

Retrospection of the Influence of Culture on Formal Education Acquisition in Rundele (NDELE) Kingdom of Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract – The study focused on the influence of culture on the acquisition of formal education in Rundele (Ndele) Kingdom. The paper qualitatively discussed the origin of Rundele which is traceable to the ancient Benin Empire. It also discussed in details some of the traditional/cultural practices that abound in Rundele such as new yam festival, observance of weeks of peace, female wrestling matches, orior-orior, burial rites, ogba otna Rumu-uknu, Ogba Ohia Rumu-uknu, Minikoro festival, right to inheritance of family/father's property, occupation etc. After an exhaustive exposition and analysis, it was found that each of the cultural practices is not only expensive and time consuming but also affects the peoples' acquisition of formal education. Based on the foregoing, it was recommended *inter alia* that some cultural practices that are fetish should be modified; cultural practices that are capital intensive should be reviewed downwards; laws should be enacted for parents so that resources meant for their children's education would not be sacrificed on the alter of cultural practices.

Keywords – Retrospection, influence, culture, formal education, acquisition, Rundele (Ndele) kingdom

I. INTRODUCTION

Rundele now popularly known as Ndele is one of the ancient kingdoms that existed till date. Presently, Rundele is in the political creation known as Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. Geographically, Rundele is located within Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Specifically, Rundele is bounded in the North by Elele Alimini, in the East by Rumuji Odegu, Ovogo Odegu and Rumuewhor Odegu, in the West by Rumuekpe and Ekpeye; and in the South by Abua and Kalabari. Historically, Rundele is one of the sons of Ihuruoha (Ikwerre). The said Ihuruoha together with his brother, Ekpeye and Ogba Migrated from the ancient Benin Empire due to the tyrannical rule of the son of Oba Ewuare also known as Ogwaro the Great.

Culturally, Rundele could be regarded as an epitome of culture. This stems from the fact that in Rundele almost every human activity has traditional or cultural connotation. Moreso, in Rundele cultures abound. For instance in January which is the twelfth month in Rundele, there is the traditional practice known as Ovuwhuo ahua: In this event, any native doctor who is inspired would climb a tall palm tree to cut the tender palm fronds without knife or cutlass but with his 'Ordu olo', there are other cultural

activities like Ovuwhuo Ogbudu (bringing out wrestling drums), Ogba ohia Rumu-uknu (hunting expedition), Ogba otna Rumu-uknu (initiation into elders forum), Osnuenwa (new yam festival), observance of weeks of peace (Esavu Runde), Otna Mgbu (female wrestling), Ori Ogwu (traditional Christmas), Orio Orio, Ohia Minikoro, Ovuwho Oknu, etc. Each of these traditions is so elaborate and expensive. The people of Runde are so used to their culture and traditions that it clashes with Christianity and its attendant western education. This paper therefore is billed to explore the observance of some of the traditions/culture and its implications or influence on acquisition of formal education in Runde.

II. OCCUPATION AS CULTURE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON FORMAL EDUCATION IN RUNDELE KINGDOM

The term occupation refers to a job or profession. According to Elekwa, Okai and Okanezi (2014, p.62) occupation is “an activity from which one earns a living”. Culture itself is the totality of the ways of life of a people. Considering the above meaning of culture, it becomes glaring that occupation is a component of culture. There are however, various types of occupation which the people of Runde Kingdom engage in. Such occupation include crop farming, fishing, animal husbandry, oil palm cone cutting, rain making, native medicine (herbalist), black smiting, weaving such as mat, basket, thatch, carpentry, trap setting, hunting, carving, trading, palm wine tapping, distilling gin, palm oil milling, bone setting, etc. Crop farming engaged in include yam, cocoyam, water yam, cassava, calabash, melon, pepper, native beans (akede), akpuka, rime, pumkin, okro, corn, esara, rehuvelle, plantain, banana, pineapple, pawpaw, cucumber, orange, mango, guava, star apple (odara), sugar cane, alligator pepper, kolanut, ginger etc. The females engage in their peculiar crafts and trades such as hair plaiting, dyeing, decorations, sewing etc.

