World over, elders are the custodians of knowledge and instructors in indigenous societies. Among the Tugen people of Kenya, elders play a role in transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next in the society. This indigenous system of education is both informal and formal. In the case of formal education, the programmes of teaching were restricted to certain periods in the life of every individual, notably the period of initiation or ‘coming of age’ as contextualized by Rodney (1982). On the other hand, the informal education was mainly done through story-telling, riddles and proverbs. In this system of education, parents had the greatest responsibility for imparting acceptable societal morals to their children and the youth. In fact values such as honesty, hard work, respect, truthfulness, obedience and good manners constituted the broad based curriculum of the Tugen youth. These virtues played a role in producing youth who were morally upright and hardworking. This paper therefore highlights the key responsibilities played by the elders and parents in moulding the behaviour of children and the youth. In the modern society, the youth engage in a myriad of anti-social behaviour that include illicit sex and drug abuse among others that could be traced to failure of particularly elders and parents in teaching the virtues of life to the youth as already identified in the foregoing analysis.

Key words: Formal education, children culture, indigenous education, informal education, youth.

INTRODUCTION

In the pre-colonial society, education in its wider sense included the informal learning through socializing, a process that runs throughout one’s life time, provided by elders by deed and word and passed down to all generations in the society. The content of this informal and non-formal education was relevant to the daily life of the learner and contained all the cultural aspects of the society. According to Rodney (1982), education in pre-colonial Africa had its close links with social life, both in a material and spiritual sense; its collective nature, its many sidedness, and its progressive development in conformity with the successive stages of physical, emotional and mental development of the child. In effect, through informal means, pre-colonial Tugen society produced well-rounded personalities to fit into that society. Rodney (1982) further observed that education is crucial in any type of society for the preservation of the lives of its members and the maintenance of the social structure as well as the entire traditional system of education.

Basing on this discourse, Tugen indigenous education was both formal and informal where processes were utilized for the transmission of knowledge, skills, ideas, attitudes and patterns of behaviour. It included all influences, which acted upon an individual during his/her passage from the cradle to the grave. The main aims of Tugen indigenous education were to preserve the cultural heritage of the extended family, the clan and the tribe so as to adapt members of the new generation to their physical environment and teach them how to control and use it; and to explain to them their own future, and that of their community. Tugen indigenous education also
depended on the understanding and perpetuation of the institutions, laws, language, and values that were inherited from the past. Education can therefore be seen from a cultural realm where each generation purposely gave to those who were to be its successors, in order to qualify them for at least keeping up, and if possible for raising, the level of improvement which has been maintained (Tharan, 1989).

The content of Tugen indigenous education as earlier remarked grew out of the physical environment, where both formal and informal processes were utilized for the transmission of knowledge, skills, ideas, attitudes and patterns of behaviour. Thus, in the Tugen community, as in other African communities, before the advent of the Europeans, oral literature was the device through which people learnt from one another. The story was the most commonly used of all oral communication devices (Chesaина, 1991; Chesang, 1973). Although children often told stories to one another, most of the stories were learnt from older people especially in the evenings and they were passed from the youth to younger children. As such, knowledge was preserved through stories that were mainly about animals which were personified and talked to human beings. In this way, knowledge was passed on from one generation to another.

Apart from stories, riddles and proverbs, children also learnt medicine. This was knowledge that was also passed from one generation to another. This seems to support the sentiments of Anderson (1970) that put emphasis on the use of oral literature such as riddles, proverbs and myths to clearly focus on informal sense of education. Trial legends and proverbs for example were told and retold by the evening firesides and through them much of the cultural heritage of the community was kept alive and passed on to the children (Anderson, 1970). Also, there were riddles to test children’s judgment and myths to explain the origin of the community and the genesis of man. Such oral traditions, narrated with care and repetition, additionally constituted the Tugen society’s child’s training in what was often a complicated linguistic system without a script (Tuitoek, 2007). Names of trees, plants, animals and insects, as well as the dangers and uses of each were learnt as boys herded cattle or farmed land with their fathers. Girls helped their mothers in household work and ultimately learnt from them through observing them engaging in domestic chores. Imitative play too formed mock battles and made model huts and cattle pens by boys, whereas girls made dolls, played as wife, and cooked imaginary meals. The importance of play in indigenous education in Africa has been underlined by many observers (Ocitti, 1973). As such, a major part of the cultural heritage of the African people including the Tugens was transmitted to children and the youth through role playing activities (Almagor and Baxter, 1978). Particularly, the youth were taught to master the environment and how to exploit it for survival in terms of resources and security, with the emphasis that the future of the society depended on the preservation of these teachings which were a must to be passed down to all future generation by similar means.

Tugen indigenous education therefore was geared to training the child to deal with problems of living in his/her particular environment and with the right behaviour. Essentially, this education was concerned with conserving the society, maintaining its social and political integrity and passing on the skills necessary for its economic survival. Through this type of education, the Tugens were able to find ways of passing their own culture or their way of life to the next generation (Chesire, 2007).

FORMAL EDUCATION

Formal education in pre-colonial Tugen was directly connected with the purposes of the society, just like informal education. The programmes of teaching were restricted to certain periods in the life of every individual, notably the period of initiation or ‘coming of age’ (Rodney, 1982). Tugen way of life was full of special observations and ceremonies to mark every stage from birth to death and knowledge was passed through such initiation ceremonies and rituals. For instance, the Tugen, like many African societies had circumcision ceremonies for both sexes. This was a rite to be performed to both boys and girls after attaining or passing puberty stage. It did not only involve the act of cutting off the prepuce of males and females’ genitals, but was the culmination of the cultural socialization process, which started right at birth. It also marked the end of one’s childhood, and ushering the individual into adulthood. Before such a rite, a teaching programme was arranged. The length of time involved could vary from a few weeks to several years (Limo, 2007). The objective of teaching programme was to mould and fit young people into their place in society as a group particularly after circumcision (Datta, 1992). This is because circumcision was considered the peak of learning, although according to Ochieng (1975) it should be born in mind that learning is a continuous process.

The training of the girl initiates for instance on their society’s values ensured that each became a fully rounded woman who understood how values and institutions were established. The instructors of these girls were circumcision and they were normally older and respected women (Kandie, 2007). Moreover, Kandie (2007) noted that girl initiates were referred to as Chemerinik and they were initiated into their own social group namely: Kusanja, Chelemei, Chebargamai, Chesira, Selengwech, Masinya and Chesur. Hence, girls were circumcised in small groups by female circumcisers and secluded in their parents’ homes to be taken care of by their own mothers. The girls were thereafter confined to the kitchen for a minimum of six months, a period which they are not expected to perform any household duties but to be fattened and instructed on
how to be good wives and mothers. This was in readiness for marriage almost immediately following the seclusions.

Before circumcision was performed, girls were inspected for virginity. If one was found to be a virgin, she was operated upon sitting on a special chair and was subsequently referred to as ‘Kotebe ngecher’; ‘she was allowed to sit on the chair, a very respectable status in the community’. When the father of the girl invited people for beer drinking after his daughter was healed, the mouth of the pot containing the beer was tied with a climbing plant, “Sinendet”. Before drinking commenced, the Sinendet was cut ceremoniously by a guest of honour ready to offer a herd of livestock as his gift to the girl. The girl who had lost her virginity had no such honour, and a cleansing ceremony was organized for her healing (Chesire, 2007).

For a girl, circumcision marked the transition to a fully procreative being, it was the social creation of her sexuality and fertility, and it legitimated a woman’s right to have children. The initiates Chemerinik underwent a series of themes which revolved around subordination and power, authority and challenge. Much of the teachings into which women were socialized while in seclusion was actually about the power of female sexuality, the difficulties of being a wife, responsibilities of a wife, the strength of women as a group (Kapelgetio) and the respect which was owed to older people and family life education in general. The main training to the girls was to be respectful to their husbands in future and to the community at large. Irresponsible women were therefore not allowed to train the young women. Only the older and respectful women did that, after which they graduated them as mature women ready to be married (Chebore, 2007). This is in line with Albert Bandura’s learning principle of role modelling (Rao, 1992).

On the other hand, the male initiates were referred to as Tarusiek. Unlike the girl initiates (Chemerinik) as earlier reported, male initiates were not inspected for virginity. This is because the Tugen culture was not puritanical particularly for men thus early sex play was not frowned upon by elders just like the Xhosa culture of South Africa (Datta, 1992). It is also worth noting that male initiates were led into Menjo, a temporary structure constructed for this purpose in a bushy environment, away from home, symbolizing the nature of their male outdoor activities. It was at this juncture that both physical and mental training and exercises were undertaken by the initiated youth with the supervision of the male elders and Motirenik (instructors), making sure that every art and skill was mastered with maximum dedication. The young men remained in seclusion feeding and training for several months until they were strong enough to face the world and get married. Traditional defence mechanisms also formed part of the training of the young men as they would, in case of war, be expected to defend the society and their families. In addition, the initiated youth practiced the art of debate and listening; a rehearsal of their future roles of Clan elders arbitrators (Datta, 1992).

