Abstract: This paper explores the concept and practice of education in traditional African societies. It attempts a critical examination of general aspects that surround African indigenous education. The writer begins by defining the concepts of education, indigenous and tradition as related to the topic. Pedagogical approaches used in the delivery of the curriculum have been addressed. The paper concludes by examining the relevance of African indigenous knowledge to modern theory and practice of education with the understanding that no study of the history of education in Africa is complete or meaningful without adequate knowledge of the traditional or indigenous educational system prevalent in Africa prior to the introduction of Islam and Christianity.

Keywords: education, indigenous, curriculum, philosophical basis.
1. Introduction:

Indigenous education forms part of African heritage and therefore it is inseparable from African way of life. It pre-dates colonial period and has survived many forces posed by western influences. According to Jary and Jary (1995), colonial rule in many parts of the world led to the destruction or marginalization of some cultural norms and values as colonial administrators imposed their authority on native tribes who often resisted their influence. Laws were passed in order to subjugate these people and marginalize their cultural heritage. Indigenous education was often despised in order to promote Western forms of knowledge such as natural science. But modern research has demonstrated that indigenous education is neither inferior nor backward as they were derived from centuries of accurate observation and experiments. This paper examines some of the features of this system of education which includes 1). The aims of education, 2). curriculum of traditional education, 3). Pedagogical approaches, 4) its philosophical basis and concludes by giving a critical examination of the relevance of the system to education in Africa in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.

2. Definition Of Terms:

2.1. Education:

Bologun (2008) posits that there is no unvocal definition of education as the concept has been exposed to different and often contradictory interpretation. However Hamm (1989) suggests that we can have clear understanding of the concept of education if we isolate it by uses to which it is put.

In English the term “Education” has been derived from two Latin words Educare (Educere) and Educatum. “Educare” means to train or mould. It again means to bring up or to lead out or to draw out, propulsion from inward to outward. The term “Educatum” denotes the act of teaching. It throws light on the principles and practice of teaching. Accordingly education does not mean only the acquisition of knowledge but it is the development of altitudes and skills. Historically, philosophers have from ancient times given their views on education. Socrates (470-399) was one of the first to do so. He gives a definition which is closely related to the study as he preferred to describe education by comparing it with his mothers’ profession. He said education is midwifery. A teacher like a midwife only helps the mother to give birth. The teacher is not the mother. So also, pupil himself ‘conceives’ the idea (called
concept) and the teacher only helps (www.studylecturenotes.com/Foundation-of-education./etymological-meaningofeducation).

Dewey (1916) remarks that education is not a preparation for life, rather it is the living. He states education is the process of living through a continuous reconstruction of experiences. It is the development of all those capacities in the individual which will enable him to control his environment and fulfill his possibilities.

Adeyinka (2002,) defines education as "the process of transmitting the culture of a society from one generation to the other, the process by which the adult members of a society bring up the younger ones.” he is in agreement with Nyerere who observes that education is to transmitting culture, altitude and skills as well as accumulated wisdom from one generation to another.

Boyd and King (1977), consider education to be the training and instruction of the young for the business of life. This definition is appropriate because since the beginning of human civilization this has been one of the most ancient concerns of humankind. Each human society has been interested in training the future generation to improve on their social, economic, cultural and political life of their society. Such an education is derived from the traditions of the people and conditioned by their worldview and environment as well as borrowed or imposed foreign factors.

Situating education in the context of Africa, Adeyima and Adeyinka have concluded that education should aim at enabling individuals to survive in a society, cultivate good habits and develop good citizens capable of earning a good living (Adeyima and Adeyinka 2003).

