

Critique of Idealist Philosophy of Education: Towards a Reconstruction of the Nigerian Philosophy



Philosophy

Keywords: Idealism, philosophy, education, reconstructing.

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Abstract

The Nigerian philosophy of education, which in its fundamental organization was articulated to militate against Nigeria's socio-economic Quagmire, has overtime been bedeviled with a plethora of human endemic enigma; egocentricism, corruption, poor leadership, ineffective implementation, and to this variance has been termed inefficient in meeting the ultimate aim or needs of the individual and society at large. Concomitantly, idealists' philosophy of education which thesis proposes the development of the self, towards mental emancipation for societal transformation, is periscope by this paper as the green-light for current encumbrances challenging the educational system in Nigeria. Hitherto, the paper embraced the method of analysis, descriptive and criticality in this enquiry, with the optimistic intention of reconstructing the Nigerian philosophy of education.

Introduction

The debate over harnessing the Nigerian spirit, culture, tradition and values after colonization has been a seasoned one. Thinkers in the different epoch of existence in Nigeria have learned their opinions and prowess in the discuss of finding an authentic—all-encompassing philosophy of education that will reflect the true Nigerian ontology, but this effort have been evasive countlessly by the attendant demands of the age.

In an attempt to challenge this status quo, Nnamdi Azikiwe advised that:

Education should impact to its students not only academic and cultural excellence in accordance with the classical concept, but also to endow them with scientific erudition, bestow them with vocational proficiency and infuse in them a sense of mission, particularly in those areas which satisfy the needs of the particular communities concerned in their crusade against poverty, disease, ignorance and superstition (Owan, 17).

He can infer that tone is derived from the idealist face of thought system. This is so because, in the thinking of the idealist philosophy of education, the focus or objective of education is thus:

Promoting a high cognitive level of education, being concerned with safeguarding and promoting cultural learning, being concerned about student morality and character development, viewing the teacher as central to the educational process, stressing the importance of self-realization, placing a premium on the human and personal side of life, and approaching education in a comprehensive, systematic, and holistic manner (Baguia and Diluvio, 3).

Being thus stated earlier, educational philosophers from the Ancient to contemporary era either the Western or African strata have philosophize on the basis of the foundation as well as registering their views on the development or attainment of absolute truth (Sarbojit, 5).

In contradiction to this thought pattern, critics have advanced arguments against the idealist philosophy of education. Amongst these criticism is the allegation that “their concern for morality and character development is founded on cerebral knowledge, when in truth lived experienced alone can fortify and consolidate a human being” moral mettle. Baguia and Diluvio further asserts that morality and character are not grown in laboratories, libraries or classrooms. They culminate in moment by moment actions people take outside the portals of formal learning (7).

This apt seeming pragmatic and or eclectic approach of strategizing a philosophy of education divulges the clear essence of education. It runs contrary to the opaque Nigerian philosophy of education, which only theorizes that

The overall philosophy education is to:
live in unity and harmony as one
indivisible, insoluble, democratic and
sovereign nation founded on the principal
of freedom, equally and justice; promote
Inter-African solidarity and world peace
through understanding (5)

Analyzing the afore stated philosophies of education, in order words the idealist and Nigerian philosophy of education, this paper will attempt a revamp of Nigerian philosophy of education on the foundation of idealist philosophy of education.

Idealist philosophy of education: an overview

The concept “idealist” is coined from the English word “idea” which connotes “any result of mental activity; a thought, a notion; a way of thinking” (Wiktionary, 220). In a way, it can be interpreted as the ideal way of thinking, that makes sense to the listener or context.

The word also gains repute in philosophical milieu as a school of thought known as “idealism”. It began in the Western world with Socrates and Plato, it was Plato who note that ideas are real” (Vashishtha, 232). Ozumba espoused parri passu that “idealism is the philosophical position that says that only the mind and ideas exist” (Concise, 50). For the idealist, premium is a given to idea rather than material substance and “reality is fundamentally mental in nature” (Blackburn, 177).

