

An Assessment of Nigerian Educational Problems in the Light of Some Philosophical Orientations

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Abstract

The educational system of any society is usually designed and directed to meet the needs and aspirations of its people; and there is usually a necessary philosophical foundation for such system of education. It is such foundation that points either to the success or the failure of the system of education in place. In this vein, it could easily be seen that Nigerian system of education is bedeviled with series of problems ranging from corruption to inept curriculum and the like. The aim of this paper therefore, was to attempt an exposition and analysis of the sub-structure of Nigerian education in a bid to clearly understand the reason for the persistent problems facing the system. We discovered that Nigerian philosophy of education is eclectic; as its expectations, at least in principle, seem to cohere with the ideals of some philosophical orientations like idealism, realism, naturalism, pragmatism, existentialism and humanism. However, the problem in Nigerian education and probably many developing nations like Nigeria, is that practice has not been matched with the theories and demands of these underlying philosophies. Thus, our conclusion is that if stakeholders in education could consciously follow the dictates and ideals of the supposedly underlying philosophies, then the problems - corruption/ moral decay, underfunding, inept curriculum, ethnicity, etc, could be curbed and the system would grow better.

Keywords: philosophy; orientations; education; problems; policy; foundation; goal

INTRODUCTION

The general philosophy of any society informs the philosophies of the subsectors of that society. In the same vein, the educational philosophy of any society reflects the needs and aspirations of the people as contained in the broad philosophy of the society in question. It stands to reason therefore that the success or the failure of any educational system could be discerned from the kind of philosophy that stands as its basis. In other words, the success of an educational system is a pointer to the success of its philosophical foundation, and vice versa.

The philosophical foundations here refer to the views, ideas, and opinions of philosophers that had evolved over the years. These shades of opinions and views have been systematized into worldviews that are now generally regarded as schools of philosophy or what Enukoha (2010) prefers to call philosophical orientations.

In recent times, Nigerian educational system has been grappling with some problems ranging from moral, social, inaccessibility, to financial issues. Thus, for one to philosophically analyze the problems of Nigerian educational system, it becomes imperative that such analysis be done from the purview of

philosophical orientations which presumably underlie the national policy and goal.

As a method of procedure, the paper is expository and analytical; for it will attempt an overview of some philosophical orientations from which it will then highlight the philosophical basis of Nigerian education. The paper shall discuss and assess the problems of Nigerian education in the light of philosophical orientations with a view to showing the disconnect between mere following of theories and consciously practicalizing such.

This paper may be limited in scope to the Nigerian educational situation, for the fact that the authors as Nigerians are well aware, and have been affected by the problematic that impedes education in the country. This does not preclude the fact that the problems are not peculiar to Nigeria, nor that our suggestions and the conclusion inferred cannot work in other cultures that have similar problems. Thus, this paper is significant in that it can stimulate stakeholders of education in Nigeria and such other places to re-assess their educational philosophies and live up to the billings of these underlying philosophies practically than paying mere lip services to them.

An Overview of some Philosophical Orientations

By philosophical orientations, we mean the various views, positions, and philosophical thoughts of philosophers that had evolved over time. These thoughts and views have been gradually systematized, and have come to be represented by schools of philosophy like idealism, realism, naturalism, pragmatism, existentialism, and humanism. We shall briefly expound the positions of the above schools with particular reference to how they are related to education.

Idealism

This is a school of thought in philosophy which holds that the most important element in the nature of reality is mind or spirit. It is a school that maintains that man's spiritual nature is the very essence of his being, and insists that everything is basically mental, rather than physical. It does not deny the existence of the physical world. Rather, it maintains that the physical world is the manifestation of some great spirit behind it. Another dimension to this position is the belief in the duality of human beings as both physical and spiritual while contending that the manifestation of the spiritual is found in the human mind. Erukoha (2010) best captures this when he explains that idealism emphasizes the significance of the human mind, spirit, or soul in the explanation of reality. Ideals like goodness, beauty, etc, can only be discovered through the mind and are said to be absolute, changeless, and eternal.

Idealism subscribes to an education that emphasizes the full potentialities of man as well as help man to develop his complete personality particularly in terms of accomplishing, promoting, and developing the moral, intellectual, and aesthetic activities of man's spirit. It is considered that the above will enhance freedom, responsibility, and self-discipline.

Idealist curriculum emphasizes the study of the humanities because they satisfy the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic needs of man, ensure revelation and creation of the mind. The teacher in the idealist philosophy, is a special environmental factor whose major function is to bring the learner nearer reality, as well as ensures that the learner attains his utmost possible perfection.

