

NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: ~~ISSUES~~, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

A paper ~~to be~~ presented at An International Conference on "Africa: Philosophy and Public Affairs" at Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, Enugu, State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

Our enthusiasm for education seems to be paralleled by our ignorance of what education is. Education for what? For whom? And how? Is there no relationship between a society and the type of education it imbibes? These questions border on educational value and goal. It is in an attempt to proffer answers to these questions, examine and evaluate the principles and the validity of thought that underline issues in Nigerian educational system that this paper is being written. Periodic and constant examination of the Issues, Problems and prospect in the educational system of any country is necessary, because any desirable development hinges upon the educational system.

The nature of the issues, and problem, in Nigerian educational system are conceptual, historical, methodological, moral and financial. We show that any educational policy, if it is to gain credence and vitality, must function in and draw inspiration from a dynamic philosophy. It is only a thorough knowledge of philosophy that can meet the greater challenges of education. Given the necessary philosophical tools, we should be tending towards an indigenous educational philosophy for Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION:

CONFERENCE PAPER

The subject matter of this paper raises some fundamental questions.

What is Education? Education for what? For whom? And how? What is a system? Our enthusiasm for education seems to be paralleled by our ignorance of what education is. Is there no relationship between a society and the type of education it imbibes? These questions border on educational value and goal.

In this paper we attempt to proffer answers to the above questions, examine and evaluate the principles and the validity of thought that underline issues in Nigerian educational system. This is because periodic and constant examination of issues, problems and prospect in the educational system of any country is necessary. We show that the nature of the issues and problems in Nigerian educational system are conceptual, historical, methodological, moral and financial. We argue that any educational policy, if it is to gain credence and vitality, must function in and draw inspiration from a dynamic philosophy.

When beginning a course of study the student normally seeks some form of definitions of the subject matter or at least its boundary as well as an over-view of its contents and importance. The purpose of this is to enable one understand the nature of the thing in question and because academicians, more than any other group of people, are

too intellectually cantankerous and ideologically unyielding. Consequently, a dispassionate analysis of the terms 'education' and 'system' is rather imperative.

Etymologically speaking, education means to 'lead' or 'bring out'. Education has been given various definition. It has been said to be a systematic training and instruction geared towards the development of ability, character and mental powers of the individual. Education has also been defined as a conscious moulding of man by man, in which he acquires knowledge needed to cope with the inherent problems of life, according to his age, ability and aptitude, in his environment, in order to live a good and useful life in the society.

To R. S. Peters, Education is a systematic attempt to develop the character, physical and mental powers of individual through a careful dissemination of knowledge.¹

G. F. Kneller defines education as "the process by which any society through schools, colleges, universities and other institutions deliberately transmits its cultural heritage, that is, its accumulated knowledge, value, skills, from one generation to another - -".²

On our part we adopt G. F. Kneller definition because it is most inclusive and elastic. It has accommodated formal, informal and non-formal³ educational set ups. Moreover, it makes education relevant to a society.

Given G. F. Kneller broader definition of education, our analysis should ideally have included formal, informal and non-formal education, but we shall be limiting our analysis of the problems and issues in Nigerian Educational System to the formal aspect of education only

(i.e. primary, secondary, post-secondary and tertiary institutions, ~~having~~ set patterns of work, set curriculum, professional examinations and certificates as evidence of successful completion of work). This aspect, to our mind, is a very important part in the entire system.

Having acquainted ourselves with the idea of education, what then is a 'system'? By definition, system means rigidity, vested interests, impediments.⁴ The idea of an educational system is to have an organised pattern of relationship between parts, ensuring orderliness. Implicit in the idea is also rigidity, conservatism and inflexibility. A system tends to negate the idea of progress and resists innovations.⁵

PROBLEMS

The above short interpolation, brings us to the idea of Nigerian educational system which seems to obey all the above criteria. Nigerian educational system for the past three decades has been a system and as a system, it has been rigid, inflexible, conservative to a disadvantage. The Nigerian Educational System, like most human system seems to be "designed not to promote but to retard change".⁶ This precisely explains the problems in Nigerian educational system today, which includes; the problem of alienation and Foreign models, resulting in irrelevant curriculum, the problem of proliferation, problem of moral decadence, over-emphasis on paper qualification, teaching methodology and unequal educational opportunities. Given this frame work, we can now take a closer look at the problems in Nigerian education.

