

Regenerating Edo Proverbs in Child Upbringing: The Woman at the Epicentre

Azunmi Adokutu (Mrs)

School of Basic and Remedial Studies,

Kwara State College of Education, Umoru Saro Road, Ilorin, Nigeria.

adokutuazunmi@gmail.com +2348038365575

&

Babatunde Mustafa Ajadi

English Department, School of Languages

Kwara State College of Education, Umoru Saro Road, Ilorin, Nigeria.

mustafaajadi@yahoo.com +2348034291645

Abstract

Child upbringing is generally regarded as the way a child is raised. It could also mean the lessons, instructions or the teachings a child receives from his/her parents and or adult members of the family while growing up. It is a truism that the way a child is brought up goes a long way in shaping the type of adult such a child eventually grows up to become in the society. This is why the importance of child upbringing cannot be over emphasized. It is in view of this, that this work examines the place of Edo proverbs in the upbringing of the child. Taking cognizance of the place of woman in raising a well behaved, balanced and total human being, the work took in-depth explanations on the woman (particularly Edo woman), the child, child upbringing and proverbs of the Edo people. It was concluded that, to enjoy a peaceful and humane society, parents, most especially the woman (as a result of her paramount role in raising a child), needs to inculcate proverbs in the upbringing of the child.

Keywords: Proverbs, upbringing, child, Edo woman

Introduction

The practice of child upbringing is as old as time itself. In the traditional African society, child upbringing is an interdependent effort within the families. This requires the elders and adult members of the family to responsibly impart the knowledge, and instructions, teaching, educating, training, and governing the upgrading of the child. Bringing up a child is one of the most important tasks any parent or adult members can embark upon in a society. This is because, the way a child is brought up or trained goes a long way in determining how such a child eventually behaves as an adult, and as a member of the society. Most of the time, child upbringing are done through the use of proverbs. Oluyomi (2016), quoting Adebayo (1979) opines that proverbs are words of wisdom popularly used by elders to advise the younger generations. They are simple truths of life that contain the ethical and moral values of a society. The truth about proverbs is that, is often empirical facts based on and derived from experiences that people had and still have in life (Mieder, 2005). Generally, proverbs belong to the wider category of figurative

forms of expression like simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, etc. Proverbs remains the treasure of wisdom in Africa and is found in most world cultures, particularly and most richly in the culture and tradition of the Edo people and Proverbs has proven to be of great continuing relevance to man even in modern times. It's still maintains its position as a powerful tool for the transmission of culture, social morality, manners, values, norms and practices and ideas of people from one generation to another.

However, it is saddening that among the Edos of today, the above traditional value system is gradually being eroded if not totally extinct. This erosion has led to what could best be termed as "value crisis". This crisis exposes the fact that the growth and progress of Edo as a society and "the Edo" as a people has been retarded in many aspect as a result of the tendencies towards materialistic achievements of the present generation. Experiences have proven beyond doubt that materialism has taken over every facets of our life as a people; even the religious institutions seem to be in the fore front in the pursuit for materialism than the secular society. This malady of value crisis has portrayed Edo as an open society (and as a people) where anything goes. In the Edo of today, it seems to be grabbing the worst; very little of the best and our image as a people is continually on the decline.

The concern therefore is: Where have things gone wrong? What comes next? The position of this work resonates from this proverb "going back to point out where the rain started beating us." This endeavour argues that, one way of overcoming the present problem is to return to the core values (of those days) of ancestral past, when proverbs were employed in laying the basic foundation for the upbringing of children. It is the belief in this write up that, since this way worked for the elders before us, who used them in the course of bringing up their young ones, there is no reason this cannot be used again today, to educate children in various homes, as well as train the children in order to inculcate morals and values in them. This work stresses that the home remains the primary base for value formation with the woman at the centre; as the first contact, as well as, the first school of the child. Before now the woman used to be the rallying point in the home but nowadays, probably in the struggle for identity and in the quest to be "modern", this role has been abdicated. The result is what is seen today among the present generation of Edo youths.

Conceptual Clarifications

Meaning of Proverbs

The word 'proverb' has been defined variously by different scholars. This divergence in definitions has resulted in a non-definite definition of proverb. Nevertheless, the following sources define proverb as a simple and concrete saying, popularly known and repeated, that expresses a truth based on common sense or the practical experience of humanity. They are often metaphorical, Sanni (2016), quoting Bada (1985), defines proverbs as "statements emanating from experience, keen observation and deep thought. It is a way of being circumspect in speech

making”. Akporobaro (2005) views proverbs as sentences or phrases which briefly and strikingly express and recognises truth or shrewd observations about practical life, and which has been preserved by oral tradition. Finnegan (2012) is of the view that proverbs are rich sources of imagery and succinct expressions in which more elaborate forms can draw. Although she confesses that an exact definition of proverbs is not easy, she however, says that there are some agreements as to what constitute a proverb. It is a saying in a more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and thought distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it.

