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## **Role of Indigenous Education Content in Mitigation of Youth Unemployment: A Case of the Abagusii Community of South-Gucha District, Kenya**

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### ***Abstract:***

*Youth unemployment is a social and an economic problem in the modern world. In contrast, in the African traditional societies, unemployment was rare and crimes were minimal. Several factors might have contributed to this level of unemployment and crime rates, among them being the African indigenous education. However, the Abagusii community in Kenya has high unemployment rates and gradually has abandoned its indigenous education despite this indigenous education prepared youths for future roles among the Abagusii. Therefore this study aimed at critically examining the content of indigenous education among the Abagusii. Structural-functionalism theory and ethno-historical research approach were employed along with emic and etic research designs. Purposive and snowball techniques were employed in sampling and 35 informants were interviewed. Interview schedules and archival sources were used to collect primary data. It was noted that indigenous Abagusii people taught youth skills in carving, weaving, farming, brewing, smithing and herbalism. Values like honesty, fairness, hard work, self reliance, productivity and creativity. Positive attitudes were also instilled like loving manual work and youths growing knowing to be job creators hence all this mitigated unemployment in this community. The study recommended the current system of education to borrow some best elements from indigenous education so as to mitigate youth unemployment in Kenya.*

***Keywords:*** *Abagusii, attitudes, indigenous education, skills, unemployment, values*

### **1. Introduction**

Youth unemployment is a worldwide menace experienced by both developed and developing countries although at varying degrees. Despite some strategies that have been put in place by many countries to cushion youth against unemployment, still the rate has not really changed significantly. For instance, in sub Saharan Africa countries, youth unemployment was estimated to be 21% in 2003 and a decade later, the rate was estimated to be 23% (ILO, 2012). In Kenya, an economic survey of 2012 by Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) indicated that unemployment rate stood at 40% of the total employable population of which 70% were youths (KNBS, 2012). It is therefore not uncommon to find young people idling on pavements or gathered in groups with nothing productive to do but planning evil things hence leading to soaring crime rates (Okoro, 2009). Through these indicators of increased vices, youth unemployment is a major concern among policy makers and other stakeholders not only in Kenya but also in the rest of sub Saharan African and beyond.

At independence, the Kenya government noted unemployment and poverty as main challenges that would face its citizens. Despite the numerous policy initiatives like *Kazi kwa vijana* ( job for youth) that have since been undertaken towards mitigating this problems, unemployment still continued to afflict many youths notwithstanding being educated (ILO, 2012). Many youths passionately embraced western education with the mind set to get formal employment, although such hope was not always fulfilled (Hooker, 1975). With non-attainment of such high expectations of formal employment, many youths got frustrated and subsequently resorted to crimes like robbery prostitution, violent destruction of life and property to earn a living in spite of being learned (Okoro, 2009).

According to Quan-Baffour (2012), the vices experienced today, were not witnessed in the African traditional societies since youth unemployment was unknown to people and most importantly, everyone was engaged in different apprenticeship schemes and other productive activities. In contrast today, the Abagusii community in Kenya is not only one of the highly populated communities but also with high youth unemployment rates unlike in the pre colonial times (Simeyo et al, 2011). Many youths in this community have grouped themselves into illegal sects like *sungu sungu*, *amachuma* and *chikororo* to earn a living despite having gone to school. Therefore it is good to note that the African societies including the Abagusii had well established indigenous education systems that

played a role in mitigation of unemployment before introduction of western education that is why the incidences were rare. Hence this study focusing on the role the Abagusii indigenous education played in mitigation of youth unemployment up to 1940.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Youth unemployment, though a world-wide problem, has however been more acute in developing countries like Kenya. Specifically, the Abagusii community has recorded one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Kenya. Traditionally, on the one hand unemployment as we know today was rare in the African societies such as the Abagusii community, while on the other hand, African indigenous education was not only highly valued but also consistently offered to the youths. That notwithstanding, the researcher had noticed, that indigenous education in this community was almost vanishing in view of the western education that has progressively been greatly embraced. This is despite the fact that there are many literate youths that are unemployed in this community unlike in the pre-colonial times. Although numerous attempts have and continued to be made towards seeking innovative solutions to youth unemployment, little such attempts have been directed to scrutinize the Abagusii indigenous education system in curbing unemployment before the onset of western education in Kenya. It was against this background, and a firm belief that past experiences and successes can explain present challenges as well as inform present decisions and guide future actions, that this study sought to examine the role Abagusii indigenous education played in mitigation of youth unemployment.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

This study adopted the ethno-historical approach. This approach enabled the researcher to systematically locate, evaluate and synthesize responses in order to establish facts and draw conclusions concerning the past events (Creswell, 2012). Emic and the etic research designs were employed. The emic design focused on the intrinsic cultural distinctions that were meaningful to the members of the Abagusii society. Etic design enabled the researcher shift the focus from the local understanding, categories, expressions, explanations and interpretations to those of the ethno-historians who not only go beyond reporting events and details but also attempts to explain and interpret them in a contemporary point of view (Gall & Borg, 2003).

