West African Pre-colonial Education: An Exploration of Perceptions through Narratives

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“Of this I am quite sure, that if we open a quarrel between the past and the present, we shall find that we have lost the future”.

Winston Churchill, 1940 (To the House of Commons, 18 June 1940)

“…today our concern must be with the future. For the world is changing. The old era is ending. The old way alone is not enough”.

John F. Kennedy (Los Angeles, 15th July, 1960)
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Abstract

African pre-colonial education has been described by certain Africans, authors and educational researchers as a system of education which seemed flawless, unique and particular to the African people. Such descriptions are often followed by staunch criticism of the Western style system of education in Africa. Having reconceptualised such descriptions, several groups across the regions of West Africa (such as the Boko Haram sect of Nigeria, amongst others), have often called for the abandonment of the Western style system of education, and a return to the pre-colonial ways of living and education. Authors and researchers have called for the need for African centered critical educational theory, the need to reclaiming lost African identity, etc. However, before such calls are followed through, should Africans not strive to objectively identify the likely effects of time on certain pre-colonial cultural practices and specific pre-colonial educational practices? Should Africans not consciously analyse the context within which they perceive their past? Hence, this in depth qualitative study explores how West Africans perceive the West African pre-colonial education system through narratives.

Narrative accounts were collected through two different means: (1) through unstructured interviews with three indigenously trained—“retired”—crafts men (2) from “textual source” – also referred to as “implied narrative”. This research utilises the tension which exists between the equilibrium and the conflict paradigm in relation to education and development in Africa as its conceptual framework.

Empirical materials explored implied that: West African pre-colonial education system is been perceived the same way it was perceived during the fight for political independence in West Africa, and the experience of colonialism influence how certain West Africans construct their meanings of the past. Therefore, the said perceptions present a romantic view. Also, what has changed in African education so far is the culture; the conceptual framework is still the same.

This research concludes that, authors, researchers, policy makers and government bodies, and we common citizens of the independent African states needs not only to liberate our minds from the oppressor consciousness, but also seek to broaden our scope of criticism to include certain degrees of objective perception of our history.
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1. Introduction

This research is an exploratory study which is based on narrative accounts and implied narrative (a story). Therefore, by the way of introduction, I will illustrate the aim of this research project through a well-known folklore: “The Elephant and the Blind Men”:

Once upon a time, there lived six blind men in a village. One day the villagers told them, "Hey, there is an elephant in the village today."

They had no idea what an elephant is. They decided, "Even though we would not be able to see it, let us go and feel it anyway." All of them went where the elephant was. Everyone of them touched the elephant.

"Hey, the elephant is a pillar," said the first man who touched his leg.

"Oh, no! it is like a rope," said the second man who touched the tail.

"Oh, no! it is like a thick branch of a tree," said the third man who touched the trunk of the elephant.

"It is like a big hand fan" said the fourth man who touched the ear of the elephant.

"It is like a huge wall," said the fifth man who touched the belly of the elephant.

"It is like a solid pipe," Said the sixth man who touched the tusk of the elephant.

They began to argue about the elephant and everyone of them insisted that he was right. It looked like they were getting agitated. A wise man was passing by and he saw this. He stopped and asked them, "What is the matter?" They said, "We cannot agree to what the elephant is like." Each one of them told what he thought the elephant was like. The wise man calmly explained to them, "All of you are right. The reason every one of you is telling it differently because each one of you touched the different part of the elephant. So, actually the elephant has all those features what you all said."

"Oh!" everyone said. There was no more fight. They felt happy that they were all right. (Retrieved from: http://www.jainworld.com/literature/story25.htm)

Several stories of pre-colonial Africa have been told in the past decades. Stereotypical stories, stories that bears a certain elements of “truth”, depending on the context and the purpose for
which such story was told. Such stories have been told by different people. Some were Africans, some had shared their lives with the African people, and some perhaps had never been to Africa. However, stories are often told for many reasons. Some stories were told to amuse their listener(s) or reader(s). Some were told to preserve history and legends, and some stories were told in order to illustrate particular aspects of the past, such as pre-colonial social structure, pre-colonial education system, etc. (Riessman, 2008).

The above folklore can represent a great number of typologies depending on the context. However, for the purpose of this research, if the Elephant was to represent pre-colonial Africa, and the blind men represent we Africans of today, researchers, authors, etc., who did not directly experience the so called “pre-colonial African era”, but experienced it through history, artefacts, and other aspects of the African cultures. Which of the numerous perceptions of pre-colonial Africa can one refer to as being predominant in present day, and / or which of these perceptions constitutes a “commonly accepted reality” of the pre-colonial African era, and of specific aspects, such as the pre-colonial socio-cultural values, pre-colonial social structure, pre-colonial education system, etc.?

![Image of the Blind Men and the Elephant]

**Figure 1**: Original Image Retrieved from: [http://www.jainworld.com/literature/story25.htm](http://www.jainworld.com/literature/story25.htm)

In the folklore, the blind men compared the parts of the Elephant they could feel to certain elements which they might have previously experienced in their day to day life (pillar, rope, thick branch of a tree, etc.). Could one say that the blind men’s previous life experiences are a key element in their perceptions of what an Elephant is?
As an individual and/or collectively, “we are not alone in the world; we share the world with other fellow human beings, animals, our immediate environments, etc., as we meet these others in our day to day life, we typify them” (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009, p. 25-26). We give them names and group them into categories based on our experiences of and or with them. Such names and groupings help us to construct and associate meanings to things. Therefore, “reality” can be said to be a product of human activity. Reality of a thing, an era, etc. is not an independent fact which is aloof to human processes, rather, reality or meaning is constructed through human activities-human relationship with, and experiences of the said thing.

When certain African researchers and philosophers, and certain Western researchers and philosophers who feel a sense of solidarity towards Africa, write or refer to pre-colonial Africa, and specific aspects of the pre-colonial era, such as the pre-colonial social structure, pre-colonial socio-cultural values, pre-colonial education system, etc., they tend to generalise in their descriptions. They often present an image of some entirely detached societies with some set of unique, undiluted, pure and static ways of living of the pre-colonial indigenous people. This is often followed by staunch criticism of the interference of the colonialists and the imposition of Western values and social structure on the African people, a purpose which was achieved through Western styled education system (Arowolo, 2010; Dowden, 2008; Frantz, 1967; Frankema, 2012; Iroegbu, 1994; Kanu, 2010; Mimiko, 2010; Oba and Eboh, 2011; Onwubiko, 1991; Tochukwu, 2013).

The predominant stories about pre-colonial Africa in the last decades have often been stories of the harmonious co-existence of the pre-colonial African people within their various tribes, clans and kingdoms, the uniqueness of the pre-colonial African culture, pre-colonial social structure, the pre-colonial education system, etc. These stories have gained many grounds to the extent that, whenever pre-colonial Africa is mentioned amongst certain present day African people, and certain non-Africans, the pleasantness and uniqueness of the pre-colonial era tend to often resonate. In other words, such perceptions can be said to be a “commonly accepted reality” of the past by those who perceive the African pre-colonial era in such a way.

Such descriptions of specific aspects of pre-colonial Africa, specifically the African pre-colonial education system, have been reconceptualised in recent years, and have served as the bases for comparison between the pre-colonial Africa and what Africa has evolved to become.
today. However, the focus of this research project is to explore how certain West Africans perceive the West African pre-colonial education system.

My experiences of Western styled system of education in public schools in Nigeria, from primary school through to teacher education studies (1988 – 2006), made me question the ethicality of the processes of the said education system in Nigeria. They were experiences full of constant academic failures in primary and secondary school, due to my slow learning tendencies, and several corporal punishments and occasional beatings from my teachers, due to poor performances in the classroom.

Although going through primary and secondary school education, and obtaining an accredited university or college degree is the basis for a successful life in Nigerian and in most West African countries (as I was taught to believe), even so, I desired very much, an alternative means of education. When I compared my perception of the African pre-colonial education system, which is derived from literatures and other historical means, to my rigorous experiences of the Western styled system of education, I certainly preferred the indigenous system of education.

However, certain questions remain unanswered as my interest for an alternative means of education became stronger. Would the pre-colonial approach to education tolerate my learning difficulties, or would it provide the skills needed to be successful in the present global context? Hence, the interest to explore further understanding of the pre-colonial education system arose.

### 1.2 Research Questions

In the attempt to further understand the past, specifically the pre-colonial education system, this research project explores how certain West Africans perceive the West African pre-colonial education system through the following research questions:

**How do West Africans perceive the West African Pre-colonial Education? A study of Selected Narratives from Nigeria.**

Sub-questions:

1. How do West Africans perceive the structure of the West African pre-colonial education?
2. What do West Africans perceive to be the significance of the pre-colonial education in the pre-colonial West African societies?

3. What influences the perceptions of West Africans of the West African pre-colonial education?

1.3 Pre-colonial Era in Africa

When one refers to African pre-colonial era, one refers to a vast period of time between the first sign of human presence in Africa to the era of the formal establishment of the colonies. However, following the works of historians such as Falola and Fleming, (2009) and Arowolo, (2010), one can refer to Africa’s pre-colonial era as the era between the first sign of civilisation in Africa to the era of the formal establishment of colonies.

According to Falola and Fleming, 2009, the use of iron tools was a significant milestone in the beginning of civilisation in Africa. According to them, the use of iron tools facilitated large scale farming, communal living – i.e. living together in larger groups and effective warfare increased the adaptability of the pre-colonial people to their environment (p. 124). First signs of major civilisation in Africa were identified in ancient Egypt, between 3000-4000BCE. As at that time in history, the ancient Egyptians had already established a structured unified government which united the Upper and the Lower Egypt. Empires started emerging across the sub-Saharan Africa, specifically in West Africa around 700CE. The empires were powerful politically organised societies which spread across large areas and peoples (p. 125)

As identified by Arowolo, 2010, by the 9th AD century, Africans had not only lived in large groups, they had structured states and organised political systems. The pre-colonial states were run by skilled and spiritual practitioners who were directly accountable to their people and ancestors.

However, for the purpose of this research, although the aim is to understand the pre-colonial West African education, pre-colonial era will be limited specifically to the era which existed at the time when the colonies were established. According to Olaniyi and Olajumoke, 2013, they argued that “the dynamic nature of human societies justifies regular innovations” (p. 73). In other words, their argument justifies the claim that the West African pre-colonial societies, as similar to every other pre-colonial society across Africa, have experienced transformative
changes over time. Therefore, the understanding which this research is aimed at exploring is that of the system of education which existed in the era which precedes colonialism in West Africa (Hilliard, 1957).

1.4 The Aims and Contribution of this Research

This research project explores how certain West Africans perceive the West African pre-colonial education system. Furthermore, this research explores possible elements which may have influenced how certain West Africans perceive the West African pre-colonial education system, and/or how certain West Africans construct their meanings of specific aspects of the pre-colonial West Africa.

The thinking process which this research project is aimed at facilitating can serve as a basis for further research endeavours in the field of education in Africa, particularly for researchers who may be interested in comparing West African pre-colonial education system with the Western styled system of education which is prevalent in today’s West African societies, with the aim of creating a system of education which will incorporate the inherent values of both system of education (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003).

According to Dei, 2000, there is an unbroken connection between the past and the present. Therefore, the experiences of the past, and what was in the past cannot and should not be overlooked when analysing the present, with the aim of achieving a desired future. Hence, understanding how the West African pre-colonial education system is perceived is considered paramount when researching into the need for “African centered critical educational theory” (Zulu, 2006, p. 41) in today’s West African societies.

Most importantly, this research project is aimed at provoking an objective and critical perspective on the ways the West African pre-colonial education system is being seen in relation to the Western styled system of education in today’s West African societies. This research is also aimed at inspiring the possibilities of creating a model (system) of education which Africans might feel a sense of ownership towards.
1.5 The Structure of this Thesis

This thesis consists of six main chapters; each chapter presents specific aspects of this research project. The introductory chapter illustrates the focus of this research project, it spells out the main research question and sub-questions, and it also defines the term “pre-colonial era” in relation to this research project. In other words, the introductory chapter identified specifically, the time in the pre-colonial West Africa which is referred to in this research as the West African pre-colonial era. It also identifies the aims and contributions of this research project to the field of education in Africa, and how this thesis is structured.

The literature review chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part presents detailed descriptions of the pre-colonial education system in Africa, as derived from several literatures. The second part presents certain prevailing theories in the field of development and education in Africa; it also presents the conceptual framework within which this research project is situated.

Chapter three presents the research design, and it identifies the epistemological assumption (social constructivism) which underpins the way this research project approached its data. It also gives detailed explanations of the step-by-step processes of data gathering, and how the data are analysed. It explains specifically, the use of fiction, which is referred to as “implied narrative” in this research project as a source of data.

Chapter four presents and analyse the collected data, using an aspect the conceptual framework of this research project as the undelaying thinking which the presentation and analysis is based upon. The data presented in chapter four are discussed in chapter five based on the second aspect of the conceptual framework within which this research project is situated.

To conclude, this research directs its recommendations towards three main audiences: authors and researchers who writes and/or conducts research about specific aspects of Africa’s past, educational policy makers in Africa, specifically in West Africa, and we common citizens of the various independent African states of today.

Therefore, the structure of this thesis is designed to ensure coherence and to facilitate a good understanding in its reader(s) as far as possible.
2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

“Africa” is a continent. One will assume that even the most uneducated would know that it is a part of the human world, somewhere far away. But one could wonder about the meaning of the name ‘Africa’, or what the ancient Romans thought of when they first named the little part of the continent they could access, Africa?

The name “Africa”, which was originally used by the Romans to refer to present-day Tunisia…

The name "Africa" came from the red bumpy skinned cows that were raised there four thousand years ago. Africa literally means "land of bumpy reds". (“Africa” (n.d.) in Wikipedia, 2013)

If one could be indulgent, and attempt to explore the meaning of Africa through a romantic lens, one could therefore imagine “Africa” as a “mother”; as most authors who rely very strongly on the feminist approach would refer to it. One could therefore imagine the sight of a beautifully dressed mother in her flowing apparel, sitting in the splendor of her adornment, her children sitting on the floor around her, and the youngest of them, cuddled within the warmth of her bosom.

With such a perspective of Africa, one can identify a great number of typologies, such as the beauty of nature, the wild life, the different cultures and the diversities which exist between them, etc. However, the question is, can such a perspective exhaust all the meanings there is about Africa? Or can it reflect the true experiences and the nature of the African people; their joy and celebrations, their difficulties such as colonialism, war and poverty; their triumphs and great achievements? It is obvious therefore, that one will need more than a romantic perspective to truly understand it.

Over the past century, several theories have emerged about Africa, and the African people. Africa is a complex continent, comprising many indigenous communities with significant diversities in culture and general ways of living. Having spent several years traveling across certain regions of Africa, Dowden (2008) in his book “Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles” narrated his experiences of the African states, and the African people. Dowden’s narrative about African states and the African people is rich and unique. It differs very significantly from the images of Africa, as presented by the media and charity organisations.
When referring to the level of diversity amongst the African states, Dowden acknowledged that:

…every time you say “Africa is…” the words crumble and break. From every generalisation you must exclude at least five countries. And just as you think you’ve nailed down a certainty, you find the opposite is also true. Dowden (2008, cover page)

On the other side of the discourse of diversity amongst African states, Taylor, (1995) and Wiredu, (2004), identified the actuality of cultural relativity amongst the various African states, and argued for the validity of such relativity. They argued that, although Africa is a vast continent with significant cultural diversities amongst its various communities, there is relativity in the thoughts which underpin the philosophical ideas that exist in those communities. And to disregard such relativity due to lack of empirical prove of its validity, is to evaluate African philosophical ideas based on Western ideology.

Journalists and charity organisations seeking marketable stories have played a prominent role in presenting a particular image of Africa to attract their targeted audiences. According to Birrell, (2012), the image of Africa as presented by the press and charity organizations, is a continent driven by “hunger, poverty, illiteracy, diseases and conflicts”. Birrel then argued that these images do not reflect the entire nature of a “fast-changing continent”.

Most authors consider the issue of race to be a significant factor when defining Africa and the African people. However, Dei, (2012) argued differently. He argued that skin colour has little or no significance in “Africanism” (being African). “Africanism is a badge of honour and a call to action” (p. 45). Dei bolstered his claim by pointing out the fact that today’s Africans comprise various races and skin colours. Therefore, to associate Africans with a certain race or skin colour is insignificant in the present day context.

When referring to Africa based on its wealth of natural resources Dowden, (2008) in his narratives, opined that the imperialists may have thought of Africa to be the “newly discovered Garden of Eden”, a paradise filled with all sorts of raw materials, but occupied by bunch of relatively confused and disunited people.
However, defining Africa and the African people is not the focus of this research project. This research project is focused on understanding how Africans themselves, particularly West Africans, perceive an aspect of their past, the West African pre-colonial education system.

This chapter therefore, is aimed at identifying the theoretical framework, within which this research project is situated. Therefore, literatures which address issues such as African education, with specific focus on pre-colonial education system, colonialism and African socio-cultural issues are reviewed with the aim of understanding some of the theories and ideologies which exist within the field of African education with specific focus on pre-colonial education system.

The choice of literatures in this review is inspired by certain theories which presents different dominant views in the field of development and education in Africa, as identified in Agbo, (2005); Kinyanjui, (1980); and John Dewey’s theory on education, where he (Dewey) referred to “education as a necessity of life”. According to Agbo, (2005); Kinyanjui, (1980), theories such as structural functionalism theory, modernisation theory, human capital theory and dependency or underdevelopment theory, have so far played significant roles in determining the nature and fate of education across Africa.

2.1 Education in Africa

When one refers to the pre-colonial era in Africa, one refers to the beginning of human civilization across Africa (Falola and Fleming, 2009). Since education had existed from the time “when human beings became socially organized” (Obanya, 1995, p. 4), Obanya argued that, education has long existed amongst the pre-colonial African communities before Western education was introduced in Africa (Dei, 2002; Mazonde, 2001; Oba and Eboh, 2011; Taylor, 1995).

However, Oba and Eboh, (2011), argued that Western colonialists created an educational system which had aims and structure that were alien to the existing African socio-cultural system, and which were also aimed at “subjugating and exploiting Africans” (p. 624). Zulu, 2006, argued the same. However, Zulu called for “a need for a critical corrective theory in African education” (p. 41), considering the present state of education across the African continent (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003).
According to Hilliard (1957), since the introduction of Western education to Africa however, its purposes has changed over time. In the beginning, the aim was to convert Africans to Christianity. Since the missionaries’ Bible was written in English language, it was necessary for the natives to learn the language in order to access the contents.

Hilliard further argued that another main purpose at the early stage was also to make trading between the western merchants and the local traders possible and easy. A new purpose of western education was identified in the early 1800s, when the slave trade was abolished and some slaves were returned to Africa. The colonial masters were obliged, by the nature of their responsibility to the freed slaves, to provide some sort of formal education for the freed slaves and their children.

According to Mazonde (2001) and Windel (2009), they identified that purposes of education across Africa also witnessed some changes during the era right after colonialism. Most African countries made efforts to indigenise Western education through new educational policies and the introduction of new curriculums.

Similarly, many theories can be said to have emerged as education went through its transformation processes across Africa, specifically in West Africa, over the last few decades. Theories such as modernisation theory, human capital theory amongst others, have recommended what the focus of formal education should be, amongst the various African communities. Some of the theorists who align themselves with these schools of thought have argued that formal education in Africa should focus on economic and social developments, capacity building, and so on (Agbo, 2005; Kinyanjui, 1980). On the other hand, these theories have been strongly criticised by the dependency or underdevelopment theory, a theory which is commonly subscribed to by many African educational researchers and writers. These theorists often argue that Western styled system of education has so far under-developed Africa, and it has led African societies to become dependent on developed Western societies for economic and social development (Arowolo, 2010; Frankema, 2012; Frantz, 1967; Iroegbu, 1994; Kanu, 2010; Mimiko, 2010; Oba and Eboh, 2011; Onwubiko, 1991; Tochukwu, 2013).

The tension which exists between these differing theories is that, the system of education which is said to be needed in order to ensure effective modernisation, economic and social development, capacity building, etc. of the African societies, as argued by the modernisation
and human capital theorists, is also said to be the tool that is been used to ensure underdevelopment, and to promote the dependency of the various African societies on the more industrialised Western societies, a claim which is often made by the dependency or underdevelopment theorists.

In order to be just in one’s own conclusions about Western styled system of education in Africa, when one compares Western styled system of education with African pre-colonial education system, just like most of the above mentioned authors did before they arrived at their various conclusions, should one not strive to be objective in one’s own perception of the pre-colonial African education system? Therefore, the main focus of this research project is on West African pre-colonial education system, specifically, the system of education which the missionary and colonial education took over from.