Proverbs are gems of wisdom. They are coined in order to impart practical knowledge to people. They contain great truths with lots of experiences and profound thinking. Proverbs are mixture of wisdom and philosophy. A proverb does not argue over a point or explain anything, it just tells a great truth in the most significant and apt way. Because most proverbs come from real-life scenarios, they are often particularly relevant to the culture from which they are derived. At the same time, they manage to convey a universal truth that has a wider application. Hence, Chinua Achebe calls proverbs “the palm oil with which words are eaten” (*Things Fall Apart* 1958).

Who is a Child?

Article 1 of the United Nations Conventions on the Right of the Child says “a child is a human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.” With the Convention, it is easy to define a child as a human being, below 18 years of age unless the law of the country in which the child resides deems the child to be an adult at an early age. The CRC definition of a child granted individual countries the discretion to determine by law, the age at which childhood ceases: whether at 12, 14, 16, or at whatever age it is found appropriate.

Socially, a child is used to describe a relationship with a parent such as sons or daughters of any age or metaphorically, an authority figure or signified group membership in a clan, tribe or religion. Therefore, in this context, a child shall be taken to be an individual such as a son or a daughter of any age who is related to a parent. It is worthy of note here that a child in this instance goes beyond biological relationship between an individual and a parent(s) to encompass blood relations. In the traditional African society, nomenclatures like cousins, nieces, nephews, uncles and aunts do not really exist. What obtain are brothers and sisters as substitute for cousins, nieces and nephews while aunts and uncles are referred to as fathers and mothers.

Child Upbringing

Upbringing is synonymous with to rear, educate, train, raise, encourage, nurture, support, etc. In an online Wordweb Dictionary, upbringing refers to the way one is

treated and educated when young, especially by one's parents, particularly in relation to the effect, that this has on how one behaves and take moral decisions. Child upbringing is the process of promoting and supporting the development of the child physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually from infancy to adulthood (Wikipedia, 2012). Bringing up a child is a complex process, a process which has to equip the child with knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs. It is the process of introducing the child to the world. It is about the mutual influence of a tutor (parents, particularly the mother,) and the child in order to shape the child's specific physical predispositions, being the foundation of attitudes and moral behaviour of an individual (Langier, 2016).

The Need for (Good) Child Upbringing: The Edo Example

Bringing up a child is a herculean, yet the most responsible and most satisfying, task any adult could take on. It is also a job for which people receive the least formal training but one thing to note is that each individual's knowledge on how to bring up a child usually comes from the individual's surrounding and his/her own upbringing. Doing this may result in patterns from the parent's own social experiences being repeated and passed on to the child. It is from the above standpoint that Adekoya (2012), in an online write up, views child upbringing as:

The deliberate efforts of parents in teaching the child the facts of life, discovering the child's potentials in order to help develop it and also raising him up to a desired standard of behaviour, efficiency and physical condition through their personal exemplary life, discipline, love, encouragement and instruction (www.elifeonline.net).

In the typical Edo society, the child is seen as the essence of the society. The child is seen, among other values, as the society's future, its treasure, and its pride. This is why children are often named as Omokefue (child is wealth), Omokahagbo (child is life), Omokoghie (child is royalty), Omonegho (a child is valuable than riches), Omoaduagboghie (child is the foundation of all other life acquisitions), Omokpeda (child is the ultimate), Omokhojo (child is of prime position), Omoayena (we live for the child), Omoalukhe (everything one acquires is for the benefit of the child). Materially speaking, in the Edo society, no matter what an individual acquires in life, such is not reckoned with unless there is a child to inherit it.

Basically, a child should be well brought up for the following reasons:

- a. To bring good reputation not only to the parents but the entire family and the community.
- b. To enhance the child's chances of making good and reasonable choices in life.
- c. To assist in bringing out the best in the child, which serves to benefit the child's family in particular and the society in general?
- d. To guide him/her away from the path of evil and all acts that could defame his/her person, his/her family and his/her society.
- e. To promote the longevity of lives of both the parents of the child and the child himself/herself.

