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AFRICAN STUDIES

**CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA WITH THE LENSE OF A. BAME NSAMENANG**

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***INTRODUCTION-***

Before the advent of our colonial masters, Africans have their own way of training their children; this is part of education. Coaching becomes a necessary tool for helping the young ones to develop. Education, coaching, tutoring or instructing, they say is a touch that illumes the world and heals it from ignorance. One may copy blindly if he or she does not cherish a rich value he or she possesses but always stretches the hand for a new one. Educated Africans, raised an endless war to reunite within their minds and lives the conflicts stimulated in living within the twilight of ferociously contending value systems and beliefs, they are isolated from their local traditions. Bame Nsamenang was an exceptional force for Africa’s children, seeking to have their live experience be heard and appreciated globally. With his concern with the development of African children, he expressed some weaknesses in the early childhood education, care and development literature becoming an inspiration to a younger generation of African scholars and a beacon for those who have raised concern about this topic. This paper aims at how children of Africa could be developed as far as education in Africa is concern. The format for this work starts with the introduction, exhibiting the intention of this work. Followed by the stages of development in African children. The next thing which this paper cannot leave in oblivion is looking at measures or theories or tools which aids coaches or teachers who serve as sticks on a river that help ants to be able to cross rivers. It must be admitted that, inspirations and core ideas are made possible in this paper with the help of the Handbook of African Educational Theories and Practices written by Bame.

***Synopsis Of The Handbook***

This section intends giving a brief summary of the wonderful work of the A. Bame. The student has tried curving this section into his own view as he sees the book; he will try to add practical examples, perhaps, outside the book but emblematic to Ghana or Africa.

Bame must be applauded for such an epic piece of work which covers nine thematic sections. There are thirty-six scholarly dense chapters. With the help of forty-four contributors, the book makes an effort to address a major canker “brainwashing” which has been a thorn in the flesh of Africans since the colonization and its assimilation of Western education. There has already been a misconception that “Africa has no history prior to its contact with the western explorers. Another fallacy was that EDUCATION simply connoted “formal education” or “western style of schooling.”

The beauty of the handbook was to introduce something new. An attempt was made at de-kutiwa-kasumbalisation of Education in the African context. The predominant point of departure is that Education predated schooling; it is deeper and broader than ‘schooling.’ With that the fundamental aim is intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage. Africa is rich in culture. In fact, it happens to be the only region of the world where all the role models to which its children in their formative years are exposed to are things that are different from their own. Africa becomes the only region where its children begin socialization from learning about other people instead of being deeply entrenched into their own world first (encultration). It is sad, that in all other parts of the world, education is usually the culture of the land but when it comes to Africa, education is the de-cultured. Books, practical examples given in textbooks are mostly foreign to the African child.

The handbook brings vital issues concerning the adoption or reconceptualization of Education and its goals Africa wants to achieve. Of course, Africans have their pattern of thought (philosophy), values, beliefs and practices. The book suggests ways in which these could be cultivated into educational research and development, curriculum development and didactic practices. The facts given in various chapters wet the appetite of others for further discussion and in-depth analysis and not a foreclose debates.

***African Child Development***

Children are the future of every society and so how to care for, educate and guide them matters most to every society of which Africa is inclusive. Educating the young ones in the society is as old as man. Individuals and cultures in the world have developed a gamut of approaches. There is always a concern of the masses that a positive relationship between education, economic and human development must be met. Ultimately, for the society to reach its development, human capital is crucial because it helps in improving productivity in the economy and facilitates development; the sure way to attain this height is through education, hence, the emergence of the child onto the global stage; a trend that has not gone undetected in Africa. In Africa, education forms integral part or avenue through which the people can acquire the talents needed to promote growth and development.

The process of education is best promoted through the propagation of the knowledge spawned by it. In the absence of scientific based research, Africa will never scheme evidenced-based policies as Africa’s child development and educational policies will continue to be based on imported research evidence. At least, Africa could lay its hand on policies which will help both teachers to help in the formation of African children and as such, the aim of African child development may be attained because of the theories and principles laid down.

African children do endure a lot. The hardship and struggle they go through to acquire academic knowledge and skills, they concurrently try to uphold parental cultural values that give a cultural mark or identity and keep them in peace with their families and society. For this motive, they see the necessity of putting in place their own school systems with new educational strategies that are in true with the socio-cultural realities of the continent while alongside assimilating the focal technical demands of schooling. Practical example is that in Senegal, they have a practice called parental traditional curricula which is used widely to care for children and formation of distinct Senegalese identity; this is an un-formalized in writing. It analyzes parental curricula and suggest how to train parents to a ready children for school.

***Early Childhood***

Common understanding of Early Childhood would be a period from birth to eight years. The age necessary for consideration for the development of African child is under the age of six; this is the time a child commences formal schooling. It should not be overestimated that most marginalized children in most African countries do not begin schooling at this age but later. The child’s experience in the first six years of life has a decisive bearing on later development, with the first three years being especially important because during this period, the developing brain is particularly sensitive to the effects of nutritive deficits, and also to the effects of stimulus deprivation. Children necessitate nutrition, sensitive and warm interactions, good health care and various chances for stimulation and learning if they are to flourish and benefit from the prospects provided in school.