Considering the cultural diversity which existed amongst the pre-colonial African communities (specifically West African communities), as identified by Dowden (2008), it can be said that pre-colonial education system does not refer to a single form of education. According to Taylor (1995), Wiredu (2004) and Zulu (2006), they argued that the various pre-colonial West African communities had their own forms of education, which was indigenous to each community. The curriculum and processes of these various forms of education strongly reflected the underlying principles and cultures of the individual community.

2.2 Pre-colonial Education in Africa

This sub-chapter presents African pre-colonial education as described by certain authors and educational researchers. It presents the nature, the structure, the principles, and the factors that determined the contents, and the teacher of African pre-colonial education system.

2.2.1 The Nature of African Pre-colonial Education

“In the beginning was education” (Obanya, 2010, p. 27). It can be said that civilisation and education often go together. Obanya argued that education is the basis of any social group or structured society. In order for the culture and values of any given social group or society to be transmitted, education must come into play. He further argued that education came to existence at the dawn of civilisation in Africa, and that education existed in Africa since African societies became socially organised (Obanya, 1995; Olaniyi and Olajumoke, 2013; Zulu, 2006).
Therefore, it can be said that, the use of iron tools, creating and effectively governing structured societies, cultivating land spaces and rearing of herds of animals, transmitting the socio-cultural values and norms of the society from one generation to the other, etc. all these could only be possible through some forms of education (Arowolo, 2010; Falola and Fleming, 2009).

However, several definitions of the forms of education which existed in West Africa before the introduction of Islamic and Western styled system of education have emerged over the years. Kelemba-vita, 1977, cited in Taylor, 1995, defined Pre-colonial education as a form of education, the aim of which was to:

transform the individual from his or her status of absolute individual to that of an integrated member of the society, to make him or her lose the illusion of happiness in the state of isolation so that he or she may accede to true happiness by being open to others, not for personal benefits but in order to create with everybody a new reality transcending individuals (p. 240).

According to Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003, when describing the African pre-colonial education system, they identified that African pre-colonial education system was gender specific. Boys and girls were educated separately, and the purpose and contents of their education was different.

2.2.2 The Structure of African Pre-colonial Education

According to Mazonde (2001) and Zulu (2006), they argued that it is fallacious to argue that formal education did not exist in Africa before the introduction of Islamic and Western styled system of education. They identified that some of the educational processes which took place in the pre-colonial African societies was formal in the pre-colonial African context. They further argued that some of the skills transmitted through the pre-colonial formal education included medicine, science and technologies, law, etc. the aim was to use the skills acquired to improve the standard of living of the local community, and not for the individual’s interest alone. Therefore, it can be said that African pre-colonial education system was both formal and informal in structure (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003).

In line with Mazonde’s and Zulu’s argument, Ehinderedo, (1986), cited in Olaniyi and Olajumoke, 2013, Ehinderedo identified the purposes of African traditional education system,
some of which can be said to only have been possible through structured teaching and learning process. The goals of pre-colonial African education as identified by Ehindero, (1986) are:

Ehindero, (1986):

i. total development of the child-intellect, physical and moral

ii. introduction of the child to the community and inculcating in him/her respect for elders and others in position of authority

iii. acquisition of specific vocational skills and training to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour

iv. developing and nurturing a strong sense of belonging, the “we feeling and encouraging the individual to participate actively in family and community affairs

v. development, understanding, appreciation and promotion of the cultural heritage of the community at large (Olaniyi and Olajumoke, 2013, p. 74)

In contrast to the argument of well-structured African pre-colonial education system, when analyzing pre-colonial education based on its method and contents, Ayittey (1991), argued that, pre-colonial education system was a form of education which depended strongly on oral tradition. Ayittey further argued that socio-cultural values and traditional skills were passed on from one generation to the other through words of mouth. There were no written literatures. Ayittey then identified the roles of the oracles, proverbs, storytelling and music as being the core of the pre-colonial forms of education in Africa.

Winters, 1991, cited in Zulu, 2006, argued differently. Winters argued that, many pre-colonial African societies had written literatures in the form of scripts. Some of which were used for the “purpose of record keeping, long distance trades and transactions, to preserve local religious doctrines, for obituary records” (Zulu, 2006, p. 34), and for the purpose of education. Examples of these scripts are: “the scripts of ancient Egypt hieroglyphic, Meroitic and Coptic scripts of Nubia, Sabean and Ge’ez scripts of Ethiopia, the Nsibidi script of the Efik of Nigeria, Mende scripts of Mali and Sierra Leone” (p. 34), etc. (Karenga, 1993; Tedla, 1995).
Obanya, 2010, argued that African pre-colonial education was not entirely informal as most educational researchers have argued today. Obanya illustrated the organizational structure of African pre-colonial education as follows:

**Table 1.1: Organisational set-up of traditional African education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of life</th>
<th>Educational goal</th>
<th>Place of education</th>
<th>Agencies of education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td>Primary socialization</td>
<td>The home</td>
<td>Parents, Older relations, Elders in the family and the neighborhood, The age grades, Community-based organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The extended family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>Life skills acquisition</td>
<td>The community (all places of work, recreation, communal activities, religious observance, etc.), The initiation ground</td>
<td>Parents, Community elders, The age grades, The guilds, Skilled craftsmen/women, Secret societies, Games and sporting groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adulthood</td>
<td>Social and organizational</td>
<td>The community</td>
<td>Community rulers and elders, Community special service groups, Special interest groupings, The guilds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>skills development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Obanya, 2010, p.28. Table 2.1: Organisational set-up of traditional African education).

2.2.3 Principles of African Pre-colonial Education

Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003), identified what they referred to as the guiding principles of African pre-colonial education system as follows:

**Education for Preparation**

According to Adeyemi and Adeyinka, the aim of the pre-colonial education system was to prepare the indigenous African people, specifically the younger generation, for their roles in the society; To equip the individual with relevant skills “appropriate to their gender” (p. 432),
in order to help them adapt to, and develop their immediate environment, and to provide continuity of the cultural heritage of their local community.

**Education by Imitation and Practice**

Adeyemi and Adeyinka further described pre-colonial education system as a kind of education which required the active participation of the learners. They identified that it is a process of education whereby the learner learnt through “imitation, initiation ceremonies, work, play, oral literature, etc.” (p. 432). As a result, they argued that the learner therefore, remained actively productive at every stage of the process of the pre-colonial education system. It can be said that the pre-colonial education system followed the apprenticeship model of education. This principle can be said to be responsible for the lack of references to unemployment in the pre-colonial society because, every citizen was productive in his or her own way, and thereby contributed to the economic growth of their local community.

**Education for Community Development**

Adeyemi and Adeyinka described the pre-colonial African education as a system of education which was aimed at developing the “we feeling” in the learner (p. 432), and encourages the learner to actively participate in family and community affairs (Olaniyi and Olajumoke, 2013). They argued that the pre-colonial education system was focused on educating the learners to always put the interest of their community first (Kingsley, 2010; Obanya, 1995).

**Education for the Preservation of Life**

Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003) argued that one of the main purposes of pre-colonial education was to preserve the cultural heritage of the pre-colonial society. Therefore, pre-colonial education was focused on transmitting custom, cultural beliefs, traditional vocational skills and traditional work ethics, etc. from one generation to the other (p. 433) (Illife, 2007).

**Education for Acquisition of Multiple Skills**

According to Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003), the pre-colonial education system was structured in a way that an individual could acquire more than one skill at a time. They argued that it was a system of education which empowered each individual in the pre-colonial African society with the skills needed to undertake multiple tasks.
An individual in the pre-colonial society could, therefore, embark on a variety of occupations without difficulty. He could work as a builder, farmer or fisherman, while a woman was a gardener, housewife and cook, besides being a nurse to her children, etc. (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003 p. 433) (Mazonde, 2001).

2.2.4 Factors that Determined the Contents of African Pre-colonial Education

Each pre-colonial West African society can be said to have been responsible for determining the core contents of their education and for the re-development of the contents as the pre-colonial societies went through their gradual processes of transformation and development over time. Mazonde (2001) identified that, pre-colonial education was structured by the indigenous people and it was structured in relation to the needs of the local community (Illife, 2007). According to Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003), they argued that the contents of pre-colonial education were developed based on the following factors:

**The Physical Environment**

Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003) argued that the child’s physical environment was one of the core factors which determined the kind of skill the child would need to acquire in order to adapt, survive and develop the environment in return. They further argued that every child in the pre-colonial society had to “learn to combat the dangers of their immediate environment and how to make good use of its fertility” (p. 433). Therefore, it can be said that, in pre-colonial communities which were surrounded by rivers and lakes, the contents of education would include the art of fishing, net making and mending, boat making, the art of fish preservation, etc.

**The Social Environment**

Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003) argued that the aspects of pre-colonial education which emphasised moral etiquettes were based on the social qualities of the pre-colonial society. They further argued that one of the qualities of pre-colonial education was that it was aimed at imbibing in the child, a “community first” attitude; an attitude which regarded community affairs and interests as more important than that of a single individual. They also identified that in the pre-colonial education system, “Children were taught to respect elders, to
appreciate their social obligations and responsibilities and, above all, to subordinate their individual interests to those of the wider community” (p. 434). It can be said that the knowledge in the pre-colonial education was unique to the socio-cultural values of the local community. It was a reflection of the everyday realities of the indigenous people (Dei, 2002; Kelemba-vita, 1977, in Taylor, 1995).

**The Spiritual Environment**

According to Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003), in the pre-colonial societies, “every event is accorded spiritual significance”, this includes events such as the birth and death of a person, etc. Therefore, it was argued that every member of the pre-colonial society was taught to strictly adhere to the society’s spiritual traditions and the do’s and don’ts. They further argued that the failure to adhere to the spiritual traditions of the pre-colonial society did not only have negative effects on the individual who violated the spiritual custom, but also on the entire community. Therefore, it can be said that the strict adherence to spiritual customs was a core aspect of the pre-colonial education (p. 434).

According to Dei (2002), another unique characteristic of the pre-colonial education system in relation to spirituality was that, the spiritual forces of the local community played a significant role in the pre-colonial education system. Dei argued that it was impossible to separate the spiritual values of the indigenous people from their education.

2.2.5 The Teacher of African Pre-colonial Education

The role of the teacher is core to any form or system of education, be it pre-colonial, colonial and or education in today’s Africa. To achieve the aims of education, the role of the teacher is inevitable (Dei, 2002; Frankema, 2012; Hargreaves, 1994; Hilliard, 1957; Kinsley, 2010; Mazonde, 2001; Obanya, 1995/2010; Windel 2009).

Education is considered to have been in existence since “human societies first became socially organized” (Obanya, 1995 p. 4). In other words, it can be said that, since teaching is core to education therefore, teaching had existed as long as education.

According to Obanya, 1995/2010, there were categories of pre-colonial teachers, depending on the form and stage of education one refers to in the pre-colonial era. There was the pre-colonial informal education teacher and the pre-colonial formal education teacher (see table 1.1).
This first set of teachers (the pre-colonial informal education teachers), as identified by Obanya were the parents, older relations, community of elders of the local community and the eldest member(s) of a group (gender groups or age groups). These identified members of the pre-colonial society were expected to have more life experiences and to be well aware of the spiritual and cultural values of the local community (Dei, 2002).

The second set of teachers (the pre-colonial formal education teachers), which Obanya referred to in the pre-colonial educational context, were the individuals with specific skills. These were the skilled craftsmen and women in the local community. They were responsible for transmitting “specific vocational skills”, the preparation of people for specific roles in the local community, and transmitting “specialized philosophical and technical skills” (Obanya, 1995, p. 4).

One of the main differences between pre-colonial education and colonial education as identified by Frankema, 2012, is that pre-colonial education is vocational in nature. Therefore, the method of the pre-colonial education can be said to be the apprenticeship method. The pre-colonial formal education teacher therefore, can be referred to as the crafts master, while the learners as the apprentices.

According to Kinsley, 2010, there were no special training schools for the training of the pre-colonial teachers as there were no specialized classrooms where education took place. The pre-colonial teachers assumed their teaching positions by the virtue of their age and their life experiences and / or specific skills or roles in their local communities.

If one then examines Obanya’s descriptions of the pre-colonial teacher, it can be said that, the position of a teacher in the pre-colonial education, was not a position that one can apply to get. It can be said that it was a responsibility which one acquired naturally. Obanya further argued that, in order to keep the socio-cultural values of the local community alive, every adult in the pre-colonial African society is obliged to transmit such socio-cultural values to the younger generation (Obanya, 1995/2010).

According to Obanya, another unique characteristic of the pre-colonial education teachers is said to be the multiplicity of their roles. By the virtue of the parents’ responsibility at home, they are obliged to educate their children in both social, cultural, religious and life skills. Should such parents possess other special skills like wood carving, hunting, specialized farming, medicine making, etc., they are also obliged to transmit such skill(s) to certain
younger individuals or group of young individuals, in order to ensure the continuity of such skill and the sustainability of the local community (Obanya, 1995/2010).

2.3 African Socio-Cultural Values

Socio-cultural values are a unique set of ideals, knowledge and belief systems, values and norms which cover the entire aspects of any given society, and which play regulatory roles in human relationships and help in stabilizing every aspect of the given society (Arowolo, 2010). Education in the pre-colonial Africa was aimed at ensuring the continuous transformation and the continuity of the pre-colonial African socio-cultural values (Kanu, 2010; Tochukwu, 2013).

According to Charles A. Ellwood, as cited in Arowolo, 2010, when giving a broad explanation as to what socio-cultural values are, he defined them as:

…a collective name for all behaviour patterns, socially acquired and socially transmitted by means of symbols; hence a name for distinctive achievements of human groups, including not only such items as language, tool making, industry, art, science, law, government, morals and religion, but also the material instruments or artefacts in which cultural achievements are embodied and by which intellectual cultural features are given practical effect, such as buildings, tools, machines, communications devices, art objects, etc. (p. 3).

In other words, living and transmitting the socio-cultural values and norms can be said to be the core of the pre-colonial African societies. It was argued that, each generation therefore ensured the effective transmission of the values and norms to the younger generation after them. Such transmission was achieved through various means of education (Dewey, 2011).

It can be argued that, as each generation lived over time, they tended to transform their immediate environment, developed new ways of adapting to it, and in so doing, they gradually transformed their ways of living. Although Arowolo (2010) argued that socio-cultural values and norms are core aspects of any given social group and / or societies, however, Dhillon and Halstead, 2003, argued that cultural values and norms are “subject to development and change over time” (p. 148). Their argument indicated that, in so far as people tend to transform their immediate environment, and develop new adaptive skills, the
process of transforming and adapting to their new environment often impose significant effect on obtaining socio-cultural values (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003; Bullivant, 1986; Olaniyi and Olajumoke, 2013).

Therefore, such perspective of socio-cultural values buttresses the claim by Bullivant (1986). Bullivant argued that socio-cultural values tend to change or become transformed over time. In other words, it can be said that some aspects of culture (i.e. ways of life of a people) can become obsolete or approached with a different understanding as the society evolves over time. Few examples of such aspects of the pre-colonial West African culture if compared to the obtaining socio-cultural values in today’s West Africa would be human sacrifices, child marriage, amongst others (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003).

2.4 Colonialism

Part of this research project is aimed at identifying some elements which may have influenced the perception of West Africans of the West African pre-colonial education system, and colonialism is assumed to be an influencing factor. Therefore, certain description of the concept of colonialism is essential.

Colonialism was an act which lasted for a very long time, and its effects were felt and/or experienced differently across the regions of Africa. In British colonised Africa for example, the policy of indirect rule might have brought about a slightly different experience of colonialism to the indigenous people, compared with the French, German or Portuguese colonised regions, where the policy of assimilation was implemented.

Therefore, it is quite a challenge to give an all-encompassing definition as to what colonialism is. However, the motive of colonialism across Africa is argued to be the same. According to Oba and Eboh, 2011, colonialism did not only arise from the wish to express superiority over African people, rather, it arose out of “the need to have direct political control over the colonies …and to repatriate the profits of colonialism to the metropolis” (p. 624). Therefore, in order to achieve such ends, Oba and Eboh further argued that, subjugation, repression and the oppression of the African people became inevitable (Arowolo, 2010; Dowden, 2008; Frantz, 1967; Iroegbu, 1994; Kanu, 2010 Mimiko, 2010; Onwubiko, 1991; Tochukwu, 2013).
Therefore, to conclude this section of the literature review, the above sub-chapters have presented the descriptions of certain authors and educational researchers, and certain discourse which exists in the field of African education, with specific focus on African pre-colonial education system, and other specific aspects such as African socio-cultural values and colonialism. However, the conceptual frameworks within which the authors and educational researchers referred to in the above sub-chapters situated their works are not identified. Secondly, the predominant conceptual framework in the field of African education – both the pre-colonial education system and the dominant system of education in today’s African societies (Western styled system of education), is yet to be identified.

Therefore, the next section of this literature review presents certain prevailing theories in the field of African educational development. Secondly, it identifies the nature of the conceptual framework within which this research project is situated, and it also identifies certain tension which exists between the theories which constitute the conceptual framework, and how this research project uses its empirical material to explore the said tension.

2.5 Prevailing Theories on Education and Development in Africa

The main area of focus of this research project is African educational development with specific interest in the development of West African education. Due to the exploratory nature of this research work, it will only explore basic meanings of few theories in relation to education and development in West Africa, under two dominating paradigms in the development of social science and the study of development, which are: the equilibrium paradigm and the conflict paradigm as identified by Agbo, (2005) and Kinyanjui, (1980).

In relation to the development of social science and the study of development, these two paradigms are made up of several theories and knowledge traditions. The equilibrium paradigm consists of theories amongst others, such as structural functionalism, evolutionary theory and neo-evolutionary theory. The conflict paradigm on the other hand, is a paradigm which is strongly influenced by the Marxist tradition, and one of the leading theories of this paradigm is the dependency or underdevelopment theory (Kinyanjui, 1980 p. 3) (Agbo, 2005).

However, as the purpose here is to explore basic meanings of few theories in relation to educational development in Africa (precisely West Africa) and not the development of social
science in its entirety and / or the study of development in itself, this research will only strive to present a brief description of certain theories within the structural functionalism and dependency or underdevelopment theory in relation to African education, and highlight certain tension which exists between them. In addition, this research will also explore a direct interpretation of Paulo Freire’s (1970) concept of “the oppressor consciousness” with the aim of creating a conceptual frame within which this research work is based.

2.5.1 The Equilibrium Paradigm

Equilibrium paradigm as a perspective on education and development, it perceives education as a means for creating equal and balanced society. Through effective education the society can become adaptable, it can maintain its status quo, and maintain social balance (Dunn, 2010). The equilibrium paradigm is made up of several theories and knowledge traditions. However, this research project will only explore basic meaning to some of the theories within this paradigm such as the structural functionalism theory, modernisation theory, human capital theory, and Dewey’s theory of education where he referred to “education as a necessity of life”.

2.5.1.1 Structural Functionalism Theory

Structural functionalism in relation to educational development, as identified by Agbo (2005) and Kinyanjui (1980), can be said to be a perspective on education, with its focus on education as “an instrument for social mobility, inculcating values necessary for system maintenance and for influencing change in the society” (Kinyanjui, 1980, p. 4). Some historians and researchers such as: Dei, (2002); Illife, (2007); Mazonde, (2001); Roberts, (1998) and Zulu, (2006), who have written about African pre-colonial education, a system of education which this research work is aimed at understanding, have based some of their work within structural functionalism theory. They have unanimously asserted, in their individual work, that one of the main purposes of African pre-colonial education was the preservation of the indigenous norms and values of the pre-colonial African societies.

According to Bray, Peter and Stephens (2000), Obanya (2010), Taylor (1995) and Wiredu (2004), they have argued that pre-colonial education system was structured in a way that the educated individual was well equipped with the skills required to uphold beliefs and traditions
of his or her people, with the aim of preserving the social structure of the tribe or kingdom, across generations.

However, in relation to educational development in Africa in general, i.e., traditional education (pre-colonial education system) and Western styled system of education, this research will approach structural functionalism theory through three other theories, which have their root in structural functionalism theory: modernisation theory, human capital theory and education as a necessity of life (John Dewey).

2.5.1.2 Modernisation Theory

According to Hargreaves, (1994) he argued that modernisation or modernity:

...is a social condition that is both driven and sustained by enlightenment beliefs in rational scientific progress, in the triumph of technology over nature, and in the capacity to control and improve human condition by applying this wealth of scientific and technological understanding and expertise to social reform (p. 8).

Hargreaves’s definition of modernity clearly expresses the need for capacity building through education. The campaign for modernization requires a total transformation from the “primitive ways” of doing things. Therefore, following Hargreaves’s definition, modernisation in the African context requires that Africans re-create all aspects of their pre-modernised societies; for example, to increase production from what used to be subsistence to commercial production, etc. In order to re-create, effectively manage and sustain a modern society therefore, it can be argued that Africans need formal knowledge (formal education), which is often considered to be the means for capacity building. Therefore, for Africans to be able to create and sustain a modern society which is considered to be the avenue to participate in the global economy, education can be said to be inevitable.