2.2. Indigenous:

Indigenous knowledge is often perceived as primitive, historical ancient practices of the African peoples. While that could have a meaning to those who propagate such views to Angioni (2002); Dei (2002); Purcell (1998), Turay (2002), the word indigenous refers to specific groups of people defined by ancestral territories, collective cultural configuration, and historical locations. Owour observes that indigenous denotes that the knowledge is typical and belongs to peoples from specific places with common culture and societies. (Owuor 2007).
In this paper indigenous knowledge is defined as an inclusive act set of activities, values beliefs and practices that has evolved cumulatively over time and is active among communities and groups who are its practitioners. Wane (2002) observes that indigenous knowledge is dynamic and in the process of learning old knowledge new knowledge is discovered and this makes indigenous dynamic

Webster’s country, region; Dictionary (1979) defines "indigenous" as born in a native, growing or produced naturally in a country or not exotic; innate; inherent; inborn. In this work the term "indigenous" will be used synonymously with the term traditional".

2.3. Traditional:

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1990) defines tradition as “… the passing down of opinion, beliefs, practices, customs etc from past to present; especially by word of mouth or practice”(Longman 1990).

The Dictionary of Social Sciences (1964) defines "tradition" as a neutral term used to denote the transmission, usually oral, whereby modes of activity or taste or belief are handed down (given across) from one generation to the other and thus perpetuated. Boateng (1983) states that it is “…the education of the African before the coming the European- an informal education that prepared Africans for their responsibilities as adults in their communities”.

In essence African traditional education refers to ways of teaching and learning in Africa which are based on indigenous knowledge accumulated by Africans over centuries in response to their different physical, agricultural, ecological, political and socio-cultural challenges. But how relevant and valuable is traditional education to modern day life? Are all values from Africa’s educational heritage suitable for the 21st century?

African indigenous education was a lifelong process of learning where by a person progressed through predetermined stages of life of graduation from cradle to grave. Cameroon & Dodd (1970). This implies that African indigenous education was continuous throughout lifetime from childhood to old-age. Mushi (2009) defines African indigenous education as a process of passing among the tribal members and from one generation to another the inherited knowledge, skills, cultural traditions, norms and values of the tribe.

(Merriam, 2007), disputes the existence of indigenous knowledge and remarks that there is no such a thing as indigenous education .i.e. indigenous education exists only in the mind.
According to H. J. Baker’s publication on “children of Rhodesia the above denial is true. He observes “the children of this land (Rhodesia) are nonentities. Nothing at all is done for them. They feed, sit, move about and sleep and in this manner they grow until the time comes for them to do something. They have no nurseries, no tea parties no birthdays and no instruction from their parents. They are there and that is all their lives are one big nothing.’” (Ocitti 1973, Kelly, 1998)

According to the above assertion, indigenous education is not education. However going by the definition of Nyerere on education in his book Africans qualify to have and education system that was well established. He observes that education plays purpose of transmitting from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society, to prepare for the future membership ship of the society and their active participation in its maintenance or development.

On the basis of this definition it is easy to see that African indigenous education was effective, tangible, definite and clearly intelligible.

According to anthropologists, every society has a culture which is transmitted from generation to generation through the means of education. Put differently education is the humanization of man in the society. Whether it referred to as socialization (the way the sociologist prefer to call it) or as enculturation (as termed by anthropologists) indigenous education is education.

West mann D. (1933) asserts that:

‘Education is not something which the African has received for the first time from the white man. The ‘primitive’ African is not uneducated. Many Africans, sow such dignified and tactful behavior; and reveal so much refinement in what they say and do, that they well deserve to be called educated.’

3. Aims Of Education:

Although indigenous education systems varied from one society to another, the goals of these systems were often strikingly similar. Sifuna and Otiende (2006), posits that indigenous education was essentially an education for living whose main goal was to train the youth for
adulthood within society. Emphasis was laid on normative and expressive goals that stressed on instilling the accepted standards and behavior and creation of unity respectively.

Fafunwa (1974) has identified five cardinal goals of African traditional education.

1. He remarks that African traditional education has the goal of developing the child's latent physical skills;
2. To develop character;
3. To develop intellectual skills;
4. To acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour;
5. To develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs;
6. To understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large.

