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PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

**AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION Reconsidered: ON BEING HUMAN”**

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***Introduction***

For about two decades now, people have raised the concern of understanding what African Philosophy of Education really is. To curb this problem, some pedagogical encounters with students of philosophy brought an antidote. Many sages have made effort but in fact, Yusef Waghid needs to be applauded for such a wonderful piece, *African Philosophy of Education Reconsidered:* *On being human.* It is worthy reading for academics, lecturers, scholars, and other people in the education community, as well as for wide-ranging readers. It does not only add knowledge and defense of African philosophy of education but offers an attempt to conduit or bridge the long-quest gap in African philosophy.

It would be a blander if this paper leaves some words of the title of the book unexplained. Prefixing the whole course with “African” makes it stand unique among other philosophies. It suggests that the course has been framed by what it means to be an African not in the sense that every African is to adhere to it or limited to only Africans but in the sense that an African philosophical system arises from. That is, it is related to African thought, practice, and tradition as it is evident in Yusef’s book. The word “RECONSIDERED connotes the act of reevaluating something again and again. This is exactly what Yusef Waghid has done in his master piece. There is that urgent need for Africans to relook what other African Philosophers think African education entails.



As many have tiresomely written, Waghid acknowledges their efforts and compares his ideas with his and that of others.

The advent of colonial masters brought a lot of positive changes but the woes of certain things made their period in Africa hegemonic and disruptive to African cultural practices, indigenous African epistemologies and ways of knowing. Their exploitation, oscillating or ranging from slavery to the creation of socio-economic structures during the colonial era which were designed to achieve supreme extraction and exportation of raw materials, wreaked serious damage that leaves an indelible mark on Africans. This was accomplished by a whole range of measures including educational philosophies, curricula and practices whose context did not correspond with that of African culture but that of the respective colonial powers. In light of this, the student wish to attempt to respond to the question and topic chosen, ***Can we voice out an African Philosophy of Education***. All inspirations and reflections would be taken from ***Philosophy of Education Rconsidered, On being Human by Yusef Wighid***.

The aim of this paper is to review the above quoted book. In doing this, this paper attempts to critically examine African philosophy of education as a practice, see the collective nature of it, the African understanding of epistemology and metaphysical in relation to education, religion, ethics in African cultures, a major contributing factor to consider for African philosophy of education. This paper will end with a conclusion which will be the stand of the student.



***Brief Summary of the Book***: The author embarks on the duty of drawing a philosophy of practice that views African philosophy of education guided by communitarian, reasonable and culture-dependent action by drawing on a communitarian understanding of the belief of Ubuntu.[[1]](#footnote-1) As a wise philosopher, Yusef takes *umuntu* to offer a vehicle not only to the playacting or enactment of African philosophy of education but also for its aid towards reaching autonomous or democratic justice on the African continent.[[2]](#footnote-2) The gratified, defense and depiction of Ubuntu will be of interest to wide audience wishing to find out more about this key concept in African educational philosophy, moral, ethics, political and readers within the Africa.

The cogent argument of the book suggests that, an African philosophy of education as a practice has three constitutive aspects: To be reasonable in one’s articulations; also, to demonstrate moral maturity; and lastly, to be attuned to deliberation.

The book is amalgamated in two corresponding splits. The introductory aspect to chapter 4 present an assertion of African philosophy of education, while chapters 5 to the postscript set out to apply African philosophy of education, specifically the preceding elucidation of Ubuntu as an expression of communitarian thought, to selected examples of problems[[3]](#footnote-3) that Africa faces. Agreeing with Yusef, there is a sure foundation or hope



that philosophy of education could make an impact to change educational discourse and so, empowering communities to address this formidable predicament, though we are not convinced that a distinctively African philosophy of education is necessary to perform this role.

The book has seven chapters and each chapter is friendly with every chapter having its own heading and subheading; this makes for clear understanding of the content of each chapter. The author highlights African’s institutes of democracy using unbuntu *inkundla, ibhunga or ibandla[[4]](#footnote-4)* (courts, councils or forums) to illustrate the communitarian state of living and ukama[[5]](#footnote-5) are nurtured. With this, Yusef argues that these are foundations of democratic citizenship that should be woven into African’s ways of life through African Philosophy of Education.



