RELEVANCE OF PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION TO CURRICULUM THEORY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Attempts of undue separation of the philosophy of education and curriculum theory and development in the teaching of systematic functional education have been seriously criticized. This has been so because it is not in the best interest in the teaching of an intelligent and national curriculum which forms the bedrock to the development of a truly vibrant educational system in Nigeria. This paper, therefore, is an attempt to investigate the relevance of the philosophy of education to the development of an intelligent curriculum which is imperative to the teaching of functional education in the technical, the sciences, the humanities and social sciences towards the revitalization of the Nigerian educational sector.
INTRODUCTION

The tendency to dichotomize the philosophy of education from the national curriculum theory in the teaching of technical, vocational and other relevant areas in education seems to have been persisting over the years. This, however, is not in the best interest of achieving the major objective of education in Nigeria which is the provision of the requisite skills to meet the day-to-day sectoral requirements of the Nigerian economy.

Educational professionalism has adequately revealed the interdependent character of educational philosophy, the development of the curriculum and teaching in the development of any society. The supply of technical and vocational manpower is the mainstay of economic activities. The pursuit of economic development should, therefore, begin from that angle.

The dismal performance of the Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) products (more particularly for example) and the way this has affected the manufacturing industry in Nigeria is lamentable (Mohammed 2001). This is a strong indicator and support for our argument. This has been attributed partly to professional inadequacies as a result of delinkages within the framework of philosophy of education and curriculum development. The result is that teaching in the practical oriented and vocational education is more of the lecture types. Graduates in the varying degrees of professionalism leave Colleges and Universities equipped not with functional education which they can apply in the world of work. On the contrary, they graduate stuffed full with abstruse theories and out dated assumptions. The result is crisis of performance at work places (Salisu, 2001). To arrest the situation and create a vibrant and effective system of education in Nigeria, emphasis in education should be more on the development in the students appropriate attitudes and dispositions critical to the actual utilization of the acquired knowledge and skills which these students acquire in the various fields of education in the Universities and other relevant educational institutions. These are no doubt found in the philosophy of education and the rational curriculum.

Phenomenal changes have been witnessed (more specifically) in terms of depth and expanse of knowledge in the field of education over the years. This has increased, in scope and intensity, in the requirements for qualification as a curriculum developer and a teacher in the field of education (Enoh and Bamanja, 1997). Furthermore, as can be rightly observed, the persisting problematique bedevilling the Nigerian educational sector has been the production over the years of half-backed inefficient manpower to the Nigerian economy. Generally graduates tend to be less practically and functionally oriented thereby leaving schools and universities without much practical skills related to their variety of disciplines. This has been a serious problem. Lack of incorporation of philosophy of education in the development of the curriculum by curriculum experts in partly to blame.

Different professionals in the field of education, especially the new entrants, see no relevance of philosophy of education in the process of designing and developing a curriculum and teaching same to students. They, therefore, refrain from grounding themselves in philosophy of education which to them is too abstract, critical and destructive, and which does not prescribe any course of action to the practising teacher. But on the other hand, the philosophy of education, curriculum development and teaching, which are more practical and, therefore, directly relevant to the engagement of the teacher, make much sense.

Considering the five national objectives of the Nigerian state which have been derived from the Nigerian philosophy of education, one can but doubt the relevance of philosophy of education in designing an educational curriculum and, of course teaching same to the Nigerian child in Nigerian universities and other relevant educational institutions. In fact as emphasized in the National Policy on Education, 1981. "the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation ..........." forms the basis of philosophy of education in Nigeria.

The quality of instruction at all levels of the Nigerian educational system, which has to do with the issues of curriculum development and teaching, has been oriented towards achieving the values of respect for the worth and dignity of the individual, faith in man's ability to make rational decisions; moral and spiritual values in interpersonal and human relations; respect for the dignity of labour; shared responsibility for the common good of the society, and the promotion of emotional, physical and psychological health of all children (National Policy on Education, 1981). All these are intrinsically interwoven within the framework of education development which forms the bedrock of a vibrant and effective educational system meant for developed economic sector in Nigeria.

