

## ANALYSIS OF PRAXIS OF AFRICAN COMMUNALISM: A MODEL OF ETHICAL VALUES IN PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN KENYA

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The importance of value education in character development and the inculcation of values attitudes among children cannot be overemphasized. In the recent past, there has been an increase in cases of unethical conduct among primary school going children in Kenya and those who have graduated from this important segment of education.

**Purpose:** This research sought to examine the practice of African communalism as a value-based education strategy to improve ethical values in the primary school curriculum in Kenya.

**Methodology:** Since this is a philosophical study, conceptual analysis was adopted as the research methodology. Conceptual analysis entails breaking down and clarifies meanings and boundaries of concepts to promote understanding.

**Results:** The study found that the principles of African communalism have not been fully integrated in the Kenyan curriculum despite the efforts of policy makers to localize the curriculum. Integration of African communalist principles in the primary school education curriculum envisages the inculcation of the ethics of responsibility, citizenship, fairness, transparency and participation which are essential in enhancing ethical values.

**Recommendations:** The study recommended the integration of the principles of African communalism into the curriculum so as enhance the teaching of value education from an African perspective thus reducing the influence of Western epistemologies.

**Keywords:** African communalism, ethical values, Value-based education



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### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Value-based education is important in shaping the character of students. Provision of education from an African communalist perspective is significant in teaching children pre-colonial ideals that were essential in shaping the moral agenda of children. The aim of integrating African communalist principles in the curriculum is to reduce the influence of Western epistemologies and culture that alienated African ideas in education. This study will be of benefit to policy makers in the Kenya Ministry of Education and curriculum developers, as it provides information on how to integrate African values into the curriculum.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In traditional African societies, African communalism has become a common theme in most discourses on African philosophy and ethics. African communalism is the traditional way rural areas in Africa have worked in the past (Olufemi, 2016). According to Ikuenobe (2006), African communalism is a set of cultural practices and conceptual framework that prioritizes the collective role of the group over the individual in the community. Furthermore, Ikuenobe (2018) notes African communalism as a moral doctrine that values human rights, dignity and responsibilities. African communalism, which is a core element of African cultural traditions, has a significant role of imparting ethical values that are important in promoting desirable behavior that can make an individual become a useful member of the society (Gyekye, 2010). Communalism as a moral philosophy allows for the members of the community to cooperate and pull together their resources for the common good of every member of the community. This is because communalist ideals hold an opinion that it is only through other people that an individual becomes aware of their responsibilities, existence and privileges towards other societal members (Senghor, 1964). For example, when individuals rejoice or suffer, they share the experience with the corporate group which is the family. The study investigated how the integration of African communalist ideals can promote the ethics of responsibility, fairness, participation, citizenship and transparency.

Before the arrival of colonial masters and missionaries to the African continent, there were no formal institutions of learning because the African education system was informal.

Nonetheless, pre-colonial African societies had a system of education which was informal in nature (Katola, 2014). The informal education in the African communities was intended to develop an ideal person who would fully fit into, and be acceptable by, the society. However, the introduction of Western education interfered with the African way of life and the value system that was propagated through the African philosophy of communalism. Masaka (2016) posits that schooling gave prominence to Eurocentric ideas that imparted skills and knowledge often unrelated to the authentic needs of the African children, especially issues concerning values. Moreover, Western education undermined African communalist ideas that was transmitted through African indigenous education informally thus, making schooling an agent of alienation of African culture instead of being a tool for cultural affirmation (Mosweunyane, 2013). Evidently, this was a terrible anomaly in the eurocentric education systems in Africa, since the learners were socialized with foreign cultural values while it allows them to remain in their own local setting.

Ethical values are principles or life stances that function as a guide to behavior, making virtuous choices, or doing the right thing (Schroeder, 2019). They are the rules which people use to assess their actions, beliefs and thinking when confronted by a situation that requires them to distinguish between the right or wrong (Chowdhury, 2016). Schroeder (2019) demonstrate the need for considering ethical values as vital facet of education by noting that an education that does not promote ethical values is prone to creating a society of individuals who are unethical. Brown and Wangaard (2017) identify compassion,

fairness, respect, trustworthiness, responsibility and citizenship to be the core universal ethical values. The aforementioned virtues that are considered worthy building up the character of an individual can be effectively transmitted to learners through education. Otieno (2018) outlines that education is a process of inculcating values to equip learners to live a life that is satisfying to the individual according to agreed societal values and ideas. Here, the role of education is emphasized for character development, to bring our inherent qualities, latent potentialities and developing personalities for the individual well-being and the society. The concept of ethical values in African traditional societies is based on the notion that an individual is never alone. This is because a society is regarded as a series of interrelationships in which each one contributes to the welfare and the stability of the community, and members are socialized to avoid that which is disruptive or harmful to the community's well-being.

