

EDUCATION, CREATIVITY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper is a philosophical exercise on the concept of relevant education for national development. It maintained that any nation that seeks relevance in the global economy, cannot afford to neglect education for creativity. It also identified and discussed lack of creativity as well as misconception and misplacement of values as the factors of major weakness in Nigeria educational effort towards national development. The paper postulated that for Nigeria education practice to produce people who can create employment for themselves and for others, like in Britain, America, Japan and China, Nigeria is to adopt pragmatic or functional education. Based on the discussion of the paper some recommendations were drawn.

Introduction

In the economy of learning, the pursuit of knowledge is determined by its usefulness in practical circumstances, and the working out of the acquired ideas as instruments for achieving specific objectives. Hence, knowledge is vindicated by its applicability to specific situations, and its relevance to the solution of some particular problems in human cosmic experience. In the view of Ejionueme (2007) education in Nigeria needs improvement at all levels, but essentially in all its aspects of teaching and learning. The country tends to be bold in thought but timid in action with regard to its educational policies.

Nigeria spent time building grand theories, while the schools remain in their comfortable ruts. Standing still in a time of headlong change is to fall behind. Regrettably, the assessment of its educative enterprise in the submission of Babarinde (2001) portrayed a mariner's odyssey in the sea of life. Its education system as it is now appears to have fallen short of creativity. The relevance of such education is left in doubt. In an attempt to proffer some explanation, