

Post-Independence Early Childhood Program: The Intersection of
Language, Region, Social Class, and the Girl Child's Pre-school Experience
in Niger

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Abstract

This article is an inquiry into the post-independent nation-state of Niger's practice of early childhood education. The discussion focuses on issues of inequity inherent in an inherited colonial model of education. The author discusses her own experiences as an African child born and raised in Africa coupled with document analysis. Several paradigms inform this discussion including human capital theory, post-colonial and feminist critical policy analysis. First, the author will attempt to deconstruct her childhood education by examining the role family and community played, thus, illustrating the significance of traditional model of African childcare. Secondly, she will deconstruct the formal model as she acknowledges changing practices, limited opportunity, and/or lack thereof, due to the child's gender, geographic region, socioeconomic origin, and language. The concern is for the neglected poor rural, nomadic, and allophone African child in general and the girl child in particular, to whom educational opportunity is severely limited. Finally, the author argues for a transformative approach by suggesting a sustained dialogue amongst educational stakeholders: policymakers, researchers, parents and pedagogues by looking for more relevant, inclusive and alternative model of child rearing in order to enable the African child to learn and succeed through multiple and enriching approaches.

Haoua M. Hamza

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Introduction

"It takes a village to raise the child. Does the village still raise the child?"

Both book titles are very refreshing and stimulating and lead the African child that I am to wonder and tackle the question of the provision of early childhood education in my post-independence West African society of Niger: *Does the post-independence African city raise the child?*

I will first attempt to deconstruct my traditional early childhood education through a personal narrative, secondly, through document analysis, I will attempt to deconstruct the post-independence model of early childhood education in Niger, and finally as an insider, I will share some thoughts that may contribute to reforming approaches to early childhood education. This discussion will attempt to examine assumptions and historical roots of issues of inequity by discussing the intermix of culture, socio-economic, regional variations, language, gender and classroom pedagogy, and their impact on the girl child. As suggested by Bloch (1992) this paper, to a certain extent is a critical analysis of "the relationship between the state and classroom or pedagogy" (p. 7). The discussion will draw insights from the human capital theory, post-colonial theory, and feminist critical policy analysis. It is the hope that such a discussion contributes to enriching the dialogue of expanded perspectives and opportunities, which would enable the African child in general, and the girl child specifically to tap into his or her potential and become a self-sufficient and productive national and world-class citizen.

Geographical and Demographic Background

The Republic of Niger is among the largest countries in West Africa, but its remoteness and aridity make it one of the least populated countries in the region. Landlocked, Niger has a total landmass of 1,267,000 sq. km (MDSP/PF, 1993) (489,191 square miles), and is “one of the Sahel countries with a large proportion of its northern area belonging to the Sahara desert” (Lawler, 1994, p.4117). It is approximately twice the size of France and five times the size of Great Britain (Zamponi, 1994). Two-thirds of the country lies in the Sahara desert and the northern Sahel belt. It shares a long boundary with northern Nigeria extending approximately from 16:00 N to 8:00 E degrees

According to the World Factbook (1990), the latest estimate of the population of Niger is 9,962,242. Ecological characteristics of the country have determined human settlement and population distribution. The population is heavily concentrated in the southern regions--1/3 of the total area--suitable for rain-fed agriculture and extensive animal husbandry. These characteristics appear to influence economic activities and determine regional differences in educational participation (Hamza, 2001).

According to the 1998 census, there are five dominant ethnic groups in Niger. Over half of the population of Niger is Hausa, while less than 21 percent of the population is Zarma-Sonrai, 10.4 percent constitutes the Fulani, who are nomadic. Another largely nomadic group, the Tuareg, constitutes 11 percent of the population, and the Kanuri, 3.4 percent. The sedentary or nomadic lifestyles of these groups tend to impact children’s participation in education differently. For instance nomadic groups lead such a mobile life that the system has not succeeded in planning an alternative approach that reaches out to these children effectively.

