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Is Nigerian Education System Underpinned by a Philosophy Worthy of the Name?

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Abstract
The Nigerian education system has come under severe criticisms for lacking what could really be called a philosophy of education. While some argue that the present system could not have emerged without a particular philosophy reinforcing it, even if this philosophy is weak, some others contend that the way education has been run in the nation should not center on whether the education system is underpinned by a philosophy or not, but on the level of philosophical veracity in the system. It thus submits that while it could be said that Nigerian system of education is anchored by an eclectic philosophy, which is the right philosophy needed for any nation with cultural multiplicity and diversity such as Nigeria, this philosophy however will be better if it is structured to give room for consistencies and coherencies in its blend of inputs from various genres of philosophies so that it becomes possible for the emerged brand of philosophy to generate coherencies and clear direction, and thus foster a synergy between Nigeria's social ideology and her system of education.

Keywords: System of education, philosophy, eclecticism, consistencies and coherencies.

Introduction
The above question appears trivial, and sometimes taken for granted, but it is indeed a subject of concern for philosophically-minded scholars who are interested in the actual development of education in this part of the world. There are those of us who believe that Nigerian education system is anchored by a philosophy, although weak, while there are critics who profess otherwise. Those who have challenged the existence of an educational philosophy in Nigerian system of education could be conveniently grouped into four: first, those who feel that Nigeria does not have a philosophy because such is not stated in the policy on education; second, those who opine that Nigeria does not have a social ideology at present, and when there is no ideology, there is no educational philosophy; third, those who deny the possibility of Nigeria having a philosophy because of the confusion on what social ideology she wishes to adopt; and fourth, those who ascribe eclecticism to the philosophy adopted as the basis for the system and for

such thinkers, eclecticism is not a philosophy. These groups of scholars deny the existence of real philosophy in Nigerian system of education at the moment. The reasons for the denial are quickly considered.

The Critics' Arguments
The first group of critics represented by Fayemi (2008) recognizes the usual relationship which ought to exist between an educational philosophy and a nation's education system. This recognition makes them expect that the philosophy guiding the Nigeria's education system ought to be explicitly stated in a conspicuous section of the policy-document on education. Disappointingly, nowhere in the policy is it stated what the philosophy guiding the education system is. For instance, there are expositions on the general national goals of Nigeria in the policy; specific mention is also made of the national educational goals and the values to be inculcated and the various measures for implementation; but in reference to the philosophy of education, what the policy-document presents are elusive statements such as:

In Nigeria's philosophy of education, we believe that...”;

"Nigeria's philosophy of education therefore is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen; the full integration of the individual into the community; and the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens...”; “For this philosophy to be in harmony with Nigeria’s goals, education has to be geared towards self-realization, better human relationship... (FRN 2004:1-3).

And so, the critics begin to wonder where and what exactly is that philosophy which is alluded to by the above kind of statements. Not having a direct answer to their question, the critics conclude that Nigeria cannot boast of a philosophy of education; that what we parade today as Nigerian philosophy of education is mere educational policy.

The second group of critics represented by Fadahunsi (2008) proclaims the dearth of philosophy in Nigerian system of education premised on the fact that the country at present appears not to have a social ideology. Rightly, the ideology imbibed by a nation is the foundation for the kind of educational philosophy and the consequential educational system that appears onboard. Educational philosophy is often structured towards the realization of nation’s ideology. If there is a disconnect, then such philosophy would not deserve: the name ab initio. This is
what Dewey means when he stresses that education is a social function, and that until we know what sort of society is best desirable, we do not know what sort of education is best (Dewey, 1916). The function of education, basically, is to help in the achievement or realization of ideology agreed upon by men in the society. This connotes that without such ideology, education would have no use in the first place. For education and its philosophy to justify their existence and purpose, they need to be aligned with the societal ideology. The logic thus becomes clear - no social ideology, no philosophy of education, and no meaningful system of education. This logic explains the position of the second group of critics. They believe that if Nigeria as a nation does not yet have a social ideology, how then can anybody mull the idea of a philosophy of education? Fadahunsi, for instance, opines that;