- f. Most importantly, the life of a well brought up child brings joy and peace of mind to the family of the child in particular and the community in general.

Edo Woman as Catalyst for Good Child Upbringing

In most Edo communities, particularly in North Ibie found in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State, it is common place to hear statements like ‘inyo khovue’, (mother is shield/cover/protector), ‘inyo o mhue afe’ (mother is home), ‘inyo ki ufulo’ (mother is light). All the above mentioned are used in naming the child, to underscore the importance of a woman in the upbringing of the child, a popular Etsako musician, Sir Waziri Oshoma, dedicated one of his tracks in the 80s titled “Ega” to mothers as the light of the child. In the track, Waziri emphasised on the enormity of a woman’s influence on the child; either positively or otherwise. Also in the early 80s, in his track titled “Mother”, Sunny Okosun, another Edo musician, sang of the love and affection of a mother as well as her role as the light, mentor, teacher, and guardian of the child.

Generally, African traditional societies and Edo, in particular, assign to women the role of educator. Such education is the type that starts from the cradle and is affected by a variety of activities in which the child participates. Thus, the most general implication in all the studies on child upbringing is that, the culture of good upbringing in traditional African societies is implanted in a child through responsible training, teaching and socialization undertaken and supervised by mothers; this is present in the Edo society. In her role as a teacher, the Edo woman is the one who takes maximum responsibility for the upbringing of the child during its formative years. These early years in the child’s life are crucial for mental development (including beliefs, attitudes and prejudices) of the child. Values like patience, contentment, perseverance, tolerance, respect, fear of God and the likes inculcated in the child’s formative years become major determinants of the type of adult such child grows up to be in later years. The type of adult the child grows up to become also depends on the continuous learning which a mother provides for the child in its initial learning stage as well as the moral and emotional support provided by the mother which makes a child feel secure. Such feeling of security reduces the child’s tendency of getting involved in vices in the future.

Indeed, the central message in this study is that good upbringing was taken seriously in our society in those days and that this was established, little by little, in young minds and moulded in the behaviour and personality of the young through the agency of the mother. In traditional Edo community, each child has his/her own responsibility as a member of the society and the elderly members of the community are responsible for these training. Each child is exposed to a variety of songs, stories, sayings and especially proverbs directed by the mother or aunts and conveyed at the fire place or after the evening meals. Each of the above verbal arts, particularly the proverbs contain simple but clear messages laced with moral teachings which are

aimed at conveying the consequences of bad behaviours (e.g. greed, rivalry, conflict, inordinate quest for wealth) as well as project what is expected of the children as sons and daughters in the community.

Also in traditional Edo society, women were part transmitters of social and cultural values to the future generation. This was done via proverbs, which were used to admonish, instruct, warn, advice, encourage, and enlighten the child or as the case may be. The implication of this type of training is underscored in the fact that good upbringing is not born with a person but made through a gradual process. The culture of good upbringing was imbibed in the child through responsible teaching, training, rearing and instruction. By her nature and attribute, the woman is a direct influence on the future generations of any society through her everlasting influence on her children in the crucial formative years. Mothers are the first school of the children where social values of the society are inculcated and the direction of growth and development of the child are provided. The inculcation of good upbringing in children will give rise to citizens who are conscious of the norms and values of their society and who would uphold such. It is the absence of mother's touch in the lives of children of today that has resulted in various forms of vices being perpetrated which has projected Edo in a bad light.

Selected Edo Proverbs and their Interpretations

- Omo o kha khii le dobe tu agami aa lue, a wuon wen naali – If a child insists he/she can swallow an axe, you simple hold it for him/her.
- Eemi nee fua, unu lo ti a zi irirhia – A bad yam seedling is recognised from the budding tendons.
- Erhali o ka to se omo a, o mi ewuen na – A child once scalded by fire gets scared of ashes.
- Omo o ka khi le a mhuo li ogbo, a a lu o omi olimhi – A child who fails to appreciate his/her family ends up being treated as an orphan.
- Okhalie lo o khi omo obe ni le via, li unu orho li le kholo – The shrew said it is as a result of the bad child she has that made her develop a long snout.
- A vhi egbe omo, a ma, a vhi udu omo – Parents give birth to the body of the child but not the mind of the child.
- A kha khi agbo mo kemi, a a me ono rha ni omi olimhi – When it comes to sharing of goodies, nobody remembers the orphan.
- Afe la te fu a a je ode – Charity begins at home.
- Obo oguo o vha guese akhe – One hand cannot cover the pot.
- Alamigho lo o khi, a kha de, inami o khi eva – The hare says when he falls, the race becomes doubled.
- Ogbe no gbe, la a mase a a na – One can only plan for a day that has come.
- Obo no vha nue ni elamhi, lo ro ri unu tagie ekhili – It is the shortness of the goat's hand that made it untie the head pad with its mouth.
- Omo na gba shi ukoko, o vha yese khi ode oki o nue – A child carried on the back does not realise the road to the market is far.