However, Kinyanjui, (1980) argued that although there are variations of definitions of modernisation, but the underlying principle is the same. He argued that modernisation is “a development model which envisages the transformation of underdeveloped countries into the images of Western industrialised societies in values, norms, institutions and political orientation” (p. 6). This principle therefore justifies the wide spread of Western styled education in the immediate post-colonial era across Africa. Daniel Lerner (1969) as cited in Kinyanjui (1980), asserted this underlying principle when he defined modernisation as “the
process of social change whereby the less-developed societies acquire characteristics common to the more developed societies” (p. 6).

However, the aim in this section is not to create a critique of modernisation theory, rather to try to understand modernisation in relation to African education (specifically West Africa education). Therefore, modernisation in this context requires effective formal education.

2.5.1.3 Human Capital Theory

At first, it is important to identify the synergy between modernisation and the human capital theory, according to Agbo (2005) and Kinyanjui (1980), the two theories are complementary. Across Africa, education is seen as the “vehicle for modernisation and economic development” (Agbo, 2005, p.1). Therefore, it can be argued that, to effectively operate the “vehicle”, there is need for skilled men and women. Agbo and Kinyanjui argued that human capital theory emphasise the need for the development of professional skills- the skills needed for effectively managing the various mechanism of the social structure.

According to Zulu (2006), although, in the case of most West African societies, the implementation of human capital theory has led to mass unemployment among the educated, it is still one of the prevailing theories in policies of education of many countries across the region. It can be said that human capital theory views education, that is, the transmission of skills and knowledge as an investment, which will thereby bring about economic growth, which is considered to be a sure foundation for development (Gyimah-Brempong, 2010; Kinyanjui, 1980).

Simply put, the argument for human capital theory is that, for any given society to create and sustain a modern society, such a society must invest in processes of skills acquisition, in order to create the necessary and adequate professionals who are capable of managing each aspect of the social mechanism (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003; Olaniyi and Olajumoke, 2013).

2.5.1.4 Education as a Necessity of Life (John Dewey)

Life is a self-renewing process through action upon the environment. …but the continuity of the life process is not dependent upon the prolongation of the existence of any one individual.
…”life” covers customs, institutions, beliefs, victories and defeats, recreations and occupations.

…with the renewal of physical existence goes, in the case of human beings, the recreation of beliefs, ideas, hopes, happiness, misery, and practices. The continuity of any experience, through renewing of the social group, is a literary fact. Therefore, education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life. (Dewey, 2011, p. 5).

According to Dewey, education preserves life. It is a means through which continuity of culture and social structure of any given society, either pre-modern or modern, is made possible (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003). However, education in itself is a process which is based on effective communication. Dewey argued that, to effectively transmit “life process” or in other words, to ensure “the continued existence of any society” (Dewey, 2011, p. 6), effective communication is required.

Dewey argued that the nature of communication is educative. He further argued that, for human beings to live together and create a society, they must share things in common, and communication is the means through which they can be made aware of the qualities and characteristics which they have in common. Therefore, it can be said that effective communication is a dialogue which does not only affect a party involved in the process, but rather the two: “…to be a recipient of a communication is to have an enlarged and change experience. One shares in what another has thought and felt and in so far, meagerly or amply, has his own attitude modified” (p.6).

To perceive education in this way is to emphasise the inevitability of teaching and learning. However, according to Dewey, teaching and learning are not activities restricted to formal schooling only.

According to Dewey, as human societies became increasingly complex, the introduction of schooling and formal education helps in structuring communication, and makes the transmission from one generation to the other or from the teacher to the learner, much easier and more effective. Dewey further argued that as human society became complex, informal or unstructured communication cannot cover every aspect of its complexity. Therefore, a structured form of communication, which schooling provides, is required for the effective transmission of culture and the continuity of life in general.
Although this is not in any way a critique of Dewey’s theory on education, since this research is focused on West African pre-colonial education system, it is important to identify that the introduction of formal schooling in West Africa, and other regions of Africa alike, did not attempt to structure the existing knowledge system (pre-colonial knowledge system) from which it took over, rather, it introduced an entirely different structured knowledge which served as the bases for a different social structure, if compared to the obtaining social structure in the pre-modern West African societies (Oba and Eboh, 2011). Therefore, this raises the question of, in which direction does the ‘social continuity of life’ face in modern West African societies and in Africa as a whole? However, that is not the main concern of this research project because, in order to effectively answer such question, this research argues that, it is paramount to first have objective understanding of the pre-colonial education system and the continuity of life which it facilitated. Hence, the focus of this research project is to explore how the West African pre-colonial education system is perceived.

2.5.2 Conflict Paradigm

The conflict paradigm is a paradigm which is strongly influenced by the Marxist tradition. Therefore, in relation to education and development in Africa the conflict paradigm is a critique of the equilibrium paradigm. It situate its argument on the premise that Western styled system of education creates inequality, and that it tend to increase the dominating power of the more industrialised societies (Western societies) over the less modern or less industrialised societies. One of the leading theories of this paradigm is the dependency or underdevelopment theory.

2.5.2.1 Dependency or Underdevelopment Theory

The dependency or underdevelopment theory is a perspective which is strongly rooted in the Marxist tradition. The theorists argued that Western styled education or formal schooling is not a vehicle for modernisation or development. Rather, it is a means through which the Western industrialised societies tend to under-develop the African societies (Oba and Eboh, 2011).

This theory was developed from a strong critique of modernisation and human capital theory. Therefore, if one takes Daniel Lerner’s definition of modernity, as cited in Kinyanjui (1980) where he defines modernisation as “the process of social change whereby the less-developed
societies acquire characteristics common to the more developed societies” (p. 6), it seems logical to assume that the so-called modern African societies will continuously be seen as dependent or underdeveloped.

One of the arguments for such a claim by this school of thought is that, as long as the idea of development or modernisation is based on the desire to build societies in Africa, which are replicas of the industrialised Western societies, African societies will continue to maintain the position of underdevelopment. Therefore, Western education or formal schooling which serves as the agent for modernisation and development across Africa, tends to under-develop Africa and it makes African societies continuously dependent on Western industrialised societies Kinyanjui, 1980 (Arowolo, 2010; Frantz, 1967; Frankema, 2012; Iroegbu, 1994; Kanu, 2010; Mimiko, 2010; Oba and Eboh, 2011; Onwubiko, 1991; Tochukwu, 2013).

2.5.3 Paulo Freire’s Concept of the “Oppressor Consciousness”

It is essential to emphasise that Paulo Freire is associated to the conflict paradigm. The synopsis of one of Freire’s theories on education (conscientisation) is that, education is the process of developing awareness of one’s social realities. The awareness of the said social realities therefore, tends to stimulate the need to question hegemonic power structure (Nyirenda, 1996).

Although Freire is associated to the conflict paradigm, however, the concept of the “oppressor consciousness” is presented in this research project as a contrast to the arguments of the dependency or underdevelopment theorists regarding Western styled system of education in Africa.

According to Freire, (1970) when a person, group of people or nations experience oppression, on a scale similar to colonialism, they tend to unconsciously internalise the “consciousness” (i.e. attitude, approaches, world view, etc.) of their oppressor. Therefore, the drive for freedom is often driven by the will to be free from oppression and the wish to bring the oppressor to justice. The implication however is that, when the long awaited freedom is achieved, in most cases, the oppressed, then tends to resent the ideas of the oppressor (the form of education included), and in the name of seeking justice to years, if not centuries of oppression. They (the oppressed) tend to inflict similar pain (which they had experienced) on
the oppressor. In other words, what has happened in the process was not freedom per se, rather, a change in roles.

…in order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both. …this, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. (p. 26).

One of the implications of such attitude of resentment towards the culture (or consciousness) of the oppressor is what Dei, (2000) referred to as “romanticising the past”. According to Dei, when people refer to the past, they tend to present a past that was perfect, absent of any form of irregularity or imperfection. He identified that the past is usually presented as an era which was disjointed from the present. Therefore, it can be said that educational researchers who argue for dependency or underdevelopment theory in relation to African education, might have analysed African pre-colonial education in comparison to Western education, based on their romantic or incomplete perception of African pre-colonial education system. Could such analysis be due to their resentment towards Western culture, which significantly includes Western education?

Therefore, the “oppressor consciousness” can be said to be a possible reason for the lack of connection, and resentment of certain indigenous African people towards Western styled education (as the case with the ‘Boko Haram’ sect of Nigeria), obtaining social structure and socio-cultural values in today’s West African states, specifically, in Nigeria.

To conclude this section, it is important to reiterate that this research project is exploratory in nature, and its aim is to seek an understanding of the West African pre-colonial education system through perceptions. Therefore, this research will endeavour not to become tangled in the critique of various educational theories, rather than focus on the main interest of the study.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

Firstly, this research will situate itself partly within the context of structural-functionalism theory, which also encompasses modernisation and human capital theory, because as identified in the first section of the literature review, the main focus of the West African pre-
Colonial education system was the effective transmission of indigenous socio-cultural norms, values and skills in order to maintain the pre-colonial economic and social structure from one generation to the other, and this was achieved through capacity building and investing in human capital (Olaniyi and Oluwajumoke, 2013).

Secondly, this research will also situate itself within Paulo Freire’s concept of the “oppressor consciousness”, because the main purpose of this research is to explore how West Africans’ perceive their pre-colonial education system, and what may have influenced their perceptions of the said education system. In other words, this research is focused on construction of meanings. Freire’s concept identified possible reason for the culture of resistance or attitude of resentment of the colonised people or people who were once oppressed, to the principles and practices of their oppressor(s).

According to Smyth (2004), conceptual framework is made up of certain perspectives and concepts “derived from relevant fields of enquiry and used to structure a subsequent presentation”. Therefore, the conceptual framework of this research project which influenced the choice of research design and method, the processes of data presentation, analysis and discussion, is based upon the tension which exists between the equilibrium paradigm and the conflict paradigm.

Therefore, the conceptual framework of this research project reflects two elements, firstly, education for the “social continuity of life” which is situated within the structural-functionalism theory (equilibrium paradigm). Secondly, the exploration of elements which influences the oppressed construction of meanings, with a focus on “the process of transformation” (change), this is considered to be the core of Freire’s concept of the oppressor consciousness (conflict paradigm).

This research contends the rhetoric of dependency or underdevelopment theory which is prevalent amongst many African educational researchers (Oba and Eboh, 2011; Olaniyi and Oluwajumoke, 2013). This research’s contention with dependency or underdevelopment theory is based on one of Adeyemi and Adeyinka’s (2003) recommendations. They recommended that one of the ways forward for African education is for African educational researchers to start seeking “a merger of what is good in African traditional education with the good aspects of formal education of the Western type” (p. 439).
This statement, in a way, is a call for African educational researchers to stop playing the blame game regarding the state of African education today, and for the developing African societies to desist from taking the victim’s positions in relation to modernisation and development (in all its domains), rather they should find a way forward. To achieve this aim therefore, it is paramount to problematise our understanding of the African pre-colonial education system.

2.7 Summary

So far, I have explored basically, the concept of education in Africa, with a brief insight into the forms of education which existed in the three socio-political eras in Africa i.e. pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras. As the purpose of this research is to understand how West Africans perceive West African pre-colonial education system, I have explored in-depth, African pre-colonial education, with specific focus on the nature of pre-colonial education, the structure of pre-colonial education, factors which determined the contents of pre-colonial education, and the pre-colonial education teacher.

One of the main enquiries of this research project is that, the effects of colonialism may have played a role in the way West Africans perceive the West African pre-colonial education system. Therefore, I have also explored basic understanding of the concept of colonialism through existing literatures.

Therefore, before one starts some kind of comparison between West African pre-colonial education system and Western styled system of education in West Africa today, with the aim of finding the way forward, as recommended by Adeyemi and Adeyinka, (2003), should one not strive; first, to eradicate one’s romantic perception of pre-colonial education system, in order to achieve an objective understanding of it? Should one not consider the changing times and the context in which such comparison is being made?

Lastly, I have attempted to outline certain theoretical framework which underpins the study of development and education in Africa. I have done so by first identifying certain theories from two main paradigms, and briefly presented the theories as the opposite ends of a polarity. I have also situated the conceptual framework of this research project between structural functionalism theory and Paulo Freire’s concept of the “oppressor consciousness”, capitalising on the tension which exists between the two perspectives, with the aim of
challenging the rhetoric of the dependency or underdevelopment theorists on education and development in Africa, specifically in West Africa.

This research project therefore, will explore how West Africans perceive the West African pre-colonial education system, what they perceive to be the significance of the pre-colonial education in the pre-colonial West African societies, and what may have influenced their perceptions of the pre-colonial education system.
3 Methodology and Method.

This research project is an in depth qualitative study, with an eye for exploration. As identified by Denzin and Lincoln, (2005), one of the purposes of the qualitative approach to social research is to “constantly challenge the distinction between the “real” and that which is constructed” (p. xiv). The aim of this research project therefore, is to explore how West Africans perceive an important aspect of their past - the West African pre-colonial education. The task of this study reflects elements of history of the West African people, and how the meaning of the past is being constructed. Therefore, the qualitative approach is considered suitable for achieving such aim.

This research project adopts the narrative approach to qualitative research. Chase, (2005) defined narrative as “an extended story about a significant aspect of one’s life” (p. 652). In so far as this research project has concerned itself with exploring how West Africans make sense of an aspect of their past, restricting one’s self to academic theories and ideologies is not enough to justifiably achieve such aim. For this reason, Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918/1927, as cited in Chase, 2005, argued that:

…a social institution can be fully understood only if we do not limit ourselves to the abstract study of its formal organisation, but analyse the way in which it appears in the personal experience of various members of the group and follow the influence which it has upon their lives (p. 653)

Therefore, for the purpose of this research project, narrative accounts of certain West Africans’ have been collected through two different means, as empirical data for answering the research question. Narratives were collected through unstructured interviews with three indigenously trained—“retired”—crafts men (a blacksmith, an herbalist and “Ifa” oracle priest, and a talking drum player who was also the king’s entertainer). Narrative was also collected from “textual source” (i.e. narrative which is generated from text –fiction) Earthy and Cronin, (2008, p. 432); Chase, (2005, p. 653), an approach which I will refer to in this project as “implied narrative”. The textual source is a well-known West African fiction, set in the West African pre-colonial era (in the old Igbo kingdoms), specifically, in the era which preceded the formal establishment of the colonies in the region. The book is titled “Things Fall Apart” written by Chinua Achebe, and first published in 1958.
This research work is interested in how West Africans perceive their past and how they construct their meanings of the past. The epistemological assumption on which this research is situated is social constructivism.

3.2 Epistemological Assumption

According to Alvesson and Skoldberg, (2009), they argued that, the reality or true essence of a thing is socially constructed based on the society’s experiences of, and or relationship with the said thing. Therefore, people tend to construct their own meaning(s) of any given experience when giving a narrative account of such experience (Riessman, 2008). McAdams and Bowman, (2001) cited in Chase, (2005), they discovered that, the “psychological wellbeing” (p. 658) and the quality of life of the narrator determines how (s)he presents his/her narrative accounts.

The construction of meanings can be influenced by several sociological factors, “…knowledge (of a thing) arises from processes more related to ideology, interests, or power” Alvesson and Skoldberg, (2009 p. 25) (Mallon, 2007; Stam, 2001). As an individual or a group of people, “we are not alone in the world; we share the world with other fellow human beings, animals, our immediate environment, etc. As we meet these others in our day to day life, we typify them”. We give them names and group them into categories based on our experiences of and or with them. Such names and groupings help us to construct and associate meanings to things. Therefore, reality is a product of human activity. Reality of a thing, an era, etc. is not an independent fact which is aloof to human processes, rather, reality or meaning is constructed through human activities- human relationship with, and experiences of the said thing (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009, p. 25-26).

In the case of this study which is concerned with how West Africans perceive the pre-colonial West African education system, it is therefore important to consider certain elements such as the experience of colonialism, the socio-political positions of the West African people, and the time in which such perceptions were made. Therefore, this research project has analysed the narratives of certain West Africans, about West African pre-colonial education system from the philosophical stand point of social constructivism, and some questions in relation to the above mentioned elements such as, what are the implications of perceiving the past with the eyes and experiences of the present (in what context were the perceptions made), and what is the motive of such perception (i.e. for political, social or economic purposes)?
3.3 Research Design in Relation to the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research project is focused on, and working with the tension which exists between structural-functionalism theory, and Paulo Freire’s (1970) concept of the “oppressor consciousness”. Structural-functionalism theory emphasises “continuity of life”, while the “oppressor consciousness” is focussed on “the process of transformation (change)”.

According Denzin and Lincoln, (2005) when defining qualitative research they identified that:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 3).

In the light of Denzin and Lincoln’s definition, and based on the conceptual framework of this research project, the qualitative approach to research is deemed suitable, firstly, because the main focus of this research is to explore how West Africans’ perceive their pre-colonial education system, a system of education which was concerned with the effective transmission of indigenous socio-cultural norms, values and skills in order to maintain the pre-colonial economic and social structure from one generation to the other (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003; Olaniyi and Olajumoke, 2013).

Secondly, in order to “study” the West African pre-colonial education as experienced and or perceived by West Africans themselves, with an “attempt to make sense of, or interpret” their perceptions based on how they (West Africans’) construct their meanings of the past (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.3), the narrative approach with social constructivism as the underpinning epistemological assumption is considered suitable.

The conceptual framework of this research project also played significant role in the presentation, analysis and discussion of data. Firstly, the narratives were presented and
analysed in a way which reflect how West Africans perceived their pre-colonial education system in relation to the structure, and the significance of the said education system on the pre-colonial social and economic structure, with the underlying theoretical frame of “education for the social continuity of life”. Secondly, the presented data was discussed based on the epistemological assumption that meanings are generally constructed based on experiences (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Mallon, 2007; Stam, 2001).

3.4 Scope and Limitations

The state of education as it is in West Africa today, calls for “African centered critical theory” (Zulu, 2006, p. 41). And most significantly, some parts of the region have developed total and or partial resentment towards Western styled education. The reasons for such resentment perhaps are that:

(1) Western styled education tends to separate Africans from their local community and socio-cultural values (Dei, 2002).

(2) The concept of Western education is entirely foreign, and it promotes a culture which is different from the pre-colonial African socio-cultural Values (Frankema, 2012; Oba and Eboh, 2011).

(3) Western education does not acknowledge the pre-colonial knowledge system which it took over from (Dei, 2000; Mazonde, 2001).

(4) Western education has led to mass unemployment amongst Africans (Mazonde, 2001).

However, before one draws conclusions about how divine and complete the West African pre-colonial education system was, and how Western styled education may have ruined Africans and the indigenous African social, political and economic structure, should one not strive to, first, understand what the pre-colonial education was? Before one starts some kind of comparison between West African pre-colonial education system and Western styled education in West Africa today (for the purpose of “striking a balance between traditional education and modern-day education in a continuing attempt to produce all-round citizens” as recommended by Adeyemi and Adeyinka, (2003 p. 439), should one not consider the changing times and the context in which such comparison is being made?
Therefore, one aim of this research project is provoking a certain degree of objectivity and critical perspective on the ways West African pre-colonial education is being seen in relation to the present. This research is also aimed at inspiring the possibilities of creating a model of teaching and learning-educational- processes, referred to by Adeyemi and Adeyinka as “a merger of what is good in African traditional education with the good aspects of formal education of the Western type” (p. 439), which Africans might feel a sense of ownership towards.

As a graduate of teacher education in Nigeria, and following my experiences as a school teacher for five years in the same country, my understanding of and devotion to African history and West African cultural believes and practices, I admit that the statements referred to above regarding the probable causes of resentment towards Western styled system of education, are common arguments amongst most African graduates, educational authors and researchers. However, I have strived to conduct this research as objectively as I can, admitting my possible predispositions, where necessary.

One of the limitations of this research project however, is that, although most of the literatures referred to in this research paper are based on African issues, and most significantly, on issues relating to African education as a whole, the three interview participants were selected randomly from the South-western part of Nigeria, and the “textual source” is set in the Eastern part of Nigeria. These two regions were the seat of some pre-colonial powerful kingdoms and empires which spanned across few other countries in today’s West Africa. Today’s Western part of Nigeria comprises the Old Oyo empire which had the Ife city state, parts of the Mossi kingdom, which is known today as the Benin Republic, and parts of the Ashanti kingdom, which spanned across today’s Togo, Ghana, and parts of Cote d’Ivoire. The Easter part of today’s Nigeria comprises the old Igbo kingdoms. It also comprises parts of a region which was known to be the original Bantu homeland, which spanned across the Northern part of today’s Cameroon (see Image 1.1 below).
However, a major limitation of this research project is that, its findings cannot be generally considered as conclusive facts across the regions of West Africa or across Africa as a whole. Rather, as recommendations which can produce effective and lasting solutions to the problems faced by the African education systems. One can only argue for such achievement of the recommendations of this research project, only if the recommendations are considered based on the “cultural relativity” which exists amongst the various African states, as argued by Taylor, (1995) and Wiredu, (2004). Taylor and Wiredu argued that, although Africa is a vast continent with significant cultural diversities amongst its various communities, there is relativity in the thoughts which underpins the philosophical ideas which exist in those communities. And to disregard such relativity due to lack of empirical prove of its validity, is to evaluate African philosophical ideas based on Western ideology.

