Educating Humans

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ABSTRACT

African traditional education and soka approaches to education share a common vision of human education, which is key to transforming the education crisis facing Africa. We make this case in four steps. First, we explore the history of education in Africa to illustrate the roots of the crisis. Second, we introduce soka approaches to education, its history, and fundamental principles. Third, we analyze the convergence of African traditional education and soka approaches to education in terms of their underlying philosophies. Fourth, we investigate possible applications of both philosophies to improve schooling in Africa. The last section outlines how harnessing the insights of both philosophies will engender an African renaissance based on young people striving to live creative and contributive lives.

Keywords: African Traditional Education, Education Crisis, Human Education, Psychological Crisis, Schooling in Africa, Soka Studies.

INTRODUCTION

What needs to be done to transform the state of education in Africa? Shocking statistics illustrate the learning crisis plaguing education systems across the continent: for instance, three quarters of grade 3 students in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda found it difficult to understand the sentence "The name of the dog is Puppy" even when they read it in their local language (Sow, 2017; World Development Report, 2018). African schools also have to contend with a resource crisis. Many schools lack classrooms, textbooks, and other essential teaching and learning materials (Addy, 2013).

While much of international attention focuses on this learning and resources crisis, there is a serious, unquantifiable crisis affecting education in Africa. It is a cultural and psychological crisis, characterized by a deep disrespect for the dignity of life. Upholding the dignity of life means understanding that all living beings are inherently worthy. To illustrate, many research studies have documented that despite the expansion of tuition-free education, a significant number of parents across the continent are less enthused about enrolling their children in schools or freeing up their children's time for their studies (Johnson, 2013; Oyeniran, 2017; Pansiri & Bulawa, 2013). Teachers and school administrators are often late or absent from school; others sexually abuse students, mock students in front of their peers, or create a hostile school atmosphere, which inhibits teaching and learning; further, many teachers simply show no interest in teaching (Adhami, Chenelle, Freeman, & Gulino, 2018; Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Heto, Odari, & Sunu, 2020; Moletsane, Juan, Prinsloo, & Reddy, 2015; Mulkeen & Chen, 2008). Similarly, some learners abuse and bully their teachers, refuse to go to school, or show little interest in learning (Gbollie & Keamu, 2017; Du Plessis, 2018, Heto et al., 2020; Woudstra, van Rensburg, Visser, & Jordaan, 2018). These problems point to a pervasive lack of respect for the dignity of life in schools. This is a recapitulation of the prejudiced attitude with which European colonizers initially designed formal education systems on the continent. Consequently, we think any genuine attempt to reform schooling needs to address the human issues at the root of the educational crisis on the continent.

We turn to African traditional education and *soka* approaches to education to understand how to transform Africa's schools into life-affirming and transformational institutions. The first section introduces the history of education in Africa to explain the roots of the current education crisis. The second section reviews the literature on African traditional education and *soka* approaches to education and illustrates their convergences. The third examines the potential applications of both philosophies to schooling in

Africa. The last section discusses how the implementation of human education can engender an African renaissance. We conclude with recommendations for future research in this field.

HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN AFRICA

This section reviews the history of education in Africa with a focus on the purpose that drove each educational approach. Although we recognize the diversity of the continent and range of objectives that each educational approach sought to achieve, we highlight cross-cutting trends to illustrate the dominant aims shaping each time period. While many early European explorers presumed that Africans had no prior form of education, the history of education in Africa predates Europeans. We call these indigenous educational approaches African traditional education. Before the Europeans' arrival and colonization, Africans had their own system of transferring knowledge from one generation to another (Boateng, 1983). They helped children acquire a variety of skills, including farming, carpentry, hunting, drumming, singing, dancing, public speaking, and the like (Omolewa, 2007). Beyond technical skills, the focus was on the holistic development of each child into a capable citizen in the community (Fafunwa, 1974). In other words, the community strove to raise each child into an excellent human being with virtues such as humility, generosity, and bravery (Omolewa, 2007). We introduce the general characteristics of African traditional education in greater detail later on in this paper.