*It is worrisome to note that Nigeria, despite her forty-eight years of national history, has not concretely spelt-out her philosophy of education. All there is as of today, is the National Policy on Education which is just a volume show-casing government’s way of achieving parts of our national objectives through education. The absence of a Nigerian philosophy of education is not a product of dearth of philosophers of education in the country. Rather, it is a function of lacuna of national ideology. Nigeria, unlike America and other developed nations of the world, has no precise and articulate ideology of her own (Fadahunsi, 2008:8).*

He goes further;

*Not until Nigeria fashions for herself a stable and sound ideology, which other sectors of the national life will be patterned after, the future probability of sustainable educational development in Nigeria may be dwindled (Fadahunsi, 2008:8).*

There is yet another group of critics represented by Nduka (2006) & Akinpelu (2005). These critics profess that Nigeria indeed, has a social ideology which is reflected on page one of the fourth edition of the National Policy on Education, which is merely repeated verbatim in the current sixth edition of the document. The point of departure from the preceding critics, however, is that the ideology put in actual practice by Nigerian leaders is radically different from that which is stated in theory in the policy. Put differently, “what we want to be” finds contradiction in “what we are presently”. This means that the ideology we imbibe at present differs from the ideology we aspired to imbibe. This situation creates confusion in the mindset of the critics. This seeming confusion precipitates the impossibility of having a workable philosophy of education in Nigeria. Nduka makes his position clear with the following words;

*As far as I am concerned, what now passes as a philosophy for Nigerian education is a non-starter in the philosophical stakes. At best, it is a mythology of aims, goals and objectives lacking clarity, coherence and consistency. The basic problem arises from the fact that as a philosophy of education for a particular society, it does not address itself squarely to the basic question: what type of society are we setting ourselves to build? Is it a semi-religious oligarchy or a secular state, tradition-bound or scientifically oriented, capitalist or socialist, just or unjust, elitist or egalitarian, and so on? The lack of clarity and coherence over such basic issues leads predictably to inconsistencies in thought and practice (Nduka, 2006:142).*

The above submission might seem to portray Nduka’s ignorance of the stated ideology Nigeria wishes to imbibe, as contained in the policy; but indeed, Nduka is in no way ignorant of such ideology; his criticism is that the ideology put in theory contrasts entirely the ideology set in practice. He says;

*...The point I am making is that we are in this country busy running an elitist, egalitarian and unjust socioeconomic system. It is a system which acquiesces in the exploitation of the mass of the people by a small class of the so-called commercial and industrial elite, the managers and the bureaucratic elite whether in the civil service, the army or the universities. It is a system which permits the appropriation as well as misappropriation of a disproportionate amount of the nation’s wealth by a favoured but numerically small class, who are thereby enabled to live in comfort, and even luxury while the rest of the people wallow in comparative poverty and downright misery... The socioeconomic system we are referring to is, to call it its proper name, capitalism (Nduka, 2006:127).*

Capitalism, of course, is the very antithesis of building a just and egalitarian society. Nduka thus concludes that we must make up our mind whether we wish our country to be a capitalist or socialist state, a semi-religious oligarchy or a secular state, tradition bound or scientifically oriented, just or unjust, democratic or despotic, elitist or egalitarian, and until this is done, we may never be able to achieve a consistent and coherent philosophy of education worthy of the name. Nduka’s criticism incidentally, lends support to Akinpelu’s submission that;

*Nigeria, like many other African nations, is still groping towards a statement of what type of society she wants. Never mind the five national objectives enunciated at the beginning of the 4-year...*
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development plan. It is in the nature of such plans to be preceded by high sounding statements of objectives, the sincerity of which is immediately betrayed as soon as the pages containing the allocation of money are opened. The current 4-year plan is no exception (Akinpelu, 2005:153).

Akinpelu makes reference to Aluko (cited in Akinpelu, 2005), who in referring to the planners could not in one breath speak of national policy, points out that the aiming at an egalitarian society and in the quarters of the nation's children to a life of same breath condemn half or three-quarters of ignorance, poverty and illiteracy, through

He sums up his position thus;

Presently, multifarious philosophies influence and inform the so-called Nigerian philosophy of education. These philosophies have foreign foundations and could be described as a hybrid of Euro-American thinking about reality, knowledge and values. Without doubt, this eclectic nature of the philosophy of Nigerian education cannot but generate contradictions, illusions and frustration for teachers and students alike (Amaele, 2005:185).

