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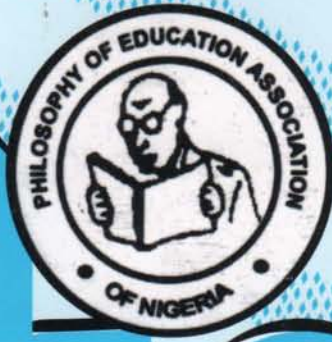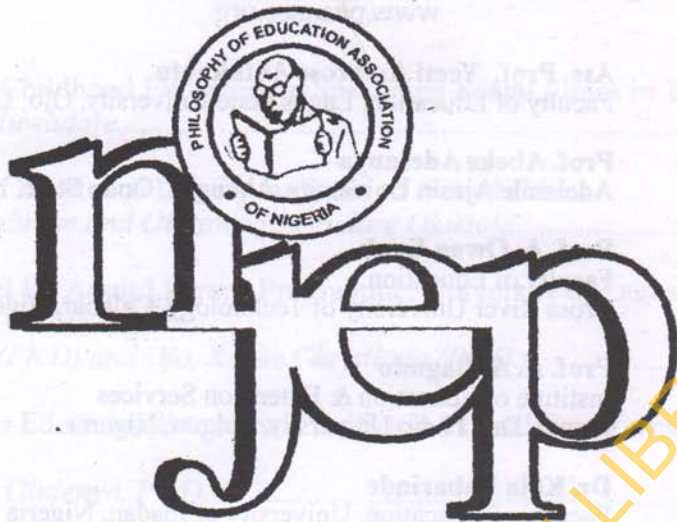
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PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION
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CONTENTS

RECONSIDERING A PHILOSOPHY FOR NIGERIAN EDUCATION

Chris. O. Omoregie & Emma. E. Osuji

Abstract

This paper examined the Nigerian philosophy of education as stated in the 2004 National Policy on Education. It argues from the position that philosophy of education ought to consist of the nature of human beings and of the society, what the society considers the best type of knowledge worth having and the value system considered most valuable. The paper speculates that communalistic living and effective citizenship are essential elements that should be reconsidered in the Nigerian Philosophy of Education.

Key words: Goal of education, Nigerian education, Philosophy of education

Introduction

The five national objectives of the Second National Development Plan from 1970 to 1974 were made the official philosophical base for Nigerian education in National Policy on Education (1981). These five objectives were the national goals of Nigeria and they were endorsed as what education should aim at achieving;

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

From the five national objectives of Nigeria stated in the Second National Development Plan, a united, strong and self-reliant nation seems to be the most important goal because the national development plan that generated the objectives was formulated to address the problems created by the civil war by instituting a programme of reconstruction and rehabilitation in Nigeria. After the civil war, the concept of unity continues to appear as the major goal of the nation because of much diversity in the country. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states that 'we the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria firmly and solemnly resolved to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation under God dedicated to the promotion of inter-African solidarity, world peace, international cooperation and understanding.

The concept and issue of unity should be central to policies study for two reasons: the other provisions are democratically derived and to discuss a free, just and egalitarian soci-

ety from the present political arrangement in Nigeria could mean a discourse of what the ideal situation should be rather than the current practice of governance in Nigeria. The problem of disintegration that daily confronts citizens from tribal conflict to religious agitations, war over resources are factors that can set the country apart regardless of the form of government being practiced.

Chapter II section 18, of the 1999 constitution states that government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels and that government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy and to this end, Government shall as and when practicable provide: free, compulsory and universal primary education; free secondary education; free university education; and free adult literacy programme. Whether the country has the ability or not is another issue entirely. This provision and the growing establishment of private schools at all levels in Nigeria raise some moral questions like, are individuals not free to choose the kind of education they wish to give to their children even if government provides for free education at all levels? Can educational provision at public and private schools ever be of the same cost, curriculum and standard? So, a free and democratic society, a just and an egalitarian society is the sole duty of the government. This is why there is the need for the kind of education that would inculcate the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and of the country at large.

