

# The role of the School in the transmission of Culture, with Kenyan references

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**Abstract:** This paper sought to explore the role of the school in the transmission of culture. Using analysis, the study attempts to examine how school curriculum is constructed to transmit culture, to investigate the role of the teacher as socializing agent and to relate the cultural nexus of pedagogy. The study indicates that the school is a culture-laden social institution. It further infers that curriculum, in its different subject matters not only transmit but also preserve culture and that the teacher is a paramount *socializer* of the cultural content. The manner in which pedagogy is done is further observed to be either perpetuating the ideals of the dominant culture and thus leading to social stratification or otherwise enhancing dialogue, which leads to an integrated cultural mindset among the learners.

**Keywords:** School, Culture, Education, Curriculum, Pedagogy, Teacher.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Back Ground of Study:

The Essence of a school is Education- which is the "...process by which the society through schools, colleges, universities and other institutions deliberately transmit its cultural heritage"(O'Connor as cited in Ezewu 1987,p71.). It is the "...initiation...into a culture...one is born in or intends to join"( R. S. Peters as cited in Ezewu,1983,p.71). Ezewu, (1983, p.70) defines education as "...that which prepares man to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously in all offices. From these definitions we can, at the first glance infer that culture is concern of education and that education's aim is to habituate man into his cultural environment and into the wider society. According to Tylor (1902) Culture is "...that complex whole which include knowledge, beliefs, arts,moral laws,customs and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of the society". Put in other words culture is the total life of a people, it is a people's civilization. Culture also has traits, transmittable through Education. Ezewu (1983) identifies six major dialectical characteristics of culture:

First of all, Culture is *Organic and Supra organic*. *Organic* nature of culture simply means that the existence of culture is necessarily pegged on the existence of a human beings. There is culture if and only if there are human beings. In its *supraorganic* nature, culture survives an individual's human life. Socrates is born into a particular culture, is integrated into it but when he dies the culture into which he is born does not vanish. This view is also espoused by Emile Durkheim. Secondly Culture is both *overt and covert*. It is overt because it is observable, for instance in work of art and creative arts. It is covert because there is always underlying attitudes and interpretation behind every overt aspect. For instance it has variously been observed that Africans are not good time keepers but it is because, covertly for many Africans Events matter more that western mathematical time. Thirdly Culture is both *Explicit and Implicit*. It is explicit because there are things in any given culture that can be easily and readily explained yet it is implicit because there are some things that cannot/should not be explained. Fourth, Culture is both ideal and manifest. There is always the highest expectation in any given culture, what we call the Ideal. The ideal is the standard of measurement, the criteria upon which various cultural aspects are measured. It is rarely achieved. Whatever then is achievable is called Manifest. It recognizes the imperfection of humanity. For instance despite the belief among Christians that people should be holy and loving, but the reality is that is that many times Christians find themselves not so holy or less generous. Culture is both *stable and changing*; Stability of a culture means that there are some values that any given culture will always want to retain no matter what. Change

means that culture is dynamic and *ipso facto* changes with time, at least in some aspects. This is facilitated when a culture interacts with another culture which it may influence. It may be influenced as well. Lastly culture is *shared and learnt*. An individual is born into a culture and by default shares in it. However individuals can also learn from others; peers, teachers, social media

Apart from its characteristics, culture can also be discussed in terms of content. Clark(1923) classifies the content of culture as Speech, Material culture, Art, Mythology and Science, Religious ,Family and social Practices, property, Government and warfare .

### 1.2. Statement of the problem:

Education and Culture are be closely related social functions. It is difficult to determine the difference between the two and the extent to which they influence each other. The thin line between the two may not be noticed easily and consequently the extent to which they impact on each other may not be obvious. However, it is still the case that culture is not only preserved by the educative process but it is also transmitted both formally and informally. This study sought to investigate the impact of school on the transmission of culture's traits and content.

### 1.3. Objectives of the study:

- i. To examine how school curriculum is constructed to transmit culture
- ii. To investigate the role of the teacher as socializing agent
- iii. To relate the cultural nexus of pedagogy

### 1.4. Method of Study:

This study uses simple conceptual analysis as a method of investigation. Analysis is the breaking down of composites into its elements for purposes of clarification. It is suited for this investigation because the research is essentially expository in nature.

## 2. SCHOOL CURRICULUM AS CONTENT OF CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

Sifuna (2006) observes that “Education is the main avenue through which a society’s culture is transmitted from generation to another” . Waiyaki gives the notion that the transmission of culture is a pivotal role of the school. Indeed the school widens the scope of the cultural integration by building on what the family does. One of the ways through which the school transmits culture is through its Curriculum. Ezewu (1983), admits that curriculum being the content of education is also the bearer of the content of culture within the school. Indeed each curriculum item transmits a portion of the content of culture (pp.72-73) as pointed out below:

First of all, Speech as content of culture is very vital for all members of the society. This is because it facilitates interaction among members of the society. The constitution of Kenya recognizes the importance of language and that is why it says “Every person has the right to use the language, and to participate in the cultural life, of the person’s choice”(Constitution of The Republic of Kenya, Article 44,par.1).The school passes on this tool for communication through languages and linguistic studies. In Kenya, Languages form part of the school curriculum. Kiswahili and English are in fact compulsory in primary and secondary schools education . Kenyan Sign Language is also recognized as a language by the 2010 constitution. Foreign languages are taught to farther widen the scope of communication and social interaction. Secondly through Agricultural sciences, vocational studies, Technical and Technological Sciences, the schools transmit the material traits of a culture for better living and fending. The society can only survive if it is able to fend itself, but it can only fend itself if it knows how to do so.

The art of the society is transmitted though Drama, literature, fine arts and other related subjects. In Kenya the study of *Fasihi* and Literature has been made compulsory in secondary schools, subjects like Art and Design, Drawing and Design, Music are also taught in Kenyan education System. Further, every year the schools and colleges participate in Music festivals at different levels as a national actuation of artistic culture. Through Geography, Natural Sciences and philosophy, scientific and mythological contents of culture are transmitted. Natural Sciences and Geography help learners understand their physical environment. Philosophy has been variously referred to as the mother of all sciences. It helps the learner to not only think critically but also speculate and raise questions where culture claims to be at rest. It also preserves a society’s way of thinking, its attitudes, its ontological inclinations among others.

Religious practices as content of culture are transmitted through religious studies and moral education (Barker 1968). These studies not only help develop spiritual needs of members of the society but also lay a proper and explicit basis for moral conduct. In Kenyan system Christian Religious Education, Islamic Religious Education, Hindu Religious Education and Traditional African Religious Education embedded in the aforementioned studies cater for the religious traditions of the country. It is very important to note here that Kenyans are predominantly Africans, but isn't there is no independent African Religious Studies in the school curriculum. This perhaps is a misgiving. Christians in Kenya are first Africans before they are Christians. That is why they are called African Christians, and without firm roots in African religions and culture there may never be authentic Christians. The reason why the Romans whole heartedly embraced Christianity is that they were whole heartedly devoted to their traditional religions like Mithraism.

In History, Sociology and psychology, family and social practices. They help members of the society to live in harmony with themselves (intrapersonal relationship) and with others (interpersonal relationship). The knowledge on physical living environment is open to students through courses like Building and Technology, Surveys, Building and construction among others. Governance as part of content of culture is passed on through curriculum courses like political science, history and government and civics. Last but not least is the education in Warfare. It is handed down from one generation to the next with room for improvement now and then. The curriculum caters for this through military Science. In a nutshell we can infer that curriculum is a culturally laden activity Endeavour.