The Problem of Alienation and Foreign models, Resulting
in irrelevant Curricula:

This problem is historical. The formal education which we have adopted is based on Western world view, culture and value. The curriculum is the most important aspect in the process of education and learning. Its selection, evaluation and change has been determined by the kinds of aims and objectives in various societies. The curricula in Nigerian schools, to a very large extent, follow the pattern of the universities in the United Kingdom and to a limited extent those in the United States of America. And as Prof. Babs Fafunwa puts it; "Conservatism, romanticism and a colonial outlook joined forces to frustrate curriculum reform in higher education"⁷ The only changes that has taken place since the colonial days, perhaps, is the inclusion of African Studies (like African history, African philosophy, African Art, African literature and Languages) as new area of interest.

Nigerians who are the recipients of foreign form of education are thus alienated from their own culture because the education does not find meaning in the context of our culture. Our educational system has failed to measure up to what is essential and basic to us as a nation. It is based on the myth of "that is how things are done in Europe and America." We go abroad to find solutions to our indigenous problems.

Our educational system naturally leads to unemployment because the products are not trained to generate jobs independently. We introduce foreign courses that are redundant and unproductive, into our school curricula, just because they are being offered in Western countries.

So, our enthusiasm for education is paralleled by our ignorance of what education is all about. We should begin with the concept of the Nigerian man. Education is supposed to prepare one for life in his society, but the Nigerian Educational System divorces the pupils from the society, it is supposed to prepare them for. There is over-emphasis on paper qualification.

Proliferation and the Quality of Teachers and Teaching

Nigeria is witnessing today a proliferation of institutions of learning. We find federal and state governments setting up Colleges and Universities of Technologies all over the country. As of now, we have about 36 Universities, not to talk of the numbers of Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, the thousands of primary and secondary schools, Ordinary and Advanced Teachers' Colleges and Allied institutions. On a casual observation, one would even think that Nigeria is developing educationally. But the expansion in the educational provision has not been matched with equal educational development. Hence, Nigerian educational system in the past three decades, has been described as that of proliferation and growth without development. Most of the institutions are not well equipped; whether with adequate manpower or infrastructure. Hence, we have frequent teachers strikes and students rampages.

The proliferation of institutions of learning has also necessitated the influx of all kinds of teachers, who are unqualified, unprofessional and inexperienced - teachers who use teaching as a stepping stone to enter into other professions and those who have divided interest; engaging in other vocation along side the teaching profession. This

later problem borders on the quality of teaching and teachers. And as the saying goes, no nation can rise above the quality of its teachers.

The Problem of Standard and Moral Decadence

The question of quality of teachers and teaching has led to the problem of standard. It has been said that there is fallen standard in Nigerian education because of the poor quality of teachers and teaching. Other reasons have been advanced to justify this problem of standard. The existence of moral laxity and decadence resorting to leakages of examination questions, cheating in examination hall, forgery of certificates and other malpractices, like sexual harassment, etc. have been cited. There is also the influx of cinema houses, ~~night~~^{clubs,} video clubs, phonographic films and disco houses, which distract the attention and concentration of students. These developments have been attributed to the take over of schools from the ecclesiastical or religious authority.

Another reason adduced for the fallen standard is the over-emphasis on paper qualification. This has made education, especially the formal education to be seen as a meal ticket. Consequently our youths simply learn how to read, write and pass examinations, which will qualify them for employment. It is this attitude of simply learning how to read and pass examinations that makes students to seek dubious and immoral means of passing their examinations.

The purported fallen standard in Nigerian education has also been attributed to teaching methodology. Knowledge, in most of our institutions is imparted through the lectures, seminars and hand-outs methodology. This methodology has been referred to as the "banking system of education".

In the "banking system of education" there is no participatory relationship between the teacher and the students. Students are assumed to be empty containers in which knowledge could be deposited. The result is that instead of communicating with the students, the teacher only issues communiques, which the student patiently receives, memorizes and reproduces. The point is that the teaching method in most of our institutions treats students as objects rather than subjects.

The consequence of the methodological problem and fallen standard is that some of our graduates, especially those at the primary school level, often cannot read, write or speak simple English correctly, compared to those of "the good old days". Moreover, there are vastly increasing drop-outs all over the places.