Therefore, an idealist is one who holds the believe that the universe is the construction of mind and that whatever is true or real about the world is what the mind expresses or explains by the mental (Bekomson, 1). The physical world is just a manifestation of this Great Spirit behind it called the idea. The physical world it which is the essence or is destructible and changeable, but the idea behind the Spirit of the universe cannot be destroyed.

Philosophers of this school in philosophy of education includes but not restricted to Socrates, Plato, George Berkeley, Kant, Hegel and so on. These philosophers as well as those of the various epoch who celebrates this school of thought are termed idealist philosophers of education. Their resolve is to “ideally” discuss, solve and or implement educational thoughts using the instruments of philosophy.

Idealists advocate the use of intuition for knowing the ultimate. Accordingly they use deductive and inductive logic for understanding the physical universe. Spiritually, they believe in the three values of the truth (an intellectual value), the beauty (an aesthetic value, and the Good (a moral value), and they constitute the good (Vasshishtha, 234). And that education is the viable pathway to attain this highest and deepest goal.

Consequently, the aim of education for the idealist is to develop the natural man into an ideal man. The ideal man will be possessing physical, intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual perfection and all-round, integrated and complete development (235). He will suppress and conquer his natural tendencies and desires. This self-realization and mental victory will subsequently lead to societal transformation.

Their philosophy has as its curriculum, man and his environment. It is idea centered, and should lead to the attainment of higher goals. They generally subscribe to the conclusion that curriculum of education should have regard for;

The learners abilities and to his psychology,
The demands of the community, and the kind
of environment in which we live, (Bekemson, 8).

In addition to the above, they asserts that the curriculum content should be diversified, fitting these individuals, and especially their district, unique inertness. They promote the teaching of subjects like; culture, art, morality, history, philosophy, literature, and those subjects that center around man and aid his moral and spiritual development (237).

The teacher in this regard is focal and imperative. “He has the onus of providing key to the educative process, decides the opportunities for learning and growing for the students and also set the environment congenial for that” (238). The teacher is described as the mouthpiece and master of knowledge which the child is going to learn.

Conclusively, since education was an organized process; like the state of nature where all things were in place, although here it was more flexible, it was the task of the Government to see to the implementation of the educational process and this was supremely accorded. Shusterman, Richard pragmatism and criticism: A response to the critics of pragmatic aesthetics in the *Journal of speculative philosophy*. Penn State University. Vol. 16 No. 1, 2002 pp. 26-38.

Critique of Idealist Philosophy of Education

It was John Dewey who defined philosophy as “a criticism of criticisms” (Shusterman, 26). And this definition was not by any means celebrating the philosopher as a “carping, derivative fault-finder, preoccupied with recursively rechewing the critical cud of previous criticisms” (27). Rather, he envisioned a philosopher as an imaginative reconstructionist of ideas, who creatively refreshes ideas beyond their current conventions. It is in this regard that criticism retains a central momentum in philosophy. And the intent herein is to juxtapose and adjudge the areas where the idealist philosophers of education view links strength inter alia, areas where there is prevalence of weakness.

Judging from the exposed links above, it is a truism that the idealist philosophy of education is all encompassing. That is to say, it covers and or give credence to all areas of human and societal development. It does not cower away from the complex nature of the learner’s psychology, rather it believes in the training and fueling of the mind through ideas towards self-realization, mental emancipation and societal transformation.

On this bearing, thinkers in the scope of education revealed that “the contribution of idealism to educational thought is solid and profound” (Vashistra, et al, 239). It is affirmative also that the idealist philosophers have influenced the educational system through what they assert as the aim of education.

Iuoman, in supporting this hint of thinking, articulated the contributions of idealism to education, argued that “idealistic philosophy in education emphasizes the exaltation of personality which is the result of self-realization, achieved by spiritual knowledge, self-discipline and dignified teachers” (65). Concomitantly, their regard for human values, social sciences, arts, literature, man’s perfection physically, spiritually, intellectually, morally, aesthetically and socially, cannot be overemphasized.