### 3. THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN TRANSMISSION OF CULTURE

A teacher in his right and nature is could be said to be an embodiment of culture. Any teacher, therefore is expected to be knowledgeable on the values of the society which he in turn transmits to the learner in the school environment, and even outside the school. He is the representative of the adult and mature society in a school set up. The extent to which the teacher is cultured correlates with the extent to which he will influence the learner. It is important to note here that the learner in a school set up also learns informally and implicitly. Ogachi (2006) observes "the values and attitudes of the teacher and how they communicate to the child affect the socialization of the Child" (cited in Sifuna (2006), p. 23). Therefore a teacher who is a positive role model will influence the child in a positive way. In this case, Positive way refers to the values of the society in which the teacher and the learner are members.

The attitude the society has about the teacher also influences how he / she transmits the culture. In some societies the teacher is seen as "...one who intentionally and professionally undertake the task of fashioning the young" (Phenix, 1961, p.41). Two things are important in this context: First the professionalism of the teacher, Secondly Fashioning the young. Professionalism of the Teacher is loaded with the notion of authority. The teacher is an authority by the virtue of his training and age, and is revered by not only the society but also the school community. He is therefore there to be heard, to be obeyed, and in most cases not to be challenged, or if challenged it must be with moderation. In this way the teacher imparts the culture of obedience, the culture of reverence to authorities not just professional but other valid authorities as well. Fashioning the young, depicts the society's functional role of determining the direction in which the society believes is the right direction for the young ones to follow (Baker, 1974). When the children grow up, as adults they grow knowing they are fashioners of the young ones in different cultural directions.

### 4. PEDAGOGY AND THE CLASSROOM IN TRANSMISSION OF CULTURE

Another way in which the school transmits culture but also preserves it, is through what happens in the classroom and how it happens. The actual formal learning and transmission of culture happens in the classroom because it is where the teacher, the curriculum and the student converge, deliberately and formally. The teacher employs different techniques in imparting knowledge mostly depended on the characteristics of culture. For instance the teacher being aware that culture is both Organic and Supra organic presents his content in such a manner as to reflect his consciousness of the humanity of the student, as if it were the case that without the individual student no knowledge would be transmitted. A dialogical approach or even existential approach would be convenient. The teacher then develops the attitude that he is not the all there is in terms of culture and that there will be other teachers after him and that there were other teachers before him.

The fact that Culture is both overt and covert, and the knowledge of the same, helps the teacher to adopt an approach that extends his judgment about an observed phenomenon in a classroom to further investigation. For instance it is normal in many classroom situations that a reasonable teacher will want to understand the hidden attitude of attention seeking students. Such a teacher will transmit virtue of patience, understanding and prudence to the learners. The same applies to Explicitness and Implicitness of culture. Actually the speculative and critical thinking are better developed in learner's through awareness of these two traits of culture.

A teaching methodology that does not recognize that culture is both ideal and manifest will tend to overstretch the learner's to breaking point, but one that is informed by this trait of culture employs a method that coheres with the learner's abilities, who then apart from content learn that they are limited but can do better without stretching themselves to breaking point. Such student finally develops tolerance, fortitude and ability to accept the self. Most societies would not frown upon these virtues for such are what they expect their members to become. The Classroom arrangement school also plays a very important role in cultural transmission. For instance when a classroom is arranged in such a way that the all the students are facing the teacher who is in front, the authority of the teacher is the central focus and the teacher plays a representative of the dominant culture. When sitting arrangement is such that learner's cluster in groups, or are sitting in circular formation, democracy and collegiality is being transmitted both explicitly and implicitly. There is also the case of peer group as a socializing agent or rather an agent of transmission of culture.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Aristotle, the Great Greek Philosopher once asked whether knowledge, virtue and the useful life should be the aim of education (cited in Njoroge & Benaars, 1986, p. 172). We answer thus; That indeed knowledge virtue and the useful in life should be the aim of education but what is most useful to *anthropos* according to Aristotle's Nichomean Ethics is Happiness (*Eudaimonia*). Happiness however constitutes in Living in harmony with oneself, with others (other men and nature), and with God; in other words, being in a *politikon*. Each *Politikon* is a cultural entity that uses Education to perpetuate itself. As such, the death of education may as well be the death of cultural transmission.

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