He seems convinced that the eclectic nature of the chosen philosophy is the reason for the inconsistencies and incoherencies witnessed in Nigerian education system; and since it is not in the character of a sound philosophy to generate contradictions, then, it is logical to say Nigeria does not yet have a real philosophy of education. Perhaps, Amaele is a disciple of Hirst who had been an unrepentant champion of clear-cut philosophies. In one of his articles, he had asked if it was not obvious that;

committed to a particular philosophical outlook. It borrows variously from different schools of thought such as idealism, realism, existentialism, pragmatism, among others. Amaele sounds forceful with his opinion that Nigeria is yet to have a real philosophy of education given its eclectic nature. According to him;

If people differ about the nature of ultimate reality, they must differ in judging what is important in the school curriculum? Must not a religious person think religious education absolutely essential and an atheist think it thoroughly undesirable? Must not a Western liberal democrat, because he holds different ethical doctrines, necessarily disagree with a communist on at least some issues in moral education? And must it not therefore be true that philosophical beliefs do determine clear educational principles which must be put into practice if obvious inconsistencies are to be avoided? (Hirst, 1963:51).

In the opinion of Lucas (1969), supporters of eclecticism are those who find themselves unable to give their allegiance to any single school of thought, hence, they pick and choose bits and pieces from one position, now from another. He affirms that such dispositions towards eclecticism cannot help but be superficial; inevitably, it does serious damage to whatever cohesive unity and internal logic a position may possess. The submission of our fourth-type of critics, then, is that the Nigerian system of education would have to be patterned after one philosophy, say idealism, realism or existentialism before we could conveniently assert that Nigeria really has a philosophy of education. Let us, at this juncture, evaluate the positions of the critics.

Refuting the Critics

To the first group of critics who do not think Nigeria has a philosophy of education on the basis that such is not neatly written-out in the policy-document: this position appears too simplistic and elementary. It berates the level of sophistication which a policy of this nature should typify. Put differently, to expect that the philosophy underpinning the Nigerian system of education should have been bogously written out as..., is to presume that such document was designed for some children in the kindergarten, due to their level of maturity and simplicity. If, for instance, I meet a man who does not believe in pre-determined and fixed aims of life, but opine that they are in the making through a process of change. If I later find out that my man teaches that power or capacity of a human being is valuable and important which enables him to adjust to the environment or which makes him able to change his environment according to his needs and requirements; and again, the man's view about realities, especially education, is that they are only useful and purposeful if they contribute to human welfare and progress or perhaps, if
they are instrumental and experimental, would I still need by these facts, to be told by a soothsayer or by a special announcement by the man himself that he is a pragmatist, or that he belongs to Dewey’s camp of pragmatism?. His life and thought-pattern should of course, portray or betray him as such. One may wonder if any thorough-going philosopher down the ages, announced him/herself as such before peoples’ discovery of his/her inclinations. Socrates, for instance, was just going about the city of Athens, acting like an ‘intellectual-midwife’ to his fellow compatriots. Little did he start, before people detected the philosophical dexterity in him. The policy on education could not have been written in that elementary form proposed by the critics. If the critics care much about the philosophical content of the policy, then, they may wish to go through the national goals of Nigeria; the objectives of education; the submissions and assumptions of the policy makers; the basis of the policy; the direction of the policy; the values expected for inculcation duly stated in the policy; the purpose of education at all tiers of the education system; and the various measures for the implementation of the policy—they are all contained in the document. These parameters are the indicators through which one could discover the kind of philosophy underlying the policy on education in Nigeria.