National Goals of Nigerian Education

National policy on education states that the national goals of Nigerian education can be used as a means for realizing national objectives of education through the content of the curriculum and the methods, material, equipment and aids required for implementing the curriculum. The objectives of Nigerian education which were formulated into a national philosophy by the national policy on education were:

a. the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and of society.
b. the training of the mind in building valuable concepts, generalisation and understanding of the world around us.
c. the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence, both mental and physical, as equipment for the individual to live in his society.
d. the acquisition of relevant and balance knowledge facts about local and world phenomena. (Aderelegbe, 1972)

Taking more than a cursory look at the objectives shows that though they are laudable and reassuring, they nevertheless are beset with the problems of ambiguity and hence in need of clarification. (Uduigwomen & Ozumba 2004) Why are these objectives thought to be what would lead to the achievement of the national goals for Nigeria and how can each of these statements achieve these goals?

One of the achievements of the conference that deliberated on a philosophy for Nigerian education was that it brought together Nigerians from many different walks of life and got them talking on the goals of Nigerian education. (Taiwo, 1985) The 1988 National Policy on Education refers to this conference as a culmination of expressions of general dissatisfaction with the existing education system which had become irrelevant to national needs, aspiration and goals.

How has the objective of education stated by this conference been able to show the philosophy of Nigerian education? The 1981 and 1988 editions of the National Policy on

education state that Nigeria's philosophy of education therefore is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, both inside and outside the formal school system. This statement has been criticized by Aboluwodi (2008) as vague and ambiguous because it cannot be easily understood by an interested member of the public.

From this criticism one can ask, what is the first and foremost element that educational activity in Nigeria should aim at achieving? If it is the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen, then what are the attributes of a sound and effective citizen? What is the relationship 'between a sound and effective citizen with equal educational opportunities? Do sound and effective citizens have equal educational opportunities?

Questions that can be raised from this statement on the philosophy of Nigerian education are unending. Perhaps this was why the 1998 and 2004, subsequent editions unlike the section one of 1981 edition that is entitled Philosophy of Nigerian education, was changed to Philosophy and goals of education in Nigeria. This change has not solved the problem of ambiguity in Nigeria National Policy on Education especially on the philosophy of education. Hence, there is the need to explain the terms used in the 2004 edition of National Policy education and examine it, if there is truly a Philosophy of Nigerian education. This can be done from the statement that a viable philosophy of education should be based on the nature of man and of the society as conceived by that society; on what that society considers the best type of knowledge worth having, and how it is acquired; and on a value system or a theory of what it considers most valuable and worth having. (Akinpelu, 1981)

Countries that have constructed a viable philosophy of education based it on their national philosophy where in the nature of man as conceived by the society can be understood. Liberal education is traced to the writings of Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle and their influences can be found in educational systems of European countries. The pragmatism of John Dewey has influenced the American system of education. As a national philosophy, pragmatism in American has various dimensions. It adopts the scientific method of understanding human person and solving human problems and contends that education would develop only if there were true democracy (Elias & Merriam, 1980). From this philosophical background one can explain the 'what works' and 'no child left behind' tenets of the American educational system.

Another example of an influential educational philosopher on national philosophy is Paulo Freire. Paulo Freire philosophy of conscientisation though initially resisted by the society later became useful in bringing about the desirable change in Brazil. Most African nationalist in their struggles for self-determination found socialism as an alternative ideology in combating the imperialist European countries. They tagged their version of socialism, African socialism through which they developed their own philosophy. Three of these African nationalist namely Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Senghor and Julius Nyerere who had the opportunity of leading their countries had the opportunity of constructing a national philosophy under which their educational system developed. Nkrumah calls his philosophy, consciencism, which affirms the primacy of matter, and maintains that spiritual realities developed from matter through dialectical tension, is inherent in matter (Nkrumah, 1974)

Leophold Senghor's Philosophy of negritude rejects French Colonial policy of assimiliation but asserts the value of the African culture and identity (Senghor, 1975). Julius Nyerere's Ujamaa emphasises family relationship in traditional African society. Nyerere

believes that when a country is made up of family villages that are self reliant, there will be mutual cooperation that extends to the whole country. Kwame Nkrumah, Leophold Senghor and Julius Nyerere give prominence to the communalistic nature of African society and reject the individualistic mentality of western society. These three nationalists who were products of western education would have perceived the differences between the African and western society and postulated ideas that depicted African society as uniquely based on communalism and brotherhood. This does not mean that African societies were in a state of perpetual peace and harmony, or that members of the societies were always satisfied with their lot. On the contrary, there is evidence of conflict, dissent and of narrow identities (Bello, 2002)