***The Practical Aspect Of African Philosophy Of Education***

Using the lens of Yusef, he or she who waits to understand the experiences and conditions of African communities, such a person needs to fall in love with or practice

philosophy of education. Philosophy of Education is an activity of inquiry that enables one to understand the situations of communities, albeit Africans’ ‘lived experiences.’[[6]](#footnote-6) It is not improbable to refer to an African Philosophy of Education, because it encompasses happenings of logical inquiry that helps one to comprehend, elucidate, explore, query or criticize the lived experiences of people. In short, an African Philosophy of Education searches the lives of African communities and their circumstances in the same way that other philosophies do. One should understand that philosophic activity is not a thing or body of knowledge that is neuter and objective, but rather a mode of intellectual inquiry.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Aristotle is credited with saying, ‘to educate is a human action that tells us something about how people become knowledgeable.’ That is, how they develop their capacities to understand, reflect on and attend to achieving ‘the good life.’ In line with Western philosophy of education, human beings attempt to make sense of and strive towards achieving, ‘the good life.’ The western philosophy of education shows how they cooperate with one another and find common ways to interact with their environment.



Comparing African Philosophy of Education with others is to see how one communicate and relate with his or her environment. Typical example is Islamic philosophy of education

involves the strive of cultivating in Muslims a sense of cooperativeness in terms of which they relate to one another in the quest to achieve worthwhile ends; living the real meaning of Islam (meaning peace) with one another. Since any philosophy of education targets achieving its aspiration of nurturing in people a sense of cooperativeness in terms of which they interact and share with one another, it would not be out of place to conclude that an African Philosophy of Education ought to reflect on, and attend to, what it means for Africans to live a way of life well-matched with their experiences on the African continent.

With this, one cannot avoid talking about African Philosophy of Education. To do that may seem to be undesirable and incongruent with the existence of a multiplicity of philosophies of education that do exist. I side with Wiredu who claims in his paper entitled ‘Prolegomena to an African Philosophy of Education’ that an African philosophy of Education cannot be spoken of without considering what it means for a person to be educated. Philosophy of education frame human action in a way that is commensurate with its underlying meanings. For Wiredu, educated person is one who possesses reasonable knowledge of his or her culture and environment, and demonstrates an ability to construct and articulate defensible arguments.



With some terms in the local dialect of the Akan people of Ghana, an educated person may be referred to as *wapo*;[[8]](#footnote-8) meaning such an educated person is reasonable by virtue of the fact that she or he demonstrates linguistic understanding, knows how to say what and not especially through the use of proverbs. If being reasonable is understood to encompass virtues of articulation and a willingness to listen to the other, then an African Philosophy of Education accentuates the important of being able to articulate clear and defensible arguments and to demonstrate a willingness to listen.

Teachers must develop a well-attuned ear tor their responsive capabilities of students; they become reasonable themselves, and that they refine their range of communicative capabilities in order to elicit student responses and to nurture them to become self-critical and deliberative. Again, when teachers and students reason together, they give to one another an intelligible account of their reasoning, show their ability and their willingness to evaluate the reasons for action advanced to one by the practical conclusions of self and others. Every teacher expect his or her child to learn. Teachers on the other hand of the coin, learn because they feel threaten by occasions on which we sometimes need to admit that we do not know or understand everything.



Ghanaian Educational system, from kindergarten to university, there is an urgent need for restructuring. Whereby the education could be brought to the ground for the people to form themselves with the values, norms, beliefs and customs of the land. Combing

through our education system, you could see that examples cited are from our soil so a child may be tempted to memorize things (learning the abstracts) without necessarily knowing what they are studying. So for scholars to come out proposing theories which is our own is a good thing to embrace. Our customs are in such a way that the young always sit at the foot of the aged to listen to wise sayings and proverbs. Rich is the culture, such in a way that, conversations, matters settled in the palaces are always needed to be deciphered because they are full of proverbs. So as the word “reconsidered suggest, Africa, especially Ghana needs to relook into it educational system and adopt the style of education which would be guided by Ghanaian traditions.