Since farming and other trades had been the means of livelihood, the Runde people in the past preferred the aforementioned to schooling. Parents painstakingly teach their loved male children how to brush the bush, climb and trim sticks to be suitable for staking yams. The male children are also taught how to tie the sprouted yam stem to stick as well as how to dig (harvest) the yam when it matures. Males are also taught how to climb oil palm trees to cut bunches of ripe fruits and how to climb raffia trees and how to tap palm wine (ngwo) as well as teaching other skills. It is expedient to note that the skills above are taught loved children. On the other hand, the child whose parents do not love very well is usually sent to school because it was believed that school is for the weakling or lazy people. This corroborates with the view of the village men whom Mr. Okafor, the school teacher pleaded for Eze's School fees in the book titled Eze Goes to school. In that literary work according to Nzekwu and Crowder (1963, p. 70-71) it was clearly stated that “were schooling a good thing, I would not mind helping. But it takes people away from their proper way of living. It does not teach a boy to farm yams”.

III. THE CULTURE OF MARRIAGE AND ITS EFFECT ON EDUCATION IN RUNDELE KINGDOM

Marriage is a process of comprehensive union between a man and a woman who have mutually consented and when the process is completed, they are declared husband and wife meaning that the relationship can not only be consummated but be sustained in love throughout their life time or period. A similar meaning of marriage is explained as follows:

Marriage to me is the union of the different entities (a man and woman). It is the blending of two different individual hearts (man and woman) into one. It is the sweetest human interaction or relationship that still remains a mystery (Ayimson, 2007, p.17)

More so, marriage according to Ayimson (2007, p. 16) refers to “a social institution regulated by the word of God and by the laws and customs which a society develops to safeguard its own continuity and welfare”.

The above definitions of marriage depicts marriage as cultural. Marriage as an aspect of culture is practiced in every clime and nation including Runde Kingdom. Giving credence to the above, Onwe (2022, p. 24) stated that “child marriage is a common practice in Nigeria. It is usually rooted in traditional, economic, religious and legal conditions that affect girls and women”. It is however worthy of note that Runde people in the ancient times up to the 1940s practiced early marriage. The females then marry from age of 15 years. This age which is predominantly school going age means that the teenagers would drop out of school due to the child marriage culture. The reason is not far-fetched considering the fact that naturally pregnancy occurs at the instance of marriage consummation. Besides, most schools neither admit nor retain students who are pregnant. This zero tolerance to pregnancy has significant effect on access to school in Runde Kingdom. Ordinarily schooling is difficult for those that are single and if it be so, how much more would it be for the married couples?

A further credence to the effect of marriage culture on access to school is thus:

According to a 2020 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, 43 percent of women between the ages of 20 and 24 has been married by the age of 18 in Nigeria. Child marriage has deep and lasting impact on women throughout their lives. It prevents them from making their own life choices, disrupts their education, subjects them to violence and discrimination, and denies their full participation in economic, political and social life. (Onwe, 2022, p.24)

Apart from the above, marriage is expensive in many parts of the world. For instance, in the holy book (the Bible), Jacob served his father-in-law for seven years as bride price to marry his wife. In other words, it was his earnings for seven years that was used as bride price. This amount of resources is too high or much. Equating this biblical account with the contemporary society, it can be deduced that such resources could have been used to further the education of the girls who were made to marry early.

IV. MINIKORO FESTIVAL AND ITS INFLUENCE ON FORMAL EDUCATION IN RUNDELE KINGDOM

According Hornby (2000, p.546) festival is “a series of performances of music, plays, films, movies etc usually organized in the same place once a year”. Festivals are organized in both traditional and urban communities. Comparatively, traditional communities carry out more festivals than the urban communities. In Rundele Kingdom, several festivals are undertaken in certain periods of the year. For instance, Osnu-enwa (New yam festival) is observed or celebrated in second week of August annually. It is done on the big urie, ie former Mgbuelia Ndele market day now Rumuji market day that falls on second week of August. There is also Otna-Mgbu (female wrestling) festival which takes place yearly in November. This annual event is hosted at certain designated areas on Ekne days. The Otna-Mgbu is a festival where young females engage in wrestling contest among themselves. The Otna-Mgbu holds on three different Ekne days. At the end of the female wrestling, the following Ekne day is called Ekne Owume meaning the “Ekne day that is usually skipped”. In other words, it is usually skipped in order to prepare for the next Ekne day which is “Ekne Minikoro”.

Minikoro is one of the outstanding festivals in Rundele Kingdom. Though participation in the Minikoro festival is open to all young females in Rundele Kingdom, a family known as Rumuokoro is the custodian of the Minikoro deity.

It is based on this fact that in the morning of the annual Minikoro festival day, the Okorobia (young males) of Rumuokoro family usually gather chanting war song as they match to the Minikoro pool where the shrine is located in Omofo-Rundele community. It is customary that the male youths must first enter the pool in the morning before the female participants or celebrants would start their festival event from 12.00 noon. The morning male activity of entering the pool is called Ozowa-mini. It is mainly to clear away debris from the lake or pool.

The bodies of young females that wish to partake in the Minikoro festival were usually decorated or designed with either ede-ali or uri (native ink). Ede-ali is the seed of a particular plant which is harvested and later grinded. The juice from the seeds is used to design or make drawings of certain objects like flower, book, pots, house, fish, plant leaf etc. Also, some partakers of the Minikoro festival design their head by shaving certain parts and the shaved parts were usually painted with either uri or ovo-o-ovo. In fact, it is well contoured to make it look quite fascinating. That is of course for the young unmarried females. The married females on the other hand make a unique design on their heads which is known as “Risi-Ojongo”. Preparing the Risi Ojongo is expensive as it requires certain materials. What is spectacular is how the ojongo is woven with the hair and does not fall off even when the carrier lies down to sleep. A further explanation of the ojongo/minikoro is as follows:

The Ogbarisi Ojongo is very characteristic. It has both social and economic implications. On the social aspect, it is a mark of initiation into womanhood. As soon as the risi ojongo is made, the girl youth becomes graduated from youth and transited to adulthood. On the economic perspective, the Ojongo is so technical that the clay (charcoal) is woven with the hair and it is sometimes as high as one foot from the head... the designer is paid high and the materials used for the erection of the ojongo are bought (Okanezi & Hanachor, 2018, P. 1-6)

It is also the practice that the participants in the Minikoro festival were admired due to the high level of beautification with beads, bangles, earrings, uri, ede ali, ovo-o-ovo etc. while the admirers appreciated in the form of giving gifts and spraying money on them, the participants reciprocate not only by giving souvenir but also by serving food notably roasted yam well toasted with palm oil, tin/canned fish, rice etc.

Ordinarily, one would deduce that the resources used for beautification and the lavish entertainment associated with the Minikoro festival could have been used for payment of the child's school fees. This stems from the fact that after wasting this huge resources on Minikoro festival, sometimes virtually nothing is left for the girls' school fees/school needs.

Besides, the time spent for the beautification is much. The time conflicts with either school hours or time to study at home. More so, those designs on the body or beautification are customarily allowed to stay for some days or weeks. Unfortunately, the school girls who participated in the Minikoro festival were always ashamed of going to school with such designs on their bodies. More over, the schools in the past were owned by Christian missions. Of course, it is factual that the belief of the missionaries does not allow them to either admit or retain in their schools any pupil or student involved or perpetrate acts of paganism.

V. WRESTLING CULTURE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE ACQUISITION OF FORMAL EDUCATION IN RUNDELE KINGDOM

Wrestling is a sporting event that is beneficial to the body. In otherwords, it is an exercise which is good or necessary for human health. Nowadays, wrestling has become a career for some people as it is now a means of livelihood. Such persons train so much and engage in tournaments where trophies are won thus exemplifying it's economic value. The above is obtainable in the contemporary era.

Back in the past (the precolonial, colonial and early post-colonial periods), the people of Rundele Kingdom used wrestling as a social event as well as an economic activity. The value placed on traditional wrestling was so much that it became one of the means of marrying. Infact, great wrestlers were held in high esteem. It would not be out of place to view that the Chinua Achebe's literary work titled. "Things Fall Apart" bears an unalloyed resemblance to Rundele wrestling culture. In the story, Okonkwo had brought honour to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was called the Cat because his back would never touch the earth. He was a great wrestler as no one has thrown him for seven years throughout the nine villages from Umuofia to Mbaino. Without minding Amalinze's pedigree, Okonkwo who was a teenager challenged him and finally threw him in a fight. This made Okonkwo to become famous throughout the nine villages and beyond (Achebe, 1958).