Realism

As a philosophical school of thought, realism is founded on the basic principle that matter or objects we see around are not just ideas in the minds of individuals but exist in themselves whether the mind perceives of them or not. This position presents realism in an opposite position to that of idealism. Realism rejects the idealist's position and rather maintains that objects have a reality of themselves whether we have knowledge of them or not. For the

realist, matter is the ultimate reality, and truth or knowledge is acquired through the study of matter.

In the realist's view, propositions can only be said to be true if only such propositions are consistent with the features of the world as it is. This explains why objectivity and reliability are two major instruments of the realist's test of truth and knowledge.

The realist's aim of education is the achievement of the knowledge of the nature and inner workings of the universe. Commenting on the educational relevance of realism, Oroka states: *a worthwhile aim of education is one that is directed to acquaint the learner with the objects around him and which ultimately assists the learner to form habits, dispositions, and tendencies towards searching for truth and consciously adjusting to what is real (2005).*

The curriculum of realist education is centred on the physical sciences and the social sciences. Attention is also given to disciplines like mathematics for purposes of observation and experimentation, and culture studies. The task of teaching in realist education is simply to assist the learner to make discoveries with objects through observations and experimentations.

Naturalism

Naturalism is a school of philosophy which holds that man's nature is the propelling force that determines his course of action. The emphasis here and which seems to be of major concern to the naturalist school of thought is man's natural self. For this school of thought, nature is everything, and as well constitutes the whole of reality. In the words of Taneja (2001) the naturalist school of philosophy is opposed to any idea that has to do with sentimentalism, spiritualism, supernaturalism, established truths and values, given the fact that their emphasis is on the natural self.

The naturalist educational aim is that which guarantees self-realization and self-expression. It is centred on free development of the nature, the power, and the inclinations of the learner with minimum level of guidance. Omatseye (2010) observes that the major thrust of the naturalist position is that educational aim should proceed according to nature and in accordance with an inner principle.

Naturalist education emphasizes the sciences and such other disciplines that deal with nature. In addition, all other disciplines that will help the learner develop his reasoning powers also fall within the domain of naturalist educational curriculum.

On the issue of teaching and learning activities, the naturalist philosophy is completely opposed to the traditional system of education because it is assumed to be a great impediment to the natural development

of the learner. The teacher's task in naturalism is to set the stage, supply the materials and opportunities, provide and create ideal conditions and environment conducive for the child's natural development.

Pragmatism

According to Ornstein and Levine (2003), pragmatism is one school of philosophy that is founded on observation and experimentation like empiricism but goes further to maintain that whatever is real is what is able to provide solutions to existing problems. The point of emphasis in pragmatism is on action rather than on thought and that is why this school is sometimes referred to as 'the philosophy of workability' (Oroka, 2005). It is quite distant from dogma but rather accepts as worthwhile everything that has positive and practical consequences.

Reality in pragmatism is not static but changes with time, place, and situations. It is worth noting also that experience is one fundamental issue that runs through the pragmatist philosophy and it is considered as the basis and source of all knowledge. Such experience is expected to be productive, workable, unlimiting, and makes possible other future experiences. This explains why Westbrook (1991) quotes Dewey as maintaining that knowledge and the entire educational process is a continuous reconstruction and reorganization of experience.

The aim of pragmatist education is to direct the impulses, the abilities, and the interests of learners towards transmitting the social background and the dynamic outlook of the society to younger generations, and as well cultivate a dynamic and adaptable mind for purposes of creating values to solve existing problems. Educational aims, therefore, must grow out of existing situations; must be flexible and capable of being altered, and must be directed towards solving particular social problem.

The curriculum of pragmatism emphasizes integrated knowledge around a particular problem of life which also informs the problem-solving method of teaching. The teacher in pragmatist education is one that suggests few problems, indicates the lines of activities, and then allows the learners to carry out experiments on their own.

Existentialism

This is one philosophy that is concerned with existence. Man is seen from the standpoint of existentialism, in his real and concrete existence, as a human being with thinking, feeling; and one that is considered as an acting individual. Existentialism is concerned with individual meaning and as such emphasizes that the individual man is lonely, estranged, alienated, and made to battle with a meaningless and absurd world. The attention of the existentialists is drawn to the definition of man as a free and self-regarding individual rather than to man

in general. It opposes any doctrine that sees the individual man as the manifestation of the absolute. This is the reason why existentialism claims that ultimate reality consists of nothing more than a lived reality.