African communalism epitomizes humanism and the relationship between an individual and the community. In various African cultures, African communalism as a philosophical stance is highly regarded as a legitimate and critical mode of inquiry that manifests African morality. For that reason, Ikuenobe (2016) opines that moral thoughts in traditional African culture are against individualism. From a communalist perspective, individuals are supposed to see and identify themselves in terms of how their community trains them, shapes, and morally educates them to acquire identity and how their moral thinking is shaped by the context of the community with respect to their actions and behavior. Thus, making Ikuenobe to view a person as a social communal.

Social responsibility is another critical component of African communalism. An individual's existence out of the community's context is unthinkable. This is because communal problems are shared collectively since

members of the community overcome the problems of survival as a unit. This is why communal people create social processes which ultimately recreate them, thus the community creates an individual. As a matter of fact, the African concept of person or human being is inadequate without the idea of a shared existence. The idea of social responsibility which implies social correlative rights seems to suggest that there are two kinds of moral rights that members of a community have. The first involves the right that we have by virtue of being part of a community, and as a result, there are social responsibilities that we owe others. These are communal rights that people have by virtue of being meaningful members of the community (Ikuenobe, 2006).

Also, communalist moral discourse calls on the moral duty, responsibility, and obligation for others. For instance, Wiredu (2008) points out that a communalistic society advocates for the respect of the natural human rights, protection of the children and women during wars and caring for the elderly in the society. The community has a collective moral obligation, which is a sense of duty toward the upbringing of children into becoming morally upright people who can sustain the community and inculcate values that contribute to human welfare like taking care of their parents when they get old. In this sense, African communalism provides children with a unique sense of moral obligation towards others and guarantees that prosperity of the community by taking on the mantle of leadership from the elders.

Another striking feature of African communalism is the 'we in I' whereby an individual views themselves with respect to others in the spirit of collectivism, brotherhood, communal spirit and togetherness. This could be well illustrated with the story in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* of a man with amputated leg who went on fishing expedition, but on his way back home, the fish was snatched away from him. When he cried out, the whole community came out to retrieve the fish (Achebe, 1958). This is a typical display of the

communal spirit. In African thoughts, the community that 'We' refers to includes traditions, values, and spiritual beings that are metaphysically connected to living people, the dead, ancestors, and posterity (Ikuenobe, 2006). The dead are thus part of the community in African traditions.

The Kenya Law Reform Commission (2014) underscores this sentiment by indicating that in the traditional African community, the Kenyan tribe of Luo did not bury their dead abroad. The dead were buried in graves at their ancestral home. This is evident in the S.M. Otieno case 1987. Upon the death of S.M. Otieno, his widow, Wambui Otieno embarked on making burial arrangements for her husband in Ngong', a settlement on the outskirts of Nairobi. According to Luo culture, Ngong' was considered abroad since the Luo tribe of Kenya buries their departed loved ones in their ancestral home. Despite the burial arrangements by the widow, *UmiraKager*, the clan in which S.M. Otieno was born and wanted to bury the body in his ancestral home in Nyalgunga according to the Luo customs. The matter led to a dispute that ended up in the High Court of Kenya. The court granted the *UmiraKager* clan their wish of burying their kin. The court stated in part.... *'There is no way an African citizen of Kenya can strip himself of the association with the tribe of his father if those customs are patrilineal. It is thus clear that Mr. Otieno, having been born and bred a Luo, remained a member of the Luo tribe and subject to the customary law of the Luo people.* From the ruling, it is apparent that African cultures are metaphysically and morally fused whereby the 'We' refers to a transcendental community that is based on a moral and concrete tradition and a spiritual reality. An individual belongs to the society, whether living or dead, and the court affirmed this important African belief. Besides, African communalism is rooted in the conviction that the society forms an ontological (nature of being) and well-structured unit in which everybody is linked with all the other members, living or dead, through a

complex network of spiritual relationships into a kind of a mystical body. The ontological unit makes sense having God at its summit from whom all existence and life draws its source and its continued force. As a result, a fundamental force in African traditional life is religion, which provides a strict moral code for the community (Ogbonna, 2009).

