

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL THEORIES AND PRACTICE THROUGH PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

Nigerian educational sector suffers a budding neglect in practice. Many great educational theories abound in our educational sector but the same cannot be said for the practical aspect. Using the method of critical analysis, this paper attempted to proffer steps at bridging the gap between theories of education and *practicum* through effective philosophy of education. The researchers nevertheless recommend that Curriculum Planners and Developers and of course the introduction of entrepreneurial courses would help in solving the problem at hand.

Keywords: Education, Theories, Practice, Philosophy

Introduction

Education is to every nation what the eye is to the human body- it is the light with which the way is seen in the quest for a better future. Education is the source of hope for many because it promises a better and brighter tomorrow. It is, therefore, only natural that education be considered one of the most important factors that determines the growth, progress or development of any nation at all.

When, however, education is reduced to a body of theories, when all that is done is instruction or direction without practise, and when knowledge is only partially being imparted, it becomes difficult, if not impossible to categorically say that 'education has happened', resulting in graduates who would not only be half-baked but also unbaked.

Education in the Nigerian nation has for so long been on a plain plane. This is because there is a gap which has been created between her theories of education and the practices. You see

students being taught agriculture in theory without tangible evidence of practice, or being taught the mechanics of an aeroplane without practice. This type of teaching is wrong because there is a prescribed way of teaching these things as this paper points out.

Education

Etymologically, *education* is derived from the Latin *ēducātiō* (A breeding, a bringing up, a rearing) from *ēducō* (I educate, I train) which is related to the homonym *ēducō* (I lead forth, I take out; I raise up, I erect) from *ē-* (from, out of) and *dūcō* (I lead, I conduct) (Educate. Etymonline.com. para. 1). These diverse explanations of *education* as seen above might be the reason why it means different things in different contexts: it conveys the idea of being an institution, a discipline, a product, a process or counselling. It becomes tasking, therefore, for one to undertake giving a definite definition to the term *education*.

Plato is quoted in Igboabuchi and Ofojebe (2010) (and said to be the first definition of education based on history) thus:

By education, I mean that training which is given by suitable habits to the first instincts of virtue in children, when pleasure and pain are rightly implanted in non-rational souls. The particular training in respect of pleasure and pain ...is called 'education' (p. 39).

This definition by Plato goes in line with the ideas of the school of thought called the idealists who are of the point of view that a child is born with a mind that is fully equipped with knowledge required in this world and the job of the teacher is to pull out, lead out and expand this knowledge.

Milton (1957) defines education as "...that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously, all the offices, both public and private, of peace and war" (para. 4). 'Peace and war' are here used as metaphors to represent life. Milton, therefore, implies that a complete education is one that kits learners with all skills required to conquer all that life throws one's way.

Cremin (1971) sees education as a deliberate, systematic and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, skills and sensibilities (p. 29) while Omolualas

cited by Igboabuchi and Ofojebe (2010) gives a definition that takes a more poetic approach in his definition of education thus:

Education is life.

Education is what happens to us from the day we are born to the day we die.

Education is initiative.

Education is the art of training a person intellectually, morally and physically (p.41)

Langford (1967) birthed the most relevant definition to this paper when he said: "Education is an activity which aims at practical results in contrast with activities which aim at theoretical results." This definition by Langford captures the essential relationship between theory and practice. It reiterates the relevance of practice over theory while also appreciating educational theories.

Educational theories

John Dewey, an American philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer, is noted to have asserted that "the aim of education is to enable individuals to continue their education- the object and reward of learning is continued capacity for growth" (p.117). He noted also that "... the purpose of school education is to insure the continuance of education by organising the powers that insure growth. The inclination to learn from life itself and to make the conditions of life such that all will learn in the process of living is the finest product of schooling" (p. 60). The above two assertions efficiently capture the objectives of education which are moulded into its theories.

Theories of education or educational theories are strategies, schemes and proposed policies submitted for effective education. They deal basically with WHAT should be taught and HOW it should be taught. They are Perennialism, Essentialism, Progressivism and Reconstructionism.

Perennialism

Perennialism is somewhat related to realism. It teaches the relevance of preaching permanence as per the education of children. Perennialists believe that reality lies in permanence and the task of education is to impart the permanent truths of knowledge which is logical, static and incorruptible. To them, the rational and intellectual powers of the learners ought to be given more consideration than anything else; and rational powers include reason, will and memory.

The faculty of reason is developed through disciplines that have logical undertones, such as philosophy and Grammar which "disciplines the mind and develop the logical faculty, rules of reading, rhetoric and logic..." (Igboabuchi & Ofojebe, 2010, p. 145); the faculty will is developed by engaging learners in unpleasant tasks requiring perseverance for corruption; and the faculty of memory is developed by making students memorize.

It is the belief of the perennialists that rationality is the highest attribute of man. Their principles, according to (Igboabuchi&Ofojebe), hold as follows:

- Human nature is the same everywhere, differences in environment notwithstanding. Therefore, education should be the same for everyone, everywhere.
- The learner's needs and interests and that of the society are not important in determining the curriculum.
- Education is a preparation for life, not life in itself.
- The learner should be taught basic subjects which will acquaint him with the world's permanence (p. 145).