Finally if the curriculum expert and teacher has to determine his aims, he must of necessity, benefit tremendously from developments within the philosophy of education terrain (Enoh and Bamanja, 1997). In this way a vibrant manufacturing industry in Nigeria could be a reality.

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AND RATIONAL CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

To establish whether or not educational philosophy is relevant when developing a curriculum for educational training in Nigeria, one cannot escape from the problem of definitions. In a way, only when the philosophy of education and the curriculum are adequately defined and clarified can this relevance be established and its imperative ness to creating a vibrant effective educational system in Nigeria be appreciated.

Educational philosophy is that applied discipline which examines the various schools of general philosophy and the educational doctrines of the great educators and relate their relevance and application to educational problems and situations (Bello, 1991). Schofield (1972) examines philosophy as the process of asking questions, while Hirst and Peters (1970) believe philosophy to be concerned with questions about the analysis of concepts and with questions about the
grounds of knowledge, beliefs, actions and activities. On the other hand, education can literally mean the process or methodology of performing an activity expertly in the field of trade, profession or career. This could be just one definition out of several others. In the attempt to effectively train students technically and functionally in order to revitalize Nigeria’s ailing education sector a kind of philosophical guidance is required in the designing and teaching of the curriculum.

In the light of the above, philosophy of education has been interpreted as the application of philosophical tools in solving of educational problems. In so far as this is determined, then philosophy of education has painstakingly established its relevance in the selection of aims, experiences and contents, and in the organisation and integration of learning experiences and evaluation all of which form the basis of a rational education curriculum and teaching (Enoh and Bamanja, 1997). Furthermore, the selection of educational aims, goals and objectives are the indispensable process in curriculum development and the philosophy of education sets the entire process in motion. Hook (1956) interestingly points out that "........ The only distinctive theme with which the philosophy of education has concerned itself from Plato to Dewey is: What should the aims and goals of education be?"

The consideration of educational aims is that of conversation about the good life, the nature of man and events, the varieties of experiences among others. These form the perennial themes in philosophical investigation. While philosophy states the nature of the good life that all men should aspire to live, the curriculum developer and teacher prepares the process and also provides the necessary tools needed to adjust each member of the society to live this good life and be useful to the society. This is what is needed for a vibrant educational system in Nigeria. Also, a good understanding of the philosophical reality of the physical world and the nature of man will dictate the methodology of the curricula and the goals of the teacher. While educational philosophy is a guide to curriculum development and teaching, the curriculum expert and teacher also yields some facts needed for accurate philosophical justification.

Moreover, the curriculum is planned “not in the light of what we think to be the nature of knowledge nor by reference to what appears to be the requirements of the society or culture in which we live, but in response to what we can find that is actually of interest to the children themselves” (Kelly, 1967). Though the notion of interest, a popular cliché in curriculum development and teaching is doubtful and vague for what the curriculum expert may consider to be of interest to the learners may not, after all, be. The conceptual clarity is done by the philosophy of education and this is very much relevant to the curriculum expert and teacher.

**STEPS IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND THE INDISPENSABILITY OF PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERSTANDING**

Curriculum comprises all the necessary learning activities which are intended to bring about certain desired changes in human beings and the assessment of the extent to which such changes have taken place in the society for which the school, the University included, assumes responsibility. Going by this definition, the curriculum must, if this is to be relevant to the educational environment, involve certain stages which include aims, goals and objectives, selection of learning experiences, selection of contents, the organisation and integration of learning experiences and contents, and evaluation (Wheeler, 1967).

In each of the stages in the curriculum development, the application of educational philosophy becomes imperative. Philosophical understanding and thus philosophy of education, becomes even more relevant in the sense that philosophical issues look into the aims and purposes of education, the politics and ideology of the society and therefore, influence what is or what is not to be included in the curriculum. Furthermore, since the school is now used as an instrument to achieve political aims and foster particular attitudes and values deemed necessary for the development of society, unity and cultural identity, then the philosophy of education assumes greater responsibility as a determinant of the curriculum and the process of teaching.

Whereas it is the duty of the curriculum development expert and teacher to select the content, the philosopher defines this content and further gives relevant meanings and understandings which the curriculum developer must have to incorporate in his task of selecting those contents that are relevant to the learners. In selecting the contents, we would like to point out that, at this juncture, the criteria of validity, significance, interest and learning ability are important (Enoh and Bamanja 1997). These by no means demand much philosophical knowledge.