African communalism advocates for mutual help in the society. Etta et al. (2016) note that pre-colonial African society was organized to satisfy the basic human needs of all members. Here, most of the resources, such as land, were owned collectively for the benefit of everyone. If, for example, a villager wanted to construct a new hut, all the men would cut trees to erect the frame and bring grass for thatching, and the women would participate by doing mud-plastering of the wall. In the same spirit, the able-bodied would accept responsibility for tending and harvesting the gardens of the sick and deformed. A hungry stranger could, without a penalty, enter the gardens of the village and take, say, a bunch of bananas to fill his stomach. His actions only became theft if he took more than was necessary to satisfy his needs. This study promotes the inculcation of African values of sharing and mutual help in the primary school curriculum so as to foster an ethical citizenry in the contemporary Kenya.

Recently, there have been noticeable values and behavioral crises among the general Kenyan population and young people in particular (KICD, 2017). The moral decadence being witnessed in Kenya is aggravated by the fact that many youngsters are growing up without the desired values, positive attitudes and psychosocial competencies needed to function as responsible citizens. The government of Kenya through the Basic Education Curriculum Framework (BECF) recognized that values are essential to socio-economic development and stability of a country. According to Cheptoo and Ramdas (2020), the values that were incorporated in the CBC followed the

values in the Education Study of 2003 that recognized that all school contexts promote, foster and transmit values to build the character of students. The Kenyan government through the Basic Education Curriculum Framework aligned the curriculum with the 2010 constitution of Kenya to promote the national philosophy (KICD, 2017). The values stated in the BECF include: responsibility, respect, trustworthiness, accountability, honesty, care, compassion and ethical citizenship. The alignment of the education curriculum with the constitution of Kenya 2010 envisioned that at the end of the learning period, the learner should have acquired various competencies like communication, problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration and citizenship that are critical in enhancing ethical competency. As noted by Menzel (2016), an ethically competent person is one who through innate or learned behavior can distinguish between right and wrong and act accordingly. Some of the components of ethical competency which facilitate ethical citizenship include: ethical knowledge, ethical skills and ethical attitudes and ethical values (Ghiatau, 2015).

The term citizenship, which essentially means a right to participate in the *polis* decision-making process, has its roots in Greek. The term *polis* in Greek means city. Thus, this definition affirms the principles of African communalism in what most people would consider as the main element of citizenship; that an individual is a member of a state and that there is a relationship between the city and an individual. Another aspect worth noting from this definition is the idea of a right to participate. The notion of right is central to the understanding of citizenship. As a citizen, one has certain rights. This connection between the state and the individual is essential to understanding citizenship. In citizenship, the relationship is not only with the people around an individual in the society but also, individuals who make political decisions. Political decisions in this context lead us to the concept of

democracy. The first of the rights that are in the understanding of citizenship is the ability to have a say in political discussions in a democratic forum (Harris, 2012). Ethical citizenship in brief is radically democratic. It requires active participation in public debate and collective self-government and genuine respect for the diversity that is integral to any human society. Although citizenship is a contested concept, Law (2006) says it has been traditionally associated with the notion of state. Citizenship generally refers to membership of people who live within the borders of the same political community with its own sovereignty. This membership is marked by a set of common rights and duties that determine the degree of participation of citizens in political, civic, economic and social affairs. Citizenship education, particularly in schools provides students with relevant civic knowledge, skills and attitudes for functioning and leading responsible lives in the community.

On the other hand, Kuhumba (2019) notes that the concept of citizenship in the contemporary world includes the legal status and political recognition as members of a community as well as the specific obligations and rights associated with the membership. In political philosophy, there are several categorization of citizenship. However, this study will be limited to two. First, where citizenship is regarded as a liberal thought. The centrality of the liberal thought is the notion that individual citizens act rationally to advance their own interests and that the role of the state is to protect citizens in the exercise of their rights. Granting each individual person the same formal rights is understood as promoting equality. Exercising rights is seen as the choice of citizens. The underlying assumption is that citizens should have the necessary opportunities and resources to realize their potential capacities (Kuhumba, 2019).

Another aspect of citizenship that is of interest to this study is the communitarian notion of citizenship. Communitarianism is a normative model that serves as an antidote to

individualistic liberation and the notion of self-interest that was advanced by the colonial education. This category presupposes that human identity is constituted through the social realm. Human beings are born into a socio-cultural universe where moral commitments, values, and existential meanings are negotiated dialogically. Thus societal fulfillment is never achieved in isolation, rather through human bonding at the epicenter of social formation. Sandel (1998) argues that an individual sense of identity is produced only through relations with others in the community which they are part.

### **African Communalism and Ethic of Responsibility**

Responsibility entails one being in charge of something or someone. It is a state of having authority or control and being accountable for one's decisions or actions. Here, individuals are expected to be aware that they are responsible for the consequences of their actions and behavior. In African communalism, infringement of societal morals is punished irrespective of an individual's background, wealth, social status or achievements. For instance, in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe (1958) gives us an insight into this: During a funeral, the 16-year-old son of the dead man was killed by the explosion of Okonkwo's faulty gun. Although what happened was an accident, Okonkwo, the main character of the book, was to flee the village and remain in exile for seven years as a punishment. It was a crime to kill a clansman, and the individuals who committed the crime were expected to flee from the land. Okonkwo went into exile despite all his social achievements and the honor he brought to his community through his wrestling contests. This is a clear indication of communalistic justice at work. It also underscores an aspect of being in-charge or one taking responsibility for their actions and a justification of various decisions to the populace. Refusing to accept responsibility for any wrong act committed has the possibility of damaging reputation, relations and it is

akin to lying. It was the responsibility of Okonkwo to make sure that his gun is safe, and so he had to pay for his carelessness by fleeing the village. Cultivation of this attitude to learners through African communalism is essential in bringing up individuals who will always strive to make decisions that are of the best interest to the public because they will be personally liable for any mistake made, plundering of the public resources included. The ethics of responsibility can educate young people that a community or a nation can suffer because of the misconduct of one of its members. Therefore, the conduct of a person is a communal responsibility.

### **African Communalism and Ethics of Fairness**

Fairness as an ethical value espouses even handedness in treating people with the same criteria, from the same ethical base since it asserts that all members of the community are of equal value. Communalist ideology embodies some element of justice which demands a constant effort to recognize and maintain an equitable balance in the sharing of resources as a recipe for enhancing cohesion in various component parts of the society. Communalism presupposes a fair mode of sharing and distribution of benefits and burdens within the society. This aspect of justice highlights that there is an obligation on the part of governments to ensure that societal wealth is for everybody and not just a few. It also prescribes that it is actually a failure on the part of the government if societal resources are not utilized or shared equitably. In the traditional African societal framework, wealth was seen as being in service of the community rather than the benefits of the individual.

### **Communalism and the Ethics of Transparency**

The ethic of transparency implies honesty, openness, and lack of guile. Lack of transparency among individuals creates a climate of distrust and suspicion as such, damaging relationships and would probably tend to make some

people feel devalued, thus denting cohesion (Taylor, 2011). The essence of transparency lies in the understanding that public office bearers hold the positions in trust for citizens, therefore, they are accountable to the citizens. Transparency is rooted in the right to freedom of expression and opinion and right to access of information. Transparency and accountability are intertwined and as a result feed into each other. This relationship is made more explicit in the functions of transparency as the facilitation of public participation in communal affairs, improvement of decisions making, enhancement of the government's credibility and provision of powerful aid in the fight against plundering of public resources. In contemporary African society, land finds its parallel in natural resources available to all citizen African states. After independence, most African countries Kenya being included experienced a trend whereby national resources were taken for plunder by public officers due to capitalist ideas that were championed by the Western Education. The Introduction of colonial education and value system eroded African way of life that was anchored on fundamental societal values like collective responsibility, support from the family, traditional systems of social protection, interdependence and reciprocity. The Eurocentric education produced individuals who were concerned with profit maximization unmindful of the community obligations. The consequence of the above is profound changes which have affected traditional loyalties, social obligations and patterns of behavior. The ensuing alienation of African values is manifested through corruption, economic sabotage and violence.

### **African Communalism and Participation**

African communalism is anchored on the principle of systemic thinking and the communal understanding of 'I am because we are and because we are, therefore, I am' (Gyekye, 2010). In light of this, it can be noted that in African communalism, everyone's contribution in the community counts, the communalist

embodies participative leadership because under this philosophy, instead of transferring all power to the leader, the people must participate and contribute to national policies. Omilusi and Aladegbola, (2020) postulates that participative leadership style is the ideal since it takes the input of other into account and this type of leadership encourage participation thus developing a society of people who are committed to decision making process and nurturing of leaders who are at the service of the people (Hedondo, 2019). Furthermore, African communalism so understood has its intrinsic elements in the principles of participation. This is because it views members of society as being connected, linked, and bound to others.

### **STATEMENT OF THE STUDY**

Provision of value-based education from an African communalist perspective is an important strategy in localization of curricular in African countries.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This research sought to examine the practice of African communalism as a value-based education strategy to improve ethical values in the primary school curriculum in Kenya.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What is the influence of African communalism on the improvement of ethical citizenship in the primary school curriculum in Kenya?
2. What is the influence of African communalism in promoting ethics of responsibility and transparency in primary school curriculum in Kenya?
3. What is the influence of African communalist principles in promoting the ethics of fairness and participation in the primary school curriculum in Kenya?