Unlike the African countries such as Ghana, Senegal, Tanzania where there were dominant philosophies of nationalists and leaders. Nigeria seems not to have any national philosophy on which its educational system can be based. Although there is no single dominant philosophy that can be regarded as Nigeria's national philosophy, there are ideas and thoughts on educational system in Nigeria that can be used to construct a philosophy of education for the country.

5.2   Towards a Reconsideration of a Nigerian Philosophy of Education

From Akinpelu's proposition that three elements should be considered in constructing a Philosophy of education for a country, that is, the nature of man and of the society, what the Nigerian society considers the best type of knowledge worth having and value system most desirable in the society, one can attempt a construction of a Nigerian philosophy of education.

The Nature of Man and Society in Nigeria

From historical perspectives, the nature of human beings in Nigerian culture can be seen in extolling the virtues of courage, boldness and moral strength of heroes and heroines from three dominant cultures of Nigeria. The Yoruba's honoured men and women with mystical powers like Oduduwa who is said to be the father of the Yoruba, the Igbos honoured those who had the physical and moral powers to keep the tradition of the people like Okonkwo portrayed in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart, while the Hausas gave respect to those born into royalty or who attained prominence by the virtue of their birth or natural endowment. These virtues that are extolled in history and literature point to the nature of man and the society in Nigeria. The general notion of the traditional African society and perhaps the primitive society in other continents is the communalistic nature of the society. Each person belongs to the society and the society gives each person an identity and prominence. The communalistic nature of the Nigerian society reflects in the languages and names. George Ehusani makes a distinction between names in Africa and American cities.

There is a new development in the contemporary American society whereby young parents pick names for their children merely on consideration of how sweet they sound. To an African however a name means much more than an identification mark, and serves as an important vehicle of cultural identity (Ehusani, 1999). An indigenous African name defines the bearer, tells some story about the family of the bearer, carries the parents' aspirations for the future of the bearer, and points to the values of the society into which the bearer is born.' More importantly, Nigerians call people not merely by their names but also by whom they are associated with. Hence, there are references to Iyabo's father, Chukwudi's mother and

Amina's husband. This shows that ones relations, parenthood and neighbours can give a person a name or an identity which could be either desirable or not. That is why the point of departure in describing the nature of humans in Africa is 'we are, therefore I am' as opposed to the Cartesian 'I think, therefore I am'.

In the traditional African society, individuals sacrifice personal gains for the survival of the society. It is in this sense that human sacrifices for the survival of society was done and carried out. Human sacrifices were not originally for money or position, but mainly for peace to reign in the indigenous society. It is a welcome development that western civilisation outlawed human sacrifices, for example by abolishing the killing of twins, but that political office holders and those who are desperately searching for money are still engaged in human sacrifices in Nigeria has no justification whatsoever. Whatever is not done in the interest of the community falls short of the two vital points in the African conception of man that is, the respect of human dignity and the superior claims of the family. Africans find it difficult to conceive human nature as a purely contemplative being: for them human qualities presuppose a world of human relations. Thus, the influence of group consciousness is recognised as the motivating influence of African ideas and thought (Busia, 1972).

The Best Type of Knowledge worth Having

The epistemological standpoint of the western culture has been distinguished from that of the Africans by Leophord Senghor and Kwasi Wiredu. These authors have interpreted African type of knowledge differently in their bid to defend African philosophy. The question that both seek to answer: are African views of the world different from the western? In the words of Senghor (1975:53) :

> *The African goes out to the things of the world and to his fellow man through a reason which is primarily 'empathy'. His whole person grasps the totality of the world in which he lives with a single intuitive embrace rather than cutting up his objects into purely mental categories and reassembling them according to a purely mental and subjective plan. African intuition seeks participation rather than the cold, analytic and superficial contact which discursive reason has with its objects. There is emotional warmth, a lived and spontaneous involvement in reality and particularly in one's fellowman*