Therefore, this research will not generalise its findings in the statistical sense, rather, its findings are generalised in the abstract sense because the data used in this research project provides the opportunity to reflect on different theories.
3.5 Ethical Considerations

This sub-chapter presents certain ethical issues in relation to the narrative interview participants, the textual source, and the conclusion and recommendations of this research project.

3.5.1 The Narrators and Their Narratives

The stories of the past often create a nostalgic feeling of a ‘paradise lost’; the feeling of a sunny day with cloudless blue sky and singing birds over the orchards; a beautiful sunset over the glittering surface of the ocean. This is what Dei, (2000) referred to as romanticising the past. According to Dei, when most researchers and historians refer to pre-colonial African social structures and pre-colonial education, they tend to do so in a seemingly romantic way. They tend to present a past which is entirely detached from the present. Such description of the past does not seem to represent the “true nature” and / or a complete view of the past.

The interview participants were between the ages of 65-85 years. Due to the age and life experiences of the interview participants, they might present an idealised view of the past. Also, the tendency to forget things or leave aspects of their past experiences out when telling their stories was an important element considered during the interviews and when analysing the interview data.

According to Chase, (2005) interview participants tend to behave differently than they would in their everyday lives during interviews with a researcher or a reporter. This in a way can impact on the stories they would tell. This might be due to their fear of loss of privacy or their wish to impress the person conducting the interview. Therefore, prior to the interviews, a consent form was presented, read and explained to the participants, in the language they best understand (Yoruba language), wherein a contract of confidentiality is clearly stated.

Another major ethical issue in relation to the interview participants is the gender imbalance. Since the focus of the narrative interviews is to interview indigenously trained skilled craft masters and professionals, interviewing only men reflects the degree of gender imbalance which existed in the pre-colonial form of education, a factor which will be discussed further in the discussion chapter of this study.
An ethical issue regarding the “textual source” (Earthy and Cronin, 2008, p. 432; Chase, 2005, p. 653), is that, it is not a direct narrative of the author of the book (Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe, 1958), rather, it is considered to be the objective representation of the author’s reality (Clough, 2002; Badley, 2003; Wyatt, 2007). References to West African pre-colonial education were extracted from the novel, and they served as “implied narratives” of the author’s perception of the West African pre-colonial education system. Another ethical issue in relation to this source of data is that, although the novel is set in real cultural scenarios (pre-colonial Eastern Nigerian culture), the story is fiction and the characters in the story were unreal (Badley, 2003; Clough, 2002; Wyatt, 2007). Therefore, the extracted texts were referred to as “implied narratives” of Chinua Achebe of the West African pre-colonial education system. Because the book “Thing Fall Apart” is a published literature, and it is well referenced throughout this study, the author therefore, did not sign a consent form.

Another ethical issue in relation to the conclusion(s) of this research work is about generalisation. Africa is a vast continent with extensive diversity, if compared to other continents (Dowden, 2008). Due to factors such as time and limited resources, this research will only use data collected from Nigeria (see chapter 3.4 above). Therefore, this will make it quite difficult to generalise its findings statistically. Hence, conclusions cannot be said to be exhaustive.

3.6 Data and the Processes of Data Collection

As earlier stated, narrative data for this research project were collected through two different means, through narrative interviews, and “textual source” (Earthy and Cronin, 2008, p. 432) also referred to by Charmaz, (2006, p. 37) as “extant texts”, an approach which is referred to in this research as to be “implied narrative”.

As defined by Charmaz, (2006) and Smith, Flowers and Larkin, (2009) an interview is a purposefully guided interaction or conversation with a person or group of people, which could be exploratory or interrogatory, with the aim of generating a set of data which could help in answering or lead the way towards answering a set of questions. Narrative interviews however, is aimed at collecting stories of certain real life experiences of the interview participant(s), for the purpose of exploring the participant(s’) construction of meanings of certain social phenomenal.
In the case of this research project, the interviews conducted were aimed at collecting detailed narratives of the participants’ experiences of the pre-colonial styled educational processes which they underwent. The interviews were unstructured, with few broad open ended questions. The questions were aimed at inviting detailed discussions on the educational experiences of the interview participants. The participants’ responses to the open ended questions generated sub-questions, which required certain clarifying details of some aspects of the participants’ narratives. The open ended questions were chosen carefully, and asked very “slowly, in order to allow some degree of reflection in the interview participants” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25-26).

3.6.1 Criteria for Selecting Interview Participants

The purpose of the interviews was to collect narrative accounts of the interview participants of their experiences of the pre-colonial styled approach to education. Therefore, the participants must have experienced such approach to education.

After the formal establishment of the colonies in West Africa, specifically in Nigeria, where the interview participants were randomly selected, the effects of colonialism and the establishment of formal schooling was more significant in the big cities and amongst the city dwellers. Therefore, during the colonial era, some rural areas and suburb villages across West Africa, specifically Nigeria, still practiced the pre-colonial styled education to a certain degree (Keller, 1995). Therefore, the interview participants must belong to the generation which experienced the pre-colonial styled education, and who have so far experienced the rapid development of Western styled education since the post-colonial era up to the present day West Africa. And who have also witnessed the gradual but steady extinction of the pre-colonial styled education which they underwent.

Another important criterion which was considered when selecting the three interview participants was the skills they have and the nature of the crafts they practised.

The introduction of iron tools marked the beginning of civilisation in Africa (Falola and Fleming, 2009). Therefore, one of the interview participants is an over 80year old “retired” blacksmith (actual age cannot be verified due to his inability to remember his actual year of birth). The second participant is a 65year old (age confirmed by the participant) “semi-
retired” traditional medicine man and Ifa oracle priest. He was trained in traditional medicine-making and divination. The third participant is an over 70 year old (actual age cannot be verified due to his inability to remember his actual year of birth) traditional entertainer. He was trained in the art of making and playing a traditional West African drum, known as the talking drum.

3.6.2 The places and processes of the interviews

The three narrative interviews were conducted separately and on different days. However, the broad open ended questions asked during the interviews were the same. The questions were:

i. Why did you choose to learn this particular skills/profession?
ii. Who was your teacher and how were you taught?
iii. How would you teach someone else your skills/profession today?

Two of the interviews took place in the participants’ workshops, where they practised their crafts. The interview with the traditional medicine man and Ifa oracle priest was conducted in the participant’s consultation room; and the interview with the blacksmith was conducted in the participant’s former workshop (being used at the time of the interview by another blacksmith). The two interviews were recorded with an audio recording device, and later transcribed into text. The third interview participant on the other hand, requested to have the interview session in the comfort of the living room of his house, and for some undisclosed reasons, he refused the use of an audio recording device during the interview. Therefore, interview notes were taken during the interview (Roberts, 2002; Chase, 2005; Charmaz, 2006).

The recorded audio interviews were transcribed into English language using a windows based transcription programme. The transcribed interviews were edited by a university graduate of English language, who understands the language in which the interviews were conducted.

3.6.3 Criteria for Selecting Textual Source

The “textual source” is a well-known West African fiction, set in real cultural scenarios of the West African pre-colonial era (in the pre-colonial Eastern Nigerian culture); specifically, in
the era which preceded the formal establishment of the colonies in the region. The book is titled *Things Fall Apart* written by Chinua Achebe, and first published in 1958.

Achebe made significant references to “what he assumed were objective facts” of the nature and structure of the pre-colonial form of education in the region where the novel is set (Prior, 2003, in Charmaz, 2006, p. 35). Another very important reason for choosing this novel is that, it played a significant role in the struggle for national independence across the regions of West Africa when it was first published in 1958.

3.6.4 The Step-by-Step Process of Extracting “Implied Narratives” from the Textual Source

For the purpose of this research, the term “implied narrative” is defined as the ways in which the author of the textual source (Chinua Achebe) represents or presents the nature, the structure and the guiding principles of the West African pre-colonial education system within the frame of the contents of the book, “Things Fall Apart”. These representations are seen as the author’s perception of the West African pre-colonial education system. Because the primary purpose for which the said book was written was to complement the nationalists’ fight for national independence across Africa, therefore, the author’s references to the West African pre-colonial education system which is used as data for this research project are referred to as “implied”.

The processes of extracting the “implied narratives” of the author from the textual source require tact and a good deal of cognitive activity. For the purpose of extracting Achebe’s implied narratives of the West African pre-colonial education system, the following steps were followed in the following sequence:

**Step 1: Objective Reading**

The book “Thing Fall Apart” was read without bias or underlying research agenda. The contents of the novel were seen as a remarkable piece which reflects a good deal of poetry and a unique writing skill. The aim of the first reading is to enjoy the story, identify the theme of the story and the context in which it was written.
Step 2: Purposeful Reading

This stage is referred to as the second reading. The aim of this second reading was to identify data for the purpose of this research project. The focus at this stage was directed towards the author’s references to the West African pre-colonial education. This stage of reading required a good deal of cognitive activity. At this stage, the book was no longer seen as a novel or a piece of art, rather, as the author’s subjective representation of reality (the pre-colonial West African era). The contents of the book were seen as a direct dialogue between the reader and the author himself, whereby the reader sets the tone for the dialogue. In other words, the author was hypothetically asked certain questions by the reader. Therefore, in order to identify data for this research project, since the aim was to understand how West Africans perceive the West African pre-colonial education system, Achebe (the author) was hypothetically asked the following questions:

i. why do West Africans choose to learn particular skill(s)/professions?
ii. how were the pre-colonial West Africans educated?
iii. how do the educated/knowledgeable pre-colonial West Africans pass on their skill(s)/knowledge?

Step 3: Extracting Data

At this stage, aspects of the contents of the book which reflects references to the West African pre-colonial education were extracted. They were typed into a separate document with references to the pages from which they were extracted.

Step 4: Data Categorisation

This step is considered to be the final step in extracting implied narratives from the textual source. At this stage, the extracted references to the West African pre-colonial education system were categorised using the questions referred to in step 2 as the heading for each category.

3.7 Data Analysis

This sub-chapter presents the step-by-step process through which the data from the textual source and the narrative interview data are approached and analysed.
3.7.1 Interview Data Analysis

During the analysis of the narrative interview data, the emphasis was on the construction of meanings, the content of the narratives, and the interplay between each interview participant and the socio-cultural context in which their narratives were told. The focus of the analysis was not to identify the discourse which exists between the three interview narratives, but to explore how each participant constructed their own meanings of the pre-colonial West African education system, and identify the commonality which may exist between the three narratives.

The contexts in which the narratives were told in relation to time and the socio-political positions of the interview participants were significantly considered when analysing the interview narratives. Most significantly, it is important to reiterate that the interview data were analysed based on the philosophical ideology of social constructivism (Roberts, 2002; Chase, 2005; Charmaz, 2006; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009).

3.7.2 Textual Data Analysis

The novel Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe was written with the purpose of reinforcing the nationalists’ struggle for political independence in Africa, and not for the purpose of research. However, its references to West African pre-colonial education provide significant insights to the nature and structure of that system of education.

Some of the benefits of using textual source is that, it provides data which “reflects shared definitions” of the West African pre-colonial education system. It can also be referred to as an “objective source of data” because, it provides data which is not directly influenced by interview questions or any pre-constructed data gathering processes (Charmaz, 2006, p. 37-38).

The purpose of analysing the texts was not to focus on the discourses of the West African pre-colonial education system which the texts may provide, rather, to complement the real life experiences of pre-colonial styled education, collected through narrative interviews, with a fiction set in real life cultural scenarios, which presents similar experiences of unreal characters (Badley, 2003; Clough, 2002; Wyatt, 2007). Questions which refer to the purpose of the text, and the context in which the text was written; how does the text reflect the
author’s perception of West African pre-colonial education system, as identified by Charmaz (p. 39-40), will be considered when analysing the texts.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has looked at the conceptual framework which informed the choice of the research design and the philosophical ideology within which this research project is situated. It has also presented the methods used in data gathering, and some of the ethical issues underpinning the methods and approaches used in exploring how West Africans perceive the West African pre-colonial education system. This chapter also explained the step-by-step process through which this research has collected implied narrative from a fiction. The data collected are presented and analysed in the next chapter.
4 Data Presentation and Data Analysis

In the previous chapter, I have explained in detail the step-by-step process through which data was collected for the purpose of this research. Although data was collected through two different means, the collected data are presented and analysed in this chapter, not as two separated sets of data, rather, as complementary data.

Although the data for this research project were collected from certain parts of Nigeria, the collected data are referred to in this chapter as the perceptions of certain West Africans of the West African pre-colonial education system (see chapter 3.3 Scope and Limitations).

There are several ways of approaching the perceptions of West Africans of their pre-colonial education system. I have chosen to approach their perceptions of the pre-colonial education system with the epistemological assumption of social-constructivism.

The first amongst the aims of this research project is to understand “how” West Africans perceive their pre-colonial education system. The word “how” in the context of the aim of this research, reflects certain degree of construction of meanings. Therefore, the use of social-constructivism as the epistemological assumption which underpins how the data for this research project is approached, analysed and discussed is reasonable.

In the process of trying to understand how West Africans construct their meanings of their pre-colonial education system, this research also explores what may have influenced their perceptions of their pre-colonial education system.

Therefore, the aim is not to criticise the perceptions, and / or seek the discourse which may exist between the different perceptions. Rather, firstly, as identified in the previous chapter, to explore how the perceptions complement each other, and secondly, to explore what may have influenced the perceptions of West Africans of their pre-colonial education system, with the aim of instigating a cognitive process which can accommodate a possible opposite and / or a broader perception should the influencing elements be different from what they might have been.
4.1 Conceptual Framework in Relation to Data Presentation and Data Analysis

As identified in the previous chapters, the narratives are presented and analysed in this chapter in relation to the conceptual framework of this research project, which is based on the tension which exists between two differing perspectives on African education. The narratives are presented and analysed in a way which reflects how the narrators perceived their pre-colonial education system, how they perceived the structure of the pre-colonial education system, and what they perceived to be the significance of the pre-colonial education system in the West African pre-colonial societies. The presentation and analysis emphasises “education as the means for the social continuity of life” (Agbo, 2005; Dewey, 2011; Kinyanjui, 1980), a perspective which is situated within the structural functionalism theory which also encompasses modernisation and human capital theory.

4.2 In What Context Do the Narrators Express their Perception of the West African Pre-colonial Education?

In order to understand how the narrators construct their meanings of the West African pre-colonial education system, this research will explore the context within which such construction of meanings was made. The narratives on which this research work is based were collected through two different means. Although the narratives are presented as complementary sets of data, the implied narrative is situated within a different time frame and era, if compared to the narratives collected through narrative interviews.

4.2.1 Chinua Achebe’s Implied narrative

Chinua Achebe was born in 1930 in Nigeria, and he studied extensively in Nigeria and in the United Kingdom. Achebe was born, and studied in an era when the adverse effects and pain of colonialism had become unbearable, and Africans had begun calling for political independence from their colonial masters.

Achebe first published his novel Things Fall Apart in 1958. The novel presents the unique nature and special qualities of the West African pre-colonial culture and general ways of living. Achebe expressed in details, the harmonious co-habitation of the pre-colonial West African people, how they lived in communities and cared for one another.
The novel also presents the unique nature of the West African pre-colonial education system. Achebe implicitly identified the pre-colonial education system as a means through which the pre-colonial societies maintained their culture and general ways of living, while they also ensured a stable and well governed societies from one generation to the other, before they were colonised by the imperialist West.

Achebe’s novel also presents the step-by-step process of the imperialists’ incursion and colonisation of certain West African pre-colonial societies. The novel identified quite significantly, the brutality, pain and the loss of identity which the West African pre-colonial people experienced as a result of colonialism.

Achebe’s novel was written and published in an era when the call for the political independence of the African states had reached its peak. One of the implied purposes of Achebe’s novel however, was to reinforce the nationalists’ struggle for political independence of the African states.

Therefore, Achebe presented to his readers, “a past which flowed with milk and honey”. He presented the pre-colonial ways of life as a way of life which was completely disconnected from the social, political and economic ways of life in the colonial era. He identified the gradual but steady replacement of the West African traditional cultures and belief systems with the colonialists’ ideologies and worldviews. Achebe’s story also presents how the pre-colonial West Africans were tactically enslaved in their own land and their culture and belief system undermined.

The direct interpretation of the title of Achebe’s book Things Fall Apart, a phrase he took directly from W.B. Yeats’s poem “The Second Coming”, denotes the destabilisation, disorganisation or the destruction of something which was well and peacefully organised, and / or the fall of a once peacefully functioning social structure.

Therefore, Achebe’s experiences of repression, oppression and extortion associated with colonialism can be considered as a key motivating element in his effort to emancipate for the political independence of the African states; a course which he aimed to achieve through his novel, by presenting a past which was harmonious, culturally driven, and morally stable; an era when Africans lived in community, and the attitude of solidarity and commitment to the other prevented greed and selfish attitude, which was prevalent in the colonial masters.
Therefore, Achebe’s perception of the West African pre-colonial era, specifically, his perception of the West African pre-colonial education system, which is referred to in this research project as “implied narrative”, was constructed in the nationalist context, and it has emancipatory character.

4.2.2 The Narrative Interview Participants

The narrative interview participants are three traditional craftsmen: the blacksmith, the traditional medicine man and Ifa oracle priest, and the traditional entertainer (the talking drum player). The three participants were between the ages of 65 and 85 years old at the time the interviews were conducted. Therefore, the interview participants were born between 1928 and 1948 (see Chapter 3.6.1).

Due to the rural locations of the interview participants, they were able to experience the pre-colonial styled education system. They were born, and they learnt their different crafts in an era when the adverse effects of colonialism was strongly felt by the colonised African societies, and total resentments towards colonialism and the colonial masters, and the call for political independence of the African states were on the rise.

Therefore, the interview participants had first-hand experiences of the extortion and pain which was associated with colonialism, and the gradual but steady loss of identity of the colonised African societies. They (the interview participants) also had the privilege of experiencing the collapse of the colonial empires, and the long awaited political independence of the African states from their colonial masters.

After the collapse of the colonial empires, certain Africans hoped for the return of the independent African societies to their pre-colonial socio-political structures and their pre-colonial ways of life. Rather, the newly independent African societies reinstated the socio-political structure which was introduced by their colonial masters (Dowden, 2008; Kingsley, 2010; Zulu, 2006).

Therefore, the interview participants, having experienced colonialism and the cultures associated with it, they witnessed the re-establishment of the socio-political structure which was introduced by the colonialists, in their newly independent societies. The socio-political structure which have so far been considered to have led to the gradual but steady extinction of their pre-colonial cultures and worldviews.
Therefore, although the interview participants expressed their perceptions of the West African pre-colonial education system in 2013, which marked over five decades since the wave of political independence swept across the African continent, the participants’ perceptions reflect a strong belief in the pre-colonial education system, and certain degree of distrust in the Western styled system of education. During the three interview sessions, the interview participants stated that, the adoption of the Western styled system of education in Nigeria has led to the collapse of the traditional values and believe system.

4.3 Data Presentation and Analysis

As identified in the previous chapter, this research is based on narratives of certain West Africans (specifically Nigerians) which was collected through two specific means, namely, narrative interviews and the “implied narrative” process which involved the use of fiction story.

Fiction is an objective representation of the author’s “reality” (Badley, 2003; Clough, 2002; Wyatt, 2007). In so far as this research is concerned with exploring perceptions, the use of fiction to complement real life experiences of the same “reality” is therefore considered valuable.

The narrative interview data were collected through three broad open ended questions which prompted the interview participants to give detailed narrative accounts of their experiences of the West African pre-colonial styled education.

Therefore, in this chapter, I will present and analyse the data on which the discussion and recommendations of this research are based, using the main research question and the first two sub-questions as themes of presentation.

Research Questions:

**How do West Africans perceive the West African Pre-colonial Education? A study of Selected Narratives from Nigeria.**

Sub-questions:

1. How do West Africans perceive the structure of the West African pre-colonial education?
2. What do West Africans perceive to be the significance of the pre-colonial education in the pre-colonial West African societies?

3. What influences the perceptions of West Africans of the West African pre-colonial education?

4.3.1 Education in the Pre-colonial West Africa –The Narrators’ Perceptions

As identified in chapter two which reviewed some of the existing literatures in the field of African education, “education had existed in Africa since Africans became socially organised” (Obanya, 1995 p. 4). However, the system of education have undergone several reforms and restructuring processes; as Africa, specifically West Africa, went through its phases of change and transformation in all ramifications.