### 3.2. Population of the Study

35 persons aged 70 years and above drawn from Nyamarambe and Etago divisions of Kisii County were interviewed in view of the fact that a range of 20-50 informants were considered adequate (Creswell, 2012).

### 3.3. Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques of the non- probability sampling strategy were used. Non probability sampling strategy sought a richness of data particularly on content of Abagusii indigenous education in relation to youth unemployment, as it was considered inappropriate to derive the sample randomly (Ezzy, 2002). Based on the purposive sampling technique, the researcher identified one person aged above 70 years in the category of non specialists. In the category of specialists, the researcher chose also one person aged 70 and above in each of the sub-categories to be interviewed. These sub-categories were herbalists, blacksmiths, basket makers, carvers and potters. Snow ball sampling approach was used whereby the already identified informants by the researcher in the category of non-specialists and in each of the sub-categories of specialists, introduced the researcher to the next informants after being interviewed, and thus the number of informants kept snowballing (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

Categories Verses Corresponding Number of Informants						
Non-specialist	Specialists					Total
	Sub-categories					
	Herbalists	Carvers	Blacksmiths	Potters	Basket makers	
10	5	5	5	5	5	35

Table 1: Research Categories and Corresponding Number of Informants

### 3.4. Instrumentation

Two interview schedules, one for specialists and the other for non-specialists, were used to collect primary data from respondents in the field. Open structured interview schedules provided an opportunity for cross checking of responses to avoid misinterpretation through probing. While in the field, the researcher also used tape recorders to record data from the informants. This instrument was necessary not only because that the researcher never wanted to miss anything from informants but also it was easy to retrieve the data during analysis.

### 3.5. Validity and Reliability of Instruments

Validity was ensured through the formulation of easy items in the interview schedules based on the objective of the study. Furthermore, researcher did not only adopt strategies of honesty, trust, openness, integrity, but also continuous reflexivity to ensure data validity (Finley, 2002). Member checks technique was also employed to ensure accuracy and completeness of interview notes. External and internal criticisms of the sources were employed to ensure reliability of the instruments. External criticisms involved establishing the authenticity of the sources by looking for dates, rubber stamps impressions and signatures on the documents. These

documents included; annual reports, official minutes, memoirs and letters. Internal criticism guaranteed reliability by establishing the truth of the content or data contained in the sources. This was done by way of data triangulation through comparing data with other sources that threw light on the same phenomenon.

### 3.6. Data Collection Procedure

Interview schedules were administered to carvers, ironworkers, herbalists, potters, basket makers and other chosen elderly people (non-specialists). In addition to interview schedules, some archival documents from the Kenya National Archives (KNA) were accessed. Secondary data sources like published books, unpublished articles, journals and periodicals were used.

### 3.7. Data Analysis

Since the researcher was to construct patterns that emerged from the data and try to get meaning out of them, multistage processes were undertaken namely: memoing, describing, classifying, synthesizing and interpreting (Gay and Airasian, 2003). Oral interviews done in Kisii language were recorded in tapes and short notes written. The researcher carefully read the notes and listened to tapes and transcribed and translated the data into English. The researcher looked across all informants and their responses concerning the content of Abagusii indigenous education identified consistencies and differences among the informants thus describing the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thereafter, the researcher classified the data into a theme to find all information regarding this variable. This being an analytical study, the researcher interpreted data by discussing and attaching meaning and significance to ideas and issues, offering explanations and drawing conclusions and linkages among data. Therefore interpretation and analysis focused mainly on understanding of content of the Abagusii indigenous education and the informants' responses therefore formed the base on how content mitigated youth unemployment among the Abagusii.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Abagusii traditional people had set of values, attitudes and skills that they passed on to youths. Specific findings with regard to the values, attitudes and skills that constituted the content of Abagusii indigenous education, as established in this study, are discussed;