Historical and Theoretical Background

In light of the colonial legacy, and to meet the challenges of contemporary socio-economic and political realities, Niger has understood the importance of developing formal education early on, to meet the challenge of development. As experienced in many former colonies, and to reach the goal of development, Niger deployed a heavy public expenditure for education soon after independence. Many Sub-Saharan African (SSA) nations have committed themselves to provide universal primary education (UPE) to all their citizens since the continental conference of Addis Ababa in 1960. Niger has been one of them, and its leaders' well intentioned speeches for development continue. As recently as the 2000 conference on girls' education sponsored by the World Bank (with the financial support from the Norwegian Trust Fund for Girls' Education) in Niamey, the Minister of Education opened the workshop "with a 'call to action' [stressing]...the importance of girls and women's education to national development" (p. 1). This type of speech has become a tradition informed by theories of development, mainly human capital theory, which according to Saint-Germain (1985) views human beings as capital and education as an investment. These theories inform and contribute to both educational policy and outcomes. At independence, new African nations laid their hope of development on education. They therefore invested important percentages of their national budget to develop formal education. According to Saint-Germain (1985), in the 1950s and early 1960s, OECD and UNESCO funded and produced literature relating to the theoretical aspect of development. He argues that all educational endeavors have been enlightened by certain 'theories of development' since the early 1960s and adds that two theories seem to have strongly influenced educational planning:

the human capital theory and the modernization theory. Saint Germain goes on to state that various studies examined the history of development and “traced it back to the end of World War II, when it was believed that the modernization of poor countries and regions could be achieved through education and industrialization (Escobar, 1995; Marchand and Papart, 1995; Scott, 1994 in Saint-Germain, 1985, p.17). Bloch, and Vavrus (1998) argue that for those who view development as modernization, education is the means that equips people with the skills necessary to sustain the ‘engine’ of development. Thus, modernization is the path for addressing many of the social and economic problems that assail developing countries. People need training “...in the basics of health care, nutrition, family planning, school-related skills, agriculture, technology, and commerce to help reduce population growth and illness” (p. 9). These issues of development are among the stressors of post-independence African nations.

According to Saint-Germain (1985), critics of this paradigm argue that, as the human capital theory advocates changes only at the individual level, it fails to consider the impact of international relationships on the labor market. Furthermore, researchers such as (Bloch & Vavrus, 1985) argue that in relation to women, “both human capital theory and Marxist/neo-Marxist paradigms, including dependency theory and critical theory, have traditionally failed to take adequate account of women’s positions in economic and social relations” (p.11). They argue that socialist feminists, however, find that an analysis of the continuing subordination of women as it relates to class is necessary. These Western theories of development projected onto African societies, however, do have inherent limitations in their capacity to shape an equitable structure, and a fair educational system in the newly formed nation-states at independence.

Socio-cultural context: The African Worldview

Tournas (1996) illustrates the African worldview through his description of the *Tswana soul*, which “ is the composite of every man, woman, animal and plant-in short, all life of which the Tswana individual was just one bull in a herd that acquired its identity as a collective unit” (p. 11). Here, Tournas introduces us to a pre-Cartesian worldview where, interconnectedness is the theme, and cultural practices (including the activity of education) reflect this unitary worldview. As for the encounter with Europeans, Tournas (1996) further explains that the Tswana people

have what, from the European standpoint, is understood as a pre-Cartesian or pre-rational reality, their relationship to the environment is marked different because they saw themselves part of it. The Tswana working of natural product showed a continuity between the human and physical realms...Tswana youth, educated by initiation, are employed to manufacture tools and perform pastoral services that they learned in a process governed by this principle of unity. Europe in the seventeenth century brought its own Cartesian fragmentation to Africa. It not only seemed preoccupied with building division between the knower and the known, self and environment, it also ‘masculinized’ thought by detaching it from intuition, empathy and the ‘memory of union with the maternal world.’ Britain in the eighteenth century saw Africa as a metaphor for primitiveness and underdevelopment (p.11).

This explains both colonial and post-independence developmentalist approaches to education in Africa. A colonial/Cartesian approach and pedagogy was therefore justified

to achieve what French called “mission civilisatrice.” The traditional model however, is a system that enabled the pastoral Tswana youth or the Targui nomad child of Niger to be productive, and the rural farmer to sustain his family. Anderson (1970) points out that “Europeans did not bring the idea of formal education to Africa; in many ways this has been established in African societies long before their arrival” (p.10). Contrarily to what is generally thought, Tournas (1996) discusses formal and informal education within the traditional society stating that pre-colonial formal education “was based on oral instruction, and was only for children who have reached puberty. This formal education occurred every 3-5 years, usually in winter, in what is known as initiation ceremonies, bogwera for boys and bojale for girls...” (p. 32).