Conversely, a plethora of critics identifies some fundamental areas where the idealist philosophers of education had short-comings. Britannica, pointed in support of this conclusion that “obviously, some of the types of idealism..... conflict with one another, spiritual monism and spiritual pluralism are opposite types; personalism rejects absolute idealism, and atheistic spiritual pluralism is in sharp conflict with theistic spiritual pluralism” (5). These issues stay debatable and paranoid amongst the idealist philosopher’s vis a vis idealist philosophers of education. Ewing in view of this put forward the view that “the idealist lack precision of modern thought, and stigmatized them by doting that their ideas can only be taught in class rooms” (10).

Vashistha et al post:

One of the criticisms against idealism refers to its abstractness. It has been described as an abstract philosophy and a visionary utopia. It hijacks one from immediate realities as it is based towards ultimate realities...it underrates the study of science and technology and is inimical to experimental method of learning. It is widely criticized for supporting the over-dependence of the learner on the teacher (239).

These criticisms are focused head-long on the foundation of idealist thought on education. It threatens its methods, place of the teacher as well as the lazy dependence of the student on the utopia leaders. Arguing that the after-math of this kind of system will lead to a replication of the teacher's intention, as against what the student should objectively learn. Therefore, their "centrality of the teacher in the learning process needs to be sharpened.... Leading is more about facilitating learning than imposing it because what is imposed can not only be rewritten at time of learning evaluations like examination, yet forgotten as soon as the papers have been handed in" (Baguia and Diluviou, 26).

Asouzu taking que against self-realization tenet of the idealist, mentioned that it is what he termed "the phenomenon of concealment" – tension laden factor that beclouds the learner to other realities. Therefore, the learner should affirm insightfully that to be is to be in mutual complementary relationship with all existent realities. What Asouzu calls ("Ka so mu adina"), that I may not be alone (31). This assertion derides the affirmation that one can succeed alone.

"Idealism is no doubt a good, starting point for self-realization of the human potentials but we have to bear in mind that the realization of the human potentials is never full if it does not happen in relation and together with fellow human beings, since no man is an island". (27).

Summarizing idealist criticism, Iuoman concluded thus:

Idealism is an abstract and vague doctrine. It avoids the present realities and prepares the child for the next world. It is concerned with the ultimate end of life, and avoids the real problems day to day living. Education should be such as to make individuals capable to solve the problems that confront them from time to time; Idealism lays more emphasis on thinking and mental activities. This increases the importance of intellectualism unnecessarily (53).

All these formulations and speculations against idealist philosophy where strategically aimed at bringing to fore the argument that it was not clearly experienced based. That is to say, it exalted the place of ideas and the mind in creatively utilizing ideas rather than empirically starting up a venture, before resorting to the method of idealization.

It is germane to affirm here that all the criticisms where to build a new form of idealism, not delineated from the old idealism. Researchers in the tenet of idealism have showed that ideas are the starting point of all invention. And for education, it is imperative to train the learner on how to think creatively first, before exposing him into practice.

Nigerian Philosophy in a Glance

Prior to this date 12th to 12th September 1969, the date where the Nigerian Educational Research Council (NERC) had a National Curriculum Conference, Nigerians were still being educated with the tenet of the bias educational programme-agenda of her colonial masters.

The conference was necessitated by the consummates registration, awareness or realization that the colonial educating agenda; neglected the socio-cultural background of the Nigerian society, tended to produce an 'educated' class of mere 'pen pushers' white collar job seekers or 'black European' disposed only to imitate the affluent life-style of Europe, and laid no foundation for economic freedom since it seriously lack the science and technological orientation needed for successful industrial development (Bekomson, 98).

Although the colonial educational system may have been authentic, and perhaps worked for them. It wasn't effective nor influential to us on the bearing that it was imposed on Nigerians via the spirit of colonialism with profit a motive by the colonial masters. And being so learners, it is assumed where only taught to know what the colonial masters deemed fit, neglecting factors like; Nigerian traditional background which was still in the genetical construct of the learner, the needs of youths and adults in the Nigerian society, and with that consideration, what should form the subject content.