- Okhiami o la a gbe ima ghue le – One’s stomach could be full even in the midst of hunger.
- A kha rhi ozalo a a do o ke, a soli owe ame – When assisting the blind to cross the river, you dip his/her leg into the water.
- E yese khi iilu le khi la le e ti a a vholo li a – They recognise them as cotton seedlings, yet, they weeded them.
- A khe li omo o de e de, oli gbaga – When a child is cautioned, he/she should heed such.
- Omo na gba shi ukoko, o vha mi eseke a rhue – A child on the back does not find a fortune.
- Omo o wa lewe, lo rhi okholi gbe enejo – That a child is not entitled to eat kolanut led to the capture of the elderly on battle field.
- Ina a li vie me, la a rha vie o no gu – The remembrance of our eventual and inevitable demise is what makes us mourn the dead.
- Eshe o kha te, o a a ji ukpoke – When a catfish grows to maturity, it goes to its own abode.
- Yagha yagha gbomiza: ukiomhi o a a yagha a da li onoko – The okro tree does not outgrow its planter.

Conclusion

The challenges faced by the Edo woman being misrepresented today is one that can be surmounted only if mothers would go back and assume their natural and God given role of nurturer. Therefore, the role of parents, particularly mothers, adult members of the family and community in the nurturing of any child is very paramount. In those days, in the process of bringing up a child, the parents and elders alike employed extensively proverbs, most especially, when the message intended is of a grave import. Proverbs, in the past, were used to correct, admonish, advice, warn, encourage, inspire, etc. the child and such child grows up to become a responsible adult member of his society. Today, the reverse has become the case, as most mothers, in the quest to be called “modern” have done away with what makes them African imbibing the Western culture which they, in turn, inculcate in their children.

This write-up is not out to cast aspersions on the Western culture but one thing one must not fail to realize is the fact that Western culture will always reflect the culture of the West, which is different from the African culture and traditions. What defines a people is their culture and tradition. Africa has a rich culture and tradition which touch every aspect of life of the African. In this wise, therefore, whatever an individual requires to live a responsible life in his community is inherent in the culture, values, norms and traditions of his people; his community. Today, adults, who are supposed to be custodians of African traditions and who should impart such in the child, have abdicated their roles to the child’s peers and the mass media. In fact, in most homes today, parents bring up their children with English language; local dialects are forbidden. So, children from such families grow up being exposed

to the culture of the language with which they are brought up. No wonder then, the spate of violence particularly among the youth is on the increase. This can be attributed to the fact that what they learn from their peers and the mass media mostly consist of things of negative values.

Presently, the Nigerian nation is ridden with violence, terrorism, ethnic clashes, political bigotry, kidnappings, ritual killings, ethnic militia, armed robbery, prostitution, child trafficking to host of others. The unfortunate thing about the whole of these incidents is that the youth are the ones employed as weapons of violence; they are the perpetrators of these evil acts. When opportunity arises to take statistics of this group of Nigerian youth, one would discover that they constitute those that are vulnerable, vulnerable in the sense that they were not properly nurtured.

In Africa, proverbs are used as embellishment of speech and a guide to action. The language of proverbs gives vent to a whole perspective of the world and thus constitutes a means of tapping into societies' view of reality. Proverbs are spurs to knowledge, to wisdom and morality. They can be prognostic and can serve as challenge to further reflection. They serve as warnings in human activities or relations. They criticize and praise, advice and teach. In Africa, proverbs cover every aspect of human endeavour and human relations. That is why in its proverbs, Africa has enormous resources for peace, unity and harmony in the society. We all expect other people in the society to be honest, socially conscious, environmentally sensitive, generous, polite, humane, broad-minded, non-violent and tolerant. The truth is that, the only way this can be possible is if children are nurtured to be all these things; African proverbs have the wherewithal to instill all these in the youth, when parents employ them in the process of nurturing. Let us recall that as parents/guardians, and failing to do something about this youth and contain the spate of violence that pervades the country now, this generation of youth will certainly do something in the near future.

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