The aim of existentialist education, as noted by Akinpelu (1981), is to help man search for himself. Education is expected to focus on man's unique being in the world and to awaken man's awareness and to encourage him to make out a worthwhile existence. Education should provide explanations for such questions as: 'What is my purpose in the world?', 'Who am I?', and similar questions bordering on individual man's existence.

The existentialist's curriculum places emphasis on the humanities because they deal more with the problem of human existence and help manifest individual's subjective self. The existentialist subscribes to the Socratic method of teaching since it is a method that brings out the individual as a knowing and acting being and not as a predetermined individual.

Humanism

This is a school of thought in philosophy that focuses on human beings and their nature. It is also basically concerned about man's inherent ability to achieve happiness and fulfillment without recourse to God. Various interpretations and positions on humanism had evolved and emerged over the years with all fundamentally rooted on the well-being of man. A synopsis of the different views of humanism, as presented by Erukoha (2010), shows that it is man-centred, and represents a revolt against medieval values, ideas, thoughts, and cosmology, drawing adherents from various shades of opinions and backgrounds.

The humanist position on education equally revolves around man, and designed for man; as such the aim and curriculum of humanist education is on developing and promoting human values that give meaningfulness and priority to human existence. The humanist form of education also encourages that the mind be developed to function effectively; to understand and analyze accurately; to think clearly, and to criticize judiciously.

Screening the Philosophical Basis of Nigeria's Education

From a critical standpoint, Nigeria's policy on education is not founded on a single philosophical orientation. It rather appears to be eclectic. By this we mean that the policy is based on a selected philosophical orientations that seem best or fitted for the national goal. Indeed, scarcely would anybody say that the Nigeria system of education is distinctly and exclusively idealistic or pragmatic or naturalistic

or even humanistic, etc. It is rather safe to assume that these philosophies are, as they were, implicit in the National Education Goals which, by extension, reflect the broader National Goals of the Nigerian society. The National Policy on Education is informed by the National Goals which aim at:

- (i) A free and democratic society
- (ii) A just and egalitarian society
- (iii) A united, strong, and self-reliant nation
- (iv) A great and dynamic economy
- (v) A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens

In the overall pursuit of the national goals, and for a sound philosophy of education, the following positions become imperative:

- (i) Education is expected to be an instrument for national development.
- (ii) It is to promote the worth and development of the individual to ensure overall development of the society.
- (iii) It is to enable equality of educational opportunities for all Nigerians irrespective of disabilities.
- (iv) It is to foster functional education for a united and progressive Nigeria.

Infering from the above, the specific goals of Nigerian education as spelt out in the National Policy on Education include the following:

- (i) The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity. Here, education is expected to serve as a means of creating and enhancing the consciousness of Nigerians, regarding her unity, identity and uniqueness.
- (ii) The inculcation of the right type of values and attitude for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society. Education is expected to teach cherished values to the Nigerian citizens.
- (iii) The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around.
- (iv) The acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical, and social abilities and competences that will ultimately equip the learner to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

Thus, it is our conviction that the national goal of Nigerian education, as summarily outlined in the National Policy on Education, is based on an eclectic structure, since it is drawn from different philosophical orientations.

Probing into the Problems of Nigerian Education

The Nigerian educational system is one we can surely describe as a system grappling with, or enmeshed in many thorny issues and problems. Among such issues are those of corruption, funding, moral decadence, and the problem of accessibility. For us, the best way

to assess this problematic is to square them against the ideals of the philosophical orientations which ought to act as the substructure of the educational policy and goals of the nation.

Corruption and Moral Decadence

The problem of corruption and moral decay and its attendant administrative and academic lapses has become a recurring decimal in Nigerian educational system. The problem of corruption spans through the primary, the secondary, up to the tertiary levels of our educational system. While it is true that corruption, like pandemic, is fast becoming a dilemmatic reality in some educational institutions, it has become institutionalized in some others.

In spite of the eclectic nature of Nigeria's educational philosophy, the problem of corruption could be discerned in the gulf existing between theory and lack of genuine practicalization of the philosophical ideals and demands. Corruption is a negation of the basic tenets of idealism, existentialism, and humanism where emphasis is on training the mind, ensuring lived reality, and the well-being of man respectively. Our submission here is that the problem of corruption in the educational system is fundamentally rooted on the failure of our educational practices to adhere to some philosophical orientations on which it is founded.