Though the philosopher defines validity, for example, as being authentic, or true, or the extent to which the concept is bound to make an individual perceive what he is intended to perceive, he should inform the curriculum expert of the serious limitations such views may have on the scope of knowledge to be taught. The question of who determines significance and interest is likely to be asked by the philosopher of education. Thus the philosophy of education seems to open the curriculum expert’s thinking as he considers these variables in deciding the contents of his curriculum.

Methodology or organisational procedures, which to many, is at the heart of curriculum thinking, is also open to philosophical considerations. The role of the teacher, who also develops the curriculum, in the issues of common emphasis, preparation of the different methods to be used, organisation of materials and even teacher-learner relationship is undoubtful. So, while many curriculum experts believe that a variety of methods offers the best result, it is the philosophy of education that defines what good teaching is all about. Hardly do many curriculum experts take the painstaking steps of understanding what effective teaching and learning are all about in which the conceptions of methodology should be grounded.

To be certain about what activities in class will amount to effective teaching, it is necessary to be clear about what genuine teaching and learning are. Is there any conceptual inter-relationship between teaching, training indoctrination and
instruction? Unless the curriculum developer is guided by a good philosophical understanding of these concepts, he may rather be doing one in place of the other; these issues are the prime concern of the philosophy of education.

Curriculum evaluation, which is as important, though a complex process, as the other stages in the development of the curriculum, it is also open to critical philosophical considerations. Taba (1962), regards curriculum evaluation as an intricate and complex process which begins with the formation of objectives, process of interpretation to get to the meaning of this evidence, the judgements about the strengths and weaknesses of the students, and which ends in decisions about the needed changes and improvements in curriculum and teaching. To us, the implication of Taba’s assertion here is the need to change. This emanates from a certain belief which is at the core educational philosophy, and which, according to Barrow (1976), is the truth of ultimate value judgements that cannot realistically be said to be incontrovertibly demonstrable. By this statement, every aspect of the technical and vocational curriculum process is viewed as value judgement, which are certainly subject to human limitations that can never claim perfection. Philosophy of education alone holds this view which the curriculum developer certainly needs to incorporate in his job.

RATIONAL CURRICULUM AND THE EFFECTIVE TEACHER AS END PRODUCTS OF PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS

There is no doubt that a good curriculum and an effective teacher can produce the desired manpower needs which can revitalize our educational system and even make it more vibrant. Perhaps over the years, the major problem of the manufacturing sector of the Nigerian economy is not trained manpower but the required government support to the teeming technical and vocational school leavers.

Curriculum and teaching experts who feel they are not the end products of the great philosophers of education commit the same misjudgement as philosophers of education who similarly do not consider themselves as producers of good curricula and effective teachers. The connection between a good curriculum, metaphysics, epistemology and axiology becomes self-evident when considering how schools apply them in stating the aims of education, curriculum content and even methods and source of teaching. All these are very relevant to the development of a vibrant educational system. Furthermore, the ideas that may seem purely curricula in nature are, after all, the postulations of the great philosophers of education. This assertion helps to justify that a good curriculum and teacher are the products of philosophical theories. Therefore for any one curriculum to be good enough for an effective educational system it has to be philosophical.

The philosophical works of people like Paul Birts, Richard Pitgers and Wheeler to mention a few, on curriculum issues further illustrate that actually a good curriculum must be founded within the confines of philosophical analogies. On the other hand, in the attempt to produce the effective teacher, the philosophical works of Benjamin Blooms, Skinner, Thorndike and a host of others are employed.

According to Senap (1978), education as initiation stresses the superiority of the teacher and a curriculum that are based on a hierarchical view of knowledge. The superiority of the teacher and the curriculum depends on the extent to which the teacher becomes philosophical when teaching and the curriculum containing the various theories, though philosophical, must be able to bring the desired outcome in the learner. Knowing the individual differences of the learners by the teacher is not devoid of rational application of philosophical knowledge. Even the setting of examination questions entails that the teacher knows the different levels of intelligence of the learners and the ability to attempt these questions. This demands much philosophical considerations, and its relevance to manpower supply for a vibrant economy and industry in Nigeria is certain.