As explained by Tournas (1996) pre-colonial pedagogy was one where employment and education fit so well. In the traditional model of education, there seems to be an equal opportunity for girls and boys. Some implications of modernization today are that many children young and illiterate in the modern sense move into the city and are called street children. Juvenile delinquency, disease and prostitution hunt the teenagers they become. For 90% of the Nigerien girl child population, though the traditional model guarantees their early childhood education the modern system does not guarantee their formal pre-school experience, thus leaving them at the margins of modern formal education.

With regards to cultural practices in contemporary Nigerienne society, Charlick and Ousseini (1996), discuss the disadvantages of women, and in the field of education, and ascribe “...the problem of low female participation in education to a number of cultural values and practices, including patriarchal values and structure in all of Niger’s major ethnic groups; and the reinforcement of these values and structures by a

conservative interpretation of Islam, which has strongly resisted women's rights" (p. 2). According to these authors, the discrimination against girls and women in formal education and even in such informal educational efforts as the functional literacy programs is one of the many disadvantages (p. 2). At the socio-cultural level the issue of gender bias fed by socio-cultural beliefs and practices has been a real constraint to contemporary female education for it finds its way into classroom practice. The following section, however will discuss my traditional early childhood education, which has constituted a foundation upon which the modern formal educational experience is built.

Deconstructing my Childhood Education: A Personal Narrative

In this section I will attempt to deconstruct my early childhood experience. It will provide a basis for explaining the practice of childhood education in a traditional sociocultural context. The concept or construct of culture as defined by Haviland (1990) refers to "...that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p. 30). There are thus, social institutions whose primary function is the enculturation of its members. This discussion will focus on an important social institution-the family, within which both religion and education played important roles in raising the child.

What Is a Family in the African Context?

Tournas (1996) describes an African family or household typically as a unit consisting of " a core of a husband and his wife or wives, children, perhaps the parents of the husband or wife, the children of certain sons and typically daughters for whom no bride price had been paid. [Please understand here that polygamy is an important feature

in African societies both pre-Islamic and contemporary.] This implies a larger family, many relatives and strong kinship. Traditionally, a village is composed of people primarily from the same extended family-a clan” (p.). Therefore, all not just the immediate family, but also the neighbors and the village take care of a child born into this type of structure. It is within such a context rich with customs that the child is raised and educated.

Africans are largely a polytheistic people. Even with the new forms of religion many people still worship the Supreme Being. They will pour out libations or talk about dead relatives as though they are still present-an indication of the beliefs in ancestral spirits. Children are named after dead relatives to keep the memory of the dead relative alive. Traditionally, according to African beliefs, death is not the end of living; life is continued in "the after-life". The ancestors continue to live either in spirit form, or are re-born as young children; hence, a child could be constructed as a born-again ancestor. In Muslim and/or Christian households, the mosque and church are important socializing agents. Most children grow up being exposed to diverse value systems.

My Traditional Education

In this section education in the context of a traditional postcolonial rural African society will be discussed in relation to the culture, content, teachers and the pedagogy. The discourse of education and culture cannot sufficiently be dealt with without recognizing and acknowledging the relationship between the two. Traditional education is a daily and ongoing process, which is deeply embedded in all facets of the child's life. To be an African child means to have more than one sibling in most cases. Education begins right from the ‘Kebei’, the Djerma name for naming ceremony or “Tchou” in

Kanuri language, when prayers and words of blessing are said or whispered into the newborn's ears. The baby would be told how he/she looked like his/her father or mother. I was named after my aunt the oldest sibling on my maternal side of the family. This is a significant ceremony in the child and the family's lives. In the Djerma language Kebei also means "show" as in showing the new born and making the child's name public on the seventh day, which means only after the baby is born. Mutua & Hamza (1996) stated, "...this celebration only occurred after the baby was born and never before the birth because that could have resulted in jinxing the baby, hence, the birth of a still-born baby, or a child with disabilities" (p.10). While for forty days or more, relatives, friends, and neighbors will drop in for visit the first seven days are the most intense and crowded days for the family. On the seventh day, relatives from other villages, friends, acquaintances and neighbors in the community, attend the Kebei ceremony. This is an occasion where guests take turn holding the baby paying close attention to his/her features to conclude some resemblance to a parent or relative. Older folks would even sing to the baby and one would hear praise singers praising the family and the mother. The essence of communal responsibility over the baby is best illustrated on these occasions. As the child grows older, he or she begins to pick up on elements of the culture such as acceptable social behaviors and eventually perform gender roles and expectations.