In a nutshell the traditional education of African children is wholistic in nature and aims at preparing a child into becoming an adult in all dimensions. Kenyatta in his famous book Facing Mount Kenya while describing the educational system of the Gikuyu of Kenya gives summative comment by observing that

.... it will be found that education begins at the time of birth and ends with death. The child has to pass various stages of age-groupings with a system of education defined for every status in life. The aim at instilling into the children what the Gikuyu call "otaari wa mocie" or "kerera kia mocie," namely, educating the children in the family and clan tradition. Apart from the system of schools which has been introduced by the Europeans, there is no special school building in the Gikuyu sense of the word: the homestead is the school. . . . This is one of the methods by which the history of the people is passed from generation to generation (Kenyatta 1961).

Adeyinka (1993), like Fafunwa (1974), summarizes the purpose of traditional education being channel that enable an individual to: (1) Position himself/herself in the society into which s/he has been born to live; (2) explore the world and find his/her own place in it; (3) cultivate good habits and develop the right attitude to life and work; (4) develop as a good
citizen; (5) develop his/her potentialities to the full so that s/he could acquire knowledge and training in a profession and so earn a good living.

Moumouni (1968) described this type of education as “the school of life” whose objectives were manifold, focused on producing an honest, respectable, skilled and co-operative individual who fitted into the social life of the society and enhanced its growth.

Education is based on the socio-cultural and economic features shared by the various communities. The harsh natural environment made survival to be the main aim of education. Every skill, knowledge or attitude learnt was either for protection, and acquisition of food or shelter and ensuring successful reproduction. Other aims were to create unity and consensus in society, to perpetuate the cultural heritage of the ethnic community and preserve its boundaries, to inculcate feelings of group supremacy and communal living and to prepare the young for adult roles and status. Female education was predominantly designed to produce future wives, mothers and homemakers.

4. Curriculum Of Traditional Education:

The traditional system of education is similar in most African countries. In Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, Malawi or elsewhere in Africa, traditional education of youngsters involves intellectual, physical and attitudinal training in order to develop fully into acceptable adults in the society. In addition, different kinds of games, including wrestling and running, training for healthy living, cooking, dressing, hunting, farming, carpentry, training to become a blacksmith, drumming, dancing, marriage counseling and critical thinking form part of the traditional education curriculum at different stages of the life of the youth (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2002).

The African education experience was strictly set up to prepare the young for society in the African community and not necessarily for life outside the ethnic community (Nsamenang and Lamb, 1994). Boys and girls were taught separately to help prepare of each sex for their adult roles. Every member of the community had a hand in contributing to the educational upbringing of the child. The highest point of the African educational experience was the ritual passage ceremony from childhood to adulthood. The peculiar aspect and challenge of the African traditional educational system was the absence of academic examinations necessary to graduate.
Most important to note is that up to now there is no agreed upon systematic curricula for traditional African education, but what exists is tacit and unwritten. A major problem in the practice of traditional education was the inability of the people to write and keep records, the knowledge concerning many professions remains undocumented (Ssekamwa, 1991).

The situation in many African countries is much more complex, especially the challenge of moving from past to future types of work and expectations.

African Education does not divide curricular contents into disciplines such as arts, sciences, agriculture, economics, arithmetic, etc. although these are implicit in educational ideas and practices. Nsamenang (2005) clarifies that Indigenous African education wedges the children’s daily routines and the livelihoods of their family and community together, integrating skills and knowledge about all aspects of life into a single curriculum.

The curriculum is not written but tacitly organized in sequence to fit the expected milestones of different developmental stages that the culture perceives or recognizes (Nsamenang, 2005). In other words, what is taught or what children have to learn fits their abilities and succeeding stages of development. This type of education provides not only a means for survival but also “connects” children to various social networks. The occupation of the individual, the social responsibilities, the political role as well as the moral and spiritual values was targeted in all educational considerations (Gwanfogbe, 2006).

The learning process emphasized observation, imitation and participation which are indisputably abstract processes. Besides, the child was taught the characteristics of seasons and how to determine the beginning of each season by observing atmospheric changes, the appearance or disappearance of certain fauna and flora. The effects of the changing seasons on the environment including the vegetation, the water level, and communication systems were taught to show how these changes could affect farmers, traders, builders, travelers, hunters, fishermen and all other forms of activities. Following Western classifications, such studies covered disciplines like Geography, Environmental studies, Nature studies, Rural Science, Meteorology and Bio-geography (Nsamenang & Tchombe 2011).