Subsequently, various foreign forms of education became influential on the continent: the two primary ones were Islamic and Christian. Boahen (1966) credits Mansa Musa, the ruler of the Mali Empire from 1307 to 1337, for being the first person to promote a foreign religious education on a large scale in sub-Saharan Africa; he brought scholars from his trip to Mecca to teach Islam, sent students to Morocco for studies, and provided resources to advance the learning of *fiqh* (religious law). Musa transformed several villages – prominent among them, Timbuktu – into urban learning centers that attracted scholars throughout the Muslim world (Boahen, 1966). After the Morrocan invasion of 1591, scholars from Timbuktu and other learning centers scattered throughout the Sahara, thus, providing opportunities to rural pastoralists to learn about Islam (Hill, 2009). The purpose of education at this time was two-fold: to teach a selected few to attain the status of *ulama*, or scholars, and to assist many people to gain basic literacy skills (Singleton, 2004).

Aside from Islamic schools, Christian missionaries also built schools when the Europeans arrived on the continent. European missionaries tried to

convert Africans to Christianity, but by the mid-eighteenth century, their efforts were not producing the desired results, especially in West Africa (Boahen, 1966). According to Boahen (1966), the lack of success was due to two factors - one, the commercial activities of the missionaries were given priority over their missionary work, and two, there was a high rate of mortality among the missionaries. The missionaries addressed these issues by having African converts help them.

The missionaries provided the converts with formal education - a Western-style education with a predetermined weekly schedule and prescribed curricular activities in a classroom setting. The focus of formal education was the acquisition of reading and writing abilities, instead of technical and vocational skills. The Europeans trained the Africans to be good Christians, but the ultimate goal of Christian education in Africa was to train many indigenous converts, who would help spread and sustain the Christian message (Frankema, 2012). The number of trained converts who helped the missionaries carry out their missionary work provides a clue into the strategic role education played in advancing Christianity in Africa. For example, seven out of eight official staff members in the Protestant missions on the continent between 1903 and 1925 were African (Beach & Fahs, 1925). While the missionaries obtained the initial funds for mission schools from larger missionary societies in their homeland countries, they depended on the contributions of African converts and colonial government to meet subsequent funding needs (Beach & Fahs, 1925). In essence, the success of the missionary activities did not depend on the passive acceptance of Western culture and religious values by the Africans; rather, it was in large part due to the active role the indigenous people played in promoting Western culture and values.

The missionaries succeeded in convincing the Africans to uphold the European way of life, religion, and government through religious indoctrination and making the life of converts appealing to non-converts. Europeans disdained the African way of life and taught the converts to renounce them (Boahen, 1966). Many converts complied because association with the Europeans brought certain privileges. As custodians of the Afro-European culture, the converts' lifestyle became the standard for society. Africans needed to acquire Western education and adopt an Afro-European way of life in order to gain prestige, financial security, and respect in the new world (Frankema, 2012). Boahen (1966) asserts that the legacy of formal education is a new kind of African identity: "educated; Christian; having European taste in clothing, food, drink, and music; exposed, through reading, to ideas and influence from abroad but still maintaining his African roots, and

shouldering his responsibilities to his extended family and his traditional authority" (p. 122). In other words, the new elite were a fusion of African and European, but through their education, they were trained to view many aspects of life from a Western viewpoint. This opened opportunities for the Westernized elite to participate in the colonial power structures, while most of those without formal schooling were shut out.

The colonial education system built upon the legacy of the missionary schools to achieve the objective of the colonizing powers: grooming Africans to serve the needs of colonial administrations. The colonial schooling system was unequal and dehumanized the Africans. It was a dual track system. The Africans attended less resourced, crowded schools while Whites attended the well-resourced schools (McKeever, 2017). There was also an urban-rural gap because the schools for Africans in urban areas had more resources and performed better than those in rural communities (Thomas, 2002). In Francophone Africa, many individuals criticized native schools for focusing exclusively on academic training to the detriment of practical training (Gamble, 2009). The pervasive attitude of teachers and school administrators at this time was that not all students were educatable, so they made education selective and elitist by using different tactics to encourage students who were struggling in their studies to dropout (Feldmann, 2016). The caregivers, teaching and non-teaching staffs, often yelled at, insulted, scolded, and degraded students, especially those they considered uneducable (Cağrı, 2011). The larger ramification of these practices was an education system that stripped students of their self-esteem and ruined their psychological wellbeing.

In light of these pervasive issues within the colonial schooling system, immediately after independence, governments in post-colonial Africa reformed their education systems to attempt to resolve the problems with the colonial and missionary education systems. They sought to remake the education system to offer children the skills and knowledge they needed to participate in the economic life of their states and imbibe in them the social values they needed to actively participate in the communal life of their nation-states (Ojiambo, 2018). The main goal of post-colonial education was to help learners develop their African Personality, or pride in their Africanness (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru & Makuvaza, 2017). Educationists advocated for schools to teach the post-colonial African students about their Africanness and develop attitudes congruent with the reality and struggle of their people (Nkrumah, 1970).