Pursuance to this fact, the objective of the newly proposed Nigerian education as articulated by (NERC) in the Nigerian policy on education was formulated into a national philosophy which appears thus:

*Live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principal of freedom, equality and justice;
Promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding.*

The policy subsumed the above philosophy into under the nation's national policy, which in close look depicts the mind and challenge of the people-even during the conference-a colonized mind desperately looking for escape root;

A free and, democratic society, a just egalitarian society, a united, strong and self-reliant nations, a great and dynamic economy, and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens (5).

The conference deliberately adduced that education should inculcate in the learner ethical values such as;

Respect for the worth and dignity of the individual, faith in man's ability to make rational decisions, moral and spiritual principle in inter-personal and human relations, shared responsibility for the common good of society, promotion of the physical, emotional and psychological development of all children, and acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance (7)

As an implementation instruction, the conference directed that the task of Government is to ensure that;

Education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change. Any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by education. Life-long education shall be the basis of the nation's educational policy. Education and training facilities shall continue to be expanded in response to social needs and made progressively accessible to afford the individual a far more diversified and flexible choice. Educational activities shall be centered on the learner for maximum self-development and self-fulfillment. Universal Basic education in a variety of forms, depending on needs and possibilities, shall be provided for all citizens. Efforts shall be made to relate education to overall community needs. Educational assessment and evaluation shall be liberalized by their being based in part on continuous assessment of the progress of the individual. Modern education techniques shall be increasingly used and improved upon at all levels of the education system. The education system shall be structured to develop the practice of self-learning. Government shall in this regard continue to encourage the establishment of Young Readers Clubs in schools. At any stage of the education process after junior secondary education, an individual shall be able to choose between continuing full-time studies, combining work with study, or embarking on full-time employment work with study, or embarking on full-time employment without excluding prospect of resuming studies later on. Opportunity shall continue to be made for religious instruction, no child will be forced to accept any religious instruction which is contrary to the wishes of his or her parents. And physical and health education shall be emphasized at all levels of the education system (Guide, 4).

Notwithstanding, the document did not negate the importance of language in the agenda of Nigeria education. Accordingly, it presented language "as a means of promoting social interaction, national cohesion and preserving cultures Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. And posited that in the interest of national unity cum smooth interactions with our neighbours, it is expedient that every child shall require to learn one of the three Nigeria languages of Hausa, Igbo Yoruba and French French. Accordingly, French shall be compulsory in primary and Junior Secondary Schools but Non-Vocational Elective at the senior Secondary School" (5).

They proposed that early childhood/Pre-primary education as referred to in this document is the training given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten, and geared towards inculcating in the child the ability to communicate effectively and to lay a sound basis for scientific thinking.

Primary education according to the document as articulated by Bekomson, will be organized for children between the ages of 6 and 11. While secondary education will last for six years, with the broad aim of preparation for useful living within the society and preparation for higher education (100).

The higher education was proposed to focus on the development and inculcation of the adequate value-orientation for the survival of the individual and society. While Adult and non-formal education should inter alia provide functional literacy education for adults who have never had the merit of any formal education and in-service on the job, vocational and professional training.

Therefore, the succinct implementation and attainment of the philosophy and policy they adjudged could lead to self-realization, effective citizenship, better human relations, national consciousness, national unity, self and economic efficiency, socio-political progress, scientific and technological progress, and national reconstruction (NPE, section 1:4).

It is worthy of note at this point that although we have argued that the participant of the conference had a somewhat colonial influence, the outcome of their deliberation could be poised with a modicum of Nigerian mindset-brotherhood concern.

Again, the colourful representation of a way forward from the colonial curriculum as presented by NERC had, and as time goes on, its attendant encumbrances. The problem of poor implementation, neglect of the dictates of the policy as it is evidence or pictured in the society today, the gestalt subscription to technology albeit in-depth training of the mind towards self-realization and rediscovery of the Nigerian spirit was not emphasized but neglected.

