

East African Indigenous Education Before the Era of Islam

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Abstract

This chapter argues that Indigenous education in East Africa before the era of Islam was a process which went on throughout life and not limited to time, place, or to any particular group of people. Its organizational structure was conceptualized in accordance with the educational development of the individual from infancy to old age. The purpose of Indigenous education was essentially an education for living which meant to train the youth for adulthood within the society. Emphasis was placed on normative and expressive goals. The learning process arose and grew out of the active participant of the learner in the everyday activities of the family, lineage, clan, and the entire community. Emphasis was put more on practice rather than theory. It is noted that teachers of many kinds existed within Indigenous East African education. In this regard, besides being a teacher or facilitator of learning for others, an individual was equally taught by other people, invariably by those who were older or more experienced and who formed part of the social space. Beyond the ultimate goal of education and training to produce functional members of the society, there was consistent assessment, most of which was informal and on an individual basis to ensure that the learner gained and mastered the knowledge and skills necessary for life. While it is probably no longer possible to observe Indigenous education anywhere in its pure form, free from foreign influences, nowhere has it completely disappeared to give way to Islamic/Muslim or Western education. Even in the most Islamized and Westernized communities, it is always possible to find some elements of traditional Indigenous education. Very often, it continues to form the background of the educational contribution that the child receives from his or her family and environment.