These reforms did not produce the desired effects, however. While the post-colonial education system succeeded in raising the consciousness of

learners, it was unable to exorcise the legacy of the missionary and colonial education system. When one reads Julius Nyerere's (1968) "Education for Self-Reliance" today without the title and author's name, it can easily be mistaken for a contemporary text, since all of the problems outlined in the book about four decades ago continue to plague education systems on the continent. One possible reason for the lack of significant progress is that the reforms were just modifications to the system that the post-colonial elites inherited rather than a fundamental shift in the entire system. While debates on the language of instruction and discussions on the need for decolonizing education continues, they very rarely translate into significant changes to the schooling systems left by former colonizers.

The next major shift in post-colonial Africa was through the influence of global education movements led by international institutions such as the United Nations and the World Bank. The United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched the "Education for All" movement in 2000, and the United Nations designated achieving universal primary education a millennium development goal. As a result, the total primary school enrollment rate in sub-Saharan Africa increased 42 percent from 1996 to 2002 (UNESCO, 2009). Consequently, gross secondary school enrollment rates doubled from 26 percent in 2000 to 43 percent in 2017 (World Bank, 2017). With the focus being on expanding access to education, quality suffered. Schools were built without adequate personnel to support them, or schools were built so poorly that they eventually collapsed on top of students (Asumadu, 2019; BBC News, 2019). Even when teachers were hired, delays in salaries provoked massive demonstrations that created disruptions in schools across the continent. While it expands the goal of access to include universal secondary and early childhood education, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals have placed a greater emphasis on quality of education, which includes gender equity, quality teachers, and global citizenship curricula (United Nations, 2019).

As a reflection of the impact of global education and economic policies, the rhetoric employed by modern African governments suggests that the underlying framework driving education policy is one that instrumentalizes education for the purpose of economic growth. Under this framework, education is a tool for human capital development by giving young people the skills and knowledge necessary for success in their careers. The expansion of education is presumed to lead to the development of the country as school graduates contribute to the economy. At the same time, many graduates are unable to find employment because there is a mismatch between what they learn at the university and what society needs. Dominant

concerns raised about education include the lack of teaching practical, career-relevant skills and the absence of opportunities for students in STEM (Cunningham, 2006).

Overall, the shifts in the purpose of education in the African setting throughout the different movements can be summarized in the table below. This is not to say that each approach did not aim to produce other outcomes; instead, we attempt to distill all factors into one underlying purpose that guided the implementation of each approach to highlight important trends.

Table 1: Dominant Purpose of Educational Approaches in Africa

Educational Approach	Dominant purpose
African traditional	Cultivating humanity, raising contributive citizens
Missionary	Civilizing and Westernizing
Colonial	Training to serve colonial administration
Post-colonial	Reclaiming Africanness and promoting national development
International	Ensuring access and creating economic growth

The consistent theme across the different formal educational epoch on the continent has been that the people in positions of power and authority used education to produce individuals who can serve the needs of society, whether it was religion, the state, or the economy. Under this framework, educating students was a means to a greater end, rather than the end in themselves. In sum, education has not centered on the happiness and development of children. Throughout these periods, informal or African traditional education has persisted to varying extents although it has been mostly overshadowed by formal schooling in the modern context. Indigenous pedagogies continue to fade as the dominant actors in raising children have shifted increasingly from the family and community to schools. We argue, however, that returning to the philosophy and purpose of African traditional education is necessary in challenging the continuously instrumentalized state of education in Africa and reviving the human-centered aspects that are often missing in the current schooling systems. The next section introduces another human-centered pedagogy called the *soka* approach before going on to compare both educational approaches and to explore their relevance to the modern African context.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE *SOKA* APPROACH TO EDUCATION

The *soka*, or value-creating, approach to education is a humanistic educational philosophy that considers the lifelong happiness of students as the primary goal of education. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, a 20th-century Japanese educator, developed the philosophy through action-based research. In 1930, Makiguchi published a book called *Soka Kyoiku Taikei* (The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy) in which he explained his theory of education. Makiguchi argues that education exists to nurture in students the ability to live happy lives – happiness, in this context, means bringing out one's potential to live meaningfully and to make a positive impact on others; in other words, happiness implies creating value with one's life. Makiguchi defines "true education" as an unending process that involves "awakening in the student a method for acquiring knowledge through his or her own powers, [and] providing the student with the key to unlock the storehouse of knowledge" (Makiguchi 1980, p. 68; Ikeda, Saito, Endo, & Suda, 2009, p. 117). Education by this definition is a process of helping students engage in self-discovery by providing them with the tools they need to move from unconscious living to being conscious participants in the affairs of society. Josei Toda, the disciple of Makiguchi, coined the term "human revolution" to describe the process elaborated in Makiguchi's theory. Redefining lifelong learning and growth as human revolution enabled Toda to broaden the relevance of Makiguchi's ideas beyond professional educators.