Is Today's Nigerian Philosophy of Education Tantamount to Solving The Overall Learner's And Society's Problem?

A "philosophy of" is said to be the application of the torts of philosophical enquiry such as criticality, logicity, systematicity and analyticity into any subject of discuss. To this end, the question raised interrogates the resolve of the conference and the Nigerian stakeholder in education, concerning the poor implementation strategy which has resorted to the failure in our educational system.

That is to say, the system does not take into cognizance the critical tools of philosophy, neither does the stakeholders monitor closely the implementation process. This is so said on the bearing the student and the society which ought to be the reflection of the kind of education that a nation practice is not well attended to in Nigeria. In consonance with the above known fact, Okechukwu described Nigerian educational system as one that is in shambles:

Our system of education is in shambles. The world is increasingly competitive and the current training of the individuals is crucial for the improvement and growth of any society. For Nigeria to conflate this standard and develop its economy, it must carry out a detailed evaluation of the structure of her educational system, insight into the hitches, and proffer possible solutions. This is a course towards accomplishing a valuable, driven and sustainable work force (33).

The above, is a glaring exposition that Nigerian philosophy of education pays less attention to learner and society's problems. Hence, the need for a reconstruction. Nigerian Philosophy of education, by and large should pay kin attention to the development of the 'self', 'mind', 'soul', 'creative thinking' 'mental emancipation' and societal transformation rather than stakeholders fueling their egocentric desires.

These reconstruction, where the development of the self is given credence if well attended to would lead to development of the learners' potentials, and build a formidable human resource force. And this force will lead to the transformation of the society. The fundamental question is being ask in this regard; is it worthy to advance research on technological development than human resource development?

Conclusively, the advocacy for the exalted place of the teacher in the educative process cannot be overstated. Lack of proper recognition of this fact is a major contributor to the dilapidated nature of Nigeria's educational system. That is, because the teacher is not motivated through worthy rewards, it is chronologically expected that the teachers cannot give to the student more than they have received from the state.

Hitherto the State-Nigeria, as it is recommended by the idealist tone, should enforce adequate sustainable platforms of reward and living standard to the teachers' as well as exalt their position for the betterment of the learner and the society at large.

Conclusion Recomendation

So far, the paper has exposed idealism as a school of thought in philosophy of education, adumbrating the merits and demerits of idealism. It periscope idealism as the development of the mind through deliberate and systematic tutuledge of creative thinking towards self-realization, mental emancipation and societal transformation. Doting affirmatively that the only way that a society such as Nigeria can gain its realization and relevance is when her learners have attained the highest good of self-realization by making effective use of creative thinking.

Secondly, an extensive exposition has been done on Nigerian philosophy of education through the theorization of the National Policy on education and other related materials. This was done identifying the colonial background prior to 1969 as a major influence on the stakeholders of education. Even though the paper ascertained the credibility of the conference resolution to an extent as tenable to Nigerian issues.

Thirdly, the crux of the paper also hinges on this foundational truism; that current issues bedeviling Nigeria's educational and political mindset where not considered and captured. The implementation process and procedure was not adequately construed and monitored as this is reflected in the poor allocation of learning materials.

Fourthly, the paper contends that ample consideration and regard is given to scientific or technological development than the development of the self. This is true on the bearing that today; the focus is on industrialization before man-power training that will handle the machines produced by technology. Robots or Artificial intelligence have gradually taken the place of human intelligence, so that the potentials of man die on a daily basis. Fifthly, research has exposed that in Nigeria the position of the teacher is being relegated to the background instead of being exalted has been deliberately relegated to the background. Teachers are not treated as people who have acquired the where-withal of knowledge as this is shown in their salary structure, incentives and poor recognition in the society. It is on the above argument that the basis of these reconstruction mindset is championed. As it recommends and calls on the leadership of Nigeria vis-à-vis stakeholders in education to reconsider the growing need of the individual and society and rethink the development of human resources as reasoned by the idealist philosophers of education, instead of technological or Artificial intelligence research.

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