I was born into such an extended family with many uncles and aunts, nine siblings, cousins, both of immediate and far ties. I am the fourth child (first female) of my parents with three older brothers and a younger one right after me, a position that suggests certain significance according to the customs. Therefore, my mother calls me 'Kellou' besides my given name and a nickname was given to me by my grandparents.

As the first daughter, this also meant some early initiation to women's roles and duties for future responsibilities as a wife and a mother. It is not uncommon to see a four years old child running easy errands close to home. I remember how often I run errands for my parents, older siblings, their peers, and neighbors. It is a norm for younger siblings to run the errands and declining to do so was never a question or a thoughtful option. It was the expectation placed on younger children to be available to assist those older than themselves. I have been nurtured and cared for not just by my parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts but also by neighbors by extension, the community. As I write these lines, my children and I receive an extended care. Even after so many years of marriage I am like a newly wed, for whenever I visit and leave my hometown, I am showered with gifts. The African proverb certainly applies to my experience: *It takes a village that has metamorphosed into an urban community from forty years ago!*

The content of this indigenous education consists of family and societal values, norms, expectations and roles upon which to construct one's own. According to Datta, (1984), "the traditional curriculum consists of economic activities and duties, and play. Formally, girls are instructed in matters concerning womanhood, domestic and agricultural activities, reproductive and behavior toward men" (p. 31). As the older daughter of the family I can remember my active performance of various such activities. Datta (1984) goes on to say that "formally, boys go to initiation schools overseen by traditional doctors" (p. 31). Indeed, I can vividly remember one of my older brother, young uncles and their peers' circumcision ceremony in our neighbor's compound.

Playtime mostly in company of peers and importantly with grand parents or other elders promotes the institution of oral tradition that teaches tales, riddles, proverbs, songs,

games, dances, myths and legends. Metaphors and proverbs engage the child to think deeply about the intended message. Such instruction in orature builds the child's linguistic skills as well as “develop more abstract thinking about time and space” as stated by (Ornstein & Levine, 2003, p. 58). I became fluent in three of my four national languages by the age of five before I set foot to the formal school where I learned French as the official language and later, English as a requirement.

I can remember along with my peers, how I learned to sing, dance, tell tales, and make wool or raffia basket, plait hair etc., by watching, listening, and actively doing; by rehearsing, performing and doing things all over again. My favorite tale is our version of ‘the magic calabash’ with its moral lesson. This type of education serves to develop the entire child in an integrated way: cognitive, motor, psychosocial development. Like in many societies the activity of education serves to prepare the child for gender-specific roles.

Who Are the Teachers?

As mentioned before, African societies are family and community oriented; thus a child's education takes place within the family and community settings. It is a common feature of the traditional education that a child has several teachers at each stage of his or her development. They are the parents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, elders and priests. This educational process is still experienced by millions of African children in the most remote areas of the continent. Those of us who have set foot into modern schools receive a different, additional and enriching experience called formal education, which to me became a third model, after my traditional African, and Koranic educations. Both the

Koranic and the formal school to me however, have at least one thing in common the language of instruction which is not my mother tongue, or my national language.

The Formal Pre-school Experience: The Intersection of Language, Gender,
Region, and Social Origin

The Impact of Language

According to Cushner et al. (2003) “language objectifies, interprets and justifies reality for the child, thus structuring the child’s environment” (p. 220). This is very significant to the average African child who is at least bilingual. Since many if not most Africans are multilingual and the African child grows up at least bilingual, it is the norm that most of the practical skills that the child learns by the age of seven (7), that is, before going to school would have been in their national languages. There is thus, a sudden disruption from the first day of school when the child starts to listen to, tries to understand and learn in a foreign language. In Phillipson’s article, three African scholars share their views about the question of the language of instruction: Ngugi Wa Thiong’o from Kenya states that “ninety per cent of the population in Africa today speak only African languages” to which the Nigerian Chinua Achebe adds “ there is no such thing as Nigerian English.” and the South African Desai asserts “multilingualism is the African lingua franca, South Africans are multilingual productively and receptively and draw on this competence for a range of interactions. Western notions of discrete languages and a single mother tongue are unable to capture this reality, and contribute to the disabling process that many experience in formal education” (p. 3).