This sub-chapter presents aspects of the narratives of Achebe and the interview participants, which reflects what their perceptions of the West African pre-colonial education system are.

4.3.1.1 Education as an Obligation

Based upon the understanding that education is the core of the West African pre-colonial societies (Obanya, 1995), the narrators implied in their individual narratives that, education was considered as an obligation of every member of the said pre-colonial societies. The narratives show that, at every given time of the pre-colonial era, every age and gender group, and each member of an age and gender group is obliged to educate and / or be educated. Therefore, the narratives implicitly identified that, with such attitude towards education, certain West African pre-colonial societies maintained certain social, economic and spiritual structure over time.

Chinua Achebe in his book Things Fall Apart, he presents the main character of his story “Okonkwo”, as a very successful, influential and highly respected man in his clan. Okonkwo’s main goal in life was never to be like his father “Unoka”. At a very young age, Okonkwo rejected the legacy of his father, and vowed to do everything possible to become a great man, a man of title in his clan, a man who would raise children who will become great after him, and children who will reject the legacy of their grandfather Unoka.
“Unoka was lazy and improvident and quite incapable of thinking about tomorrow” (Achebe, 1958, p. 4). Unoka’s goal in life was to eat, drink palm-wine and to live each day without much thought of what tomorrow might bring. During his life time, Unoka did not have any title in his clan. He was a debtor and could not afford to pay all his debts even if he wanted to.

Therefore, Okonkwo’s decision never to be like his father made him very ambitious and aggressive towards any sign of weakness, laziness and improvidence around him. He had no respect for lazy and unsuccessful men. He treated such men with contempt. Okonkwo vowed to raise children who will live by, and carry on the standard he had set for himself and his household, and not by the legacy of their grandfather. As a result, Okonkwo was obliged to educate his children in certain values and standards he had set for himself and his household.

Okonkwo was delighted at the development of his eldest son “Nwoye”, which is due to what he (Okonkwo) assumed to be Nwoye’s openness to the type of education which must be given to his kind due to his gender and his role as the first son in his father’s household:

Okonkwo was inwardly pleased at his son’s development... he wanted Nwoye to grow into a tough young man capable of ruling his father’s household when he was dead and gone to join the ancestors. He wanted him to be a prosperous man... And so he was always happy when he heard him grumbling about women. That showed that in time he would be able to control his womenfolk.

SO Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his Obi, and he told them stories of the land – masculine stories of violence and bloodshed... (p. 49-51).

In the light of the above, Achebe stresses the responsibility of the parties involved in the pre-colonial education processes. The teacher who often belongs to the category of the older age group, is obliged to educate the younger generation (the learner), for the sake of “continuity of life” and succession. On the other hand, the learner is also obliged to be educated in order to fulfil his or her social, economic and spiritual responsibilities within the pre-colonial family, clan and society.

On the other hand, according to the narratives of the interview participants, the obligatory nature of the pre-colonial education system deprived the learner the benefit of career choice. The three narrators (i.e. the blacksmith, the traditional medicine man and Ifa oracle priest, and the traditional entertainer) clearly identified, in the beginning of their narrative accounts, how they were restricted to make their own choice of career, and or specific skill in which they
were most interested. Rather, a specific career had been chosen for them by a supernatural order through their parents. The issue is referred to by the blacksmith as follows:

Researcher:
Why did you chose to become a blacksmith, and why not something else?
Answer:
‘Emm’... thank you. I wonder where to start from. Well... at first, I did not want to work as a blacksmith. My parents were worshipers of ‘Ogun’ (the god of iron) but my father was a cocoa beans farmer. I remember my father told me that he and my mother had prayed to Ogun to give them a male child. I have an elder sister who was their first daughter, of course. So, my father wanted a male child who would bear his name after him. Ogun answered their prayers of course, which was why I was born (he laughed)...

Researcher:
So, you did not want to be a blacksmith or what? I did not understand that?
Answer:
No! I wanted to go to school. There was a school in my village when I was a child, some kind of church school, and I think the reason why I liked the school was that, they often gave sweets and biscuits to most of the girls who attended the school... So I wanted to go to the school as well like my sister but my father told me that only lazy boys and girls go to the school. My father told me that, it was only to keep them away from home in order to allow their mothers to cook.

Researcher:
So, if you had a choice, you would not have chosen to be a blacksmith?
Answer:
‘Emm’...I ‘em’...I think my parents made the right decision for me. To go against the decision of my parents of course would be to go against the wishes of the gods...

In other to ensure succession and maintain certain standard of life, Achebe’s story and the extract from the blacksmith’s narrative shows that, to educate others and to be educated by the more experienced and knowledgeable member of the pre-colonial family, clan or society, was considered to be a naturally compulsory endeavour for every member of certain West African pre-colonial societies, and the choice of what was to be learned was pre-agreed and ordained by a supernatural order.

4.3.1.2 Life Experiences as Curriculum of the West African Pre-colonial Education

Most forms of education in today’s West Africa, as do every other part of the modern world, have curriculums. A document which states specific contents which should be addressed in
the process of educating the learner and the learner must show a good understanding of the said contents in order to obtain accredited or recognised qualification.

In the case of the West African pre-colonial education system, as implied in Achebe’s story and in the narratives of the interview participants, the curriculum was not a separate document which was aloof of the teacher or educator; it was the detailed life experiences of the teacher or educator in relation to the skill and / or culture or custom which is being transferred to the learner. The nature of the pre-colonial education curriculum placed the teacher in a position of supreme authority in the skill, culture or custom which is being transferred to the learner.

Because of Okonkwo’s greatest fear, the fear which hunted him throughout his lifetime, the “fear of failure and of weakness” (Achebe, 1958 p.13), the fear of becoming a man just like his father, Okonwo was an extremely hard working man, and he disliked anyone around him who did not possess such character. His commitment to his work, to raising his children to become a man like him, and to his social responsibilities in the clan was remarkable.

During the planting season Okonkwo worked daily on his farms from cockcrow until the chickens went to roost. He was a very strong man and rarely felt fatigue. But his wives and young children were not as strong, and so they suffered. But they dared not complain openly (p13).

Okokwo educated his children based on his experiences of life. Because he wanted his sons to become great warriors and farmers like him, highly respected men who are capable of ruling their own households and hold titles in the clan, he told them stories of warfare, violent stories like how he killed his first man in battle, he taught them how to prepare yam seeds and cultivate virgin land to grow enough yam that would last their household all year round.

Certain aspects of the narrative of the traditional medicine man and the Ifa oracle priest present a view of the pre-colonial teacher or educator, what they taught, and how:

Researcher:
...who taught you, and how were you taught?
Answer:
First, just like I said earlier, that the gods know everything. Do you remember that?
Researcher:
Yes!

Answer:

I did not have a master in this profession. The gods are my master. My grandfather was the one who first showed me the healing power in leaves and roots, and what they can do for human beings...
My grandfather took me everywhere he went to get herbs in the forest; I did almost everything with him. So, as a child, all that I could remember was that I was always with him, whenever he was getting herbs or preparing them. As a child, I could remember that he often showed me some plants and told me what they are called and what they are used for. So I did not learn my profession from anyone other than my grandfather.

Researcher:

How exactly, as in step by step, did he teach you?

Answer:

That is a funny question. There was nothing of such with me. You see, this profession is in sections. Some people are only interested in knowing a section of it and not all. Some only would like to know which herb can cure what disease, while some people would like to combine learning to become an Ifa priest...
Well, because I learnt mine from an old man who was also like a father to me, I started from running errands for him. As a child, he often asked me to go and get certain leaves and roots. He asked me to grind them together and mix this with that and so on. That grew into me sitting in when he is having consultation with the gods and with his clients. And all I did for a very long time was just to pass him certain things during the consultations, and sometimes, I had to mix some herbs and prepare some rituals and so on.
At some point, I remember that I started attending to pregnant women and some people with some kind of diseases or sickness...

Researcher:

Can you remember how long it took you to master each aspect and how old you were when you were able to handle consultations on your own without your grandfather being present?

Answer:

‘Emm’... I cannot remember the exact age I was. You see, all I could remember was that I was old enough to be with a woman (he laughed). I grew up into it so it is hard for me to tell you how long it took me to learn each aspect...
He made me understand that people would take me as a liar if I do not understand the message of the gods to them. It is when I actually understand the message that I will know exactly what their problem is, and then I will be able to prescribe the most appropriate medicine for them...
However, another very important aspect to my learning was questioning. I was a child who enjoyed asking questions. I learnt most of the things I know through questions, and I meant serious questions at a very early age. However, he always answered my questions, and I really loved him for that. I think one of the fastest, and I think the best way to learn is to ask questions. Questions about things you do not know and will like to know about. Asking questions tells more about the learner. It shows that the person is not just interested in what is being taught, rather, it shows that the person has passion for it. I asked my grandfather about some past stories of why the gods did certain things to certain people, and he gave me a lot of explanations as to the meanings behind those stories. Therefore, I know what to look for when I come across such situation(s) in my practice.

In the light of Okonkwo’s approach to educating his sons, and the extract from the narrative of the traditional medicine man and the Ifa oracle priest, it can be said that, in relation to the obligatory nature of the pre-colonial education, which is based on the need for succession and social, economic and spiritual continuity of life, the pre-colonial teacher had the responsibility to transfer the skills, culture and custom of the pre-colonial society to the younger generation i.e. the learner(s), based on the teacher’s personal experiences of the said skills, culture and custom.

The above narratives implied that, the learner did not acquire the said skills, culture and custom of the pre-colonial society as it was in the previous generation, rather, a set of skills, culture and custom as refined by the experiences of the pre-colonial teacher. This unique nature of the curriculum increased the adaptability of the West African pre-colonial societies to their constantly changing environments (physical, social, economic, etc.).

4.3.1.3 West African Pre-colonial Education was Multi-purpose in Nature

In their narratives, Achebe and the interview participants implied that, the purpose of the West-African pre-colonial education was much more than transmitting skills from the pre-colonial teacher to the learner and / or developing the qualities of a good craftsmanship in the learner. The pre-colonial education system was also aimed at imbibing in the learner, several other required skills which were needed for social and spiritual responsibilities, the ability to adapt to the constantly changing physical environment and the pre-colonial social situations.

Okonkwo’s reason for educating his sons at an early age was not only to make them skilled farmers like him. He educated them in skills required in taking on the social responsibilities
associated with been successful. Okonkwo also hopped to give his sons a good start in life. A privilege he could not afford due to his father’s miserable life.

*Inwardly Okonkwo knew that the boys were still too young to understand fully the difficult art of preparing seed-yams. But he thought that one could not begin too early. Yam stood for manliness, and he who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was very great man indeed. Okonkwo wanted his son to be a great farmer and a great man. He would stamp out the disquieting signs of laziness which he thought he already saw in...* (Achebe, 1958 p. 31).

In the above extract, “Okonkwo’s” wish to educate his sons in their early age was not only to make them great farmers, but also to make them great men. “Okonkwo” was a highly respected individual in his clan, and he occupied a respected and envied position in the council of elders. Therefore, he wished to raise children who would not only farm the land and provide food for their household, but children who would succeed him and take over his respectable and envied position in the clan, after him. Therefore, Achebe’s story implied that, with such purpose of education, the learner did not only learn the art of farming, but also the customary and political practices of the clan.

The analysis of the narrator’s stories revealed that, the multi-purpose nature of the West African pre-colonial education system was also aimed at increasing the number of skills acquired by the learner, which could in turn increase the “employability” of the learner:

*Researcher:*

*Can you still remember some of the processes which you went through?*

*Answer:*

‘Emm’... (silence)... as a little boy, when I started going to the market places and attending ceremonies with my father, the first thing I started with was the making of the drum itself. I must say that it is a very long process to actually make a drum. You see those drums hanging there (on the wall in the room), they were once logs of wood. So, the first thing I started doing was that, my father showed me how to make my own drum. During the process of learning how to make a drum, of course, I learnt how to fix broken drums, how to replace the skin, what materials to use, and the once to avoid. Therefore, my father first showed me how to make my own drum, and that process went on for many years. I must say, I made a lot of drums for my father in the process and for sale as well. I must say that I am much better making drums and fixing it, than playing it.

*Researcher:*

Were you still going out with your father to his performances even when you were learning how to make and fix drums?
Answer:
‘Oh yes! Even during his performances, sometimes I needed to fix some of the drums and / or tune them. A drum is like a little child which requires constant care and needs to be looked after.
...by the time I became a good drum maker, I think I was already like a young man by then. So, I was able to make my own drum, and then my father taught me a lot of the gimmicks of the job of an entertainer...’

Based upon the above extracts, Achebe and the interview participants implied that, the multi-purpose nature of the pre-colonial education system did not only serve economic purposes. Their narratives indicated that, pre-colonial education also increased the ability of the pre-colonial society to effectively defend itself against any external incursions. In Achebe’s story, young men were also trained in the art of warfare and how to effectively defend their clan or tribe from their enemies. Although they farmed their land, provided food for their households, produced equipment which was needed for the production of goods and services, they also ran the social and political affairs of their clans and kingdoms, etc. The pre-colonial West Africans were also defenders of their territories and of their clans and kingdoms against their enemies.

4.3.1.4 West African Pre-colonial Education was Cultural and Place-based

In so far as, “education had existed in Africa since Africans became socially organised” (Obanya, 1995 p. 4), one can assume that such is the case in every socially organized society across the globe. Therefore, every socially organized “pre-modern or modern” society has its own system of education. However, the culture and custom, and the immediate environment—physical, spiritual, social, etc. plays (or should play) significant roles in determining the purpose, content, and the method of education in the said societies.

Okonkwo’s clan was very rich in cultural practices. Wise men and women in the clan often presented their thoughts and ideas in form of adages and proverbs. On occasions, people expressed themselves metaphorically, and sometimes long and formal conversations were held in such manner.

On one formal occasion, an old man made a remark about Okonkwo’s success in the clan, how he (Okonkwo) had risen from a very poor and unfortunate background to become one of the greatest men “Umofia” had ever seen. The old man said:
Looking at a king’s mouth, one would think he never sucked at his mother’s breast (Achebe, 1958 p. 25).

On another occasion, during a kindred meeting which was held to plan an upcoming social event, Okonkwo had called a man who contradicted him during the meeting “a woman”. Because the man who contradicted him had no title, Okonkwo asked him to “remain silent when real men are speaking”. Okonkwo’s comment was considered to be rude, arrogant and socially unacceptable by everyone present at the kindred meeting. So the oldest man at the meeting intervened, he discouraged such attitude of arrogance, and reminded Okonkwo why he should treat his kinsmen with respect:

The oldest man said sternly that those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble. Okonkwo said he was sorry for what he said, and the meeting continued (p.25).

According to the interview participants and Achebe, the West African pre-colonial education system was grounded in the culture and customs of the pre-colonial societies. The narratives implied that every step in the process of educating the learner was followed in line with the culture and custom of the said pre-colonial societies. The narrators also implicitly identified that the immediate environments- physical, spiritual and social- were also of significance in relation to the pre-colonial system of education. The narratives further implied that, the physical environment was a key determining factor of the predominant skills which were required for survival in certain West African pre-colonial societies. With education based on the natural, spiritual and social resources which was available in the immediate environment, the West African pre-colonial societies were considered subsistent in their social and economic affairs.

4.3.1.5 The Narrators’ Perception of the Core Nature of West African Pre-colonial Education

According to Dewey, “education in itself is considered to be the means for the social continuity of life” (Dewey, 2011, p.5). The aspects of the narratives presented so far, can be associated to Dewey’s ideology of education being the means through which every society can preserve its values and customs, and certain skills which are generally associated to such society.
The narrators perceived the West African pre-colonial education system as obligatory, an endeavor which every member of certain West African pre-colonial society, young and old, men and women, engaged themselves in, not entirely as a result of their individual choices, but as a responsibility which was naturally required. Implicitly, every member of certain West African pre-colonial societies (from the king/ruler of the kingdom or clan to the least individual) created their individual successor through the pre-colonial education system. Therefore, certain West African pre-colonial societies were able to maintain certain social structure, economy and spiritual life from one generation to the other.

Therefore, if education was implied as being obligatory according to Achebe’s story and the extract from the blacksmith’s narrative as presented above, could one assume that every member of the West African pre-colonial societies had access to “required” education, which could have been based on either what was pre-ordained by a spiritual order, or as a result of their social responsibilities? However, such rhetorical question brings to light the issue of learning difficulties as a result of intellectual disabilities in certain West African pre-colonial societies. One could only imagine the experiences of individuals with learning difficulties in such pre-colonial societies with such purpose of education.

Another unique character of the West African pre-colonial education as perceived by Achebe and the interview participants is the unique nature of its curriculum. What was taught and the method through which the contents of education was transmitted was based on the practical life experiences of the pre-colonial teacher or educator.

As a result, such unique nature of the curriculum did not only give the pre-colonial teacher or educator the absolute authority over the processes of education, it also created an avenue for social, economic and spiritual transformation as the pre-colonial societies continued from one generation to the other. In other words, the pre-colonial teacher or educator transmitted the skills, cultural values and customs to the learner- the younger generation- based on the teacher’s experiences of the said skills, cultural values and customs.

Therefore, the learner i.e. the younger generation, did not acquire the exact old skills, cultural values and customs which the pre-colonial teacher or educator acquired from the previous generation before them, rather, the learner received the new skills, cultural values and customs as refined by the experiences of the pre-colonial teacher or educator.
Therefore, an open ended question which can be explored further in this case is that, if missionary and colonial education did not take over from the West African pre-colonial education system, under the circumstances which it did, would pre-colonial education system have evolved naturally, to incorporate “modern” (twenty-first century West African societies) skills, culture and customs? However, exploring a possible explanation to such question is not the focus of this research project.

Another character of the West African pre-colonial education system as implicitly identified by the narrators was that, it promoted subsistence way of life in certain West African pre-colonial societies. As implied by the narrators, the multi-purpose nature of the West African pre-colonial education system did not only provide just enough skilled individuals to meet the “required” work force need of certain pre-colonial societies., In most cases, it also equipped the learner(s) with the “required” skills and wisdom to run the political, social, spiritual, economic and security affairs of the pre-colonial kingdoms or clans.

Although it can be considered to be a great advantage for a society, either pre-modern or modern society, to have the required capacity in human and material resources to meet its needs without needing external support either in skills or material resources, however, a question which can be explored further is that, could such subsistent capability result into the isolation of such society from the rest of the world around it? However, exploring a possible explanation for such question is not the focus of this research project.

Lastly, the narrators also implicitly identified another very important character of the West African pre-colonial education system. They implied that, in certain West African pre-colonial societies, the purposes, contents and methods of education was grounded in the cultures and the environments (physical, spiritual and social environment) of the said pre-colonial societies.

As implied in Achebe’s story, the purposes, contents and methods of the West African pre-colonial education system were based on the philosophical position of the pre-colonial societies, and the availability of material resources in their immediate environments. Implicitly, the West African pre-colonial education system was aimed at nourishing, developing and sustaining certain West African pre-colonial societies.
4.3.2 The Structure of the West African Pre-colonial Education

To refer to the West African pre-colonial education as a system of education, reflects a certain degree of structure in the said system of education. As identified by Mazonde (2001) and Zulu (2006), pre-colonial education across Africa was a well-structured system of education (in the African pre-colonial context) with specific purposes, organized curriculum contents and effective methods of educating the learner(s).

In this section, the narrators’ perception of how the West African pre-colonial education system was structured is presented in three broad sub-headings.

4.3.2.1 The West African Pre-colonial Educational Policies and Policy Makers

The term “educational policies” in today’s West African societies is generally used to refer to a set of policy documents which clearly state the purposes of education, aims of education, the procedures to follow in order to achieve the said purposes and aims, requirements for educational institutions, who is qualified to be a student, who is qualified to be a teacher, etc. While policy makers are referred to as a group of professionals whose responsibility is to draw up educational policies.

Due to the professional nature of the said documents and the level of professionalism required to be qualified as a policy maker, it is natural not to imagine the existence of such sophisticated documents, nor the existence of such professionals who are equipped with the skills and competence required for producing such documents in the West African pre-colonial societies.

The interview participants and Achebe in his implied narrative, significantly identified a spiritual order, usually referred to as “the ancestors or the gods of the kingdom or clan”. The narrators implicitly identified that these ancestral spirits or the gods were responsible for choosing the career path for every individual in certain West African pre-colonial societies, what skills are to be learned and how such skills must be taught, and by whom.

In Achebe’s story, spirituality was a significant element of the pre-colonial tribes and kingdoms. Achebe implied that everything was made and controlled by spiritual forces. The gods were totally in charge. Feasts and festivals were organized to thank the gods, and / or present sacrifices to them.
Ani (the earth goddess) played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity. She was the ultimate judge of morality and conduct. And what was more, she was in close communion with the departed fathers of the clan whose bodies had been committed to the earth.