The wrestling culture of the above literal nine villages (Umuofia to Mbaino) is similar to that of Rundele Kingdom. The parents of a male child in Rundele kingdom in the past spend huge chunk of their resources to prepare wrestling medicine for their son. They ensure that their son would not be thrown down by anybody. It is factual that in the historical Rundele uptil the present, money is sprayed on whosoever that emerges victorious in a wrestling contest as a way of applauding the victor. However, the amount of money invested in preparing a male person for wrestling prowess is quite substantial. A determined parent could use all his resources to prepare for wrestling at the detriment of the child's school fees. In fact school needs are sacrificed on the alter of wrestling needs. Sometimes, due to the mystical powers put in the male person by the native doctor, the male child finds it difficult to remain in the classroom whenever he hears the sounds of wrestling drums. He immediately tends to respond to wrestling drum rhythms. In extreme cases, he becomes inspired and leaves the classroom heading towards the wrestling ground where the drummers are playing the drums.

VI. OGBA-OHIA RUMU-UKNU (HUNTING EXPEDITION) CULTURE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON FORMAL EDUCATION IN RUNDELE

Ogba-ohia Uknu is a cultural practice where an age group is made to go to the bush to hunt animals. This cultural practice is observed not only in Rundele kingdom but also in Odegu Kingdom, Emohua Kingdom, Rumuekpe and some other kingdoms in Ikwerre ethnic nationality. In Odegu Kingdom it is called Ogba-ohia Wonunu. The Ogba-ohia Rumu-uknu is observed by an age group once in life and after that the next younger age group would have turn after three years. So the cultural event takes place every three years in each of the five clans in Rundele. The time span of the event is four days and three nights consecutively. The Ogba-ohia Rumu-uknu is mainly an initiation into manhood/adulthood. It is also to assess their quality of being brave especially when things are not easy.

The financial involvement is such that it takes an age group between seven and ten years to prepare for the event and each individual member of the age group spends not less than two million naira for the hunting expedition. What makes the ceremony expensive is that it entails much expenses at both the corporate (age group) level and at the individual level. At the corporate level, the following are required:

1. Using drinks to inform the clan and community
2. Consulting the immediate older age group in the clan to schedule a date for the hunting expedition. That elder age group also owes the responsibility of showing/leading them to the bush for hunting. They also reserve the right to flog members of the age group whom they leading if such person or persons are either lazy or refuse to be very active in the bush. They can also refuse them eat early unless they kill or catch a considerable number of animals. That is why it is called initiation into manhood/adulthood.
3. Give a goat or cow to the clan to approve the date so fixed by the immediate elder age group
4. Using drinks to consult the immediate younger age group who by tradition would serve as messengers to the age group that is embarking on the event
5. Consult the community wrestling drummers (Rumu-Ogbudu) with drinks, alligator pepper, kolanuts etc.
6. Inform or consult the age group in charge of the wrestling arena (uknu nwe ama/Ele ofia-he-otna) with drinks etc. They sing to the houses of each member of the age group, sing in the wrestling arena and also act as referees during wrestling thus adding colour to the event.
7. Invite their corresponding age mates (age groups) in the rest four clans of Rundele Kingdom and beyond.
8. Select and buy several textile materials for uniform attire for the age group members and their wives as well as the older and younger age group members. The different uniform attires include;
 - a. For hunting in the bush
 - b. For singing around the clan to showcase the animals and birds they had killed
 - c. Wrestling attire for the following day when each members of the age group would display one after the other in the clan's wrestling arena (ama otna)
 - d. For thanksgiving service on the proceeding Sunday
 - e. For each of those outings, their wives select various wrapper and material for blouse
9. Payment for canon guns
10. Bullets for the clan's hunters association who usually assist in hunting
11. Provision for rain makers
12. Public address system
13. Provision for security – police and RUSPAC
14. Entertainment for each of the groups so invited/consulted

At the individual participant's level, it entails invitation and entertainment of the following;

(1) Paternal kinsmen (Rumunda) (2) Family daughters (Rumu Rinya) (3) Maternal kinsmen (Ele Rimenna), (4) Various associations one belongs (5) Friends, (6) Publicity (7) hunters gun (8) bullets (9) canon gun (10) souvenir (11) one full length of georgette (12) public address system etc.