### 4.1. Values Taught to Youths in the Abagusii Indigenous Education

Abagusii indigenous education was underpinned by a requirement that youths had to develop desirable point of view so as to be productive and adaptive to life. Values were cherished since they acted as a foundation to their lives hence was a core ingredient of the curriculum. According to Onduso (Oral Interview (I.O), 9.2014), values enabled youths to grow well with integrity, self-discipline and further more acquired a basis for the world of work. For instance Ong'ondi (O.I., 9.2014) affirmed that boys (*abamura*) during their prolonged period of seclusion (*gesarate*), elders actively taught them obedience (*oboigweri*), honesty (*obwegenwa*), industriousness (*omokia*). Findings also revealed that the indigenous Abagusii elders in the pre-colonial era were corrupt free and upheld justice (KNA/PC/NZA/3/6/114). Through probing, it was also established that corruption (*obokurumi*), unfairness (*oborianani*) and robbery (*oboibi*) were minimal and was termed as a 'bad snake' (*Eng'iti embe*) among the Abagusii.

The Abagusii attached great importance to values as they believed that values refined behaviour and attitude more greatly towards suitable livelihood. It was understood that an ideal youth built a good village when he or she grew up. A good village was one where youths respected parents, did no harm to another or property. Youths who failed to live up to what the society expected of them were regarded as abnormal. Indeed, judging rightly matters relating to conduct in day to day affairs was the most distinguished mental paraphernalia that elders used throughout to ensure sanity. Values such as honesty, respect for other people's property and rights and the dignity of manual labour, hard work, self-reliance, tolerance, peace, unity, perseverance, practicality and creativity were emphasized by elders among the Abagusii. For instance values like industry (*Omokia*) and self reliance (*Ogwetenenera*) were so cherished that even pregnant mothers participated in not only some normal domestic duties but also in economic activities like weaving baskets (*ebikabu*) until almost to the onset of childbirth labour pain. So the strength of loving work was up held not only to ensure easy delivery in expectant mothers but also a way of guaranteeing that values of hard work and self-reliance were practised at all planes. So unemployment was neither known nor experienced among the indigenous Abagusii. Laziness was dispirited and condemned and therefore youths were encouraged to work hard to sustain themselves and their families.

Conversely, punitive measures were meted out to youths who were professed to be indolent and corrupt. For sure this heart of self-reliance, self-achievement and personal industry frequently drove the Abagusii youths to embark on legitimate adventures like farming and other jobs like carving (KNA/PC/RVP/11/4). Moreover, this study established that values were practiced in actual lives of everyone. Meaning, these values were actively and intimately ingrained into youths in real manner through practice and played a role in mitigation of joblessness.

### 4.2. Attitudes that were Passed on to Youths among the Abagusii Community

Attitudes were also core components that encompassed content in the Abagusii indigenous education. Abagusii indigenous education was entirely engaged in inculcating certain modes of thought to youths which meant to influence youth's perception towards life and world of work as well. In essence this system initiated youths into modes of thought that enabled them survive well in the society. Through oral interviews conducted, findings revealed that Abagusii people had no unemployment experienced and lived in harmony with each other. This was achieved through indigenous education processes that contained some sort of deep purity of not only values but also attitudes. In this traditional society, every youth was to have the attitude of having creative and positive mind towards life and work as well. Therefore individual effort in doing something constructive was pound to youths to ensure that everyone a livelihood.

Findings of this study disclosed that youths were contented to use their brains and hands to know something either on carving, making pots, making baskets or how to become herbalists. So the spirit of hard work and sense of responsibility was embedded into young people from childhood. This was even echoed by the annual report of 1925 that described Abagusii people to be good workers who enjoyed carving, smithing, weaving besides being intelligent, enthusiastic agriculturists and traders as well (KNA/DC/KSI/3/2). So the kind of an attitude was nurtured among people through the education system that they underwent.

Indeed, as revealed earlier in this study, there was no problem of youth unemployment among the Abagusii people as seen today. This study established that all youths had a positive attitude towards work of any kind given that all people were engaged in meaningful activities which they lived on to get a livelihood. Ondigi through oral interview when asked how indigenous education mitigated youth unemployment through attitude, he stated “our youths were always employed because they were strong to our own creations, arts and they had affirmative feelings towards manual work as well” (Ondigi, Oral Interview (O.I), 9.2014). Therefore indigenous education enabled youths to embrace their ‘environment’ and creativity to earn a living. This was because through this indigenous education youths appreciated the art of herbalism, the art of pottery, the art of carving, the art of smithing and basketry from the beginning and more so the attitude of loving manual work. Nyanchama (O.I., 15.9.14) also pointed out that the Abagusii indigenous education enabled the youths to address their own unique problems and challenges like unemployment and poverty. For example she said “a son of a poor man was encouraged not to single out chores because finally he could sleep on an empty stomach”. Ondigi further added “many of our youths are unemployed today because the present education gives them only a mentality or a notion that they are tailor-made for a given office employment hence disregards manual or agricultural work and even home-grown arts that are lucrative”. It implies that nonetheless, the office employment is today a reality as pottery, carving, basketry, smithing and herbalism were in the traditional settings, but still positive attitude towards this indigenous arts and manual work available today can create more jobs on top of the ones that exist through modern education system if refocused.