While some analysts see moral decadence and low standard as twin issues to corruption, it is worth noting that the shame, the steady deterioration, and retrogression of the Nigerian educational system can be traced to corruption. In almost all our educational institutions today, there seems to be rising tide in unwholesome and unethical practices involving teachers, learners, and other stakeholders. This idea was expressed by Apologun (2001) when he observed that cases of examination malpractice, sexual harassment, cultism, extortion, compromising of standards and integrity, etc, involving lecturers, teachers, and staff of schools have become prevalent in our educational system. The ultimate implication is that the cycle of decadence becomes a reality shuttling between the larger society and the school; while the school continues to churn out what Vitus calls 'unemployable graduates' (Apologun 2001)

When analyzed from a philosophical standpoint, it can be argued that the problem of moral decline is borne out of the the practical apathy or ignorance of the supposed fundamental philosophical basis of our education. Moral decadence cannot, for instance, thrive in an educational system that is consciously and genuinely based on the ideals and positive tenets of idealist values; realist harmonious consciousness with the environment; pragmatic dynamic attitude to life; existentialist emphasis on individual meaning, and the humanist position on the

well-being of man. It is our position here that if the positive orientations of the various schools of philosophy on which Nigerian education is supposedly founded are strictly applied to education, the problem of moral decay will be non-existent in our schools.

Underfunding

The problem of underfunding is a key to some other problems confronting the educational system in Nigeria today. In recognition of the relevance of funding, Arubayi (2005) had observed that funding can best be described as the heart of education. This is the case particularly for the fact that it touches on the various aspects as planning, facilities, equipment, building, teachers' remuneration and so on. As important as funding is in the scheme of education, little or lip-service attention had always been attached to budgetary allocation to education, thus compounding the problems of Nigerian educational system. For instance, studies have shown that 03% had been the budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria between 1986 and 1992 (UNESCO Report). Reacting to the above position, Subrahmania (2002) had stated that the greatest challenge facing education is inadequate funding by federal, states and local governments, to the extent that funding has been in response to conditionalities imposed by international financial institutions. Statistics also show that federal government expenditure on education between 1997 and 2000 has been below 10% of overall expenditure.

The 2013 budgetary allocation for Nigeria was 10.21% (www.slideshare.net/statissense/budgetryallocation-to-education-sector). This ofcourse, was far below the UNESCO budget recommendation for education. Ultimately, the delivery of education in Nigeria has suffered from years of neglect, compounded by inadequate attention to policy frameworks within the sector. Findings from an ongoing educational sector analysis confirm the poor state of education in Nigeria (FGN, 2005).

A philosophical assessment of the problem of underfunding clearly brings to the fore the failure of practitioners and stakeholders in education to understand and to make meaning of the fundamental relationship between pragmatism, humanism, and Nigerian education. The point of argument here is that the problem of underfunding has become an unfortunate reality in Nigerian educational system as a result of the failure to operate within the context of the principles of pragmatism and humanism. One major principle of pragmatism is workability (anything that works in practice is acceptable). Humanism emphasizes the well-being of man for the very fact of his being a man. Thus, if education is to achieve its desired goal as contained in the National Policy on Education, then it requires this pragmatic and dynamic principle of making things work, just as

the humanist well-being of Nigerian citizens will also be concurrently pursued. What unfortunately has been the case with Nigerian education is the contrary. Underfunding is a problem that seems to distance Nigerian education from the redeeming edges of its supposed pragmatic and humanist goals. This problem rests at the feet of the failure to operate the educational system in line with the philosophical orientations of pragmatism and humanism.

Inaccessibility

There is the problem of access which has attracted a lot of attention particularly in recent years. It has been documented that there are categories of children who tend to be excluded from the formal schooling system- children from the poorest families, the landless, working children, children of minority groups, children of migrant or pastoralist families, orphans, children affected by HIV/AIDS and those with physical or mental disabilities. It is also the case that across the length and breath of Nigeria, there are inequalities in access to education and achievement as well as high levels of absolute educational deprivation of both children and adults. The point being made here is that over the years, Nigeria has expressed a commitment to education, in the belief that overcoming illiteracy and ignorance will form a basis for accelerated national development. However, regardless of the incontrovertible evidence that education is crucial to the development of the community and the nation, there remain inequalities in access to education. Despite its potential for leveling opportunities, education in many Nigerian communities is still being used to perpetrate inequalities. Millions of poor people and their children are excluded from the processes and outcomes of education in Nigeria. There seems to be glaring imbalances against girls in enrolment, attendance and completion rates in all levels of education in Nigeria, particularly in the northern part of the country, due to a variety of socio-cultural and religious factors. It means that the rights of millions of children, especially girls, are violated.

