearth of scholarship. In consequence of this, custodians of customs and traditions of Akpoku people appear to be phasing out in undocumented formats. Therefore, this study will document for posterity the positive impact of western education on Akpoku for education and information.

Three factors motivated the researcher’s interest in pursuing this study. The first as earlier stated, was to document for posterity the positive impact of western education on Akpoku, especially in this contemporary society. The second was to examine the system of education that had been in existence before western education was introduced and the third was to examine how western education was introduced into indigenous Akpoku society.

Methodology

This study was carried out as an interview based research. Two types of oral investigation procedures were utilized, viz:

- i. Reports of elders of Akpoku about meaning of western education.
- ii. Handed down tradition about the essence of western education

There were certain issues that were taken into account in selecting the interviewees and some of the considerations are: the position of the informant in the society; the cultural organization he/she belongs to and the position or title he/she holds; the level of the interviewee's cultural affinity, education, social exposure, travels, history and so on. Those who were culturally rooted in the practices of local community were found to be better versed in the tradition and cultural practices of the people. The study also adopted secondary sources (published materials).

Education: An Overview

Education is a complex word and very hard to define satisfactorily. This explains why scholars have not agreed on any definition. In any case, the examination of some definitions proffered by scholars will enable us have a glimpse of what education is all about. For Amadi-Nche (2022), education is the process of acquiring skill and transmitting of knowledge for life sustenance (p.346). Ownuasanya (2011) in Amadi-Nche (2022), views education as that process that prepares young people for their social inheritance and this involves development of knowledge, training of mental abilities, and development of character (p.346).

For Awajiusuk (2011) in Amadi-Nche (2022), education is the process of bringing about reasonably perpetual change in human behavior (p.346). According to Nwaokugha (2012), education is a process whereby a people deliberately transit their cultural heritage through schools, colleges and universities. It implies the conscious socialization of the younger generation by which he, the younger generation internalizes the religious, moral and axiological beliefs of his society (p.25). Oporum (2002), sees education as an industry that is aimed at producing the needed manpower that is required to launch a society into the highest pedestal of development (p.84).

Further, education is the process of training man to fulfill his aim by exercising all the facilities to the fullest extent as a member of society. It means the bringing out of the ideas of universal validity which are latent in the mind of every man. It can mean the transmission of knowledge, skills and character traits (dictionary.cambridge.org Retrieved 20th March 2023, 10am). In addition, education is the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgement, and generally, preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life. It is the act or process of imparting or acquiring particular knowledge or skills as for a profession. It is the result produced by instruction, training or studying (www.dictionary.com Retrieved 20th March 2023, 10am). Thus, education would mean the development of the abilities of the mind (i.e. learning to know). It also simply means the information acquired. It is both the act of teaching knowledge to others and the act of receiving knowledge from others. Education also means the knowledge received through schooling or instruction and to the institution of teaching as a whole (www.dictionary.com Retrieved 20th March 2023, 10am).

As for the types of education, here, education can be divided into three main types namely, Formal education, Informal education and Non-formal education. For formal education, also known as formal learning is the type of education that takes place within the school environments. In other words, it refers to the basic academic knowledge that a child learns in a formal manner. For Informal education, it is the type of education that usually takes place in the home with parents and guidance as instructors while Non-formal education is the type of education often refer to as adult basic education, adult literacy education or skill development. This type of education takes different forms of learning, which is consistently and systematically provided in order to develop a particular skill or ability in an individual (www.cuemath.com Retrieved 20th March 2023, 10am).

With regards to its importance (i.e. education), it socializes the younger adults in the society by teaching them the cultural values and norms of the society. It equips them with the skills needed to become productive members of society. This way, it stimulates economic growth and thus raises awareness of local and global problems. Apart from this, education also helps in the development of critical skills like decision making, mental agility, problem solving and logical thinking (Isschoolconnect.com Retrieved 20th March 2023, 10am).

An Analysis of the Emergence of Western Education

Prior to the emergence of education (western education) to traditional Akpoku society, indigenous education had been in existence, meaning that the people do not know “how to read and write”. In this system, parents, elders were mainly the instructors. According to our informant, Amadi Joshua, through this system, they taught the young ones how to respect elders and constituted authorities, how to farm, how to harvest palm fruits, how to fish, how to set trap, even how to marry on time and its advantages (Amadi, J. 15/03/2018, oral interview).

Another informant, Anaele Moses, discloses that they also taught them values of truth, tolerance, honest and humility, the taboos of the land which forbids to receive something with left hand from an elder, incest, sexual acts in the farm, killing and eating of sacred animals dedicated to the deities and desecration of sacred places (Anaele, M. 20/03/2023, oral interview).

Apart from this, studies in this regard show that parents at that period emphasized so much on farming. This further explains the more reasons why they saw farming as the most purposeful venture. This also explains why most parents married many wives with many children and *ohu* (slaves) that will assist them in the farm work. Also, at that period, parents thought western education to be for lazy children who had no strength to work in the farm. This however, explains why parents then preferred their children to work in their farms to schooling particularly when a child is strong.