Daisaku Ikeda, Toda's disciple, expanded on his mentor's efforts to make Makiguchi's theory accessible to all people through his writings and speeches and built education institutions to actualize the ideals of the *soka* approach to education. Ikeda has founded Soka schools based on the pedagogy of Makiguchi and Toda from pre-primary to university level that span 7 countries – specifically Japan, US, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, and Brazil (Soka Gakkai, 2020). The schools seek to raise global citizens, who will make contributions to the wellbeing of humanity. Rather than focusing on test scores, the *soka* framework encourages teachers to cultivate human relationships with their students and to continually reflect upon themselves to improve their teaching (Inukai, 2018). It is important to note that many educators, who are inspired by Ikeda' vision, also implement *soka* approaches to education in their own classrooms even though they may not be at the Soka schools.

In the next section, we will engage in a comparison of the underlying philosophy of African traditional education and Soka approaches to education

to illustrate how they converge in their shared understanding of human education.

HUMAN EDUCATION THROUGH TWO LENSES

African traditional education and *soka* approaches to education share three common aspects. First, both start from the premise that although people are born biologically as human, it is only through education that they become fully human (Tedla, 1992). Education exposes learners to the world and helps them develop the wisdom to intentionally choose acceptable behaviors over unacceptable ones. African traditional education allows learners to gain the experiences and acquire the skills, virtues, and knowledge necessary to manifesting human qualities in all aspects of life (Tedla, 1992). One becomes fully human, in the context of African traditional education, by manifesting the virtues that the community deem as essential in one's daily life (Okrah, 2003). In most societies, these virtues include care and concern for others, generosity, courage, and wisdom. There is an implicit expectation that a well-groomed person would consistently manifest these virtues for the rest of their lives. The Eʋe people, spread across West Africa, use the phrase "*amenyenye gborbor eno zi deme*" (Eʋe: the spirit of becoming human has settled in him/her) to describe someone who has become truly human. The word "*amenyenye*" translates into "becoming human" instead of "to become human" because humanity is not an irreversible state that one attains. Becoming human is a continuous process of growth and a lifelong journey. The belief is that the spirit of humanness can be unsettled, and it needs continuous nurturing for it to remain stable within.

Along the same lines, Ikeda recognizes that it is possible that some people may not fully manifest their humanity because they fail to fully engage themselves in what makes humans different from other living beings. The Buddhist concept of the five components is key in Ikeda's understanding of human education. According to Ikeda,

> [b]oth the sentient and insentient are made up of the temporary combination of what are called the five components of life – form, perception, conception, volition, and consciousness... In addition to forms, animals are endowed with perception, conception and will. Plants, too, are now thought to have perception, that is, sensitivity and emotion. It is only with the advent of humanity that the fifth component – consciousness – emerged. The autonomy or identity of humankind is firmly rooted in this function of discernment (Ikeda, Simard, & Bourgeault, 2003, p. 160).

In the quote above, Ikeda explains that both human and non-human animals possess the first four components of life. All living beings learn, build complex social organizations, react and adapt to their environment (Ikeda et al., 2003). Scientific studies are increasingly showing that animals and plants acquire, memorize, and recall information (Gagliano, 2017; Trewavas, 2014). More so, we now know that non-human living beings use what they learn to modify their behavior and adapt to their changing environment (Gagliano, Renton, Depczynski, & Mancuso, 2014). In essence, education as learning is not unique to humans.

This also aligns with African epistemology when it comes to conceptualizing the relationship between humans and non-human living beings. The general belief is that plants, animals, and the environment are an interconnected continuum of human beings, and the life force or spirit in these things have the ability to learn and grow (Ikuenobe, 2014). It is for this reason that Africans seek to learn from the actions or characteristics of non-human living beings and inanimate objects. In constructing proverbs, Africans use animals, inanimate objects, and plants as symbols to provide a representation of humans and abstract ideas (Dzobo, 2006). This is also the reason why African traditional education is not compartmentalized into different subjects; rather, all subjects are integrated together in a multidisciplinary approach that recognizes that interdependence of all fields (Omolewa, 2007).