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Since this is a philosophical inquiry, the study adopted conceptual analysis as the main technique investigation. Conceptual analysis is a

traditional method of clarifying constructs in the form of a philosophical inquiry. Philosophers use this technique to clarify meanings and boundaries of concepts to promote understanding. Various studies have found conceptual analysis to be a useful methodology, particularly when used as a precursor or adjunct to empirical form of inquiries. The goal of conceptual analysis is to produce an explicit meaning of a concept by delineating its boundaries, referents, and establishing relationships among related terms. Lack of conceptual clarity has the potential of threatening construct validity, hampering theory development, and hindering the researcher from focusing on the precise skills, attitudes, and findings that the study is expected to achieve. This form of inquiry challenges the researcher to develop examples or cases that help to clarify constructs and distinguish them from related terms. For this study, ethical values are the educational concept that was analyzed. Equally, conceptual analysis as a form of philosophical inquiry is particularly useful when trying to identify the underlying conceptual structure of arguments and justification and in particular unexamined notions of an educational practice.

The shortcoming of employing this research methodology is that while conceptual analysis helps educational philosophers to clarify and explicate concept boundaries, it does not portend to develop the definition of a concept. In fact, many philosophers caution researchers from assuming that there can be ever be an absolute definition to any word, given the fact that various words can be defined and interpreted differently depending on an individual's understanding and the philosophical school of thought that they subscribe to. Therefore, this method did not produce a definitive meaning for the various terms used in the study, but rather provided conceptual clarity and illuminated the relationship between the various concepts and how they can enhance the edification of ethical values among primary school learners. Another limitation of using this approach is that the study did not produce empirical data

regarding perspectives under investigation. Although traditional notions of validity and reliability are not applicable to conceptual analysis, this study relied on logic to ensure rigor in the analysis of the findings. Quality inductive arguments were used to ensure methodological vigor and cogency in the study findings.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

Communalist ideas are centered on the view that the society is socially-embedded; and that all citizens belong to the community. With respect to this, Ikuenobe (2018) argues that an individual citizen in an African community can only realize their identity and interests through deliberation over the social common good. Here, individual liberty is maximized by prioritising the common good and public service over the pursuit of individual interests. For communalists, citizenship is seen in terms of developing civic virtues such as respect for others and recognition of others in terms of their culture, religion, beliefs and ideological position and the importance of public service (Kuhumba, 2019). Recognition of others in the civic society should be directed towards realization of the social harmony. This is because communalist ethical values are essential in establishing social harmony in an inclusive society.

The values of compassion is probably the most critical social value of African communalism since Africans are known to show compassion for one another during hard times so as to guarantee survival. Instilling in learners the feeling of compassion is essential to nurturing a sense of shared vision among children. Helpfulness towards each other creates a climate of collegiality. Africans find it easy to be compassionate to each other since they understand that human beings are interconnected. The cultivation of this attitude is critical in raising citizens who are committed to the shared vision of the country and the enhancement of the collegial attributes that are essential to nation building.

The value of solidarity as advocated by the communalist



philosophy can help to improve cohesion among children. Instilling the value of solidarity can also be critical in building cooperation and competitive strategies that empower the team to work hard to ensure that all members of the community thrive. African communalism has the ability to create a bond among children since it places greater emphasis on the achievement of the collective whole rather than individual success. When children start to think about their identity as one, the value of cohesion is nurtured, thus fostering national unity.

Despite the fact that African communalist ideals are can be essential in provision of an Afro-centric education that gives prominence to African values, it is worth noting that African communalist principles have not been fully integrated into the education system in many African countries to help in guiding the moral agenda of the African school going children. Considering the case of teaching values in Kenya, there are logical, systemic and conceptual gaps in teaching values that require the development and restructuring of the primary school curriculum in order to include African communalism as the guiding principle for values in schools.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the foregone discussion, it is apparent that African communalism is exemplified in various ethical norms, ways of life, and values among the various communities of the African dissent. For instance, this study argues that African communalism is rooted in the traditions of a group of people with common kinship, values, aspirations, beliefs; living together proximately; sharing and organizing aspects of their lives cooperatively in a community. The aforementioned African communalism ideas are the ones that the study is promoting to be included in the Kenyan primary education curriculum to guide the learning of values. For instance, values like cooperation, caring, respect for humanity can easily be transmitted to the children through African communalism since they can easily relate

with the issues being championed at school in the community.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on results and conclusions, the research recommended the integration of African communalism ideals into the primary school curriculum to enhance the teaching and learning of African values. Furthermore, teaching of African values through communalism will help to localise the curriculum, thus reducing the influence of Western values. Further; the study recommends the introduction of a new learning area on ethics.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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