

# EDUCATION THROUGH (INTER CULTURAL) STUDIES

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## ***Abstract***

*The paper focuses on various concepts of education and how best to acquire educational knowledge. It will then look at the concept of culture, cultural studies, inter-cultural studies and how educational knowledge can best be promoted through inter cultural studies. There appear to be cultural dimension to studies in various climes across the globe and such context can be researched into in order to provide deeper insight into the issue of education through inter cultural studies and whether it has relevance for the educational system across the globe, particularly in Europe since the focus of this conference is on Europe. The research approach or methodology is to do a holistic assessment of such concepts as education, culture, intercultural studies and use them to determine relevance to acquisition of education and highlight the merits and demerits of education through intercultural studies.*

*The outline of discussions captured in the paper is as follows:*

- *What is Education?*
- *Types of Education?*
- *How to acquire education?*
- *What is culture?*
- *What is cultural study?*
- *What is inter-cultural study?*
- *Education through inter-cultural studies?*
- *How to acquire education and is it acceptable to all?*
- *Does culture influence the acquisition of education?*
- *What is the main thrust of inter-cultural studies?*
- *Does the main thrust of intercultural studies hold any relevance for acquisition of education?*
- *What are the merits of education through inter-cultural studies?*
- *What are the demerits of education through inter-cultural studies?*
- *The case of Europe: education through inter-cultural studies*

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## **1. What is education?**

Education is defined as “the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life”[1]. Education has also been defined as “the act or process of imparting or acquiring particular knowledge or skills, as for a profession”[2]. It is further defined as “the result produced by instruction, training, or study”[3]. Education has also been described as “the process of teaching or learning, especially in a school or college, or the knowledge that you get from this”[4]. The last same source views Education as “Understanding of or information about a subject that you get by experience or study, either known by one person or by people generally”[5]. “Education is the process of facilitating learning, Knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits of a group of people are transferred to other people, through storytelling, discussion, teaching, training, or research”[6]. Accordingly, I can describe education as the process of learning and acquiring knowledge through studying, teaching, experience, experimentation, reasoning and intuition. Essentially, everyone involved in the process of acquiring knowledge or imparting knowledge by whatever means could be said to be involved in education.

## **2. Types of education**

Educational knowledge can mainly be categorized into formal and informal. Formal Education includes Preschool, Primary, Secondary, Tertiary (Higher), Vocational, Special [7]. What I consider as informal education on the other hand could include other sources of acquisition of knowledge which are officially unorganized. This could include sources such as observation, intuition, reasoning, imagination, logical deductions, imitation, etc. Wikipedia refers to other educational forms to include, alternative, indigenous, informal learning, self-directed learning, open education and electronic technology [8].

## **3. How to acquire education**

Apart from some of the formal means of education as listed above, education can also be acquired through the other informal sources noted above. These other sources include observation, intuition, reasoning, imagination, logical deductions, imitation as well as through association. James Thomas Mangan notes of 14 ways to acquire Knowledge to include practice, ask, desire, get it from yourself, walk around it, experiment, teach, read, write, listen, observe, put in order, define, reason[9].

## **4. What is culture?**

Culture has been variously defined by scholars and obviously new inclusive definitions will continue to emerge. "Culture: learned and shared human patterns or models for living; day-to-day living patterns. These patterns and models pervade all aspects of human social interaction. Culture is mankind's primary adaptive mechanism"[10] Culture is also defined as "all those historically created designs for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational, and nonrational, which exist at any given time as potential guides for the behavior of men"[11] "Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected)

ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action"[12].