What sets someone fully human apart from all other living beings is the fifth component: consciousness. Educating children to understand and harness the power of the fifth component is vital because that is "where 'humanity' begins" (Ikeda et al., 2003, p. 175). An individual becomes truly human when they develop the capacity to give full play to all five components in their life and can harness their combined powers to enhance their lives and that of others. Learning about the fifth component of life enables people to "define the position of the self in relation to the eternal universe," which is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for becoming human (Ikeda et al., 2003, p. 165). Put differently, all human beings possess the qualities of good or evil; thus, the tendency that each person manifests in their daily interactions depends on how they strengthen their inner mindset and nurture their character.

Second, both philosophies are based on an appreciation for the interconnectedness of all life and the oneness of self and the environment. *Soka* approaches focus on enabling students to appreciate the interconnectedness among all humanity and the environment rather than regurgitated segmented facts (as cited in Ikeda, 2012). According to Ikeda (2010), an education that fosters humanity helps learners develop the capacity

to understand the true nature of all things and to find meaning in order to enhance their life and contribute to the well-being of others. An educated human being, Toynbee and Ikeda (2009) suggest, is an individual who has been able to "cultivate the penetrating insight that discerns the pulsating energy of life and all aspects of the universe; to employ them in oneself; and, using this reactivated vital force, to perceive the realities of life, society, and the universe" (p. 77). Put differently, people who obtain education ought to develop the ability to understand life and the world around them, so that they can participate in it meaningfully. People who have the ability to discern the interconnectedness of all life and activate a vital life force tend to live happy and harmonious lives because their way of life promotes joy and peace wherever they are.

Soka approaches to education identify lifelong happiness as the purpose of education. Lifelong happiness means living a life in which one is able to create value out of every situation – in other words, it means bringing out the human potential of creativity, which also resonates with the concept of becoming fully human. According to Makiguchi, value, from a soka perspective, has three components - beauty, gain, and good (Bethel, 1994). Beauty is something that is emotionally satisfying and evokes a pleasurable sensory response. Gain means acquiring the material and non-material things that contribute to the maintenance and development of one's life, and good refers to the conscious actions, word, or thoughts that one can use to benefit society. Creation means increasing the usefulness of a natural order to human life by transforming the ordinary order of nature into a special one through human activity.

Makiguchi is advocating for societies to educate learners to become people who can live lives dedicated to creating value that is favorable to the improvement of human existence. He believed that "the aim of education is to develop character in both the self and others that can contribute to the mutual benefit and welfare of the individual and the whole" (Garrison, Hickman, & Ikeda, 2014, p. 45 – 46). Ikeda (2004) explains that cultivating one's humanity benefits society: "A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation, and, further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind" (p. viii). Ikeda, in the quote, is expressing his conviction that the cultivation of one's humanity, human revolution, has the power to transform societies. This stands in contrast with other educational approaches that place the greatest emphasis on the intended wider impact of education on society, rather than on the happiness and cultivation of humanity of each student.

Similarly, Africans teach their children to see their environment and others as an extension of themselves (Ikuenobe, 2014). Tutu (1999), in explaining the African philosophy of Ubuntu, notes that "I am human because I belong, I participate, and I share" (p. 34). Ubuntu expresses the idea that no one exists in a vacuum, and the development of each person's humanity is crucial in and inseparable from the transformation of the entire community. The philosophy conscientizes Africans to realize that their very existence and humanity is a derivative of others – it is only by recognizing and contributing to the upliftment of others that people can also experience true joy; this is because all people and things are interconnected (Tutu, 1999). Put simply, cultivating one's humanity and using it to contribute to the continuous improvement of oneself and others leads to true happiness.

Finally, the essential way to educate human beings effectively is through relationships with other human beings, who model the ideals of humanity. For both *soka* approaches and African traditional education, the student-teacher relationship is vital. In African traditional education, all community members participated in raising each child. Much of the learning happened through informal interactions, where the child observed what an elder did and then imitated the action themselves (Okrah, 2003). Children also became apprentices to specialists in various fields to learn about their techniques before eventually starting their own independent practice. The student and teacher share a mutual respect for each other and have a direct passion for the activity, and much of the learning is student-led based upon students' interests and creativity (Omolewa, 2007).