The study of nature or botany was through identification of plants by name and utility as food, medicine, flowers, and fuel. Animal husbandry, amply covered aspects of modern veterinary sciences, included knowledge of animal care and treatment. Local history was taught, first, at family level, then at village or clan level and later at ethnic level. Heroes were
identified and songs of praise composed and showered on them and their rulers, demonstrating levels of intellectual engagements that were instilled through mental drills. The themes of mental drills varied with the occasions and the person or focal events. For example, childbirth and in some societies, the birth of twins was given special meaning and ritual attention. (ibid)

In some societies a distinction was made between male and female death rites and the age and the status of the dead. Ululations at festivals (religious or others) also had specific themes and were also done through lengthy incantations and recitations which were interrupted mainly by choruses. Priests, diviners and healers were adept at this form of oratory.

Mathematics was also well developed. The children were introduced quite early to the notion of counting and calculating local produce. Through games, folklore and rhymes, these notions were further impressed. Concepts of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division had always existed in all African languages prior to their introduction in school. The notion of quantities existed though not as precise as those of the West. Knowledge and competence in geometrical shapes and trigonometry was more evident in house construction. The construction of components of a house was done separately on the ground and then assembled together. That these pieces fitted together when erected is proof that the architectural level was well developed and the mathematical involvement was highly sophisticated. Unfortunately that is rapidly being lost to lack of research and incorporation into school curricula. It is therefore undeniable that pre-colonial indigenous education was well developed in all parts of Africa before the introduction of the Islamic-Arabic and Western-Christian education systems. How Africa’s oral educational system has coped and is coping with the introduction of alien education systems is a research matter (Nsamenang & Tchombe 2011).

5. Teachers And Pedagogical Approaches:

African educational ideas and practices are entrenched in family traditions to permit parents, especially mothers, to be the first teachers and educators. They start with language (mother tongue) training and follow with sanitary and aesthetic education. Like all other educational systems, the indigenous African Education system also encourages physical training. But unlike European education where conscious training is programmed for all aspects of
physical education, the African indigenous system profited from inherited skills discovered through social life and leisure activities. This discovery was typical in music and dance which were frequent and involved a lot of song and body movements. However, many competitive games such as wrestling, swimming, canoe races, running, hunting and farming were organized and could be interpreted as conscious training. The development of character and communal spirit took various forms in different communities. Some used the wrestling exercises to instill the spirit of reconciliation and solidarity. Such healthy competitive spirits were also taught to peer-group right from the early age.

In some communities mock wars were organized. Usually in all societies, both winners and losers were congratulated and sometimes rewarded because the essence of each competition was not to win but to acquire the spirit of gallantry, tolerance and solidarity.

Aspects of communal solidarity were taught by the establishment of laws (usually referred to by Eurocentrists as taboos) against killing, witchcraft, stealing, adultery, incest, disloyalty, infidelity, perfidy, corruption, etc. The divulging of the secrets of the society was tantamount to committing treasonable felony against the ethnic community and very often attracted ostracism. These measures were taken to ensure the imbuement of the spirit of honesty, kindness, uprightness, decency and cooperation. It was commonly accepted to remain childless than to have an uncouth child who would bring dishonor to the family and the society. When direct parental care and intervention was no longer required, children were better with their peer groups. The boys and girls who were poised for the responsibility of adulthood were assessed for proficiency on the basis of their social, moral, intellectual, and practical competency in peer cultures. Age-grades, i.e., children of the same community who identify with cohort members at all developmental stages are a common feature of many African cultures, as the learned from one another (Nsamenang 2005).