Broadly reasoning, **culture** could be defined as a people's complete way of life, reasoning, thought pattern, long time traditions or emergent ones, beliefs, associations, historical heritage, norms, customs, forms or patterns of greetings, accepted pattern of behavior, and periodic events observed, etc. Language is a major part of the cultural heritage of any people. Acting according to cultural norms and customs as well as speaking the language of a particular people could lead to easier acceptance of an alien in any society. In the sense of the definition immediately above, the **fundamental elements of the culture of a people** include,

- Complete way of life
- Reasoning
- Thought pattern
- Long time traditions and emergent ones
- Beliefs
- Associations
- Historical heritage
- Norms
- Customs
- Forms or patterns of greetings
- Accepted pattern of behavior
- Periodic events observed
- Language

## **5. What is cultural study?**

Drawing inference from my definition above of culture, cultural studies could be defined as the study of the fundamental elements of the culture of a people. In other words, cultural studies are the study of the complete way of life of people.

## **6. What is (inter) cultural study?**

“Intercultural studies examine the cultural differences and similarities of people around the world, and workers in this field focus on bridging gaps among communities and providing necessary services”[13]. For me, intercultural studies could be defined as the study of the similarities, differences, linkages and dissents of the fundamental elements of the culture (complete way of life) of the people.

## **7. Education through intercultural study**

Following that the culture of the people includes their complete way of life, which are itemized above as the fundamental elements of the peoples' culture, it follows that studies conducted within the ambit of what is already common to a people, would be easily understandable and unambiguous.

The important questions to ask in the process of analyzing education through intercultural studies are

- How do you acquire education and is it acceptable to peoples?
- Does culture influence acquisition of education
- What is the main thrust of intercultural studies
- Does the main thrust of intercultural studies hold any relevance for acquisition of education?
- What are the merits of education through intercultural studies?
- What are the demerits of education through intercultural studies?

### **8. How to acquire education and is it acceptable to all?**

How to acquire education in my perception can be categorized mainly into two which are formal and informal. While formal includes all those processes of acquiring education through formally established institutions or processes, the informal includes those mediums of acquiring education through informal self-efforts and non- established formal institutions. The world over, formal process of acquiring education is acceptable given the contemporary emphasis laid on going to school. Everyone seeks to go to school and gain knowledge which qualifies him in some respects, including those in the area of vocational or technical education. On the other hand, informal education acquisition patterns are acceptable as some of them are innate in the society and the environment people find themselves. Universally, some informal methods of acquisition of education are natural and begin before any person can be taught. Such natural methods include observation, imitation and intuition. A child essentially observes his environment including people around him; and in often cases tries to imitate what people do and thinks intuitively of actions around him even when they have different meaning. This continues until he is able to be taught or asks questions. In all, the formal and informal processes of acquiring education are fairly acceptable to the people.

### **9. Does culture influence acquisition of education?**

While the informal educational processes may involve the characteristics of the **complete way of life of the people**, informal education processes can also draw examples from the **complete way of life of the people** to make explanations and provide deeper understanding. Both formal and informal education processes point to complete way of life of the people as highlighted above in attaining its goals of transferring knowledge. For instance, if some children of certain society are accustomed to eating at the dining table, it would really look awkward to draw the picture of a child eating on the sand with an animal from the same plate and use it to teach them eating habits. It would also be incomprehensible to use the culture of another people that prostrate on the ground while greeting elders to teach others who simply stand to greet in their own culture. In essence, the way of life that is common to the people becomes a ready reference point or example for validation of knowledge or creating wholesome comprehension in education processes. Best teaching references or examples can be drawn from culturally based norms common to the people.

When language is fundamentally adjudged as part of the people's culture, it goes to explain that it send fast and easier understanding to educating processes whether formal or informal. Language as a cultural tool can be regarded as the most powerful tool for transferring knowledge or in educating processes. Use of local language or dialect creates greater conducive environment for learning and gives faster comprehension.

It can therefore be surmised that culture influences acquisition of education in many ways. This happens as illustrated above by using ready examples which are common to the people from their complete way of life.

#### **10. What is the main thrust of intercultural studies?**

As in [13] above, "intercultural studies examine the cultural differences and similarities of people around the world..."[14]. I further referred to intercultural study of the similarities, differences, linkages and dissents of the fundamental elements of the culture (complete way of life) of the people. In finding out what the main thrust of intercultural studies is, it would then be vital to appraise the definitions of intercultural studies as noted above. Deduceably, it could be put that the main thrust of intercultural studies is to research out, examine and analyze the similarities, differences, linkages and dissents in the culture of various peoples across the globe with a view to providing greater comprehension, cohesion, interaction, partnerships and peaceful coexistence.