At the end of the ceremony, some members had become indebted hence some members sell their valuable property such as land to offset some of their debts. The bottom line is that in such scenario it becomes difficult to provide the educational needs of the children. The children of some members of the age group who are indebted may not go to school because money for registration or enrolment may not be available while those who were already schooling may drop out due to financial incapacitation. Besides, it is crystal clear that children of members of the age group would not attend school throughout the days of the ceremony because they would engaged in errands.

VII. THE CULTURE OF CURTAILMENT OF WOMEN'S RIGHT TO FAMILY/FATHER'S INHERITANCE AND ITS EFFECT ON THEIR EDUCATION

The culture of not allowing female children to inherit their family or fathers' property is practiced in Rundele Kingdom and many other kingdoms/tribes in Nigeria. The girl child or female child is not given a level playing ground with their male counterparts in the right to inheritance. The money and properties of the family or father is always shared among the male children. The female children in the family are treated as if they are outcasts or slaves by deduction whereas they are legitimate members of the family. In this respect, the culture is simply gender bias hence very unfair.

The woman is put in a disadvantaged position with regards to inheritance especially in the South-East and South-South Nigeria. The practice in the aforementioned regions is that women neither inherit on their own from their own kins nor from that of their husband. A rather more discriminatory practice is a situation where according to Ugwulebo and Anele (2001, p.71) "as a spinster, a lady can be allowed to build a house in her father's compound. The underlying assumption is that anytime she marries, the building will be automatically inherited by the brothers/relations". Considering it at continental level, most African cultures deprive women from getting inheritance. A pathetic situation of deprivation is explained thus:

She does not own her children for they belong to the man. She does not own anything including herself for she belongs to the man. In short, she has no property rights and thrives at the mercy of the man (Ugwulebo and Anele, 2001, p.72)

Giving credence to the above, the Governor of Rivers State, Chief Nyeson Wike expressed displeasure at how most cultures, particularly in Rivers State, do not encourage what engenders growth among the people. He wondered why women are prevented from sharing in the inheritance of their families when they were often the most useful members of the society when compared to most of their male counterparts (Wike, 2022).

This existing discrimination in the sharing of family property no doubt affects the female folk adversely. The education needs of a female child may not be given to her even if her father has much money or a whole lot of money resources before his demise. Such school needs may include school shoes, school clothes, hostel fee, school fees, and up keep. Where such needs are not given to her, it could lead to school dropout. Of course, it becomes an instance of suffering in the midst of plenty. Meanwhile, the male children would share the money and whatever other resources. The female child suffers all these because the culture deprives her from inheriting her father's property for the sole reason of being a female.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Rundele Kingdom is indeed the custodian of Ikwerre culture as exemplified in their observance of several cultural / traditional practices. Unfortunately, the observance of those cultures/traditions are either fetish, time consuming, gender bias or capital intensive. Each of the above features negatively affects the acquisition of formal education. For instance, it is not easy for participants in fetish cultural practices to be granted admission into schools because the schools in the past were owned by the missions (churches) who do not condone fetishness. Also, both time and money that would have been utilized for formal education are spent on cultural practices. Furthermore, the cultural practice that inhibits females' inheritance of their father's property affects their acquisition of formal education.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the exposition and conclusion above, the following were recommended thus:

1. Some cultural practices should be modernized
2. Cultural practices that are fetish should be modified
3. Some cultural practices that are spotless should be incorporated in the school curricula
4. Cultural practices that are capital intensive should be reviewed
5. Laws should be enacted for parents so that resources meant for their children's education would not be sacrificed on the altar of cultural observance.
6. Some of the cultural practices should be made to come under the spotlight for public scrutiny.

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