Woolman (2001) is in agreement with Nsamenang (2005) by remarking that parents played an important role in the education of their children. Wolman observes that teaching of the young involved the parents, family members, clan and cultural group and eventually the entire community. Young girls in some African communities such as Ameru were directly taught (trained) by their mothers while boys of similar age got instructions from male adults. Various methods were employed to transmit traditional knowledge, these included listening and observing, imitation and emulation of adult activities and taking part in different aspects of social life. Nyerere (1975) says, “at the didactic level the teaching process took the form
of the stories, legends, riddles, and songs; while at the practical level individuals enacted what they had learnt didactically, by imitating and watching what their elders performed”.

The methods can be broadly divided into formal and informal. Among the informal method included play-a popular form of play was wrestling, swinging, chasing one another aimlessly, sliding, and dances, performed in moonlight. There were designed to develop children’s memory and promote their language.

Secondly, oral literature constituted an important method of instruction. This included myths which legends fork tales, music and proverbs. Bogonko, (1992), highlights deterrence or inculcation of fear as a methodology used to instruct children. This helped to conform to morals, customs and standards of behavior inherent in the clan and ethnic community involving children in productive work was extensively practical. This was basically done to assist children acquire the right types of masculine or feminine roles.

On the other hand formal methods of instructions involved theoretical and practical inculcation of skills. This involved learning through apprenticeship, constant corrections and warnings to children.

Among the Acholi of Uganda like the Ameru of Kenya, Occittí (1973) observes that much of the ethical teachings were given to children through folktales most of which had a happy ending and in involved a trump over difficulties and virtues such as community unity handwork conformity honesty uprightness and were reflected in many of the folktales.

6. Philosophical Basis Of African Indigenous Education:

Ideally, African indigenous education as practiced by many communities simple or sophisticated, rests on firm and sound philosophical foundations. This implies that this system of education used its own principles on which it was built. Sifuna, 2006, like Omona (1998) has outlined five pillars upon which African Indigenous Education rests. These are preparedness, functionalism, perenialism and holisticism and communalism.

Sifuna, (2006), like Omona (1998) contends with Mush (2002), that preparationalism as a philosophical base for indigenous knowledge implied the role of teaching and learning to equip boys and girls with the skills appropriate to their gender in preparation for their distinctive roles in the society. In most African traditional societies such as Sukuma, Zanaki,
Kurya, Maasi, Nyamwezi, Kikuyu as well as Ameru taught girls how to become good mothers and how to handle their husbands soon after marriage while boys were prepared to become warriors, manual workers, good fathers and other male dominated occupations.

The philosophy of communalism (Sifuna 2006, Mush 2009 and Ocitti 1973), attest that communalism or group cohesion, parents sought to bring up their children within a community in which each person saw his well-being in the welfare of the group. Children were brought up largely by the process of socialism as opposed to the process of individualism. This was done to strengthen the organic unity of the clan. Achebe elaborates the essence of unity in the traditional sense from the Igbo culture of Nigeria in his book Things Fall Apart (1958) while describing how a man, Okonkwo pleaded for communal unity at a feast hosted by him for his kinsmen:

A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good.

Functionalism implied becoming useful to oneself as well as to one’s family, community, clan or society to learn what was of relevance and utilitarian to both the individual and the society. Fafunwa (1974) argues that indigenous African education was functional because the curriculum was developed to attend to the realities of the community and was needs-based.

The principle of perennialism which is also considered same as conservatism explains most colonial societies were backward oriented much more than being future–oriented. African indigenous education did not allow the progressive influence of the mind of young people. Mush (2009), observes that ‘criticism’ about what they learnt or were taught was discouraged and knowledge was not to be questioned. Questions seeking clarification on aspects not clearly understood were discouraged.

Finally, the principle of wholisticism as the name implies referred to multiple or integrated learning where a learner was required to acquire multiple skills. Little room was given for specialization in specific occupation it was not vividly compartmentalized. In this, aims content and method were intractably interwoven.
7. The Relevance Of Indigenous Education Today:

A historical examination of the educational systems in Africa will reveal that there are three major origins of the current practices of education in the continent. These are: Indigenous or what others term Traditional Education, Western Education and Islamic Education. (Baguma and Aheisibwe,). However, Western educational models and interests have devalued indigenous cultures and education, projecting them as anti progressive. Meanwhile, Eurocentric views argue that there are just two educational systems i.e. Western education and Islamic education. They observe that since education necessarily involved writing, and African education was not written before the invasion of the continent by Arabic-Islamic and European educational systems, it means that there was no education. This view was not strange especially at a time when Eurocentric scholars like A.P. Newton, Professor of imperial History at the University of London, stated that “History only begins when men take to writing”. Yet a close study of the indigenous African education system shows that the universal objectives of education were targeted and remain inherent in African childrearing cultures. However, the predominance of the Western education model is unquestionable because of the ideological and technological influence on the world at large. Nevertheless, it is important to note that effective curricula reforms aimed at rendering education relevant to the advancement of any African nation can only succeed when the triple heritages are consulted. This has not been the case in most African countries and that is why reforms have tended to fail to render education relevant to African perceptions and development needs (Boyd and King 1977)

According the pessimist, to continue with indigenous education is to lead East Africa to era of doom and social turmoil. The scenario of sticking to traditional modes of education, so they maintain is one inviting the process of backwardness; of turning the clock of history backward; of advocating a return to by gone days.

Essentially there are two major groups of critics of indigenous education; namely, the pessimists and the skeptics, whose main pre-occupation is to stress the deficiencies of indigenous education that it can never provide policy options for any development today and that it is only fit for the museum.

The skeptics on the other hard skim that the effort to preserve and utilize the good elements in Africa traditional cultures and education was tried unsuccessfully before. And because
such effort were a waste of time and resources in the sense that they failed they should never be reactivated today.

Despite what has been presented above it is believed to be a tragedy to allow indigenous education to fall into oblivion. It is true that good elements of indigenous education has withstood the test of time as well as transformation to meet individual and society needs for today and tomorrow should be preserved and developed (Erny, 1981).

African indigenous education is the basis for the foundation of education, during the establishment of ESR in 1967, Nyerere recalled how the traditional education was relevant to the community life especially learning by doing, and included it in modern education.

However, some “organized” educational approaches to preparing children for meaningful cultural life existed throughout Africa and still persist in some communities today. Some examples include the poro (for boys) and the sande (for girls) in Liberia, the ‘voodoo convents’ in Benin, the bogwera (for boys) and bojale (for girls) in Botswana and rites of passage in Cameroon (Tchombe, 2007) and in the Southern African region.

African indigenous ways of knowing are as diverse as approximately the forty two ethnic communities in Kenya especially in the rural areas. Given that most of the inhabitants of Kenya live in rural areas, thus depending directly on natural resources for their livelihood, it can be inferred that indigenous knowledge systems, which relate to such resources are still very much in use and remain important to these communities. It is also important to note that such practices have evolved over time and regions, as a response of individuals and communities needs to adapt to challenges posed by their social and natural environments. As stated by Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg (2002), knowledge cannot be perceived as fixed categories, experiences, and social practices.

Wane (2002) reiterates this dynamic nature of indigenous knowledge by noting that indigenous forms of knowledge have accrued over time, which is a critical aspect of cultures. Wane has argued that in the process of learning the old knowledge, new knowledge is discovered and this is what makes indigenous knowledge more dynamic.

Therefore, when analyzing African indigenous knowledge forms in say Kenya, there is need to realize the complexities of its evolution due to its transition, enrichment, and its devaluation during the colonial era.
8. Conclusion:

The aims and principles of employed in the traditional African education are still relevant today. No serious educator in Africa can afford to ignore the principles draw from indigenous education. The assumption is that there is a certain degree, in which traditional education is still being promoted all over Africa in spite of the modifications which have come up as a result of adopting the western style of schooling.

The aim is to prepare individuals for communal responsibility and interpersonal relationships as key components of the learning process. Therefore, combining specific skills acquisition with good character has been considered as virtues of being well educated and a well integrated member of the society (Mungazi, 1996; Semali, 1999). As such Fafunwa’s (1982) axiom that: No study of the history of education in Africa is complete or meaningful without adequate knowledge of the traditional or indigenous educational system prevalent in Africa prior to the introduction of Islam and Christianity.
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