Many, including Africans themselves today may argue that the traditional model will not take us to the moon. It is true that African nations need to adjust to the various

domestic and global requirements since we so much love to talk about it today (as if globalization has not forced itself on Africa since colonization; may be we mean to say 21st century model of globalization...I mean recolonization! Although the type of education that takes one to the moon is not a panacea to all nations and children; going to the moon right now for the Bantu child in the deep forest of Central Africa, or the Tuareg nomad child in the Tenere Desert of Niger, as well as the African president's son or daughter should mean equal opportunity in a reformed system of education that incorporates knowledge and values from both worlds. There must be a system that should enable all three children to become functional citizens of their communities, nations and the world, rather than limit and /or deny and shatter this right to the poor rural, nomadic, and allophone girl child.

The Gender Factor: Some National Statistics

As education is believed to be the key to improving the condition of both women and men, it is considered as one of the most effective means for achieving gender equity and women's empowerment. In Niger, some statistics released by the Commission 4 (1995) in a conference that investigated the academic life conditions of students facing hardships in Niger's secondary schools also revealed that women, young people under 15, and children under five (5) years of age account respectively for 50.3%, 45% and 20% of the residing population of Niger (approximately 10 million). The document also suggested that the rural population accounted for 85%, and the illiteracy rate was 78.3%. It further breaks down the rates to highlight that 83.4% of rural people, 87.2% of the female population, and 96.5% of nomadic women endure a state of complete illiteracy.

Moreover, 80% of girls who account for the country's population and 90% of rural school age girls do not have access to schooling.

To expand the picture, preschool remains inaccessible to 99.2% of children 3-6 years of age which is pre-school age (p. 1). In light of the 1995 statistics above, and despite a manifest political commitment to education highlighted in the New Orientation Law of 1998, it is disheartening to realize that as of March 31, 2000, the national preschool program counts only 141 schools from 103 in 1995, with a total of 10360 children enrolled composed of 5163 girls and 5197 boys (from the significant percentage of 20% of the pre-school age population above). It is interesting to mention here that 108 of these schools are public and only 6 of the 570 teachers are males (Annuaire des Statistiques Scolaires, 2000, pp.12-13). The issue of lack of availability and accessibility at the preschool level is among the foundational roots of educational inequity. If education is a human right then, how should the state overcome the following features of systemic inequity?

Regional Variations: The Urban/Rural-Nomadic Factor

Of limited establishment, the preschool is the 'apanage' of urban centers. The private preschool sector is not well developed. It accounts for 22% of facilities, which are usually located in urban settings like most public preschools are. (Annuaire des Statistiques Scolaires, 1999, p.17). For instance a comparison between the regions of Niamey, which is more urban (and where the capital city is located) and Diffa, which is less urbanized region highlights a disparity in regional preschool enrollment rate successively 4752 and 152 and girls respectively account for 2385 in Niamey and 71 in Diffa. This pattern, by the way is consistent with other levels of education both

elementary and secondary as investigated by (Hamza, 2001). A 2000 statistical comparison between Niamey and Agadez, a nomadic region in northern Niger also shows disparity in preschool enrollment. In total 766 children ages 3-6 are enrolled in the region of Agadez compared to 2281 in Niamey still with fewer girls for both regions and even fewer in Agadez compared to Niamey (Annuaire des Statistiques Scolaires, 2000, p. 21). The socio-economic lifestyle of nomadism and rural poverty coupled with socio-cultural practices contribute to a low enrollment in general and the female child's lower access rate in particular. These regional statistics hide inequity in access due to social origin. In other words, these numbers do not break down enrollment rates of rural nomadic children who have limited to no access to pre-schooling due to lack of availability that suits their mode of life. Thus for many rural children, lack of access to education has increasingly become the norm and ironically, many post-independence educational systems may no longer fulfill the goals of development theories that guided the very development of modern schools on African soil. Statistics still show a high percentage of rural illiterate population and the modernization project continues to create and sustain unequal status between villages and cities, developed and underdeveloped regions. Where I grew up forty years ago was rural with no availability of preschool facilities a reality that most rural children still know. In Niger, modernization appears to settle with a level of exclusion of some children and education is no longer getting the lion's share from the budget.