It may be instructive to note however, that some scholars have countered the idea that the standard of education has fallen in recent times. The arguments stated above were described as either not true to fact or are conclusions based on false premises or are simply products of prejudices. For example, it has been argued that if present day primary school leavers cannot write correct English, it may be due to a shift in the objective and emphasis in primary education - a shift from the in-depth concentration on grammar, hand-writing and literary accomplishments (needed for clerks and catechists in those days) to a wider variety of subjects in preparation for a greater variety of jobs. Secondly, it has been argued that as to the comparison with the old way of English, there were in fact not many qualified school products in those days to assess the correctness of the English they were speaking, anyway.⁸

The allegation of fallen moral behaviour has been said to be difficult to substantiate, since the school is not completely responsible for the total moulding of the life of a student. The agencies of education are many - they include the home, the community, the state, the church and the school. In fact, the home has 325 days of the pupil, out of the 365 in a year! In other words, the school has 6 - 8 hours of the pupil's time out of 24 hours in a day. Translated, this means 40 days in a year out of 365 days. Now, what happens to the remaining vast period of time? It is clear therefore that "the degree of the influence of the school has to be compared with the over whelming influence of the adult society and the declining family education".⁹ This is why it has been argued that we cannot lay the charge of moral decadence at the door step of just the school.

Finally, it has been pointed out that the question about the standard and quality of education will remain unresolved if we continue to look to the past for comparison rather than the present or future. It has been suggested therefore, that when we are making comparison, it should not be between periods or times or places, rather it should be in terms of how education has been able to meet the needs of each age and time. In this respect, the question becomes that of excellence and relevance rather than that of fallen standard.

The Problem of Unequal Educational Opportunities

Even though the Nigerian constitution (the 1979 constitution for example), reflects the desire in section 18, Sub Section 1, that "Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate

educational opportunities at all levels, the Nigerian educational system still ^{pe}perpetuate unequal and unfair chance of success. The problems of unequal educational opportunities in Nigeria has taken many forms.

They are as follows:

a. Political dimension:

Such disparity in political awareness and sophistication between the North and South is attributed to disparity in the amount and level of education in both and hence to unequal educational opportunities.

Another political dimension is in the area of educational policies .

~~///~~ Unequal educational opportunities have manifested ^{with} the existence of private fee-paying schools, the issue of public and private ownership and the existence of richly funded and adequately staffed government Colleges and Unity schools along side the system of public schools.

b. Economic dimension:

Such ... disparity between the urban and rural areas are also attributed to unequal educational opportunities. Furthermore, even if given equal access or opportunity to education, those that are better placed and endowed economically will get their children to the best schools.

Still along the line of economic dimension, we have "differential funding". This issue is predicated on the attempt to bridge the eudcational gap within the federating states. Hence, the rate of education in some part of the country is slackened to enable the other educationally disadvantaged areas to catch up. Consequently, special funds are set aside for these areas.

c. Tribalism and Quota System:

These are other policies which have encouraged unequal educational opportunities. Tribalism is the discrimination against a citizen or candidate because of his place of birth or state of origin. It makes a Nigerian an alien in his own country. A student wishing to enter a College or University is made to fill out a form which requires him to confess his tribe or state of origin.

Quota system, on the other hand, was introduced into admissions, especially in higher education, because of the educational gap among the federating state. The quota system is meant to solve the problem of the educationally disadvantaged areas and educational imbalance. Consequently, candidates from the educationally disadvantaged states, who have not performed very well will be admitted on the ground that their states' quota has not been filled or on the ground of "discretionary admission" or "catchment areas". So, the standard is lowered in favour of some states and candidates.

Both tribalism and quota system take little cognizance of talent and merit and enthrone mediocrity, "which can hurt not only the individuals directly concerned but ultimately the entire society."¹⁰ The major objection to this practice "is that it exposes the citizen to unfair treatment and social injustice".¹¹ The policy of quota system, has dwarfed the principle based on the integration of the individual into sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all.

The proponents of the quota system, however, argue that the idea behind the system is the need for National integration. But then, this objective, legitimate as it may seem, is dubious in its means.