As our informant, Njoku Innocent, discloses, in this system, learning takes place in different places and at any time such as in the farm, during moon light play, while proverbs, stories, songs, observation and participation, reward (praises) for good conducted and punishment (as corrective measures) were used as mediums for transmitting of indigenous education to the young adults (All these were deeply embedded in their cosmology through which the people conceived the world around them (Njoku, I. 25/03/2023, oral interview).

Western education was introduced into Akpoku in 1928. According to our informant Nweke Davidson, it was the Roman Catholic mission that built a school in Akpoku. The school established was St. Mary's school Akpoku by a team of missionaries from Mbutu Okohia in Imo State led by Rev. Father Shepherd and Rev. Father Oconor. The curriculum contents were built on the popular three RS (3R'S) that is, Reading, 'Riting and "Rithmetic. In other words, there was the teaching of *Akwukwonso* (Bible) which involved the story of Israel as God's own people and the birth and gospel of Jesus Christ, the teaching of *Mgbako* (addition), *Okike* (division), *nwepu* (subtraction) and *nmuba* (multiplication), etc. In addition to this, is the English alphabet (A, B, C, D) (Nweke, D. 10/04/2023, oral interview).

However, through the establishment of the school, formal education was formally introduced. Significantly, it exposed the people to the art of reading and writing thereby changing their hitherto mentality that education was only meant for lazy children who had no strength to work in the farm. Thus, it also encouraged rural – urban migration of Akpoku people to big cities like Port Harcourt, Lagos, etc in pursuit of white collar jobs and modern life style. Apart from this, it also encouraged more scientific way of understanding and responses to the reality of life.

Findings

The findings from the study revealed that:

- i. Western education has exposed Akpoku people to the art of reading and writing through the establishment of the school. This is a truism because a people who do not know "how to read and write" prior to the introduction of western education are not only able to read and write but also gone beyond this level in times of education
- ii. Western education has changed the mentality of Akpoku people. The fact still remains that prior to the introduction of western education, parents at that period not only emphasized so much on farming but also saw farming as the most purposeful venture to education. Thinking along this line they rather concluded enormously that education was only meant for lazy children who had no strength to work in the farm. That is why sending a child to school at that period by parents was regarded as a monumental waste of resources. Nowadays, such mentality has changed because they have seen the inherent benefits in education.
- iii. Western education encouraged rural – urban migration. The truth here still remain obvious because it encouraged rural-urban migration of Akpoku people to big cities like Port Harcourt, Lagos, etc in pursuit of white collar jobs and modern life style and by extension to further their studies.

Conclusion

The introduction of western education in Akpoku from all indication has far reaching impacts on Akpoku. It has exposed the people to the art of reading and writing thereby changing their hitherto mentality that "education was only meant for lazy children who had not strength to work in the farm". More importantly, it has helped in all round development of the people.

References

Primary sources

Amadi Joshua, *ofo-holder*, oral interview at Umuaghara Akpoku on 15/03/2023.

Anaele Moses, Traditional ruler, oral interview at Umuorde Akpoku on 20/03/2023.

Njoku Innocent, Traditionalist, oral interview at Umuekwuene Akpoku on 25/03/2023.
Nweke Davison, Politician, oral interview at Umudim Akpoku on 10/04/2023.

Secondary Sources

- Anyacho, E.O. (1994). *Essential Themes in the Study of Religion*. Cross River: Nigerlink Printing and Publishing.
- Amadi, E.E. (2022). The Culture of *Illa Nne Eze – Agbara* and Its Implications in *Ushi* Priesthood of Akpoku Etche in South-south Nigeria in Tasie, G.I.K. and Onu, Ben O. (eds.). *African Traditional Religion and Christianity in 21st Century Nigeria*. Essays in Honour of Professor Wotogbe-Weneka. Port Harcourt: Pearl Publishing.
- Agbo, D.J. (1993). *Igbo Traditional Religion. The Spirituality and the Eschatological Character of Igbo Traditional Charity*. Volume two (N.P.).
- Church-Hill, A.N. (2022). The Impact of Islamic Education on the Traditional Nigerian Education in Tasie, G.I.K. and Onu, Ben O. (eds.) *African Traditional Religion and Christianity in 21st Century Nigeria*. Essays in Honour of Professor Wotogbe-Weneka. Port Harcourt: Pearl Publishers.
- Dinne, C. and George, T. (2009). *Moral Values in George Tasie* (ed.) *Fundamentals of African Indigenous Religion*. Port Harcourt: Chadik Press.
- Nwaokugha, D.O. (2011). "The Role of Education in Enhancing Democracy in Etche Ethnic Nationality". *Studies in Etche. A Journal of Contemporary Studies in Etche*, 1(1), 84.
- Onyeidu, S.O. (1992). *African Traditional Religion: The Problem of Definition* (N.P.).
- Opurum, E.N. (2002). *A Biography of His Royal Majesty Eze E.N.B. Opurum, Ochie of Etche Land, Rivers State*. Owerri: Springfield Publishers.
- Meaning and Definition of Education. (2003). Retrieved from www.dictionary.com. Education.
- Types of Education. (2023). Retrieved from www.cuemath.com. Types of Education.
- Importance of Education. (2023). Retrieved from ISschoolconnect.com. Importance of Education.