In a like manner, Makiguchi advocated for a shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered education. Rather than just transmitting knowledge, *soka* educators serve as facilitators of learning and mentor their students in building the skills needed for value-creation and self-led discovery (as cited in Gebert, 2012). Ikeda has also written extensively on the role of the mentor-and-disciple relationship in empowering people to bring out their full potential. Learning from a role model enables the disciple, or student, to activate their own unique latent abilities because the mentor is able to demonstrate what the student is striving to accomplish. Furthermore, the mentor cares for the disciple and strives to foster the disciple to surpass his/her abilities. These relationships are crucial in a human education and cannot be replicated through a textbook. All in all, our understanding of both *soka* approaches and African traditional education leads us to the conclusion that education for lifelong happiness is the same as educating individuals to become fully human because it requires that learners develop the human virtues required to create a life of happiness.

To put our discussion so far in some context, we outlined the history of education on the continent in the first section and concluded that existing formal education systems on the continent continue to be influenced by Western philosophies of education despite several attempts to reform them. After that, we discussed the purpose of African traditional education and *soka* approaches to education and elaborate on the shared underlying concepts of both philosophies. Explaining both philosophies shows why these two philosophies ascribe a different purpose to education than the Western approaches to education prevalent in Africa.

Before comparing Western philosophy to indigenous and Soka philosophies, we would like to make an important distinction. While the idea of human education and humanistic education also emerged within Western frameworks, the kind of Western education imposed on Africa was not human-centered because the Europeans did not regard Africans as equally human. When any system of thought, no matter how empowering, is forced upon a subjugated people, dehumanization is inherent in that system.

Western philosophy is no stranger to humanism: The ideals of cultivating humanity and developing one's virtues as a human being date all the way back to Aristotle. However, Europeans introduced their own style of education across the continent based on racist assumptions of African inferiority and backwardness. As the famous poem, "The White Man's Burden," by Kipling (1899) illustrates, Europeans viewed Africans as "Half devil and half child." European colonizers claimed that they were doing benevolent work by civilizing the savages and making them more human, or European, when in reality, they imposed educational systems that belittled the colonized people's humanity. In essence, they were trying to fit Africans into their own standard of what it meant to be human rather than enabling Africans' inherent potential to flourish in unique and different ways.

Furthermore, unlike African traditional education and *soka* approaches, some of the Western education philosophies adopted a different conception of human nature altogether. Some dominant Western philosophies of education started from the premise that children are inherently good or innocent, which eliminated the need for educators to help students cultivate their humanity (Hennum, 2014; Skolnick, 1975). African traditional education and *soka* approaches to education look at this issue from a different perspective. Children do not start out as good people, who become evil as a result of the corrupting influence of society; instead, all people are endowed with the potential for good or evil. It is through education that people come to choose their moral commitments or manifest their innate potential for good or evil. People do not become permanently good or evil; they demonstrate

their moral commitment to living good or evil lives through each decision they make continuously. From this perspective, the acquisition of employable skills is as important as the wisdom to put that skill and knowledge to a value-creating use. In the next section, we will discuss possible ways in which educational reformers may be able to employ insights from African traditional education and *soka* approaches to improve the state of education in their country.

APPLICATIONS

This section presents the unique contributions of African traditional education and Soka approach to education and how they can improve the state of education in Africa, where formal Western style schooling continues to dominate the landscape. We can apply the shared principles of both educational philosophies to modern African schooling in the following ways: fostering humanizing student-teacher relationships, teaching the interconnectedness of all life, and making education's purpose to raise humans. To clarify the purpose of this section, we argue that exploring the wisdom that exists in African traditional education and informed by *soka* philosophy will generate new ideas that can improve the current educational context. This proposal should not be construed as a call for a pure return to traditional education practices or to introduce *soka* approaches without consideration for the local context. We also do not prescribe specific policies because it is better suited for local educators to adapt these concepts to their own context.

First, schools should be a place of enriching, humanizing student-teacher relationships. While some aspects of African traditional education had structures, such as the initiation rites, much of African traditional education consisted of many spontaneous, unstructured interactions between the child and members of the community (Shizha, 2014). It was through these informal interactions that what Ikeda (2006) calls "life-to-life exchanges" occur. For instance, a child could sit with an elder at the fireside and learn about the trials he overcame when he was young and the history of the clan, or while preparing a meal together with their mother, children could learn the medicinal benefits of certain herbs and where to find them. While the interaction between children and elders in traditional African society could serve as a good model for transforming modern societies, the hierarchical relationship between the elder or teacher and child or student influenced these interactions, which often prevented children from being able to freely question the authority of their elders (Murphy, 1980).