The feast of the New Yam was held every year before the haves began, to honour the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan. New yams could not be eaten until some had first been offered to those powers. Men and women, young and old, looked forward to the New Yam Festival because it began the season of plenty – the New Year (Achebe, 1958 p. 35).

The narrative of the traditional medicine man and Ifa oracle priest elaborated on the roles of the ancestral spirits in relation to the West African pre-colonial education system as follows:

Researcher:
So, are you saying that you did not choose to do this work and that you were forced into doing it?

Answer:
My ancestors and the gods chose it for me because it is my destiny.

Researcher:
I am not quite clear about that, does that mean that the ancestors and the gods chose everyone’s work for them?

Answer:
...Ifa oracle taught us that, human lives and their professions depend on what destiny their ancestors and the gods had chosen for them.
The Ifa oracle has 16 modules. Every child has a destiny chosen for him/her by his/her ancestors and the gods. It is out of those 16 modules that the Ifa oracle will identify which destiny has been allotted to every born child.
...When a child is born, the elders will look into his destiny to find out what his/her destiny is in life, and this is so true because, as the child grows older, he/she will start going in the direction of his/her destiny...
...therefore, if a child goes against what the oracle has chosen for him/her, such child has no chance of being successful in anything he/she does in life. This what some religion will refer to as the child's star, the star which carries its own meaning, and such meaning then explains what the child is meant to become. Some other religions might refer to it as “elements” - that is, some people are created from the element of fire, some from the element of water and for some it is the element of wind while some from the element of the earth. All these elements carry the meaning of the child's destiny.

Researcher:
So, does that mean that the child does not grow up to find out his own module of the Ifa oracle?
Answer:

No! It was the parent who did that for their children. When a child is born in the Yoruba culture, from the first day of birth, the parents will put a certain amount of money (a piece of money) under the child’s pillow. On the third day, a certain ritual has to be made, called 'ita'. The parents will take the piece of money and then consult the gods through the Ifa oracle. It is during that consultation that the gods inform the parents of which module of Ifa the child has chosen.

Achebe and the traditional medicine man and Ifa oracle priest in their narrative implied that due to the spiritual nature of the ancestral spirits and their super-natural powers, they have the ability to see the future of the kingdom or clan, and they have a clear overview of the needs of the kingdom or clan. Implicitly, the narrators believed that the said ancestral spirits appointed every born child, and gave the child the responsibility of meeting particular need(s) in the pre-colonial kingdom or clan. It was the said responsibility of the child which must determine the child’s educational needs, and from whom such education must be received.

Based on such beliefs, it was understood based on the narrative accounts that certain West African pre-colonial societies were able to create the “actual number” of skilled individuals enough to sustain the social, spiritual and economic structures of the pre-colonial societies.

Such belief and understanding is a strong indication of the prominent role of spirituality in certain West African pre-colonial societies, and specifically in their pre-colonial system of education. Achebe again referenced to the prominence of the ancestral spirits as follows:

_The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them, especially at festivals and also when an old man died, because an old man was very close to the ancestors. A man’s life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors_ (p. 115).

Achebe’s definition of the ancestral spirits presents a spiritual order which is made up of the souls of individuals who were once living members of the said pre-colonial societies, whose life time experiences qualified them to make decisions in relation to the purpose and the future of the said pre-colonial societies, by influencing their systems and processes of education.
Therefore, the above extracts shows that in the context of certain West African pre-colonial societies, the ancestors of a given kingdom or clan had the responsibility of determining what the pre-colonial “educational policies” were, and the processes of implementing the said policies were closely monitored and regulated by the ancestors themselves.

4.3.2.2 Formal and Informal Structure of the West African Pre-colonial Education

In today’s West African societies, societies which are now driven, significantly by Western styled system of education, and the wishes and needs for improvement in science and technology, the West African pre-colonial education is often referred to as informal education.

The pre-colonial educational processes are often considered to be a system which was based on oral tradition. Therefore, when compared to the obtaining systems of education across West Africa today, West African pre-colonial education system is generally referred to as unstructured and practically informal in nature.

As identified in the literature review chapter, Mazonde (2001) and Zulu (2006), argued that African pre-colonial education was as structured as education can be, in the context of African pre-colonial era. Therefore, to refer to all forms of African pre-colonial education as informal is fallacious.

The three interview participants and Achebe in their narratives identified certain aspects of the structure of the West African pre-colonial education system. Their narratives reflected certain formal and informal aspects of the pre-colonial education system, stages of the pre-colonial education system, and the gender specific nature of the pre-colonial education system. Certain aspect of the Blacksmith’s narrative presents some “formal character” of the West African pre-colonial education system:

Researcher:

My next question now is to ask you how you were taught. I mean the processes. Could you tell me as much as you can remember?

Answer:

Well, ‘emm’...there is nothing I think I can compare it to right now. Mine was a little bit of a difficult process. At first, I had to go and live in the house of my
teacher, just like his son, and I was only able to go back home for the weekend, and sometimes, it was only every two weeks...

Some of the commonly known characters of Western education across West Africa are: the formal education of the child or learner usually takes place outside the learner’s home, and it is facilitated by a professionally trained educator (the teacher) who is skilled in the art of teaching. The Blacksmith’s narrative is an indication that certain individuals in certain West African pre-colonial societies may have experienced the formal nature of their pre-colonial education system. These certain individuals, like the above narrator (the Blacksmith), were educated away from their homes, by skilled crafts men whose unique skills, craftsmanship and life experiences qualified them to teach the younger generation.

Furthermore, the narrator also implicitly identified another formal aspect of the West African pre-colonial education system in his narrative as follows:

Researcher:
So when did you finish your training?

Answer:
‘Emm’...I cannot remember exactly how old I was then because, it was a long time ago. Well, I do remember that I was quite a man by that time. I only remember that after a very long time that I could manage to work on my own, and my teacher did not need to be at the workshop as he used to. I managed to do all the work, deliver to the customers and do a lot of things by myself.
...when I got home, at my parents’, my father told me that my teacher had given him good reports of me, and that he had asked that at the next ‘Ogun’ festival, I should buy my own dog for the sacrifice, which meant that I was fit to be on my own. I was so happy that day. My first thought was that, now I can make my own living and have a wife. I was very happy about it.

Researcher:
Could you say something about buying your own dog for the ‘Ogun’ festival?

Answer:
Well, that was my freedom, what you will call graduation today. That meant that I can worship ‘Ogun’ as an individual, and bring my own dog for the sacrifice and do all the rituals of the ‘Ogun’ festival. I remember that he prayed for me during that year’s festival and the dog was used for the sacrifice in my name. And we had some celebration after that, whereby my parents brought some gifts to my teacher, and he also prayed for me a lot. After few weeks, I found some space for myself, where I could work and it became my workshop for many, many years.
Graduation and graduation ceremonies are considered to be a key element of Western styled education in today’s West African societies, as it marks the end of a course of study. Similarly, the Blacksmith’s narrative indicated that in certain West African pre-colonial societies, every milestone achievements of the child from birth until death was marked with certain rites. Generally speaking, the narrative implied that, these milestone achievements also included becoming a master of certain skill(s) and attaining a social and or spiritual position in the pre-colonial society through a series of educational (and initiation) processes.

On the other hand, several authors may have argued against the formal nature of African pre-colonial education system based on the understanding that the African pre-colonial education was strongly based on oral tradition. Achebe in his story identified some element of writing in certain West African pre-colonial society, which was in relation to record keeping. A skill which could only have been learnt through certain process of education:

...look at the wall, he said, pointing at the far wall of his hut, which was rubbed with red earth so that it shone. Look at those lines of chalk; and Okoye saw groups of short perpendicular lines drawn chalk. There were five groups, and the smallest group had ten lines. Unoka had a sense of the dramatic and so he allowed a pause, in which he took a pinch of snuff and sneezed noisily, and then he continued: Each group there represents a debt to someone, and each stroke is one hundred cowries. You see, I owe that man a thousand cowries. But he has not come to wake me up in the morning for it. I shall pay you, but not today (Achebe, 1958 p. 7).

Furthermore, Achebe in his story also implicitly identified the various stages involved in the processes of the West African pre-colonial education system. When a child was born in Umofia, the first teacher of the child was the mother. The mother was expected to educate the child in the moral values of the clan. Every mother in Umofia had the responsibility of introducing their children at a very early stage, to the moral values of the clan, and to introduce them to the need for, and reasons behind certain social behaviours in the clan. This was commonly done through oral tradition.

Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell, and which she no doubt still told to her younger children.

...he remembered the story she often told of the quarrel between the Earth and Sky long ago, and how Sky withheld rain for seven years, until crops withered and the dead could not be buried...
That was the kind of story that Nwoye loved. But he knew that they were for foolish women and children, and he knew that his father wanted him to be a man. And so he feigned that he no longer cared for women’s stories (p. 49-51).

When he (Okonkwo) was a child his mother had told him a story about it. But it was as silly as all women’s stories. Mosquitos, she had said, had asked Ear to marry him, whereupon Ear fell on the floor in uncontrollable laughter. “How much longer do you think you will live?” she asked. “You are already a skeleton”. Mosquito went away humiliated, and anytime he passed her way he told Ear that he was still alive (p. 71).

As implied in Achebe’s story, at a certain age, depending on the pre-colonial society, the children were educated separately based on their gender, and by different teachers. The content of education at this stage was based on the child’s social responsibilities. Okonkwo’s daughters were educated by their mothers in skills required to become respectable wives to their husbands, good and caring mothers to their children, and to respect and uphold the moral and cultural values of the clan.

On the other hand, Okonkwo educated his sons in skills required to first protect with respect and reverence, the name of the family. Secondly, to become the head of their household and their women flock, to provide the daily needs of their household, to attend to spiritual, political and economic matters of the clan, and to defend Umofia against enemy kingdoms or clans.

*Okonkwo was inwardly pleased at his son’s development... He wanted Nwoye to grow into a tough young man capable of ruling his father’s household when he was dead and gone to join the ancestors. He wanted him to be a prosperous man...*  
*...so Okonkwo encouraged the boys to sit with him in his Obi, and he told them stories of the land – masculine stories of violence and bloodshed...(p. 49-51).*

Another means through which certain pre-colonial West Africans were educated, as implied by Achebe, was through their peer groups. Achebe implied through his story that every individual at every stage of life in certain West African pre-colonial societies belonged to a certain peer group. However, the nature and responsibilities of the groups varied quite significantly. There was the children group, teenage group of boys and girls, adulthood, council of elders, occult group, etc. These groups were educated separately and for different
purposes, and the transition between the said groups was marked with specific rites and ceremonies.

4.3.2.3 The Community as the Place for Learning

One of the unique natures of the West African pre-colonial education system, as implied in Achebe’s story, was that there was no specific place set aside for most educational activities in Umofia. Unlike the Western styled system of education, where there are classrooms and educational centres where educational activities occur.

As implied by the interview participants and Achebe, most of the West African pre-colonial educational processes did not happen in specific classes or educational centres, most education occurred in every area of life. In Achebe’s story, children were not only educated in their homes, several social events and community activities such as, going to the market places, running errands such as going to the village stream to fetch water, playing with peer groups, attending rites ceremonies, relating with the grown-ups in the neighbourhood, etc. also introduced the child to the socio-cultural values of the clan. Achebe’s story indicated that moral and cultural education mostly occurred this way while more specific education like spiritual education and education in specific skills like blacksmithing, etc. occurred at the shrine and or in workshops of the skilled craft men.

4.3.2.4 The Narrators’ Perception of the Structure of West African Pre-colonial Education

As identified in the literature review chapter, some authors and educational researchers are of the view that African pre-colonial education system was based only on oral tradition and generally unstructured in nature. However, in the data presented so far, the interview participants and Achebe in their individual narratives have implicitly identified certain structure and certain formal qualities of certain West African pre-colonial education systems.

Although the definition of “structure” and “formality” as referred to in this section so far is based within the context of certain West African pre-colonial societies, the interview participants identified some similarities between what can be considered as structured and formal qualities of the West African pre-colonial education system and the Western styled system of education in today’s West Africa, such as educational policies and policy makers, stages of education, graduation ceremonies, etc.
In this section, the narrators have implied the existence of some form of “pre-colonial educational policies”. Although such educational policies were not physically written in certain documents, and they were not referred to as educational policies, and they can only be accessed through spiritual consultations with certain spiritual order – the ancestral spirits of the given kingdom or clan. It can be considered as an indication that certain West African pre-colonial educational processes were well structured and monitored in order to ensure consistency and stability. The narratives also reveal very significantly, the inevitable roles of spirituality in the West African pre-colonial education processes.

Therefore, assuming such was the case in every West African precolonial society, could one argue that pre-colonial West Africans did not entirely manage their own affairs, rather, they only implemented polices, ideologies, believe system, etc. which was put in place by a spiritual order? In other words, could one argue that West African pre-colonial education system was aimed at preparing West Africans to become passive recipients of rules, believes and ideologies created by certain spiritual order?

In this section, the narrators also implied certain characteristics of the West African pre-colonial education system which indicate the structured nature of the pre-colonial education system, such as the distinction between the formal and the informal aspect of the West African pre-colonial education, the stages of the pre-colonial education, and the gender specific nature of the pre-colonial education.

Another unique character of the structure of the West African pre-colonial education as implied by the narrators in this section is that there were no specific classrooms for teaching and learning, unlike the Western styled system of education in today’s West Africa. Although certain processes of the pre-colonial education took place in the workshops of the skilled craft men and / or at the shrine, most of the pre-colonial educational processes were tailored into the day to day life of the learner; to the point that there were no clear demarcations between the processes of the pre-colonial education and the day to day life of both the pre-colonial teacher(s) and the learner(s).
4.3.3 The Significance of the Pre-colonial Education in the pre-colonial West African Societies.

Education is generally considered to be the core of any given society, both the pre-modern and modern societies. Education is also considered to be the means through which any given society can sustain itself socially and economically, and ensure the continuous existence and transformation of its socio-cultural values and general ways of living (Dewey, 2011; Obanya, 1995/2010).

This section presents what the interview participants and Achebe implied to be some of the significance of the pre-colonial education system in certain pre-colonial West African societies.

4.3.3.1 Education for the Preservation of Culture and General Ways of Life

West African pre-colonial societies have existed in tribes, kingdoms and clans centuries before colonialism (Falola and Fleming, 2009). The said pre-colonial societies were able to maintain certain spiritual, social and economic structures over time, by transmitting their belief system, skills and socio-cultural values from one generation to the other through the processes of the pre-colonial education system.

In his story, Achebe identified one of the means through which Umofia transmitted its moral and socio-cultural values to its younger generation, in order to maintain certain level of morality and respect for the socio-cultural values of the clan:

*The night was impenetrably dark. The moon had been rising later and later every night until now it was seen only at dawn...*

*Low voices, broken now and again by singing, reached Okonkwo from his wives’ huts as each woman and her children told folk stories (Achebe, 1958 p. 90-94).*

Achebe implied that moral and socio-cultural principles were transmitted through oral tradition and through social events like festivals, initiation rites, etc. And the interview participants’ narratives are indications that specific skills and craftsmanship were transmitted through a form of apprenticeship and / or initiation process.

The traditional entertainer in his narrative identified some details of the process through which he acquired his unique skills:
Researcher:
So you learnt how to make drums, and after that what else did you learn?
Answer:
You see, by the time I became a good drum maker, I think I was already like a young man by then. So, I was able to make my own drum, and then my father taught me a lot of the gimmicks of the job of an entertainer. He actually taught me how to truly entertain people. Although by that time, I had already become part of his band. We played together in the market places and during festivals and ceremonies. After the performances, sometimes he would tell me some things which I might have done wrong and some things which I missed. So learning from my father was a very hands-on experience for me, and I really enjoyed it.

Through such distinctive structures of the stages of the West African pre-colonial education system, Achebe implied through his story that certain pre-colonial societies were able to refine and preserve their unique socio-cultural values and certain skills which were particular to them from one generation to the other through the societies’ pre-colonial education system.

4.3.3.2 Education as a Means for Promoting Solidarity for the Other

At a certain point in Achebe’s story, the reign of Okonkwo’s strength, his riches and success was abruptly brought to a stop. It was an unfortunate circumstance which led Okonkwo away from his clan for few years, and created a gap in the clan which was exploited by the white (Western) missionaries and their new government, before Okonkwo’s return.

It was during the burial rites of the oldest man in Umofia, “Ezendu”, that Okonkwo’s loaded gun suddenly exploded, and a piece of metal from the explosion trucked the sixteen years old son of Ezendu in the heart while he was dancing the traditional farewell dance for his father with his half-brother.

The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime was of two kinds, male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female, because it had been inadvertent. He could only return to the clan after seven years (Achebe, 1958 p. 117).

Faced with such an unpleasant fate, Okonkwo took the only option he had. Okonkwo flee with his household to “Mbanta” to stay with his mother’s kinsmen, a place he last visited when he was a young boy thirty years ago, when his mother was brought back to Mbanta for burial.
Okonkwo was well received by his late mother’s kinsmen; he was given a plot of land on which he built his new compound for him and his household, and other pieces of land for farming. However, despite the solidarity of his mother’s kinsmen, Okonkwo remained drowned in his sorrow.

“Uchendu”, Okonkwo’s uncle noticed that Okonkwo had given to his sorrow, and he did not seem to be as motivated as he was in Umofia. One day, with the aim of motivating Okonkwo, and to encourage him to be strong, Uchandu presented a long speech to Okonkwo, and he also encouraged his own children to support Okonkwo in finding his feet again.

The men brought their goatskin mats, with which they sat on the floor, and the women sat on a sisal mat spread on a raised bank of earth. Uchendu pulled gently at his grey beard and gnashed his teeth. Then he began to speak, quietly and deliberately, picking his words with great care.

“It is Okonkwo that I primarily wish to speak to,” he began. “But I want all of you to note what I am going to say. I am an old man and you are all children. I know more about the world than any of you. If there is anyone among you who thinks he knows more let him speak up.” He paused, but no one spoke.

“Why is Okonkwo with us today? This is not his clan. We are only his mother’s kinsmen. He does not belong here. He is an exile, condemned for seven years to live in a strange land. And so he is bowed with grief. But there is just one question I would like to ask him. Can you tell me, Okonkwo, why it is that one of the commonest names we give our children is “Nneka” (meaning Mother is Supreme)? We all know that a man is the head of the family and his wives do his bidding. A child belongs to its father and his family and not to its mother and her family. A man belongs to his fatherland and not to his motherland. And yet we say Nneka (Mother is Supreme). Why is that?

..."He does not know that either,” said Uchendu, “and yet he is full of sorrow because he has come to live in his mother land for a few years."

...”Then listen to me,” he said and cleared his throat. “It’s true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother’s hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say that mother is supreme. Is it right that you, Okonkwo, should
bring your mother a heavy face and refuse to be comforted? ... “These are now your kinsmen.” He waved at his sons and daughters (p. 124-126).

According to Kelemba-vita, 1977, cited in Taylor, 1995, as referred to in the literature review chapter, the author defined pre-colonial education as a system of education which was aimed at integrating the learner(s) into their local communities, the process of integration cultured the learner(s) to “lose the illusion of happiness in the state of isolation”, as a result, the learner(s) are transcended into true happiness as a result of their openness to the others, “not for personal benefits but in order to create with everybody a new reality transcending individuals” (p. 24).

Achebe in his story and the interview participants implicitly presented the West African pre-colonial education as a system of education which was aimed at imbibing in the learner(s), the attitude of complete solidarity and commitment to the other, and the willingness to set the needs of others, and of their local community as a priority, and meeting those needs as obligation.

The traditional entertainer in his narrative implicitly identified such attitude of solidarity and commitment to the other when referring to the character of his teacher in relation to his role as the community’s entertainer:

*He was a very good man, and everybody in our village loved and admired him. I remember quite well, that we often fixed people’s drums for free. It is not like today where you have to charge people some kind of fees for everything that you do for them. My father was not like that at all, perhaps that was why almost everybody loved him...*

*We earned our living based on what people gave to us. Some farmers brought us yam and lots of other things; well such was the life of entertainers.*

Based on the narrative of the traditional entertainer, one can assume that the said attitude of solidarity and commitment to the other in certain West African pre-colonial societies was reciprocal. The narrative of the traditional entertainer implied that, the members of the said pre-colonial societies had the responsibility of meeting the needs of the skilled individuals (medicine men, blacksmiths, traditional entertainers, etc.) through several acts of kindness, and the skilled individual had the obligation (as ordained by the ancestral spirits and the gods) to use their unique skills to meet the needs of their local communities. Achebe also implied in his story that individuals in certain West African pre-colonial societies were educated in ways which obliged them to remain connected and committed to their local communities. And the
pre-colonial societies were able to maintain such social relationship from one generation to the other through the pre-colonial education system.