***Communalism And Philosophy of Education***

Western liberal philosophy always gears towards individualism which in a way is far different from the setting of Africans. This is because, in Africa, community and belonging to a community of people constitute the very fabric of traditional African life. Nobody is an isolated individual. An individual who is not connected to any community of political and cultural relations, onuses, duties,

responsibilities and conventions that frame and define any African community of individuals, such a person cuts himself or herself off and is unable to exist and flourish on

her or his own. Mbiti is right in saying, ‘whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.[[9]](#footnote-9)

In traditional African life then, a person depends on other jus as much as others depend on him or her. Hence, the fulfilment of the individual’s life resides only in community and with others. With regards to this, there is a great concern to see and view the role of community knowledge in philosophy of education in Africa. African Philosophy of Education must be sensitive to the double role of the individuals in African societies. People considered as Epistemic authorities and Elders in the communities should not only be seeming as important informants, but also as enquiry associates with logical viewpoints, theories and practices of philosophy of education. An African Community based philosophy of education is a kind of philosophy of education that is conducted by, with and for the community.



When one takes into consideration, the decolonization of education in Africa, awareness of *Ubuntu* needs to be looked at. It encourages Africans that the values and principles must be enshrined in our education system that a person does with a person’s dignity

and are knowledged and respected. Values such as kindness, compassion, love, helpfulness, forgiveness, understanding, caring, sharing , wisdom and humility are components to the African cultures. In this sense, African philosophy of education will be

characterized not only by its concern with the person, but also by the interweaving of social, economic, political, educational threads together into a common tapestry.

***Conclusion***: African Philosophy of Education in the 21st century still mirrors colonial models inherited from various colonial masters. The voices of African indigenous populations are, too large extent negated in discourses in philosophy of education. African epistemologies can provide a framework that contributes to the decolonization of philosophy of education. Community sensitive frameworks in African philosophy of education will contribute to the construction of empowering knowledge that will enable all to participate in their own educational development.

Sharing in the same view with those who view philosophy as a rational and critical activity, it is convincing to frown at the attempt to equate African Philosophy with traditional African world epistemologies. When such is done, one makes a distinction between philosophy in the popular sense and philosophy in an academic sense but to ignore philosophy as



Ethno-Philosophy is a big error. Traditional African Epistemologies constitute an authentic African philosophy. Philosophy like other theoretical discipline like physics, linguistics comes with its own distinctive problems and methods. We could see philosophy as a universal human phenomenon. Philosophy could be define in a broader sense to hold and accommodate these epistemologies. All said and done, this paper holds the view that the voice of education at the end of the twentieth century is the voice of the deep-seated witness of the agony and cold-heartedness of history, the pride of modernization and the conspiracy of silence in academic disciplines towards what is organic and alive in Africa. Africa is wounded and its voice is struggling against many odds to remember the past, and determine a future built on new to ideology, to grow and live without coercion, and from that to find a point of convergence with the numerous others. (Hoppers, 2001:1)

There is a high necessity of African Philosophy of education; in so doing, philosophy of education will provide for the construction of empowering knowledge that will enable communities in Africa to establish their African identity in their own philosophy of education.



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1. Ubuntu is a term derived from the Nguni language proverb :*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, meaning ‘a person depends on others just as much as others depend on him or her. In philosophical term, coining it from Descartes ideology, the umuntu expression could mean “I am because we are” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Waghid 2014, p. 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For the problems, Yusef cites, following Olusegun Oladipo: poverty, hunger, famine, unemployment, political oppression, civil wars, colonialism or imperialism and economic exploitation. (Olidapo, 1992, p. 24) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. These institutes are colloquies where Ubuntu, the idea the people live in a community where they share things and care for each other. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Interdependent relationships [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Yusef Waghid: *Philosophy of Education Reconsidered: on being human*, Routledge, USA, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Akan people of Ghana have this expression in Twi, the language the speak which means one is refined or polished. Signifying that a person attributed to this has shown some level of maturity in his or her conduct. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Mbiti, 1970: 108 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)