To further humanize these informal interactions, we suggest adding the *soka* concept of the oneness of teacher and student. Ikeda (2015) outlines

the mentor and disciple relationship as the oneness of mentor and disciple based upon a shared struggle. The relationship between mentor and disciple is not a hierarchical one where the mentor is superior to the disciple; it is an egalitarian relationship, and at times, the roles can be reversed. One who was the mentor before could become the disciple at another point, and vice versa. The oneness of teacher and student illustrates interdependency. One cannot exist without the other. Therefore, this relationship is based on mutual appreciation. Applying this oneness to the informal mentoring interactions in African traditional education humanizes the teaching process by transforming teachers and students into partners for learning. What does this look like practically for modern schooling? This could mean incorporating periods for unstructured interactions among students and teachers, such as sharing meals together or engaging in sports activities together. Teachers and students can jointly create and implement a curriculum for studying a topic in greater depth. Schools can also create more inclusive spaces, where these informal interactions are likely to happen, such as open outdoor study areas.

Second, learners should learn the interconnected nature of all life through holistic, multidisciplinary approaches. Rather than remaining within the boundaries of each subject, schools inspired by African indigenous philosophies can promote multidisciplinary learning that explores the intersections between different subjects and use different modes of thought to inform students' understanding of topics (Sefa Dei, 2020). For instance, students can apply the principles of mathematics in analyzing patterns in music, and they could also develop a deeper appreciation of literature by studying the historical context that influenced the author's writing. This approach enables students to recognize the interdependency of all life and to develop empathy for all living beings. This can mean allowing students to study multiple subjects rather than requiring them to study the same courses throughout primary school or the same elective courses for the entirety of senior high school, which is the case in many African education systems (See Heto, Odari, and Sunu in this volume for examples). Modern schooling can learn from African traditional education's approach of providing a broad-based education not limited to just one sphere of society. Learners can appreciate the currently neglected subjects of art, literature, and sports and become people who can innovate with an integrated perspective across different fields.

Third, societies should reimagine schools to focus on educating children to embrace the path of becoming fully human. When we reimagine schools with an awareness of the inherent dignity of all lives and the entire world as one community, our schools would naturally come to foster human

beings who, despite being firmly rooted in their locality, would contribute to the happiness, peace, and prosperity of people, far and near. Realigning schooling with this purpose requires reexamining every aspect of education, including its structure, curriculum, delivery, and evaluation and reforming them to uphold the dignity of life. This purpose should permeate all stakeholders at campus, including students, lecturers, and staff. At SUJ's dedication day, Ikeda shared the following remarks that are now displayed on the university's campus as a constant reminder to students: "For what purpose should one cultivate wisdom? May you always ask yourselves this question!" (Ikeda, 2006). In the same way, educators can continually challenge students to reflect upon the purpose of their education and to think about how to use the privilege of receiving an education for the benefit of others. Teachers can also constantly reflect on whether their teaching is empowering students to become good human beings and whether the teachers themselves are serving as model citizens through their behavior and attitudes (Inukai, 2018). In the same way that African traditional education functioned to meet the needs of the wider community, modern schooling can be reformed to meet the needs of humankind through raising capable people with the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and behaviors necessary to building a more peaceful and sustainable future (UNESCO, 2015).

AN AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

As a philosophy and pedagogy, African traditional education is highly relevant in its potential application to modern schooling in Africa and the world in the same way that *soka* approaches strive to pave the way for a people-centered education for the happiness of humanity. The application of African traditional education and *soka* approaches to modern schooling will engender an African renaissance of liberation and empowerment.

Re-aligning education to the purpose of educating humans will create a shift from a dependency mindset to an agency mindset because such an education will encourage students to constantly think about their role in making a positive contribution to the world. The dependency mindset arises from the inferiority complex that was created as a result of colonization and colonial education (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1994). As people were encouraged to discard indigenous traditions and adopt the Western way of life, they turned outward for knowledge and help. This promoted a dependency mindset since Africans needed to essentially borrow from the Europeans to transform their society to fit the Western way of life. This dependency mindset has been elaborated upon by African thinkers across the continent (Mhango, 2017; Moyo, 2009). Let us take the realm of education for example. If Africans

wanted to ensure that their children would obtain formal education, they would need training on teaching in the Western way and resources, such as classrooms and textbooks, which school authorities design to look and feel Western. To obtain all of the necessary components, they would most likely need to turn to aid from Western countries. In this system, schools are labeled as incompetent or resource-poor when they are lacking in these areas, and schools also blame their failures on their lack of resources. This deficit-based mindset paralyzes the situation rather than promoting innovative ways to resolve challenges.