It is the belief of perennialist that the teacher possess logical skills so as to be able to teach logical thinking so that their rational faculties are developed. Here, memorisation and the lecture method of teaching are prescribed because of their ability to "engender mental discipline and train the intellect" (p, 146).

Essentialism

The educational theory of essentialism was made popular in the 1930s. as the name implies, essentialism held that there are certain essential truths or realities that ought to be known by all men before they are considered to be educated. Essentialists re-examined curricular matters to fit their standard, thus distinguishing the essential from the non-essential in the programme of the school and re-established the authority of the teacher as the classroom leader. To them, the child is not as central-focus-worthy as the subject matter.

The major aim of essentialist education was the cultivation of the intellect and academic excellence which was to be achieved by the study of essential school subjects which included Grammar, Literature, Composition, Mathematics, Science, History and Modern Foreign Languages which are meant to develop the mental faculties of the learners.

They further believed that examinations be made as rigorous as possible so as to sieve the very bright from the weak students.

Progressivism

Progressivism evolved in the early decades of the 20th century. Progressivists are of the opinion that the child is always developing and also lives in a society that is always changing. Stating that change is the 'essence of reality,' progressivism focuses on the child in relation to change in education.

This educational theory evolved as a reaction against the traditional methods of perennialism and essentialism that preached "excessive formalism, emphasis on strict discipline, passive learning and unnecessary detail" (Igboabuchi&Ofojebe, 2010, p. 145) in the education of the child.

Progressivists, because of their belief that knowledge is so subject to change, do not agree to use planned curriculum for children in schools. They believe that each child is peculiar from the other and so be only led by the teacher to discover his treasures, with the curriculum being the environment and the society.

Reconstructionism

In these times, the world has been exposed to terrible experiences. Many nations suffer from national and global problems like war, poverty, corruption and crime, unemployment, hunger, poor health, natural disasters and many other woes that require reconstruction. It is on this ground that the reconstructionists deem it fit that education be fashioned in a way that the knowledge imparted in the students would be sufficient for the reconstruction of their societies through the use of curriculum that consist mainly of social problems and corrective programmes for collective action through critical analysis.

A Brief Insight into Philosophy

The term, *philosophy*, originated from two ancient Greek words: *Philo* and *Sophia* meaning *love* and *wisdom* respectively, resulting in the meaning *love of wisdom*. Classically, Philosophy is *scientia rerum per ultima causa*, which is knowledge of things through their ultimate causes. According to Maritain (2005), Philosophy is the highest of the human science, that is, of the sciences which know things by the natural light of reason. As a field, it concentrated on finding of one natural element underlying all nature and being. It dealt with moral, religious, ethical and secular questions, the concept of virtue and the individual's relations both with the divine and the physical.

A philosopher was someone who was interested in the pursuit of knowledge and truth in all areas of human experience. All knowledge known to man under the sun came under the umbrella of philosophy. Philosophers asked questions that sought to explain the universe in every ramification. Soon, however, other disciplines such as theology, history, psychology, sciences, sociology, geography, anthropology, and many others were birthed.

Though many of philosophy's original topics have evolved into other fields of study over time, the discipline remains rich and varied. Modern philosophy contains six main branches of thought, each with their own unique focus:

Metaphysics: the nature of reality and the universe.

Epistemology: the study of knowledge and how it is acquired.

Logic: how to develop valid arguments; includes mathematical logic.

Ethics: the study of right and wrong and how people should live.

Politics: the study of government, citizen rights and political obligations.

Aesthetics: beauty, art and artistic perception.

Philosophy is multifaceted and there are as many definitions of philosophy as there are philosophers. Marcus (1994) opines that:

Philosophy is a study that seeks to understand the mysteries of existence and reality. It tries to discover the nature of truth and knowledge and to find what is of basic value and importance

in life. It also examines the relationships between humanity and nature and between the individual and society. Philosophy arises out of wonder, curiosity, and the desire to know and understand. Philosophy is thus a form of inquiry - a process of analysis, criticism, interpretation, and speculation (para. 1).

Philosophy embraces all aspects of human activity in so far as they involve every conceivable thing or concept of the universe.

Greene cited in Igboabuchi and Ofojebe (2010) sees philosophy as an activity: something to do (p. 8) while Igboabuchi and Ofojebe (2010) themselves perceive philosophy "...as the persistent efforts to understand the world and all the natural and supernatural phenomena including human nature" (p. 9).

From the above views, philosophy can be said to be an activity that involves critical questioning and evaluations done in attempts to understand concepts, ideas and things. It is an inquiry into the known and the unknown to know more that in unknown.