Budget Cuts

The educational system remains a problematic situation due to fluctuating budget cuts. For example the 2000 Annual of Educational Statistics which reported an evolution

of national and education budgets over a ten-year period suggests the following: 15% of the national budget went into education in 1990, it increased and reached 19.92% in 1992 and significantly decreased to 12% in 1999. An important factor in this decrease in funding among others consists of the structural adjustment programs or (SAPs) spearheaded by the financial institutions of Bretton Woods such as the World Bank and The IMF, which result in government drastic measures. Thus, with regard to access, Niger's preschool program has become less than democratic in its implementation. This fact is further undermined by a pedagogy of difference. As suggested by both Polakow (1993) and Swadener (2000), an important point that these statistics should not lead us to miss is the existential aspect, the "... critical information regarding the lived experiences of parents and young children" (p. 21) in a changing socio-economic and world dynamics where domestic and global policies tend to erode rather than strengthen basic rights, and school practices enforce inequity.

A Pedagogy of Difference

Teachers' attitudes and classroom pedagogy constitute a serious challenge in the system. The objectives listed in the report from the multicountry workshop sponsored by the World Bank in Niger in September 2000, (entitled "The Niamey, Niger: Girls' Education Seminar" with its focus on the role of teachers in the school survival of girls) include the following: "improve teachers' awareness of the role they play in the children's learning and school retention, identify, in collaboration with all present, the best pedagogical methods that can help teachers promote the girls' learning and school retention rates" (p.1) In such a context as Niger, the above objectives are very significant as they point to the teacher's attitude and methodology which suggests that "often,

pedagogical methods reflect teachers' acquired biases" (p. 3). For instance, girls are not encouraged to participate in classroom discussions—a situation that plays a role in restricting their school performance and level of assertiveness in life. This attitude is a result of socialization with its strong distinction in gender roles and expectations. Unfortunately, these acquired biases are pervasive throughout the communities as a reflection of socio-cultural beliefs and practices deeply rooted as discussed above. The Forum for African Women Educationalist, FAWE (1995) argues that these attitudes and biases surround the girl child and the woman she becomes through “traditional education in the home, public education within the community, and formal education in the school, the pedagogy of difference is thus maintained” (p. 6).

This reality is further aggravated for the rural and nomadic child who has limited to no educational opportunity due to the remoteness of his/her rural community and/or the nomadic lifestyle of the child. As if to make it more challenging, the language of instruction may result in repetition or high dropout rate thus leaving most of them illiterate. How then, could the rural girl child and any poor child for this matter develop these capacities and skills that development theorists suggest, when they fail to provide and sustain a fair and equal opportunity to modern education for all?

Both dropout and high repetition rates are indicators of educational inefficiency and constitute serious barriers to student progression through the system. Participants to the World Bank seminar questioned the relevance of the language of instruction, which is completely different from students' mother tongues and its relevance to school retention. They raised concerns that “when the language of instruction in school is a language not spoken at home, learning problems can accumulate and the chances of dropping out

increase, especially for girls” (p. 3). Learning problems certainly accumulate even more for the poor rural child whose chances to hear spoken French in his/her family is little to none, which is true for the majority of children as the above statistics indicate. I remember my first day shock in Grade I when I had to twist my tongue to say “bonjour madame, au revoir madame, etc.” Yet, forty two years after independence “linguistic imperialism” as discussed by Phillipson (1996) remains a factor that contributes to the inefficiency of our system from pre-school to the secondary. Still, our post-independence systems have not succeeded in developing and valuing effective alternative knowledge and methodologies that integrate national and foreign languages for the benefits of all children regardless of gender, ethno-linguistic, regional and socioeconomic backgrounds.