On this problem of unequal educational opportunities, it has been argued however, that we cannot eliminate parental and home-rearing influences in education. J. A. Akinpelu argues that:

To achieve equality from the starting point, one would have to interfere extensively in the home and family life, in the economic and social conditions of the parents, and perhaps even in the genetic make-up of the child so as to reduce inherited tendencies that could make a difference in the long-term achievements.¹²

The point is that differences in educational achievements and opportunities may be difficult to eliminate, because they are not just environmental, which can be easily controlled. The differences are also differences in human life - "differences in capacities for physical and mental growth, in intelligence, in aptitudes, in interests, in motivations, in innate or natural ability, in resolution and will-power to carry out one's project, and so on."¹³

Be it as it may, it seems that it will suffice to say that we will be satisfied with an acceptable measure of equality of educational opportunity, if there are no restrictions or discrimination in the access to educational provisions; if minimum standard of educational facilities are made available to all schools; if every pupil is aided

in such a way that he or she is made to realise his or her learning potentials.

The Problem of Funding/Finance

There is also the problem of Funding of Education in Nigeria. Our schools are not economically viable enough to employ suitable and qualified teachers, provide the much needed instructional materials and facilities and the administration of the system effectively. The poor funding of our institutions, declining school environment and remuneration of teachers have resorted to the problem of job satisfaction. In this respect, it has been said that if you see a teacher you will know one. Why? This is because he is ill-gated, poorly fed, housed and remunerated. It is consequent upon this that we have the brain drain syndrome - teachers now leave for greener pastures.

PROSPECTS

Our education should find meaning and relevance in our culture, taking into cognizance the Nigerian man and personality. Our education should be one that tackles our social problems and make us self reliant. We need a philosophy of education that will reflect the history of our nation, portray our national awareness and forster the spirit of unity not disunity (as being encouraged by the present double standard, manifested in the quota system). So, what we need is to evolve a philosophy of education we can call our own. Some developing countries, like India, have been said to evolve their own philosophy of education.

That of India is called "Basic education".¹⁴ In like manner, the Nigerian education needs to reinforce the values cherished by our people. Philosophy of education should be an interpretation of experience and experience vary from culture to culture, from people to people.

In this regard, a good deal of re-statement and re-arrangement of our curriculum is necessary. The adoption of the Essentialist and reconstructionist educational theories is suggested.

Essentialism tells us to distinguish the essential from the non-essentials in the school programme and emphasize the role and effort, rather than just interest, of the pupil. It also enjoins us to stress the importance of social and cultural heritages. Education, according to Essentialism must come to terms with the environment and do away with the non-essentials.

Reconstructionism declares that the chief purpose of education is to continue to Reconstruct the society in order for it to meet up with the scientific knowledge now at our disposal. In fact, Reconstructionism is a philosophy of 'an age in crisis', which needs change. It enjoins us to look with a fresh eye at the way in which our curriculum are drawn up, the subjects they contain, the educational methods used, the structure of administration and the methods by which teachers are trained and make our education more functional.

Given the theory of Essentialism, we should not abandon traditional method of problem solving entirely. Essentialism will only draw the

best from our traditional, Islamic and Christain heritages thereby reconstructing our educational system and blending it with the modern culture, making it more relevant to the needs and aspiration of the country. Thus our position is eclectic; that is, a selection from different theories, system or doctrines that are favourable and combining them. The merit of our eclectic stance really "lies in the effect that by applying this method, any person or group of persons can add, substract, multiply or divide any idea and adopt it to suit their situation or historical circumstance"¹⁵

In this regard, we can combine the formal and informal education. Take the field of medicine for example, our traditional doctors can cure many diseases that modern doctors fail to cure. The first cure of cancer in this country is said to have come from a traditional doctor. So we should be able to harmonize or integrate Western and Indigenious science/technology, instead of allowing them to exist in isolation from one another.

In making the above recommendation however, we must be mindful of a possible problem that may arise. The process of shifting the essentials, reconstructing and blending, can give rise to culture conflict and the attendant problem of identity.

On proliferation, quality of teaching and teachers and moral decadence, it is suggested that the Federal and State Governments'sphere of jurisdiction on education should be integrated, instead of the present proliferation of systems by the different governments. Our

educational system should put our people in touch with what is good in our culture like the respect for elders. Provision should be made for leadership and youth centres for character, moral and ethical training and instructions. We need career counselling in order to make our education functional and rational. In this respect, we need to de-emphasize the over emphasis on paper qualification and encourage a system in which the passing of written examinations (though necessary) should not be regarded as the only key to all human successes. Practical experience is equally important.