Consequently, it was by means of initiation that the Tugen advanced beyond the ordinary knowledge of their society’s values to an understanding of why and where of things: the Tugen who had been initiated were no longer a drifter, but a complete, fully rounded man or woman who understood how values and institutions were established and perhaps also their origin. Initiation however, was a ceremony that did not allow enough time to disclose all knowledge. The individuals’ schooling was therefore continued by a moral, scientific and political development which time alone provided and provided only to the person who persevered; it demeaned a sustained effort amounting to a lifestyle, an attitude towards life, society and the universe which could not be reduced to a few formulae and prescriptions. Thus, the knowledge imparted in initiation was of a qualitative and not a quantitative order, meaning it was a matter of learning how to live well, not of accumulating facts (Kettel, 1975).

AGE-SET AS AN EDUCATIVE FRAMEWORK

In the past, initiation among the Tugen was performed once every three to four years, five times to make up an age-set for females and males respectively. This difference in years between the boys and the girls is attributed to the Tugen community’s belief that girls mature faster than boys. All those who were initiated within this period of fifteen to twenty years were then given the same name and acted as brothers or comrades-in-arms to each other (Chesire, 2007). In recent years, this trend has changed due to low life span. Since the average age for initiation was twenty-eight to thirty for boys and twenty for girls, each set was considered to be a generation set. There were therefore seven generation sets among the Tugen as shown in Table 1.

Generation sets among the Tugen was and is a ranking system since it was and is a system of super-ordination and subordination depending on the set one occupies. A person belongs to a particular generation set for life. It formed the basis of division of labour because as one passed from one age-set to another, he or she did so in a group that was expected to perform certain duties (Kettel, 1975). For instance Kettel (1975) observes that after initiation boys became ‘Murenik’ (Moran) charged with the responsibility of defending the community from invaders and marauders. Later they become Boisiek, clan elders. Women became Chepyosek (singular Chepyose) mothers, and as their husbands became elders, they became ‘Kogoisiek’ grandmothers. The duties of the grandmothers and grandfathers, ‘Kogoisiek’ and ‘boisiek’ respectively, was to train the young children and the youth about the societal norms and morals through proverbs and riddles and story telling, ‘kalewenaik’
Apart from stories and riddles, proverbs were also used. Proverbs were used to give advice. The use of idioms and proverbs in speech was seen as a sign of wisdom (Fedders and Salvadori, 1973). Parents, especially mothers, had the greatest responsibility for imparting accepted societal morals to their children. Values such as honesty, respect, truthfulness, obedience and good manners in general were taught to the children. If the misbehaviour of children warranted a beating, it was the father who carried out this punishment. This was because they believed that the cane corrected children (Chesire, 2007).

Among the Tugen people, oral literature was both entertaining and functional. One of the major purposes of oral narratives, proverbs, and riddles was to teach the younger generation the ways of their people, their conception of the world and their surroundings, social behaviour and maintenance of a good social order and the individual’s duty to society (Chesire, 2007). Storytelling was one of the components of the Tugen literature. Stories were told mostly by the old men and women at bedtime when all the household chores had been accomplished. The younger boys went to their grandfather’s hut while the girls went into their grandmother’s hut to be told folktales (Kobilo, 2007).

Among the Tugen, folktales, ‘atindonik’ were usually told and reports of bravery of great men of the past dominated the stories especially those told to young boys. The stories were mainly didactic in purpose and served to encourage the young to grow up into responsible men who could look after animals and be watchful and courageous. The stories mainly featured great men who saved their people from annihilation by their enemies (Datta, 1992; Rotich, 2007). These stories were told to young uncircumcised children at night only as daytime was reserved for productive activities like milking the animals, grazing, cooking, and cleaning the homestead. The point of storytelling was so that the young people may slowly phase out of childhoods into either manhood or womanhood. It was therefore imperative that they sit with, talk to, and observe the actions and behaviour of the people whose position they will eventually assume. In order to acquire the wisdom of the elders and effectively exercise the protection role in their turn, the young men had to be with the elders from time-to-time (Datta, 1992). The stories that they were told at this level were therefore, no longer mythical but true experiences of war or raiding for cattle.