On the other hand, applying African and *soka* philosophies engenders a sense of agency. This is because these educational philosophies require the active participation of both the learner and the teacher in transforming themselves and their realities. It does not necessitate certain resources or a style of teaching, but it depends upon the inner determination of both parties to advance their own learning and development. Because of its highly participatory nature, African traditional education empowers families and community members to become active teachers in their children's education instead of standing on the sidelines and becoming marginalized from the process, and it empowers students to take ownership of their own learning rather than passively waiting for a teacher to feed them information (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2003). Traditional societies perceived adults who refused to participate in teaching the youth as inimical to the community (Tiberondwa, 1978). Adapting this participatory aspect of African traditional education will help reverse the disempowerment of families and community members that has taken place as a result of the introduction of missionary and colonial education. African traditional education also preserves the cultural heritage of the community by transmitting traditions, history, and values from one generation to the next and builds pride and identity among leaders (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2003). All of these aspects will create a tremendous shift towards an agency mindset, which would fundamentally transform African societies. Human beings are not simply the products of social systems and evolutionary determinants; they can transcend and transform the dictates of social systems and biological and environment determinants through their agentic actions (Bandura, 2006). The vital role of education is to help people cultivate agentic capabilities to enable them to participate actively in the drama and dance of their lives.

This shift towards an agency mindset will animate Africans to turn to indigenous knowledge for inspiration. This will in turn create a shift from colonially imposed structures to new approaches based on a revival of indigenous values, which will help Africans develop pride in their identity.

African traditional education will promote innovation by encouraging new ways of thinking that embrace the multidisciplinarity of the world. Students can grapple with contemporary issues in a holistic way that takes into consideration the effects of one's actions on all living beings. For instance, African indigenous knowledge has already been applied in Sub-Saharan Africa to develop innovative solutions to problems in diverse contexts - medicine, agriculture, science, and law (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). In another example, Isabirye (2009) found that the indigenous music education practices of the Busoga in Uganda were highly engaging, joy-filled, and community-centered, enabling children to develop their own sense of agency and passion to revive traditional music. After the master musicians taught them the steps for making a traditional horn, some of the children even developed alternative ways of creating the horn using other available materials and taught it to other students; this generated a wave of excitement among the children as they practiced making and playing the newly invented instrument. Human education goes beyond teaching children how to memorize knowledge and formulas that are pre-made by others; it helps them develop the latent potential within their life and the intrinsic motivation to explore and create new knowledge on their own accord.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we made a case for how African societies can harness both African traditional education and *soka* approaches in transforming modern schooling and promoting an African renaissance. In step one, we explored the history of education in Africa to dig deep into the roots of the current crisis. In step two, we explained *soka* approaches to education and its emphasis on value creation and human revolution to foster contributive citizens. In step three, we examined the underlying concepts of human education, human relationships, and interconnectedness that are central to both philosophies. We then explored possible ways that African educators can apply these pedagogies to improve schooling in Africa such as creating space for informal, unstructured interactions among students and faculty, encouraging learning through a multidisciplinary approach, and revamping education systems through a focus on the humanizing function of education. We finally discussed the larger implications of humanizing education reform. We explain that providing such a human education will empower African youth to develop pride in their own identity by moving away from deficit-based ways of thinking about the continent and rechanneling youthful energy into thinking about how young people can live contributive lives to enrich their communities and enhance the wellbeing of humanity.

Practically, implementing such an education shift requires further scholarship. Future research can analyze different aspects of both educational philosophies from a comparative perspective and explore case studies of educators in the African context implementing human education at various levels of schooling. Other avenues of research include collaborative efforts among experts of *soka* and African traditional education in developing curricula and pedagogy.

When the happiness and the humanity of each child is placed at the center of education, learning will generate the joy and confidence to equip each student to become a self-motivated, lifelong learner who can handle any challenge in life. We hope that research on both philosophies will facilitate rich discussions on the paradigm shifts needed in education to foster the abundant human potential of Africa.

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