When these measures are a necessity for young children, the question which would be crucial for Africans to answer is, do Africans consider and put measures in place to assist their young ones? Unfortunately, there are key hazards to rigorous or sound child development in Africa. This is largely as a result of poverty (low levels of productivity and economic development), organizational or structural disparity, political maladministration and skirmish or conflict. A lot of privileges are taking from these children due to some of these problems like poverty. For instance, it is the right of a child to get good diet so as to grow healthily but a child may have to adjust to the poor condition he or she finds him/herself.

In the face of African countries and their laws, how do the rights of children be defined? At least, it is clear that apart from Somalia, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) indorses that by allowing all sign the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Both documents place much importance on a sound start in life by specifying children’s rights to survival, health, protection and development of which education is inclusive.[[1]](#footnote-1)

***Sources Of Development In Early Childhood***

In the development of Early Childhood, some factors that contribute much include: genetics, environmental influences and a child’s own activities, and in some typical African societies, spiritual and ancestral forces plays much role in one’s development. (Reynolds, 1997). Let us consider the details in some of these factors stated above.

When one mentions *Genetic make-up*, things inherited from both parents through conception comes in mind. As children grow in maturity, things inherited from parents start coming up clearly. They could easily interfere with normal development of a child. Example, children affected by congenital conditions such as Down’s syndrome. This defect comes as a result of the presence of an extra chromosome. Those with this defect are allied to a greater or less degree with intellectual disability, and produces physical features including slanting eyes, a fold on the eyelids, broad hands with a crease running across the palm and others.

People with less degree of intellectual disability, could this be attributed to genetic or environmental factors? Remember, there are some school of thought that a new born child always comes with “tabula rasa.” That is, they hold the fact that, the human mind, especially at birth, viewed as having no innate ideas. It is the environment that socializes him or her. On the other hand, those who view the definition of genetic make-up would refute such claim. It would be wrong to take side because both contribute the development of a child. Genetic influences on behavior do not wield their sway alone, but always in amalgamation with environmental influences.

Right from conception, environmental influences get effect on a child talk less the early stage. For instance, a child’s brain is affected when the mother is malnourished. A developing brain and neurological system are particularly sensitive to environmental influences. A child learns how to talk, eat, bath, and do certain things which could be classified as part of factors to maturity through the contact a child gets with the society.

Cultural values are learnt by one through the contact one gets with a culture. Neurological development does not occur in a vacuum. Children’s cultural contexts provide the major source of their development. Agents to this are those who take care of children. A child is judged by how he or she has learnt the cultural values and interacts with different ages. Parents are the primary transmitters of these values and norms. Hierarchical patterns, in which children occupy subordinate positions to adults are taught from a very young age. All societies use the notion of intelligence to refer to children who can solve problems and often children are regarded as intelligent if they are helpful. (Serpell, 1993).

Language development is strongly dependent on the opportunities provided to the child and how the communities approach this differ from community to community. Among the Africans, many skills are learnt by taking domestic tasks. As early as age 4 or even toddlers, skills are transmitted. This builds the child’s self-efficacy and self-esteem. Young ones are sent on errands and this enhances self-regulation, attention and memory. It is an undeniable fact that before the African child gets in touch with formal education, a refined education goes on in various societies. The African child like others influences him or herself. They engage actively with the world around them. They learn and solve problems as they mingle with their peers and older siblings.

 ***Ghana In Question***

Many of the early childhood pupils in Ghana are struggling in catching up with the basic behavioral and developmental growth. Biological parents in Ghanaian families play major roles in child upbringing; but as known to Africans, other adults have a say or play a massive role in parenting. Major corrections and at times punishment are done by adults in the vicinity. The latter has changed over time because of globalization, migration and urbanization. Single parenting are rampant in Ghana now of which women acting as heads of various families bring gaps in the upbringing of young ones in Ghana.

The Government of Ghana, in its effort to provide needed environment for children to access essential Early Child Development services came out with a policy in 2004. The motive behind this policy is to provide a framework for ministries, agencies and departments to meaningfully contribute to the growth, survival and development of a child.[[2]](#footnote-2) This led to the operation of a new dream for kindergarten education with emphasis on activity based learning. It also stress on the need of teachers understanding the development stages in children and how they learn.

All said and done, it should be ascertained that Early Childhood is very crucial for the various families in Ghana. The future of the nation depends on them and so, building them up must be considered as central part in the management of the state. It is a fact that things have not been right in the implementation of policies. The state is always good in the formulation of policies but seeing to its effectiveness becomes a problem. The most common approach to this is to assist the transition by providing services for young children such as parental support, assistance for teachers and others.

**Conclusion**

Good start in life is very necessary. This paper tried in tackling the fundamental facet of the society: Child development. The paper has presented the core sources of a child’s development and has drawn attention to the potent role of the child’s cultural and material environment. The fact has been made that, even though the child gets some formal education from schooling, human formation goes beyond that. In the environment, homes, among peers and others the young socializes with, the child is been formed either positively or negatively. It is an undeniable fact that, the introduction of western education, its culture, customs and norms have broken the high moral standard Africans did enjoy. Like the two sided-coin, as we praise and cherish some of the policies from the western world, it must be said that it is wrong to dump most of these policies on Africans without adopting, reviewing and modeling and putting them into the context of African culture. As specified in Article 11.2(c) of the African Charter on the Right and Welfare of Children, “it takes a village to raise a child.” We need to be sure that the school is part of that village.

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1. Article 11.2(c) of the African Charter highlights the importance of providing children with a location in the wider universe of their cultural context and speaks of a re-vitalization and respect for indigenous culture and practice. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6126985/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)