Intercultural studies would not be important to undertake if it were not purposeful. The main thrust of intercultural studies as noted above underscores the fact of that purpose which is to provide greater comprehension, cohesion, interaction, partnerships and peaceful coexistence in human existence.

The effort put into intercultural studies let's its students know why people behave in certain ways, observe certain norms and customs, why perceptions defer, and why various people have different opinions on issues which essentially arises from why various peoples think the way they think.

#### **11. Does the main thrust of intercultural studies hold any relevance for acquisition of education?**

In answering the above question, it would be important to look into the role of culture in acquisition of education. This will then help to determine if the main thrust of intercultural studies as noted above holds any relevance for acquisition of education as well. If culture is the complete way of life of the people, it then can be argued that there are cultural symbols or elements in all actions and inactions of a society. It can be clearly argued that cultural norms or customs exist in language, dressing, mode of behavior and events. Thus, people talk of cultural inclinations such as English culture, African culture, French culture, etc. As pointed out earlier, best examples in teaching or educating can be drawn from familiar premises based on the culture of a people. And when a people's language is used as part of cultural tool in educating process, greater understanding can be conveyed. With this conclusion, it can be argued in favor of culture to play a role in acquisition of education.

If the complete way of life of the people described as their culture plays a role in educational acquisition, it can then be derived that intercultural studies which has to do with getting the knowledge of the similarities, differences, linkages and dissents of various people's culture could play more vital roles in educational acquisition. Whereas cultural studies assess the complete way of life of the people and can use such cultural tools in the educating processes of a particular people, intercultural studies can use the knowledge of the various peoples' complete way of life in educating processes of various peoples.

#### **12. What are the merits of education through intercultural studies?**

- a. Provides enhanced knowledge and understanding of the pupils
- b. Provides guide on better relationship with various students
- c. Can help for use of relevant examples by the tutors
- d. Can aid the proper handling of the students' perceptions
- e. Provides adequate knowledge of the various cultures of the students
- f. Provides understanding of the culture of various people
- g. Can promote mutual respects in the study environment

#### **13. What are the demerits of education through intercultural studies?**

- a. There may be impaired understanding if studies are conducted in language that is not well known to students
- b. There may be little misrepresentation and resentment amongst the students if what is considered sacred in one culture is treated trivially by another student.

#### **14. The case of Europe: education through intercultural studies**

The European educational environment appears to have been set in cross-cultural sharing of knowledge, especially through the promotion of the various languages spoken within the region. It is equally obvious that students are encouraged to learn and speak more than one or two popular languages within the region besides their own languages. This is easily reflected in the educational curriculum of schools where students do subjects in other languages like English and French. At graduation also, the Curriculum Vitae format provides space for graduates to provide level of knowledge of other language and proficiency levels apart from their mother tongue.

#### **Final conclusion and recommendation**

In conclusion, it could be averred as follows;

- a. Education, including the process of impacting knowledge (formal and informal) is strongly linked to the culture (complete way of life) of the people as cultural examples are easily used and understood.
- b. Culture influences education; while cultural studies can provide good insight into educational mechanism and understanding of the people, intercultural studies can even

provide better educational organization and understanding of the various peoples in the society.

- c. An assessment of the sub-heading on merits of education through intercultural studies readily shows that education through intercultural studies has strong relevance and benefits for all peoples and societies.
- d. Conduct of education through cultural studies and intercultural studies should be deliberately promoted and propagated, especially in the use of indigenous languages, as well as the promotion of understanding of other major languages at the global level.

In view of the foregoing therefore, it is strongly advised that Europe continues to conduct educational processes with stints of intercultural studies as it has more benefits than demerits. It will also promote enhanced knowledge of the people of the region amongst themselves. Such knowledge would go a long way in promoting a healthy relationship amongst the various people of the European region.

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