The best type of knowledge worth having from Senghor's quotation is that by which a person has immediate participation and immersion in a perceivable world which cannot be separated into the western epistemic subject - object dichotomy. For Africans, knowledge is not abstractive but emotive and active. For knowledge to be true is to opine as a special case of the claims for anything whatever to be is to be apprehended." (Wiredu, 1980) Orangun (2001) admonishes us to tread with caution and not to be carried away with either Senghor's afrocentricism or Wiredu's subjectivism, but rather identify and characterise the basic intellectual style of a particular African race. Orangun (2001) chose the Yoruba race where he was born and nurtured and made a cross cultural comparison between Yoruba and western epistemological views. Yoruba epistemic system is human centred, evolutionary and the objects of the external are known by direct sense experience. The object - subject dichotomy prevalent in the western hypothetical-deductive system is alien to the authentic African

epistemic system which is socio-culturally inclined. Despite Orangun's caution, he claims that the best type -of knowledge worth having in Africa is the knowledge that puts the perceiver at the centre of the sense experience of the external world. The true knowledge is gained by immediate and direct experience. Does this mean that anything that is outside a person's experience cannot be known? This does not mean that Africans do not reflect. An evidence of reflection in African can be deduced from adage like 'count your teeth with your tongue'. It appeared very difficult but with patience it is said 'eyes can see nose'.

Knowledge remains true even when it cannot be immediately perceived by a person. If it is raining where a person is at a particular time and the person is told through a phone call from a friend in some kilometers away that there is no rainfall in another location, either of their experiences cannot be false because the two cannot perceive the two situations of rainfall and no rainfall at the same time. What this means is that knowledge can be true even if it is not directly perceived by someone. Rather than claim that knowledge that is abstract is either superior or inferior as some philosophers will like to argue, it suffices to conclude that Africans prefer knowledge that can be perceived immediately and directly as the knowledge that is worth having. This means that even if the knowledge is acquired through abstraction it will still be subjected to the human senses.

Value System most Desirable in the Nigerian Society

In the traditional societies, young people gathered together for ritual or ceremonial purposes such as initiation or weddings or funerals. With the coming of larger scale societies through colonialism and subsequently with the growth of the modern state, the schools system assumed very considerable importance for the development of a national culture that was very often quite different from the very many different smaller scales and often mutually antagonistic or traditional cultures. In particular, the national and colonial culture often expressed themselves with a fashion group. There is a feeling especially among young people that unless you are "in the fashion" you are not worth much, that nobody will admire or respect you unless you exhibit certain attitudes and express some opinions.

Seeking 'success' means what our society counts as success - that is, a lot of money, status, power, fame, being on the television. and so on. It is reasonable to want some 'success' in this sense since everybody wants to be recognised, and thought important but what of seeking this 'success' at the detriment of others in the society? Education has mostly been used in the developing countries as an instrument for the creation of a national culture rather than the revival or even survival of traditional cultures. Heltne (1980) argues that education would be much more effective "were they more locally ordered, more related to local cultural realities and aspirations, and more flexible in their delivery. Then the education system would be more at ease with a new ideology of development that was sensitive to spatially variable needs and aspirations of a population. This would mean much less dependence on formal acquisition of qualifications, more non-formal and adult educational centres, more on-the-job training and a much more radical curriculum in schools. In short, a shift in emphasis from 'schooling' to education, but without denying the continuing importance of a formal school's system is needed in Nigerian society.

Traditional African culture is being corroded by technology and modernity. The moral foundations built by traditional religion are being questioned by the system of modernity, especially in its emphasis on markets, profits, consumption and possessions, business and technological expertise (Ilogu, 1974). All these tend towards destroying the traditional val-

ues of consideration of the individuals as a human person, and society as a community of fellows, linked together by bonds of long stretch kinship. Instead of these, individualism and new concepts of wealth and values are being built up, and there are not yet enough moral functions for them to stand on.

Traditional education is the oldest form of education in Nigeria which preceded both Islamic and Christian influences. Before the formal school system took over the responsibility of socialisation in the case of those children who go to school, traditional education was used in training children and youths in the family and the village" (Thakur, 1980). Traditional education goes on throughout life. After maturity, one assumes the role of a teacher of the younger generation but one also continues preparation for oncoming roles right up to the old age. The idea behind lifelong learning in the traditional society is to make individuals fit for the environment. Traditional education aims at preparing the individual physically, morally, intellectually, socially and vocationally so as to make the individual good enough to shoulder the responsibilities of life.