To the second group of critics who say Nigeria has no philosophy of education because she does not have a social ideology yet. The critic’s logic is fascinating, valid and sound - no social ideology, no philosophy of education and no meaningful system of education. It is a logical position that is not arguable, debatable nor contestable by anybody who knows his/her worth in the realm of education. However, the critic’s denial of an accepted social ideology provokes a surprise; a surprise at the level of unawareness of the ideology Nigeria wishes to adopt. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), the National Development Plans and the National Policy on Education (2013) leave no one in doubt on the choice of social ideology which Nigeria wishes to imbibe. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), the National Development Plans and the National Policy on Education (2013) leave no one in doubt on the choice of social ideology which Nigeria wishes to imbibe. Specifically, in the National Policy on Education (2013), it is stated that Nigeria wishes to build “a democratic and egalitarian society”. This commitment is re-echoed in other policies in other facets of Nigeria’s life (for example, economics, politics). Where then does the opinion that Nigeria has no social ideology emanate from?. This was an opinion orchestrated in the 70s and 80s when the early editions of the policy were not clear enough on the choice of a social ideology. With other revisions, and especially, the fourth, fifth and sixth editions of the policy, a denial of an ideology in Nigeria would only be tantamount to a re-packaging of an outdated opinion which enjoys no current evidential back-up.

The third group of critics is fully aware that Nigeria aims at achieving a democratic and egalitarian society. The problem, for them however, is that what Nigeria imbibes in actual practice is entirely different from what she professes. That is, the ideology set in place in Nigeria contradicts democracy and egalitarianism which Nigeria holds in theory. This situation, thus, reflects indecision on what choice of ideology she wishes to adopt. In the light of this seeming indecision, it would be wrong for Nigeria to boast of a workable philosophy of education. This is the opinion expressed by Nduka (2006), Akinpelu (2005), Aluko (cited in Akinpelu 2005) and others. For example, Nduka (2006) tries to remind us that Nigeria, through the colonial experiences, has turned out to be a capitalist and elitist society, trying in so many ways to live up to Western capitalist structure, and that right from the colonial period until this very day, Nigerian development has been proceeding along a capitalist-elitist path, rather than egalitarian. He buttresses his point by quoting Udoji commission’s observation that “the entire educational system of the nation seems to be designed to uphold and reinforce the elitist philosophy”(Nduka, 2006). It was thus evident, in Nduka’s opinion that “the experts who drew up the second and third national development plans were ignorant of the development strategy they were adopting”. One thing is certainly obvious in the critics’ position: it is that capitalism/elitism is the ideology presently practiced in Nigeria, but that this ideology is bad and anti-developmental, given the numerous instances and examples enunciated in his position. The critics are willing to accept that there is no other ideological alternative better than the adoption of an egalitarian model of development; what they are left to understand is how to match Nigerian profession of egalitarianism with practical commitments. Perhaps what the critics need to first realize is that the practice of capitalism/elitism instead of egalitarianism is not a product of confusion on the ideology wished for. It is
just a reflection of the desire to do something, but lack of will-power to effect the desire. Put differently, Nigeria does not appear confused on what ideology she wants to adopt; she only finds herself incapacitated on the modalities for effecting her desire. If the critics are willing to accept this proposition, then, we may recast what their trouble should have been ab initio. The quagmire should have been:-how can we achieve a democratic and egalitarian Nigeria?; is the present capitalist circumstances?; what kind of structures are needed to help install egalitarianism?; what planning and implementation strategies need be put in place to herald democracy and egalitarianism? in Nigeria?; is the present adopted philosophy capable of generating a democratic and egalitarian Nigerian society?; how can we align the philosophy with the goals of democracy and egalitarianism?. The answers to these questions will definitely shift our attention from the critics’ earlier question.

But then, before re-directing our critics’ attention, there is yet another group of critics that have not been responded to. These critics argue that any system of education anchored by eclecticism is devoid of a real philosophy of education. In their view, it is systematic and concise to have a policy patterned on a single philosophy like idealism, realism, existentialism, and so on, but to have an assemblage of two, three or more of these philosophies inextricably degenerates into confusion, inconsistencies and incoherencies. It is this approach that has led to the mismatches that are currently experienced in Nigerian education. To arise from these problems, for the critics, Nigeria would now have to choose one philosophy of education. In responding to this pattern of thought, one only needs to say in line with Akinpelu (2005) that the adoption of one single philosophy as the anchor for Nigerian education is unrealistic, superficial and fallacious. The understanding here is that it is very difficult, if not impracticable, to locate any system of education which corresponds one-to-one with just a philosophical school. Nations that have purportedly adopted one school or the other as the base for their systems have resorted at one time or the other, in picking certain elements which are complementary from other philosophies, to their chosen school of thought. The thought of being purely a realist, or an idealist, or so, is practically unrealistic. The records of professional philosophers stand to confirm this; they have had to dangle around two to three complementary schools of thought in their perceptions of issues. Those who have stubbornly stuck to a school of thought have been found to be grossly inconsistent on the long run. What a clear-cut philosophy achieves in being concise and systematic, it loses in being unrealistic. More than being really unrealistic, it is a fallacy from a logical standpoint, to ever think that there could be a direct deduction of an education system from just a single philosophical school. This is why Akinpelu (2005) submits that “a genuine system of education is essentially eclectic embracing the doctrines of two or more of these schools of thought”.