4.3.3.3 Self-Sufficient Pre-colonial Society

Based on the said attitude of solidarity and commitment of the individuals in certain West African pre-colonial societies, and the multipurpose nature of the West African pre-colonial education system, Achebe and the interview participants implied that the pre-colonial societies were able to ensure self-sufficiency in managing their individual affairs (spiritual, social, political, economic, security, etc.).

As implied in Achebe’s story, certain West African pre-colonial societies were able to produce the “required” human capital which was needed in running and maintaining their socio-political, economic and spiritual affairs. The narratives of the interview participants and Achebe’s story further implied that every member of certain pre-colonial societies were obliged by the nature of their responsibility (as ordained by the ancestral spirits and the gods), to contribute their individual skills and knowledge, in order to ensure the sustainability of the ways and standard of living of their local communities. As a result, it can be said that Achebe and the interview participants implied that certain West African pre-colonial societies were self-sufficient societies.

4.3.3.4 The Narrators’ Perception of the Significance of the West African Pre-colonial Education in the Pre-colonial West African Societies

The above section has presented certain aspects of Achebe’s story and the interview participants’ narratives which reflect what they perceived to be the significance of the West African pre-colonial education system on certain West African pre-colonial societies. Achebe and the interview participants were able to implicitly identify certain characteristics of the West African pre-colonial education system which ensured the social, political, economic and spiritual continuity of life in certain West African pre-colonial societies from one generation to the other.

The data presented in this section implied that it was only through the pre-colonial education system, that certain West African pre-colonial societies were able to maintain and preserve their individual culture and general ways of living. Secondly, the data also implied a very
important quality of the pre-colonial education system which promoted effective community living in certain West African pre-colonial societies. In other words, Achebe’s story and the narratives of the interview participants implied that pre-colonial education system was aimed at promoting the attitude of solidarity for the other and commitment to the local communities in the learners.

Finally, it was also implied through the data presented in this section that the West African pre-colonial education system enabled certain pre-colonial societies to be self-sufficient in their affairs. In other words, the pre-colonial education system enabled certain pre-colonial societies to produce the “required skills” which were needed in meeting their social, political, economic and spiritual needs. As implied by the narratives, the skilled individuals in certain West African pre-colonial societies were obliged by the nature of their responsibilities and commitments to their local communities, to use their skills, not for their individual gain alone, but also, to ensure the sustainability of their local communities.

4.3.4 West African Pre-colonial Education through the Eyes of the Narrators

This sub-chapter presents the synopsis of the data presented in this chapter. It is aimed at constructing an “interpretive bridge” which links the data presented in this chapter to the discussion in chapter five.

As identified in the beginning of this chapter, the aim is to present aspects of the narrator’s narratives which reflect “education as a means for the social continuity of life” as the conceptual frame or the philosophical ideology which underlined the West African pre-colonial education system; a concept which is situated within the structural functionalism theory which also encompasses modernisation and human capital theory. Secondly, to present both Achebe’s story (the implied narrative) and the narrative interview data not as separate sets of data, rather, as complementary data.

The perceptions were presented in three broad headings which are directly linked to the research questions: education in the pre-colonial West Africa, the structure of the West African pre-colonial education system, and the significance of the pre-colonial education system in certain West African pre-colonial societies, as perceived by Achebe and the three narrative interview participants.
In their narratives, as presented in this chapter, the narrators perceived the West African pre-colonial education system, first as obligatory in nature. In other words, the narrators implied that every individual in certain West African pre-colonial societies, both young and old, male and female, were obliged by the nature of the pre-colonial social organisation, culture, belief system, etc. to educate and be educated, based on the need for succession and “continuity of life”.

Secondly, both the implied narratives and the narrative interview data, as presented in this chapter, shows that the curriculum of the West African pre-colonial education system was not aloof from the pre-colonial teacher or educator. It was based upon the life experiences of the teacher or educator. The pre-colonial teachers or educators transmitted the socio-cultural values, norms, ideologies, and traditional skill(s) to the younger generation based on how they (the teachers or educators) experienced it. In other words, the life experiences of the pre-colonial teachers or educators refined the said socio-cultural values, norms, ideologies, and traditional skill(s), before it was transmitted to the learners. Therefore, the narratives implied that, the younger generation who were the learners by default, did not receive the exact socio-cultural values, norms, ideologies, and traditional skill(s) which their teachers received from the previous generation before them. Rather, a transformed set of socio-cultural values, norms, ideologies, and traditional skill(s) which were refined by the teachers’ experiences of constantly changing environments (physical, spiritual, social, etc.) and moral standards.

The extracts of the narratives presented in this chapter also implied that, as a result of the nature of the curriculum of the West African pre-colonial education system, certain pre-colonial societies were able to increase their adaptability to their constantly changing environments from one generation to the other.

Furthermore, the narrators perceived education in certain pre-colonial West African societies as multi-purpose in nature. Based upon the interpretation of the data presented in this chapter, the West African pre-colonial education system was perceived as a system of education where the learners were not only educated to become farmers, craftsmen and culture abiding natives, the pre-colonial education system also incorporated the learning of the skills and philosophical ideologies which was “required” in running the pre-colonial social, political,
economic, spiritual and security affairs of their local communities into the process of education.

Lastly, education in the pre-colonial West Africa, specifically moral education, is perceived by Achebe and the interview participants to be entirely based on the culture and belief system of certain pre-colonial societies, and education in specific skill(s) is perceived to be place oriented. In other words, Achebe and the interview participants implied that the environments (spiritual environment, social environment, physical environment, etc.) of certain West African pre-colonial societies determined the contents and processes of the West African pre-colonial education system.

**The Structure of the West African Pre-Colonial Education**

The narrators perceived the West African pre-colonial education system as a well-structured and well regulated system of education. However, the term “structured” is defined in the pre-colonial context. First, Achebe and the interview participants implied the existence of certain “un-written policies” which regulated the West African pre-colonial education system, and the existence of a spiritual order (the ancestral spirits and or the goods of the pre-colonial societies) which was responsible for creating, refining and enforcing the said “un-written” educational policies.

Achebe in his story and the interview participants also implicitly identified certain formal and informal aspects of the West African pre-colonial education, which also reflects the stages and the gender specific nature of the various aspects of the West African pre-colonial education system.

Lastly, as part of the structure of the West African pre-colonial education system, Achebe and the interview participants perceived the pre-colonial education system as a system of education whereby the processes of socio-cultural and moral education was neatly tailored into the day to day life of both the learners and the pre-colonial teachers or educators. In other words, the narrators implicitly identified in their stories that there were no specific classrooms or educational centres for most processes of education in certain pre-colonial societies. However, education for specific roles and skills took place at the shrines or in the workshops of the craftsmen.
The Significance of Pre-Colonial Education in the West African Pre-Colonial Societies

Based upon the data presented in this chapter, the West African pre-colonial education system is perceived by the narrators as a system of education which enabled certain pre-colonial societies to preserve their cultures and unique ways of life from one generation to the other despite their constantly changing environments. Secondly, West African pre-colonial education system is also implied by Achebe and the interview participants as a system of education which promotes the attitude of solidarity and commitment to the other in the learners. As a result of the said attitude of solidarity and commitment to the other, the narrators implied that the West African pre-colonial education system kept both the learners and the teachers or educators connected and committed to their local community.

Lastly, the West African pre-colonial education system is also perceived by Achebe and the interview participants as a means through which certain West African pre-colonial societies maintained their self-sufficient nature from one generation to the other. Achebe and the interview participants further implied that, certain pre-colonial societies were able to produce the skills and professionalism required to manage their own social, political, economic, spiritual, and security affairs.

In summary, the data presented in this chapter shows what is implied by Achebe and the interview participants to be the nature, the structure and the significance of the West African pre-colonial education system. Therefore, based upon the data presented in this chapter and the order in which they are presented, the West African pre-colonial education system is considered to be the means through which certain West African pre-colonial societies maintained certain culture and general ways of life from one generation to the other.

The next chapter will discuss the position of this research project on the perceptions of Achebe and the interview participants as presented and analysed in this chapter.
5. Discussion

Achebe and the interview participants (i.e. the narrators) have given their perceptions of the West African pre-colonial education system, which in other words can also be referred to as the narrators’ definitions or perceptions of certain “reality” – the West African pre-colonial education system. It is not the intention of this research project to argue in favour of any particular perception of the West African pre-colonial education system, and / or to create a new perception of the said education system. Rather, one of the intentions of this research project is to facilitate a way of thinking which will allow certain degree of objectivity when referring to the West African pre-colonial education system, with the aim of comparing the said education system with the Western styled system of education in West Africa today.

The aim of this chapter therefore, is to discuss the narrators’ perceptions of the said “reality”, beginning with how the perceptions complement each other. In relation to analysing the context in which the perceptions were made, this chapter explores possible element which may have influenced the narrators’ construction of meanings of the West African pre-colonial education system.

However, it is paramount to reiterate the polarity which exists between the two theories which made up the conceptual framework within which this research project is situated, namely, the structural functionalism theory which also encompasses modernisation and human capital theory, and Freire’s “oppressor consciousness”. The core of structural functionalism is “continuity”, while Freire’s oppressor consciousness is focussed on “the process of transformation (change)”. Therefore, this research project works with the tension which exists between the two theories which constitutes the conceptual framework.

5.1 Conceptual Framework in Relation to Discussion

The data presented in chapter 4 are discussed in this chapter, based upon the epistemological assumption that meanings are generally constructed based on experiences - social-constructivism (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Mallon, 2007; Stam, 2001). The second aspect of the conceptual framework of this research project does present the necessity for exploring possible “elements which may have influenced the narrators’ construction of meanings”. Freire’s concept of the “oppressor consciousness” presents the process through which oppressed individuals or groups or nations tend to generate their world view, based on
their experiences of oppression and their oppressors. Therefore, the narrators’ experiences of colonialism are a key element in the discussion part of this research project.

5.2 The Complementary Nature of the Narrators’ Perceptions

Although Achebe expressed his perception of the West African pre-colonial education system through his novel “Things Fall Apart” fifty five years before the narrative interview participants of this research project expressed their individual perceptions of the same system of education, Achebe’s perception and that of the interview participants present a common understanding of the West African pre-colonial education system.

Achebe and the interview participants perceived the West African pre-colonial education to be a system of education which was aimed at ensuring continuity of the pre-colonial social structure, culture, world view and belief system. In other words, they perceived the West African pre-colonial education system as the means through which certain West African pre-colonial societies ensured the “social continuity of life”, a concept which is situated within the structural functionalism theory, which also encompasses the modernisation and human capital theory.

Every aspect of the human world, physical environment, social environment, spiritual environment, economic environment, etc. is constantly changing. These changes require the human species (and all other existing species) to develop and constantly improve their adaptive skills in order to survive. The West African pre-colonial education system is perceived to be the means through which certain pre-colonial West Africans were able to improve their adaptability to their constantly changing environments.

As a result of the nature of the curriculum of the West African pre-colonial education system, as perceived by the narrators, the contents of the said curriculum was based on, and refined by the teachers’ life experiences. Therefore, the pre-colonial learners, who were by default the younger generations, acquired skills which were relevant for survival in their current and immediate environments.

The relevant skills (social skills, spiritual skills, economic skills, etc.) acquired by the pre-colonial learners through the pre-colonial education processes, as implied by the narrators, enabled the sustainability of certain West African pre-colonial societies from one generation to the other. The said pre-colonial societies were able to manage and improve their individual
social, spiritual, economic and security affairs based on the attitude of solidarity and commitment of the available skilled individuals to their local communities, as obliged by the ancestors of the said pre-colonial societies.

Achebe and the interview participants therefore perceived the West African pre-colonial education system to have enabled consistency and continuity of life in certain West African pre-colonial societies. The consistency and continuity of life from one generation to the other in the said pre-colonial societies is then considered to have resulted into stable pre-colonial societies, in their social, spiritual and economic ways of life.

Furthermore, the cultural and moral values of the pre-colonial societies are perceived to be the foundation of the West African pre-colonial education system. When referring to the stages of the pre-colonial education in their narratives, Achebe and the interview participants identified cultural and moral education as the first stage of the pre-colonial education process. Therefore, the learners were, at an early stage, introduced to the culture; belief system, and the moral standards of their local communities.

Therefore, the West African pre-colonial education system is perceived as the means through which certain pre-colonial societies transmitted and regulated their cultural values and moral standards. As a result, certain West African pre-colonial societies maintained well cultured and morally balanced societies from one generation to the other. The term “morally balanced societies” in this context refers to certain pre-colonial societies which maintained and regulated certain socially acceptable behaviours and world views, which the said societies held to be the basis for morality at any given time.

To conclude, in light of the perceptions presented in the previous chapter, and the manner in which they are presented, this research therefore argue that, Achebe’s “implied perception” of the West African pre-colonial education system, in his book “Things Fall Apart”, complements the perceptions of the interview participants of the same issue.

5.3 How the West African Pre-colonial Education is Perceived

Most authors and researchers who situate their work within the framework of dependency or underdevelopment theory, when they describe their perceptions of key aspects of pre-colonial Africa, such as pre-colonial social structure, pre-colonial socio-cultural values, pre-colonial belief systems, pre-colonial education system, etc., their descriptions often present an era
which is entirely detached from the present social, economic and education system across Africa. They often tend to refer to the Western style system of education across Africa as the major cause of the disconnection between the past and present of the African societies (Arowolo, 2010; Frankema, 2012; Frantz, 1967; Iroegbu, 1994; Kanu, 2010; Mimiko, 2010; Oba and Eboh, 2011; Onwubiko, 1991; Tochukwu, 2013).

In order to arrive at such conclusions about the Western style system of education in Africa, most of the said dependency or underdevelopment theorists often compare African pre-colonial education system to the Western style system of education which is prevalent across Africa today. Such comparison is often based upon a similar perception like that of Achebe in his story, and that of the narrative interview participants of the West African pre-colonial education system.

Therefore, in the light of the above, this research argues that, the perceptions of certain West Africans and certain authors and educational researchers, who situate themselves within the dependency and underdevelopment conceptual framework, although reconceptualised in most cases, they have remained the same since Achebe expressed his perception of the said education system in his novel “Things Fall Apart”, which was first published in 1958.

Some of the authors who may have written about their perceptions of the West African pre-colonial education system (Arowolo, 2010; Frankema, 2012; Kanu, 2010; Mimiko, 2010; Oba and Eboh, 2011; Tochukwu, 2013), and certain West Africans who may have expressed their perceptions of the said education system through interviews or other means, in a similar way as Achebe and the interview participants of this research project, did not have a direct experience of the era when certain Africans like Achebe played their roles in emancipating for the political independence of the African states, yet they tend to present a similar perception to that of Achebe and the interview participants of the West African pre-colonial education system.

Reality is based on social construction. The meaning of a thing is socially constructed based on the society’s experiences of, and / or relationship with the said thing (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Mallon, 2007; Stam, 2001). Therefore, it can be argued that the way the narrators (Achebe and the interview participants) perceived the West African pre-colonial education system has become a “generally accepted reality” of the said pre-colonial education system by certain West Africans, authors and researchers (as referred to in the above
paragraph) who perceive the West African pre-colonial education system in this particular way.

Therefore, this research further argues that, when certain West Africans and authors who situate their work within the conceptual framework of the dependency or underdevelopment theory, describes their perceptions of the West African pre-colonial education system, they tend to often emphasise the element of “continuity” which the said system of education is said to have ensured in the West African pre-colonial societies. However, such descriptions often lack consideration for the possible effects of the processes of transformation (change) which West Africans may have experienced, as West Africa transitioned through the three main socio-political eras, on how West Africans perceive their past.

5.4 The Experience of Colonialism and the Narrators’ Construction of Meaning

When a person, group of people or nations experience oppression, on a scale similar to colonialism, an experience which took away the culture and general ways of life of the colonised, and undermined their knowledge system by imposing a different social structure which is based up on a completely alien culture and knowledge system, the colonised people tend to become frustrated, and develop attitude of resentment towards the culture of colonialism and their colonial masters. Therefore, the drive for freedom is often driven by the will to be free from oppression and the wish to bring the oppressor to justice Freire, (1970).

As a result of the attitude of resentment towards the cultures of colonialism, and the social structure and the knowledge system associated with it, the colonised people tend to desire a return to the life they had prior to their colonisation (oppression). In other words, the desire for freedom is not only driven by the need to be free from oppression, and to bring the oppressor to justice, but also the desire to get their former life back, their liberty, their pre-colonial social structure, and their pre-colonial knowledge system.

Therefore, certain West Africans who personally / directly experienced colonialism might have the tendency to refer to the West African pre-colonial culture, pre-colonial knowledge system and general ways of life, in a different manner compared to people who did not share such personal experiences. The question which arose during the process of this analysis was that, if the narrators did not experience colonialism or if West Africans were not colonised,
would they (the narrators) have perceived their past in a different way? If the education system as it was in the pre-colonial era had gone through a natural process of transformation without any influence from the “imperial West”, would the narrators have perceived the West African pre-colonial education differently?

Therefore, this research argues that the experiences of colonialism played significant role in how the narrators perceived the West African pre-colonial education system. Based upon the socio-political position and the context within which the narrators (Achebe and the interview participants) perceived the West African pre-colonial education system, this research further argues that the narrators may have constructed their meanings of the said pre-colonial education system based on their experiences of colonialism.

Should that be the case, it can then be argued that, the processes of transformation (change) which the narrators may have experienced during and after colonialism, is a key element in how the narrators construct their meanings of certain “realities”.

5.5 The Narrators’ Perceptions, a Romantic View of the past

When most dependency or underdevelopment theorists, and certain West Africans who tend to perceive the West African pre-colonial education system in a similar way as Achebe and the interview participants of this research project, presents their critiques of the Western style system of education in Africa, they often argue that Western styled education promotes inequality amongst the African people. It reinforces the dominating power of the more modern and more sophisticated societies over the so called “developing and underdeveloped societies”. Western styled system of education has led to the excessive production of skilled professionals, which has in turn led to a surge in the unemployment rate in the African societies; etc. (Arowolo, 2010; Frantz, 1967; Iroegbu, 1994; Kanu, 2010; Mimiko, 2010; Oba and Eboh, 2011; Onwubiko, 1991; Tochukwu, 2013). However, such critiques do not usually refer to what might have been the weaknesses of the pre-colonial education system, (which is the system of education often used by the dependency or underdevelopment theorist as the bases of their critiques of the Western style system of education in Africa) when perceived in the context of the twenty-first century.

The narrators fell short of emphasizing some obvious weaknesses of the West African pre-colonial education system if the pre-colonial education system is perceived within the context
of the twenty-first century. Achebe and the interview participants present the West African pre-colonial education system as a system of education which was culturally driven; a system of education which ensured the social continuity of life. It promoted stability and morally balanced pre-colonial societies. It led to the establishment of self-sustaining pre-colonial societies, etc. However, the narrators did not emphasise certain issues such as:

i. **Gender Imbalance**

In the West African pre-colonial education system, the boys and girls were educated separately, when they get to a certain age depending on the pre-colonial society, for different social responsibilities. The girls were educated to be good house wives and mothers to their husbands and children in a culturally acceptable way, and to become good housekeepers; while the boys were educated to be skilled professionals in the traditional arts and crafts, to become the custodians of their women folks and children, to become people who managed the social, political, spiritual, economic and security affairs of their local community.

However, there were very few occasions where certain women in certain pre-colonial societies stepped over their boundaries of limitations, and became prominent figures in their local communities. But most of such women were later crucified for witchcraft by their local communities which perhaps felt threatened by their prominence.

ii. **Lack of Consideration for People with Learning Difficulties**

The West African pre-colonial education system perceived slow learners as being lazy individuals who could not cope with the responsibilities which were associated with their social roles in their local communities. According to Adeyemi and Adeyinka, (2003) when they referred to the pre-colonial education system of a particular tribe in pre-colonial Uganda in East Africa. They identified that:

…slow learners and offenders were killed to discourage slow learning and scare young people from committing similar offences. This means of teaching could only produce learners who, out of fear, were obedient and submissive. They committed to memory ideas that they did not understand and the values they had no right to question (p. 473).
Therefore, in the light of Achebe’s story, there was no consideration for under achievers and learners who could not learn at the same pace as their age group because, the stages of the West African pre-colonial education system were strongly linked to age groups.

iii. The Learners’ Inability to Make their Own Individual Career Choices

In certain West African pre-colonial societies, as implied by the narrators, the child’s career path was pre-determined by a supernatural order (the ancestors of the child’s local community), which was responsible for the wellbeing of the said pre-colonial societies. In such West African pre-colonial societies, the learners did not have the opportunity to choose for themselves the type of skills they would like to acquire, rather, what they would become in their local communities had been pre-ordained by their ancestors.

iv. Limited Social Scope

The West African pre-colonial education system enabled the pre-colonial societies to be self-sufficient. Each pre-colonial society was able to produce skilled professionals, enough to manage their individual social, political, spiritual, and economic affairs. However, the system of education in each pre-colonial society was based on cultural beliefs and practices of the individual society. Therefore, it might have been difficult for the few skilled crafts men to practice, and or transmit the skills in a different kingdom or clan which practiced a different culture.