Ordinarily, a society that hopes to attain equal educational opportunities and accessibility ought to show a sincere commitment to the educational philosophy of realism, existentialism, naturalism, and pragmatism. This is because the above schools emphasize the need to erase ignorance, self-actualization, natural abilities, and practical/workable activities respectively. Accessibility is only made meaningful when the society attempts to erase ignorance, puts in place some mechanisms for self-actualization of the individual, ensure that individual's abilities and competences are respected, and showing sincere commitment to workable policies through the education of its members. When all these are lacking, the problem of accessibility become more conspicuous. This is unfortunately, the

state of affairs in Nigerian education. The point being made here, therefore, is that the persisting nature of the problem of accessibility is borne out of the failure to adopt the above policies as enshrined in the philosophical orientations of realism, naturalism, existentialism, and pragmatism.

Curriculum Issues

The problem of inept and dated curriculum had become a source of concern and had generated a lot of debates among scholars of education in recent times. There is strong and wide condemnation of the what Apologun calls irrelevant curriculum or unuseful subject topics (31). In an era where countries are contextualizing learning and other educational activities, some of what we still learn in most institutions are imported and borrowed cultures and values. This, in turn, had added little or no values to education in Nigeria. Five decades after independence, some Nigerian schools are still knee-deep in the study of foreign cultures, languages, religion, and philosophy at the detriment of indigenous human and material resources. What this trend had simply succeeded in doing is that it tends to create a very wide gap between our learning and the concrete situations of our societies. It is even more pathetic and demeaning when curriculum that are moribund in foreign lands are imported and revelled in, in the belief that it would work in Nigeria, even in the face of changing universal realities.

The problem of inept curriculum and its attendant issues simply call to mind the relevance of the learners needs and interests in instructional activities, and the need for learners harmonious relationships with and utilization of the environment for development. These are salient principles associated with the philosophical schools of pragmatism and realism. In this case, it becomes paradoxical and contradictory to identify indices of irrelevant curriculum in an educational system that is founded on the interests, the needs, and the goal of attuning learners with the environment. However, the issue of irrelevant curriculum had become a reality in Nigerian education because of our departure from the tenets of the above philosophical orientations.

Ethnicity

Ordinarily, the problem of ethnicity has been a value and a variable negatively associated with Nigerian political class and some other sectors of the country's national life down the ages. In a sense, it is a negative value that has also filtered into the educational system. The consequence is that it has tended to stifle the hitherto untrammelled ventilation of ideas, intellectualism, and creativity, which were the hallmarks of education in pre- independence Nigeria. However, the contrary had become the case in recent years, especially in most of our educational institutions and this tends to distance our schools

from the educational ideals particularly in areas of leadership. The implication is that managers and leaders of the educational system are now simply committed to observing dependent loyalty of ethnic inclinations, with lots of intrigues and backstabbing in the name of having a grab of one position or the other. This problem had assumed very negative dimensions as it has become the practice for leaders and stakeholders in education to affirm themselves in salvaging declarations of the educational system while paradoxically deepening the problems.

The emergence of ethnicity in Nigeria's educational system clearly runs contrary to the idealist position on the theory of the state where the leadership of the society is expected to be occupied by the philosopher kings, and not the guardians or the artisans. What the problem of ethnicity thus tend to portray in our educational system is a situation where the guardians or the artisans occupy leadership positions while the philosopher kings have been relegated to the background; a case of square pegs in round holes. This explains why implementation of important policies on educational development often suffer some setbacks on the altar of ethnic-inclined leadership. This has obviously stagnated educational development in Nigeria. It would therefore be right to argue here that Nigerian educational system is grappling with the problem of ethnicity because there is no sincere commitment to the major principles of idealism and humanism where emphasis is placed on the well-being of man irrespective of ethnic inclinations.

CONCLUSION

This paper has thus far attempted to assess the problems facing Nigerian educational system within the context of philosophical orientations or what some call philosophical schools of thought. Having exposed the tenets and ideals of some various philosophical orientations considered in this work; and having critically pointed out the problems confronting Nigerian education we posit that there is nothing wrong with the content and the formulation of Nigeria's educational philosophy.

The major problems we have discerned are those bothering on ignorance and mostly, the failure and lack of political will to actually and consciously operate the educational system on the ideals and foundations of those philosophies that underlie our educational policy. Our submission thus is that the identified problems can be prevented or minimized if only there is the sincere commitment to the operation and implementation of policies in line with the eclectic nature of Nigeria's educational philosophy.

Though the focus of this paper is on Nigeria, it is an incontrovertible fact that many developing nations are engulfed in the same educational problems like

Nigeria. Thus our analysis and solution proffered could make meaning to such as well.

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