As observed earlier in this study, in the Abagusii community everybody was a worker except young children. This study noted that even the elderly persons who appeared to be enjoying themselves without doing much demanding manual work, in fact did other chores like weaving baskets, making small tools like arrows to sustain themselves. Matoke (I.O, 9.2014) said “As much as an old (*omogotu*) I was taught that everyone must eat his/her own sweat of labour that’s why am still making baskets”. Matoke (O.I.,9.14) as well asserted that his grandfather used to tell him “*Kong’i ebigokoro onyore endagera yao*” implying one has stiffen his hands to get what to eat. This attitude of everybody working regardless of gender, status or old age was therefore inculcated to the minds of the youths as long as one was healthy. In fact this indigenous education had to prepare youths for rest of their lives.

Basically as observed, Abagusii believed that work was rewarding and everyone had to work hard to be prosperous since working hard was deemed to be healthy and paid off well thus was an obligation for everyone. Even though the work that was done by different people was diverse no one was exempted from work (Okemwa, O.I., 9. 2014). This therefore affirms that everyone was supposed to work hence unemployment was not known. This study also established Abagusii people believed that every child born, had innate pattern of destiny which determined the general outline of their lives. Therefore no child was coerced into a line of work; every child was expected to choose occupations for themselves according to their natural abilities as they developed (Choti, 1998). However parents could identify one son or daughter who was interested to perpetuate the family skills for continuity reasons. Thus, it is imperative to note that this attitude also enhanced passion towards work among youths since they not only enjoyed doing what their parents did but others did what they much loved out of passion.

Indeed it is clear that Abagusii people up to 1940 had the following attitudes that were much stressed and cherished; Attitude of having innovative spirit and personal industry, attitude of having positive feelings towards work especially manual labour, attitude of everyone being a worker, thoughts of choosing occupations depending on youths strength, fun and passion, an attitude of being job creators but not job seekers, an attitude of having the feeling of social responsibility, attitude of self reliance and self employment. These attitudes mitigated youth unemployment.

#### 4.3. Skills Passed to Youths in the Abagusii Indigenous Education

Abagusii indigenous education had skills that were passed to youths even though it was perceived to be embedded within cultural settings. These skills were acquired for proficiency through training or experience. These skills were mainly acquired when one sought to have an art, trade or technique particularly requiring the use of hands on. In fact skills gave youths ability to perform some tasks thus elevating their status of responding and enabling them sustain themselves through employment. These skills were open to all as they were considered basic in enabling youths to perform tasks effectively in the community. This study established that despite the fact that positive attitudes towards work were part of the content that was passed to youths in the indigenous Abagusii community, acquisition of skills was also stressed and every youth had to be trained on one or another. The this study unveiled that skills in farming, building of structures, Iron smelting, weaving of baskets and mats, carving, brewing and herbal medicine were the common ones in the Abagusii community. The annual report of 1923 also affirmed that the indigenous Abagusii people were keen and good farmers, carvers (KNA/MSS/10/187).

However, girls were trained in spinning, weaving of baskets and plaiting of mats from readily available materials like millet stems and sisal fibres (*chimboba and amakonge*), sometimes shaping of pots from clay (*esuguta*) and firing them and brewing of local beer as well. Young men were trained in building of granaries (*ebiage*) and traditional doors (*ebiige*) using certain trees like *emiobo* and *eminyikwa*, carving, herbal medicine and iron smelting. Even though many of these skills were mostly passed from father to son and mother to daughter, inclination and natural abilities were the main determinants in respect to the type of skills the youths the received (Matoke, O.I., 9.2014). Therefore youths were encouraged to develop or show their own aptitude and intrinsic passion towards certain skills or arts hence many were apprenticed to artisans outside their family clans. It was noted that among the Abagusii, youths chose

skills they cherished thus became more inventive in their respective talents and also more productive. This is dissimilar to the current system where youths are compelled to take courses in higher learning institutions based on their examination grades or compelled by parents to train in courses based on job availability. Worse still, the job market is much impulsive hence many youths end up jobless after completion of training.