The functions of philosophy, and by implication philosophy of education, may be seen as being descriptive, normative and critical (Wingo, 1974), but what is being described, prescribed or critical cannot but be what has bearings to the curriculum and teaching which are what educational curriculum is all about. One may not be interested in Plato’s revelations on the nature of the “real” for its own sake but also its connection with his educational ideas. Here the implication is that the real teacher or the real curriculum emanates from the philosophical ideas of Plato and the like. The fact that a good curriculum and effective teacher are the products of educational philosophy is undoubtful. The same is true of the normative function of what is prescribed. If it is educational, it should have curricula implications. And what will philosophical analysis in education amount to if what is being analyzed cannot have vital links to issues relevant to the curriculum and teaching?

Karl Marx (1662) rightly asserted that the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways: the point, however, is to change it. What we may ask here is who induces change? Philosophers of education of the analytical school may have analysed education in many ways: the point is to relate this to transform the individual rationally technically and vocationally, a task undertaken by the teacher through a good educational curriculum which is the epicentre of education. This is a responsibility to be shouldered by the Nigerian educators if a vibrant effective educational foundation is to become a reality.

Given the much needed desire for a vibrant educational foundation which forms the basis for economic growth and industrialisation in Nigeria, it should be pointed out that philosophers of education are concerned with both the understanding and improvement of the curriculum and teaching. This concern is very much central for, according to Fever, (1956), a philosophy of education is an applied social philosophy which is concerned especially with the problem of alternative curricula and teaching methods. This implies that, a good educational curricular and teaching method is derived essentially from educational philosophies. However, one does not employ philosophy of education when they intentionally, or otherwise, fail to take their tasks to the points at which issues about the teaching curriculum and the teacher are considered. As a matter of fact; when this point is not attained, one has been doing nothing else but philosophy of education.
Finally, and given the historical analysis of educational policy in Nigeria and its seeming implications for both educational planning and curriculum development, apparently the colonial educational policies seemed to have the shortcomings of not taking into account Nigeria’s local peculiarities nor did these policies involved Nigerians themselves. However, the educational laws of 1999 and 2004 as found in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1998) seem to pay relevant attention to the merger of philosophy of education in the formulation of educational curriculum in Nigerian educational system.

Just as in line with educational philosophy, the National Policy on Education re-examines the objectives of Nigerian education to include the inculcation of national consciousness and unity, the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society, the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around, and the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of his society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1998).

Colonial legacy has had far-reaching consequences on Nigerian educational policy and which informed the dependency on post colonial educational relics devoid of philosophical underpinnings, and this made Woolman (2001) to lamentably comment that “African School Systems today still follow the rigid structure of time periods and grade-level progression found in Western education”. Here there is little change in the curriculum which is neither philosophical nor reflect the local values of the Nigerian pupils and students.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the meaning we gather from the foregoing is that for any meaningful development to occur in the educational sector of the Nigerian economy, the relationship between the curricula taught in schools must be reflected within the confines of educational philosophy. Although philosophy of education and the curriculum are distinct and autonomous disciplines they nonetheless exhibit interplay of relationships which can be meaningful in the attempt to revitalize the ailing educational system in Nigeria.

Philosophy of education and the teaching curriculum are two ends of a continuum neither of which can exist without the other, the philosophy here becomes the means while the curriculum becomes the end in achieving the establishment of an effective system of education in Nigeria’s struggle to develop in this new historical dispensation. The philosophy of education and the education curriculum have this organic relationship which is severed at the peril of educational professionalism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the above, this paper proceeds to make the following recommendations:

A. The 6:3:3:4 policy on education must be pursued with the vigour and seriousness it deserves, and must strictly follow the objectives it contains.

B. The government and private sector must ensure adequate funding of institutions all over the country. This is the only way the interrelation of philosophy of education and the educational curriculum could be meaningful.

C. Both the government and the private sector should ensure financial support to teeming school leavers with various educational professionalism so that they can start on their own.

D. Industrial excursions should be an integral part of the Education programme, and there must be adequate fundings for these excursions.

D. The Industrial Training Fund should be made more effective by making provisions for adequate placement and supervision of students.

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