It is an irony that since independence, our constitution, our educational policy documents and our political and educational leaders consistently state and claim a democratic education which is becoming undemocratic and exclusionary in its availability and accessibility. Sadly, it is an elitist colonial legacy that we have failed to authentically own and adapt to our needs and our environment. This is what pedagogy of difference teaches and enforces nationally and globally. It marginalizes the girl child. The colonial experience of French domination in Niger has imposed French as the official language. There is a need for reinventing the system to empower people it serves so that signifiers such as social class, language, region, and gender etc. constitute an asset for the student not a deficit that leads to failure.

A Pedagogy of Empowerment

Reforming the school culture, by envisioning alternative approaches and in terms of teachers’ expectations, teaching materials and methods, is essential in creating a school

environment conducive to implementing an inclusive education. Since modern early childhood program is the foundation to further modern education, it is imperative that African early childhood educators, researchers and policymakers understand their role and responsibilities in advancing such a vision. Bloch's (1992) following arguments are constructive domestically and for international comparison.

The continuing quest for how individual children and individual family units socialize the young differently dominated debate, discourse framed in individualistic terms with emphasis on families as social units rather than on larger structural groups, institutions or forces narrowed the scope of dialogue and possibilities for other modes of analysis. As one example, until recently, questions and discussion related to the role early education may play in maintaining or augmenting race, class, gender and regional inequities within the United States have been very rare; critical perspectives, in contrast, have assumed that education may serve to reproduce these differences, not to reduce them (pp. 14-15).

Such an insightful discussion makes one wonder how much more limiting would such approaches and practices be for African societies where individualism is the opposite orientation to the communal worldview. Yet, the deconstruction of formal early childhood education above constitutes the very result of a foreign approach to educating the child in an African society; one which indeed underrepresents some groups and excludes others thus, cultivating inequity based on gender, class, region and language . African societies need a sustainable model, which would decolonize their process of formulating policy, designing and implementing research methodology, curricula and

classroom pedagogy. Our policymakers, educational leaders and pedagogues need to address the fact that our system has been so fragmented it has led to exclusion. There is no doubt that colonial pedagogy has transformed the culture by either deleting or altering some elements of traditional practices. Today, we all feel the altering effect yet we cannot lose authentic claim at Africanness, which to me is primarily my worldview that teaches me to connect with others and with my environment from the time I was born, through Kebei, and throughout my existence. It is not an approach that denies education to the child nor does it in essence encourage rural exodus. At the local-traditional level education is still pristine despite the impact of broader ecological and structural changes. The question is rather “*how does the post-independence African city raise the child?*”

As Bloch suggests there is a need to create a discourse that widens the possibility of dialogue and other modes of analysis. Revisiting the pre-Cartesian principle of unity and interconnectedness which is still alive in pristine pockets on the continent and in our hearts may enable us to reconceptualize our research methodologies, theories, policies, and pedagogies in a sense, decolonize our approaches by actively building connection between the knower and the known, self and environment, hence a pedagogy of empowerment that is inclusive. As a researcher and educator, I believe that probing issues of inequity must be at the heart of our scholarship, our methodologies, and instructional practices in order to value diversity and promote equity.

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to expose some issues of inequity as they affect the provision of modern early childhood education itself a postcolonial model, by analyzing some policy documents. I have also attempted to deconstruct my traditional early

childhood education. Paradigms discussed such as development theories, feminist critical policy analysis and post-colonial discourse have enabled me to center those issues as well as point to their limitations hence, the need for broadening the discourse. Looking at the contemporary background of the African child today, it is safe to argue that the child-rearing practices are changing. Various factors contribute to this transformation as discussed above. However, the traditional practices are alive and well in many pristine pockets in the continent. Therefore, we can observe three categories of children: the illiterates, the dropouts, and the successful ones. While on the one hand, there are those who continue to enjoy the authentically traditional upbringing, on the other hand, there are those of us who are exposed to several models.

Despite history and contemporary factors behind the perception of his childhood, the African child does however have the advantage of being raised African at home while acquiring formal education and a different worldview at school, which however confusing it may sound, would enlighten his own attitude and interpretation of the world through multiple perspectives. The information age and technological advances we experience are bound to entail more adjustment worldwide. The African child as Mazrui (1986) suggests will need to look inward toward ancestry and outward toward the wider humanity to draw the best of both worlds.

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