The attempt to base an entire nation’s education system on just one brand of philosophy is an impossible and impracticable task. Such attempt, as argued by Taneja (2001), will even undermine the several positions, perceptions and contributions of others who do not belong to the chosen school of thought; and in our peculiar case, such attempt will be anti-democratic (against our adopted social ideology). Perhaps the fourth group of critics just like other critics, need not query if the Nigerian education system has a philosophy underlying it; at best, the question which the fourth critics could meaningfully ask is: -How comprehensive is the eclectic brand of philosophy adopted in the Nigerian system of education? Put differently, does Nigeria’s choice of eclecticism in the system of education give room for compatibilities? If the last critics agree to confine themselves to this type of question, then, one begins to see some similarities with the third critics’ question. All the questions then boil down to consistence, coherence and compatibility.
This means that we should be interested in raising and answering questions on what level of relationship exists between Nigeria's social ideology and her education system. In this wise, one would be interested in finding out the kind of role philosophy has played in the relationship between Nigerian social ideology and her education system. Consequently, the pressing issue will be the determination of the quality of the philosophical component of the Nigerian educational enterprise. The compelling question, then, is: How philosophical is Nigerian philosophy of education? The above question necessarily implies one thing: that Nigeria indeed has a philosophy underlying her system of education. The question only raises instigation on how rigorous, consistent, coherent and comprehensive the said philosophy is. As such, we can conveniently replace the adjective philosophical with any of the above criteria in our question. In any case, no matter how the question is recast, the concern remains the same, and that is, investigating the level of philosophy infused into the education system. To discover this, we will first of all need to find out the nature and level of relationship that presently exists among all the units involved in the nation's education system. The units been referred to are: Nigeria's social ideology; educational philosophy and educational policy/system. The relationship among these units will automatically be an answer to our question.

Epilogue
Critical reflections on the policy propelling the Nigerian system of education would reveal an eclectic philosophical approach. However, there is something terribly lacking in the peculiar brand of eclecticism. What appears missing is the ability to perfectly blend the various inputs into what makes up the present Nigerian philosophy of education. This implies that the mélangé of schools of thought featured in the policy-document were nipped together without much care for consistency, coherence and compatibility, and this thus, presents us with no clear-cut direction. Various scholars like; Osokoya (2002 and 2008), Amaele (2005), Adenokun (2006) and so on, opine that Nigeria's policy on education suggests a pragmatic approach; an existential approach; an idealistic approach; a realistic approach, and many other approaches. But they were quick to add that the fundamental principles of these approaches are not practiced anywhere in our public school system. No wonder Freeman-Butts (1999) characterizes the whole scenario as educational disjunctivitis with a considerable degree of discontinuity jarring inconsistencies and disharmony. Indeed, it is a cut-and-paste display (to borrow from computer jargons). The mismatches experienced in Nigeria's education system are precipitated by a philosophy that has no much room for complements. If, however, there is a perfect knitting of the various inputs, with much care for consistency, coherence and compatibility, the adopted philosophy would be a golden instrument for the achievement of Nigeria's social ideology. The level of uncoordination witnessed in the chosen philosophy informs the disconnections emanating in the policy formulation, and consequently, in the system of education in Nigeria, and until something is done to eradicate the mismatches, the system will continue to give room for scholars' doubt on the presence of a strong philosophical base in the system of education in Nigeria.

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