We also need an educational system that is perceptive. The present prominence given to philosophy by the introduction of philosophy as compulsory study in our universities will help in this respect. The introduction of philosophy will give students depth, perception and better scale of values; equip them with the rational and intellectual stamina needed to delve, more than superficially, into life and living, issues and problem; strengthen the will and ability to provide meaningful and practicable answers to our educational, social, political, religious, moral and economic problems; and help to improve our reflective abilities and critical inquiries. A further step needs to be taken to establish a department of philosophy in each of the existing universities and other higher institutions in the country. This will help stimulate the philosophical spirit on a larger scale.

In addition to teaching philosophy in the universities and other higher institutions, opportunity should be made available for religious and

moral instructions, especially at the primary and secondary levels, and moral education at the higher levels of education.

As for the case of unequal educational opportunities, we need an educational system that can offer the best hope of achieving a more equitable distribution of wealth and equal opportunities, an educational system that can provide a sure way of correcting corruption, tribalism and ethnic divisions. Performance, competence or merit not tribe or state of origin, should be the basis for admission or employment. Quota system is not the solution to unequal educational opportunities but the provision of equal and adequate educational facilities, qualified teachers, and conducive atmosphere for learning. Neither is quota system the solution to national unity. Rather, more Nigerian Languages should be taught as a means of fostering national unity. Still in the interest of national unity, government *has already* considered the suggestion that each child be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages (i.e. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba), other than his own mother tongue. We need to discourage any information which will betray or indicate an applicant's or a candidate's creed or state of origin.

The problem of funding should be solved with the institution of an Education Trust Fund, like is with the Petroleum Trust Fund. We note however, that a similar fund is being instituted already by government. This is the Education Tax Fund. The only problem is that it has not been vigorously pursued and implemented.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we affirm that it is only a thorough knowledge of philosophy that can meet the greater challenges of education. For a philosophy of education to be in harmony with our national objective or "what is" for our society, it must be geared towards the right type of values and attitudes, like self-realization, tolerance, national unity and consciousness. These must be grounded in the right African ontology or meta-physics and perception of reality with regards to the Nigerian man. Above all, our education, must be aimed at the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence - moral, mental and physical, as necessary equipment for the individual to live and contribute its quota to the development of his or her society. Given the necessary philosophical tools, we should be tending towards an indigenous educational philosophy for Nigeria.

END NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. R. S. Peters (ed): Philosophy of Education,
(London: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 1
2. G. F. Kneller: Introduction to Philosophy of Education,
(John Willey and Sons, 1966), p. 20
3. By formal education we mean all educational training that takes place in organised institutions like schools, colleges, universities etc.

Informal education refers to the casual and unorganised education. It refers to the knowledge, habits, skills, attitudes, fashions, manners, characters, etc., we "pick up" at home and in the society, without organised and sustained activity. Here, Education is simply an activity, rather than a concept.

By non-formal education, we mean all educational activities outside the school network, like cultural and vocational work, *ie* mechanic, carpentering, weaving, typing, tailoring, etc, normally provided for by private individuals as commercial enterprise.

The difference between the formal, informal and non-formal education, is really in the degree of organization and institutionalization demonstrated in each - the formal being the most highly organised, while the informal is the least (see J. A. Akinpelu: An Introduction to Philosophy of Education, London: Macmillian Publishers, 1981).
4. Ibid., p. 233
5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.
7. A. Babs Fafunwa: A History of Nigerian Higher Education, (Ibadan, Macmillian and Company (Nigeria) Ltd., 1971), p. 274
8. J. A. Akinpelu: op. cit., p. 228
9. Ibid
10. Chinua Achebe: The Trouble with Nigeria
(Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd., 1983), p. 21
11. Ibid., p. 19
12. J. A. Akinpelu: op. cit., p. 220
13. Ibid.
14. 'Basic education' is said to aim at drawing out and stimulating the spiritual, intellectual and physical faculties of the children and it is woven round a suitable craft which should meet the expenses of teachers salaries. The accent is on self-support. Like wise, in Tanzania, Julius Nyerere claims to have put into practice "Education for Self-reliance" as the philosophy of education (See A. S. Thakner: The Philosophical Foundation of Education; (Kano: Daje Publishing Comp Ltd., 1982).
15. Cited by J. I. Omoregbe: Knowing Philosophy (Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers Ltd., 1990), p. 43