Another important part of the literature of the Tugen was proverbs kalewenok. These closely reflected the pastoral culture of the people. One saying among the Tugen, for example, cautioned the warriors not to raid the same people twice for if they succeeded the first time, the raided people would then take precautions and the

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‘tangosiek’ and ‘atindonik’ respectively (Tuitoek, 2007).

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**ORAL LITERATURE AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION**

In the Tugen community, as in many other African communities, oral literature was the device through which people learnt from one another. The story was the most commonly used of all oral communication devices. Although children often told stories to one another, most of the stories were learnt from older people, especially in the evenings, as they were passed from older children to younger ones. Thus knowledge was preserved through stories, and in this way, it was passed on from one generation to another. The stories were mainly about animals who were personified and who talked to human beings (Fedders and Salvadori, 1973; Tuitoek, 2007). Apart from stories and riddles, proverbs were also used.

Often during story telling, children challenged each other with riddles, which were meant to test each other’s reasoning ability. The introductory part of the riddles was: ‘tangosiek’ meaning ‘Do you know?’ and ‘atindonik’ respectively (Tuitoek, 2007).

Proverbs were used to give advice. The use of idioms and proverbs in speech was seen as a sign of wisdom (Fedders and Salvadori, 1973). Parents, especially mothers, had the greatest responsibility for imparting accepted societal morals to their children. Values such as honesty, respect, truthfulness, obedience and good manners in general were taught to the children. If the misbehaviour of children warranted a beating, it was the father who carried out this punishment. This was because they believed that the cane corrected children (Chesire, 2007).

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second time they would be caught; for instance *mokinoktoi kobiil aeng* meaning ‘you can’t marry from *kobiil* twice’ (Chebore, 2007). Another aspect of oral literature among the Tugen people of Baringo District was riddles. One important aspect of riddles was that they were exclusively used among the youth. At one point among the Tugen, when the researcher asked about riddles, an old man retorted, ‘you don’t ask me about riddles, those are for children’. Go and ask the youth, they are the ones who know (Kipsangut, 2007). Among the Tugen, riddles, *tangoch*, are told at age-set level. Like story telling, it is an activity done mostly at night after all household chores for the day have been accomplished. On the occasion when the adolescents went into their parents or grandparents’ huts to listen to stories, the boys- *werik*, and the girls, *tibik*, sat together and told one another riddles (Fedders and Salvadori, 1973).

The asking of riddles was done as a competition between the *werik* boys and *tibik* girls. This though, took place only in times of peace when there was no fear of raids. The staging of a riddle usually began with the narrator saying: *Tangoch!* and the audience could reply *O chop*. The riddle was then presented by the narrator. For instance:

Riddle: *Anyiny makiam*
   Sweet not eaten

Response: *Ma*
   Fire

Riddle: *Birir kipkoi*
   Red throughout

Response: *Or*
   Path

Riddle: *Kiakeren kerwenyu sigor*
   I have fenced my field with sticks

Response: *Korikab kongta*
   Eye lashes

Riddle: *A buch maba*
   Inverted but does not pour its contents

Response: *Kintetab teta*
   Cows udder

**CONCLUSION**

The Tugen had a complex educational system in pre-colonial times. This indigenous system of education was both informal and formal. The training of children at the initial stages was the sole responsibility of the grandparents, parents, but later the clan and the wider society intervened. During this stage, the education imparted was guided by the philosophy of learning through doing. In particular, children and the youth were expected to be useful to their parents, community and themselves. This was a clear manifestation that the child was treated as belonging to the community and not merely to the parents. At the stages of infancy, childhood and adolescence, the children grew up in the society by learning the traditional curriculum, which encompassed all aspects of the society’s customs and traditions. During the stage of puberty, the youth were given instructions pertaining to their social and physical development and central to this was the rite of initiation. Throughout the period of seclusions, the training emphasized learning, practical skills, domestic chores, social and human relations and the acquisition of knowledge, which was useful to the individual and the society as a whole. Also, initiation embraced character building as well as the development of physical aptitudes to enable one to live as a full and productive member of the community. The education imparted formally in this stage was functional and utilitarian in nature. This therefore, clearly demonstrates that learning was thus a life long process.

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