If the West African pre-colonial education system is perceived in the context of the twenty-first century, the issues referred to above can be considered to be some of its main weaknesses. However, if the said system of education is perceived in the context of the pre-colonial era, the issues referred to above can be indications of its strength.

5.6 Education in the Pre-colonial West Africa and Now: What Actually changed?

This research has presented its data to present the West African pre-colonial education system as the means for the “social continuity of life”, a concept which is situated within the structural functionalism theory, which also encompasses modernisation and human capital theory. According to the presented data, the West African pre-colonial education system was aimed at ensuring the continuity and sustainability of the pre-colonial social structure, pre-colonial socio-cultural values, and unique skills which are particular to certain pre-colonial
societies from one generation to the other. The data presented also shows that the West African pre-colonial education system was also aimed at increasing the adaptability of the pre-colonial African people to their constantly changing environments.

Furthermore, the data presented shows that the West African pre-colonial education system is also perceived to be focused on creating succession, and producing skilled individuals who were capable in running the social, political, spiritual, economic, and security affairs of their local communities. The skilled individuals then refined their acquired skills through their life experiences, and their experiences of their immediate environments, before passing the skills to the younger generation after them. In other words, the West African pre-colonial education system was aimed at ensuring social continuity of life, modernisation of indigenous skills and practices, and capacity building which also involved investing in human capital.

Education across Africa today, specifically, in most West African countries, is driven by the need for effective modernisation in all areas of life, improvement in science and technology, stable and sustainable economic growth through mass production of quality goods and services, national unity and the need to apply the culture of globalisation. In order to achieve these aims, most West African countries, specifically Nigeria, have channelled their education system towards capacity building and investing in human capital (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003).

Therefore, this research argues that, the conceptual frame within which certain West African education system is situated has not changed since the pre-colonial era to present day West Africa. Education is still situated within structural functionalism theory which also encompasses modernisation and human capital theory in most West African countries. However, the cultures which education tend to promote in both eras of the said West African societies (pre-colonial societies and West African societies today) are entirely different from each other.

5.7 Summary of Discussion

This chapter has explored the complementary nature of the narrators’ perceptions of the West African pre-colonial education system. This chapter has also presented the realisations of this research project, which are derived from the process of exploring the narrators’ perceptions within particular conceptual framework.
Achebe and the interview participants (i.e. the narrators) expressed their perceptions of the West African pre-colonial education system in different times, and different socio-political contexts. However, their perceptions present a similar character. Achebe’s perception of the pre-colonial education system was expressed in the context of the fight for the political independence of the African states. Therefore, it has emancipatory character. Achebe perceived the pre-colonial education system as the system of education which promoted the unique cultures and the harmonious co-existence of the West African people. He also perceived the pre-colonial education as a system of education which was naturally created by the pre-colonial African people, with the aim of improving their ways of living, and to ensure the continuity of life, which was focussed on continuous development of every aspect of the pre-colonial society. Unlike the colonial system of education (Western styled) which was aimed at undermining the African pre-colonial cultures, African philosophical ideologies, pre-colonial believe systems, and the pre-colonial general ways of living. Achebe also perceived the colonial system of education (Western styled) as one of the means through which the “imperialist West” used to impose a certain culture and general ways of living, which was alien to the colonised African people.

Although the time and the socio-political context within which the interview participants expressed their perceptions of the West African pre-colonial education system is different quite significantly to Achebe’s, their perceptions presents a similar character to Achebe’s perception of the said education system.

Therefore, although Achebe expressed his perception of the West African pre-colonial education system through fiction, and in a different time and different socio-political context to that of the interview participants, who narrated their individual personal experiences of the pre-colonial education system, the perceptions complements each other. The perceptions present a common understanding, and or “a commonly accepted reality” of the West African pre-colonial education system by the narrators.

Furthermore, based on the contexts and the nature of the narrators’ perceptions of the West African pre-colonial education system, and considering the way certain dependency and underdevelopment theorists, as referred to in the literature review chapter of this research project (Arowolo, 2010; Frantz, 1967; Iroegbu, 1994; Kanu, 2010; Mimiko, 2010; Oba and Eboh, 2011; Onwubiko, 1991; Tochukwu, 2013), and the way certain West Africans describes
their perceptions of the pre-colonial education system, this research has discovered that, the perceptions of certain West Africans and certain dependency and underdevelopment theorist (as referred to above) of the West African pre-colonial education system, although re-contextualised in most cases, is still the same to what it was in the era of the fight for the political independence of the African states; the experiences of colonialism influenced the narrators’ construction of meaning of the West African pre-colonial education system; the narrators’ perceptions present a romantic view of the West African pre-colonial education system; and finally, the conceptual framework of education in certain West African pre-colonial societies are still the same in most West African countries today, specifically in Nigeria. However, what changed is the culture which education is aimed at promoting.
6. Conclusion

Beyond every shadow of doubt, the act of colonialism is nothing but cruel, and its effects on Africa and the African people cannot be over emphasised. One of the unforgettable marks of colonialism in Africa, as argued by Dei, (2000) and Dowden, (2008) was the loss of identity of the African people.

The main purpose of this research project is to explore how West Africans perceive the West African pre-colonial education system. The process of conducting this research therefore, has helped to discover that, the West African pre-colonial education system is been perceived the same way it was perceived during the fight for political independence in West Africa, and the experience of colonialism influence how certain West Africans construct their meanings of the past. Therefore, the said perceptions present a romantic view of the West African pre-colonial education system. Also, this research further discovers that what changed in African education so far is the culture which education facilitates. The conceptual framework within which African education is situated in most African countries today is still the same to what it was in the pre-colonial era, what differs is the culture which education tend to promote in today’s African societies.

Therefore, although this research has analysed its data with the aim of challenging the incomplete view of the dependency and underdevelopment theorists on African pre-colonial education system, its purpose is not to undermine the fight against neo-colonialism through Western style system of education, a claim which is often made by most authors who subscribe to the dependency and underdevelopment school of thought when describing their perceptions of the purposes of the Western style system of education in modern African societies (Arowolo, 2010; Frankema, 2012; Frantz, 1967; Iroegbu, 1994; Kanu, 2010; Mimiko, 2010; Oba and Eboh, 2011; Onwubiko, 1991; Tochukwu, 2013), rather, the purpose of this study is to highlight the need for certain degree of “objectivity” when such perceptions are been made.

Likewise, it is important to emphasise that, although this research presents its data based on a conceptual frame which is situated within structural functionalism theory which also encompasses modernization and human capital theory, this research acknowledges the weaknesses of structural functionalism theory as much as its advantages. In other words, the focus of the data presentation, analysis and discussion chapter is not to undermine
dependency and underdevelopment theory by emphasizing the advantages of structural functionalism theory. Rather, to facilitate a cognitive process which is aimed at broadening Africans’ scope of criticism, and challenge certain rhetoric about African education which may have so far hindered certain degree of “objectivity”, when certain West Africans express their perceptions of the West African pre-colonial education system.

According to Paulo Freire’s (1970) concept of the “oppressor consciousness”, as identified in chapter two, the experiences of oppression through colonialism tend to result into the development of attitude of resentment in the oppressed towards their oppressors. Therefore, the attitude of resentment towards the oppressors often result into the desire and need to be free from oppression, and to bring the oppressors to justice. These then becomes the driving forces for the fight for freedom.

The implication however is that, when the long awaited freedom is achieved, in most cases, the oppressed, then tend to undermine and criticise the culture and philosophical ideologies of their oppressors, and in the name of seeking justice to years, if not centuries of oppression, they (the oppressed) tend to inflict similar pain (which they had experienced) on their oppressors. Therefore, Freire argued that, what has happened in the process was not freedom per se, rather, a change in roles.

Therefore, Freire recommended that, the first step of the process of achieving “total freedom” from oppression and the oppressors is for the oppressed to completely liberate themselves from their oppressors’ consciousness. As a result, the struggle for freedom will not only aim at regaining their humanity, but also restoring the humanity of their oppressors (Freire, 1970 p. 26). Such cognitive process as recommended by Freire, requires certain degree of objectivity in how the oppressed perceive not only themselves (which include their past and present situations), but also how they perceive their oppressors (which includes the oppressors’ culture, philosophical ideologies, etc.). In other words, the fight against neo-colonialism, the need to achieving an “African centered critical educational theory” (Zulu, 2006, p. 41), the need to reclaiming the lost African identity (Dei, 2000; Dowden, 2008), etc. does require Africans to, not only look at their history critically, but also to allow certain degree of objectivity in their perceptions of their past, by considering the possible effects of time on history, and the context within which such perceptions are being made.

6.1 Limitations of this Research
This research is aimed at exploring how West Africans perceive their pre-colonial education system, an aim which has been identified in the previous chapters of this research project. There are several ways of approaching the perceptions presented, analysed and discussed in the previous chapters of this research work, and each approach could produce different findings. Therefore, the results which can be derived from the data presented in this research work can be said to be vast, depending on how the said data are approached. However, this research has chosen particular approach in presenting and analysing the said data. The approach of this research project has led to the findings identified in the previous chapter.

Furthermore, I have worked hard in minimising the effects of my predisposition towards the purposes of education in today’s West African societies during the presentation, analysis and the discussion of the data on which this research project is based. Therefore, without entirely undermining the possibility of all predispositions, having identified and followed certain method of data presentation and data analysis, as identified by previous researchers (see chapter 3), it is the narrators’ own stories, and the context within which they told their stories which have influenced the way the data are analysed, the direction of the discussion, and the manner in which the findings of this research are presented.

This research is focused on exploring how West Africans perceive their pre-colonial education system. Therefore, the term “pre-colonial” is imperative to this research work. As identified in the introductory chapter, pre-colonial era is referred to in this research, as the era which preceded the formal establishment of the colonies in West Africa. Therefore, this research refers to pre-colonial education as the system of education which the missionary and colonial education took over from in West Africa.

The narrators’ perceptions of the West African pre-colonial education system are referred to in this research as the perceptions of certain West Africans of their pre-colonial education system. However, the narrators’ were selected from certain parts of Nigeria. Therefore, if one seeks statistical generalisation, which is not in any way the intention of this research project, it can be said that, one of the limitations of this research project is that, the narratives on which the data analysis are based represent the perceptions of very few Nigerians, and it can be argued that it did not represent the perceptions of the entire West Africans of the West African pre-colonial education system. Therefore, this makes generalising the findings of this research unrealistic. Hence, conclusions cannot be said to be exhaustive.
However, Wiredu, (2004) argued that, although Africa is extremely diverse in culture, there is cultural relativity in the philosophical ideologies which underpins the various cultures in their diversities. Wiredu therefore argued that, to disregard the existence of such relativity due to lack of empirical proof is the result of evaluating African cultures based on Western ideologies. Furthermore, as identified in chapter 3.4 of this research, the regions where the narrators were selected from, represented several pre-colonial West African kingdoms and empires which are now parts of some politically independent countries in today’s West Africa. Therefore, this research refer to the narrators’ perceptions of the West African pre-colonial education system, as the perception of certain West Africans, based on Wiredu’s argument, and what the geo-political zones where the narrators were selected from represented in the pre-colonial West Africa.

The data presented, analysed and discussed in this research project are approached with the underlying epistemological assumption of social constructivism. However, the recommendations of this research project emphasised the need for certain degree of “objectivity” when referring to African history, specifically African pre-colonial education system.

The degree of objectivity which is required, as recommended in this research project, can be defined as analysing specific pre-colonial African issues based upon “commonly accepted values”. In other words, objectivity in the context of the recommendations of this research project can be referred to as being able to analyse specific pre-colonial African issues within the context of the “generally accepted pre-colonial African values”, and the ability to analyse the same issues within the context of “generally accepted values in today’s African societies”.

6.2 The Relevance of this Research Project

This research set out to explore how West Africans perceive the West African pre-colonial education system. The aim of this research was partly inspired by how certain authors and educational researchers such as Ehindero, (1986) and Fafunwa, (1974), cited in Olaniyi and Olajumoke, (2013), Frantz, (1967), Iroegbu, (1994), and more recent authors and researchers such as Arowolo, (2010), Frankema, (2012), Kanu, (2010), Mimiko, (2010), Oba and Eboh, (2011), Tochukwu, (2013), described their perceptions of the African pre-colonial education system. In their descriptions, they tend to present a system of education which seemed flawless, unique and particular to the African people. However, such descriptions are often
followed by staunch criticism of the system of education through which the said authors and researchers were taught how to read (Western style system of education). Such criticism can be said to imply a certain degree of resentment towards the obtaining social, political and economic culture in most African countries today, cultures which Western style system of education is considered to be catalyst for.

Therefore, having reconceptualised such descriptions of the past, several groups across the regions of West Africa such (as the Boko Haram sect of Nigeria, amongst others), have often called for the abandonment of the Western style system of education, and a return to the pre-colonial ways of living and education. Certain authors and researchers have called for the need for “African centered critical educational theory” (Zulu, 2006, p. 41), the need to reclaiming the lost African identity (Dei, 2000; Dowden, 2008), and a merger of the core elements of the African pre-colonial education system with that of the Western styled system of education, in order to create an all-encompassing system of education (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003).

Although all these calls seem convincing, based upon the conceptual framework within which they are situated. However, before African societies embark on the so called “return” to their pre-colonial ways of living and system of education, should we not seek further understanding of the pre-colonial ways of living and system of education, by objectively identifying the likely effects of time on certain pre-colonial cultural practices and specific pre-colonial educational practices? Before African societies embark on the process of achieving genuine African centered critical educational theory, reclaim our lost African identity, and or create a merger between African pre-colonial education and Western styled system of education, should we Africans not consciously analyse the context within which we perceive our past? Hence, the aim of this research which is to explore how West Africans perceive the West African pre-colonial education system becomes paramount.

The process of conducting this research project has helped me to realize that, “if one perceives the past with the “eyes” of the present, depending on the aspect of the past one perceives, what one tends to often see is naivety. On the other hand, if one perceives the present with the “eyes” of the past, depending on the aspect of the present one perceives, what one tends to often see is madness”. Therefore, I have realized that perception is strongly rooted in context, and both should not be separated.
Therefore, to criticise Western styled system of education based on “romantic perception” of
the West African pre-colonial education system can be said to be unfounded, and might not
lead to desirable outcomes. If one perceives the West African pre-colonial education system
in the context of the twenty-first century West African societies, considering the obtaining
social, political and economic cultures and Africa’s role in the global context, its weaknesses
can be said to be significant, and therefore makes it impracticable. On the other hand, if the
West African pre-colonial education system is perceived in the context of the pre-colonial era,
certain elements which are identified as its weaknesses can be argued to be its strength.

Certain West Africans, authors and educational researchers (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003;
Dei, 2000; Dowden, 2008; Zulu, 2006) in recent years have yearned and / or called for
African centered critical educational theory, reclaiming lost African identity, and or the
creation of a merger between African pre-colonial education and Western styled system of
education, etc. Such calls and yearnings are made in the context of the twenty-first century.
Therefore, considering Africa’s role in the global context in the twenty-first century, it is
important that we Africans understand the past in the context of the past, and in order to
create a “desired future”, the past needs to be analysed in the context of the present.

6.3 Recommendations

Several books and research papers have been written about pre-colonial Africa. Many authors
and researchers have written extensively about specific aspects of the pre-colonial Africa such
as the pre-colonial education, pre-colonial social structure, pre-colonial power and political
structure, etc. The purpose and nature of such books and research papers vary quite
significantly. Some were written from historical perspectives, with the aim of preserving
African history and legends, and to educate the younger generations about Africa’s past.
Some were written from research perspectives, with the aim of investigating particular aspects
of Africa’s past which can either be for the sack of a better understanding of the past or for
comparing the past with the present in order to create a desired future.

Books and research papers about pre-colonial Africa serves as educational material in
schools, colleges and universities across the globe, they are a major way through which
Africans learn about their past. Therefore, the first recommendation of this research project is
that, authors and researchers who writes about African history, and or conduct research on
specific aspects of pre-colonial Africa, should ensure that their references to Africa’s past is
done with certain degree of objectivity, and issues in relation to pre-colonial Africa should be analysed in the context within which such books or research papers are written. Although books and research papers are often written for different purposes and reasons (political, economic or social reasons), even so, African history should be accorded certain degree of “respect” (objectivity – to analyse specific issues in the context of the past and in the context of the present in order to achieve a complete view) because, therein lies the “true African identity”, and African history should not be diluted to suit individual interests or to confirm authors’ passions.

If one’s “true identity” is embedded in one’s historical past, an in-complete perception of the said historical past might not be enough to restoring such “true identity” if lost. Therefore, before authors and researchers embark on any form of comparison between African pre-colonial education system and the Western styled system of education, with the aim of recommending an “African centered critical educational theory” (Zulu, 2006), a merger between African pre-colonial education system and Western styled system of education (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003), in order to create a system of education which Africans, specifically West Africans, can feel a sense of ownership towards, it is required that such authors and researchers do critically analyse both the pre-colonial education system and the Western styled system of education with a certain degree of objectivity.

Secondly, the recommendation of this research project is directed towards educational policy makers. According to this research project as identified in the discussion chapter, the conceptual framework within which the West African pre-colonial education system was situated is still the same as that of the Western styled system of education in certain West African countries today. However, the culture which education promotes and ensures the continuity of is different in both eras.

Therefore, the first amongst the calls of this research project towards educational policy makers across West African countries is to, identify the general weaknesses of the paradigm within which West African education is situated (structural functionalism – which also includes modernization and human capital theory), and seek lasting ways to addressing such weaknesses. Hence, when a merger between the West African pre-colonial education system and the Western styled system of education is achieved (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003), and an African centered critical education theory is created (Zulu, 2006). Such will be free of the
weaknesses of both the pre-colonial education system and the Western styled system of education in today’s West African countries.

Furthermore, policy makers should bring to bear certain elements of the West African pre-colonial education system which emphasises “African identity”, such as indigenous cultures, local history and belief systems, and indigenous skills and crafts which are strongly associated with the various West African societies in their great diversities. Also, policy makers should ensure that, the focus of education in the various West African societies is aimed at striking a balance between place based education and education for globalisation.

Lastly, the recommendation of this research project is directed towards we Africans, specifically, West Africans. As identified at the beginning of this chapter, the act of colonialism is cruel, and its effects on the African people cannot be over emphasised. However, in order to be “truly free” from the “shadows” which colonialism may have cast over the African people, this research recommends that we Africans, specifically we West Africans need to strive to liberate our minds from the “oppressor consciousness” (Freire, 1970).

It is time for us Africans to stop “playing the blame game”, and take full responsibility for what our ways of life have evolved to become, so that we can together achieve a desired future having avoided the “errors of our past”. Over five decades since most African states became politically independent, certain Africans (who perhaps situate their conceptual frame within dependency and underdevelopment school of thought) still blame colonialism for corrupt leadership, ineffective political system, poor system of education, high level of poverty and unemployment, etc. Even certain corrupt African leaders tend to blame colonialism for their own corrupt practices.

Africans, authors, researchers, policy makers and government bodies, and we common citizens of the independent African states needs not only to liberate our minds from the oppressor consciousness, but also seek to broaden our scope of criticism to include certain degrees of objective perception of our history – a perception that will analyse elements of our past not only in the context of the past, but also in the context of our present circumstances.

Our past is not the future that we seek to achieve. Therefore, we should not romanticise the past because of our lack of ownership of the culture of the present. Rather, we should constantly, and objectively, analyse the past not only in the context of the past, but also in the
context of our present situations, in order to identify and / or co-create the path which will incorporate the values of both, and lead to the desired future.

6.4 Areas for Further Research

This research did not exhaust all the possibilities which exist within the data presented in this research project. The main focus of this research is to explore how West Africans perceive the West African pre-colonial education system. Therefore, if the data presented in this research project is approached and / or perceived from a different perspective, such approach and / or perception can result into a great number of research possibilities.

This research only explored how West Africans perceive the West African pre-colonial education system. However, in order to achieve an impartial comparison of the pre-colonial education system and the Western styled system of education in West Africa based on the perceptions of certain West Africans, the need to explore how West Africans perceive the Western styled system of education in West Africa is therefore paramount.

Furthermore, such impartial comparison between the West African pre-colonial education system and the Western styled system of education in West Africa can lead researchers to embarking on one of the most attractive research project in the field of African education. A research endeavour which can result into the establishment of a system of education which will comprise of certain elements of both the pre-colonial education system, and the Western styled system of education (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003); a research project which can result in the formulation of an “African centered critical education theory” (Zulu, 2006); a research project which can lead to the establishment of a system of education which Africans can feel a sense of ownership towards.
References