Philosophy of Education

For the philosophers of old, philosophy was a lifestyle. It comprised of not just their opinions on things of the world but included their principles and beliefs and the values they held dear and allowed to influence their decisions and actions. It can thus be added that the philosophy of something or someone is that point view from which choices and decisions are made with certain goals in mind. Education, for example, is undertaken with certain goals in mind either by the teacher or by the government. These *goals* are attainable by certain techniques, methods and devices or ideas. These ideas that influence what to teach and how to teach it are the educational philosophies of that teacher or government.

According to Mkabela and Luthili (1997), "Philosophy of education always directs, guides and regulates education" (p. 3) and in the words of Ezeani (2013), philosophy of education is "a codified system of rational thought which guides, directs and regulates education - what teachers teach and what learners learn and practice" (p. 14).

Okafor and Quist (1988) define philosophy of education as " an activity in which philosophy enables those involved in the business of education to examine ideas, arguments, problems,

possible innovation and so on connected with and behind their classroom practice" (p. 34). This means that philosophy is used as a tool to critically "scrutinize educational ideas, curriculum, policies, practices and purpose in order to ensure that what is in place is a relevant and functional educational system" (Ezeani, 2013, pp. 14-15).

Nigeria's Philosophy of Education

In 1969, the Federal Government through the Nigeria Education Research Council (NERC) sponsored a National Conference on Curriculum Development. Based on the reports from this curriculum conference, the Federal and State ministries of education prepared a draft of National Policy on Education (NPE) which was presented to the National Council for Education (NCE). The prepared NPE contained a "philosophy of Nigerian education" amongst other things. In 1972, the NCE directed that a seminar be held where proposals for the NPE would be made. The seminar held in 1973, graced with the presence of the then Federal Minister of Education, Chief A. Y. Eke, titled "Charting Nigeria's National Aspirations." At the end of the seminar, reports were sent to the NERC, NCE and the Federal Government. The government wrote a paper on the report titled "Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education." As a document, the NPE contains twelve sections with the first section captioned *Philosophy of Nigerian Education* (Igboabuchi & Ofojebe, 2010, pp. 167-170).

The Federal Government's NPE stipulates the following as Nigeria's philosophy of education:

- (a) Education is an instrument for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education;
- (b) Education fosters the worth development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for general development of the society
- (c) The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around;
- (d) The acquisition of appropriate skills and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society (pp. 6-7).

The Existing Gap between Educational Theories and Practice

The theories of education are prescriptions as to how education should be undertaken. They lay out ideas that guide the implementation or otherwise of one theory or the other, thus making for a somewhat flawless flow of educational efficiency. Of the four educational theories previously mentioned, it is unclear which theory Nigeria subscribes to. In fact, it is almost as though every school establishes itself on its own theories, especially private schools. It is therefore pertinent for Nigeria to align her educational sector with theories of education in relation to her philosophies of education.

Bridging the Gap between Educational Theories and Practice through Philosophy of Education

Dewey (1937) noted that the purpose of education should not revolve around the acquisition of a predetermined set of skills, but rather the realization of one's full potential and the ability to use those skills for the greater good (p.63). This assertion not only proposes a definite aim of education but also explicates the reason for it. The Nigeria we see today is in no need for excessive formalism, emphasis on strict discipline, passive learning and unnecessary detail. After many years of independence, Nigeria is yet to boast of a sizable number of record breaking achievements and contributions or internationally acclaimed projects.

Nigeria's philosophy of education was earlier listed here as:

- (a) Education is an instrument for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education;
- (b) Education fosters the worth development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for general development of the society
- (c) The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around;
- (d) The acquisition of appropriate skills and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society

Based on the above, the best theory of education to be implemented into the education sector of Nigeria would be Reconstructionism.

Reconstructionism, as stated by Igboabuchi and Ofojebe (2010), preaches that "The means and ends of education must be refashioned completely to meet the demands of the present... crisis

and be in line with the findings of the behavioural sciences" (p. 150). This implies that education must lead to a complete change in the minds of men, empowering them while also buttressing the importance of nation building and development. Here, the teacher's role is to make the child or student aware of the need for reconstruction.

Dewey (1920) correctly pointed out that the school is important not only as a place to gain content knowledge "but also a place to learn how to live... acknowledge that education and schooling are instruments in creating social change and reform... and [agree that] the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction" (p. 87).

To properly initiate this theory of education into Nigeria, a rigorous refit of the curriculum would be necessary. The existing curriculum would be revisited to include changes that would agree with the reconstructionist theory while also presenting education as an instrument for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education. The curriculum should be made to include very practical technical and science courses that would task the thinking capacity of students to the extent that they would be able to invent necessary technologies for the country. Sponsorship should also be made available for brilliant students who show exceptional capabilities in the designated areas.

Courses like philosophy and critical thinking should also be taken more seriously, not just for secondary school students but for those in primary school as well. This would make it possible for these early learners to, at their early stages, align their minds with the world and the happenings around them, making it possible for them to think of possible solutions to some of Nigeria's biggest problems as the second and third philosophies of education stipulate.

Furthermore, the acquisition of appropriate skills and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society should equally be encouraged. This is in line with the last philosophy of education listed above.

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