In fact this study vividly articulated that among the Abagusii young people were multi trained and also they were non selective in that they could do broad-spectrum of chores. This meant that one could do some cattle keeping while is an experienced carver or cultivation of crops besides being trained as carvers, potters or herbalists and all these occupied them constructively in the society (Monyenye, 1977). So they never depended on one major skill but also embraced other minor skills that could supplement their living hence young people could not wait to be employed otherwise were yearning to create job instead. For instance, Onkoba (O.I., 9.2014) and Onyantha (O.I., 9.2014) stated “we still wake up very early to attend our cows, gardens of sugarcane and pineapples besides being very experienced in making granaries and baskets”. This implies that the Abagusii people valued manual work like farming on top of having other skills like carving, weaving, and smithing and all these created jobs. Therefore this study established that Abagusii indigenous people treasured blue-collar skills and this was the secret that ensured youths had always something to do unlike the current youths who wants to only be employed in offices or in line with courses trained in without giving room for creativity and others skills they learned.

It is vital therefore to note that the Abagusii people not only ensured that all youths got skills but also elders started exposing and nurturing children from childhood. Moturi (O.I., 17.9.14) claimed that “I started loving smithing because my grandfather enjoyed it so much and it made him a rich man through exchange.” Consequently, this was a clear indication that young people thrived in life as herbalists, carvers, weavers, black smiths and even brewers not only because of the passion and fun they found in those fields since their family or neighbours had pleasure in doing them but also because these activities were very lucrative industries. As a result this reduced dependence and unemployment.

Physical education skills like wrestling, dancing, drumming and acrobatics were also taught talented youths in these fields were also recognized and rewarded in different forums in the community. “I was the best drummer in the entire bogirango region and still some old men of my age remind me how I got rich from my gift of drumming during our days” (Morwani, I.O, 9.2014) said . So this system recognized yet other endowments that youths had hence made them always engaged. Furthermore, skills in trade were also pre-eminent because exchange of items and materials even took place within homesteads. So skills on trade were paramount. Tools, weapons, livestock and agricultural produces were exchanged (Hakansson, 1994).

In a nutshell, indigenous Abagusii people passed on to their youths skills in farming, weaving and knitting, carving, smithing, herbal medicine and brewing as well as trade skills. Further more recognized other endowments youths had. Hence unemployment was unknown for the reason that the youths were intrinsically motivated to utilize the knowhow acquired.

## 5. Conclusion

Abagusii community treasured values. This study established that values were seen to have a great impact on youth’s collective behaviour and guided them in every phase including world of work and consequently mitigated unemployment. Values like self reliance, self discipline, honesty, justice, hard work, and productivity, dignity to manual work, tolerance, peace and unity as well as creativity were among the values the Abagusii community greatly esteemed and exceedingly cherished so fervently and devoutly.

Indigenous Abagusii people also inculcated definite modes of thinking to youths that were crucial in life as far as work was concerned. This attitudes included; Attitude of having innovative mind and personal industry, attitude of having positive feelings towards work especially manual labour, attitude of everyone being a worker regardless of status, age or gender, thoughts of choosing occupations depending youths strength and passion in addition to an outlook of being job creators but not job seekers.

The Abagusii indigenous education imparted skills that were predestined to enable youths to carry on their future life independently through employment. These skills were in farming, weaving and knitting, carving, smithing, herbal medicine, brewing and trade through which most people accrued a living. Therefore conclusively, the Abagusii indigenous education’s content was geared towards character development, respect for others and property, positive attitudes towards work, acquisition of vocational skills, cultivation of a sense of belonging, active participation in community work and family life in addition to understanding of fundamental values of the society pertaining to work. The content was responsive to the physical, social and economic environment within which the people (Abagusii) lived. The Abagusii recognized and appreciated that production of individuals with high levels of vocational skills was a necessary. Accordingly, they put equal emphasis on skills development and impartation or formation of socially approved values and attitudes, as a way of mitigating unemployment and assuring cohesion.

## 6. Recommendation

The government should consider fusing indigenous systems into modern strategies of solving youth unemployment. This is through harmonizing and integrating best elements of indigenous education systems within the today’s education system in order to create a more viable system of education in Kenya. Integration will include diversifying the skills base to include indigenous skills, and creatively establishing a balance of emphasis between skills development and values, attitude formation in the school curriculum.

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