Moral training is given by making the individual respect his religion; believe in traditional gods, in supernatural power and in the Supreme Being. There are restrictions against stealing, lying and cheating. If rules are broken, misfortune may befall the offender, but he may also be punished by the society. The elders of the village may administer punishment to offenders and the latter accept it in good faith. Nigerians were known for their strong orientation to collective values, particularly a collective sense of responsibility. Research has largely ignored, misunderstood, or disregarded the value of Nigerian indigenous communities 'collective ethic'. The collective ethic recognises that survival derives from group harmony and all actions are within a collective context, which seeks to maintain the harmony and balance of an interrelated and essential egalitarian system (Mkabela, 2005).

Western education created a new class of educated people who could understand each other's point of view and could overcome ethnic and local differences more easily than those who had no common basis to guide them. However some people believe that western education has had bad effects also. They felt that youth's education in western schools tend to disrespect their elders and seniors. They indulge in forbidden activities like pre-marital sex, resulting in pregnancies and abortions; homosexuality; prostitution; and taking of drugs and alcohol. Though these vices are not directly encouraged by western education, it is argued that books, mass media and travelling abroad do introduce youths to bad aspects of western culture and civilisation.

The concept of education for living, prevalent in traditional societies has been restated by many leading educationists of the world. By and large, the aims of western education have become broad enough, and, these are directed at the production of well adjusted individuals for the modern complex systems. Such aims have been pursued by traditional societies, though the milieu was narrower when compared with that of the modern society. There is a lot that western education can learn from traditional education. Respect for elders, helping those in need, hospitality, strict ethical codes, and fair dealings with neighbours and others, and contentment with modest living are values and attitudes which can be gained from the traditional education and incorporated into modern education. On one hand, traditional societies cannot afford to remain hedged within only the traditional beliefs and practices. On the other hand, it need not rush into accepting all changes and innovations brought about by western education.

An Akan living in Akanland is expected, as a matter of course, to observe, for example,

Akan rule of greeting. It goes without saying that other people living in other lands need not feel any such obligation. On the other hand, according to Wiredu (1995) whether one is a Ghanaian or an American or a Chinese or of any other nationality, race or culture, truth telling is an indefeasible obligation upon a person. It is clear from this quotation that while it is possible to envisage an educational institution without the rule of greeting elders (teachers) it is almost impossible to have an educational institution that is devoid of the moral rule of truth-telling. On this consideration, truth-telling would be binding on every learner and indeed everybody in the community. If it is not binding and everybody could tell lies without inhibitions, no one would trust anyone's word and learning would become intolerably difficult. Strictly speaking, the obligatoriness of moral rules is unconditional. This unconditional nature stems from the fact that moral rules unlike customs are not conditioned by responses to environmental stimuli; comprising the results of training and of rewards and punishment in a given society (Ebijuwa, 1999).

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the philosophy of education as postulated in the national policy on education which has being revised, with little or no change in the aspect stating in categorical terms a philosophy of Nigerian education. The analysis that has been done gives room for proposing a new philosophy of education for Nigeria for three reasons. The present worldview of education has not achieved the aim and objective of education which should be centred on development in the country. Second, compared to what other countries have as their philosophy of education, what is stated as Nigerian Philosophy of Education o falls short of the philosophical underpinning that gave rise to such philosophies. Third, one of the greatest problem that beset Nigerian educational institutions and society in general is the moral crisis called corruption seen in mismanagement of public fund and flagrance disregard for rule of law.

The indigenous educational systems in Nigeria can serve as the underlying philosophical background for a communalistic living. This existed in the past and it is fast being eroded in Nigerian community as a whole. The emphasis is no longer the corporate existence of the society but on individuals' interest at the detriment of the community. Consequently, to forge ahead as a nation that is well integrated, the philosophy of education should be communalistic. This means the philosophy of Nigerian education should be built on communalistic living that fosters effective citizenship.

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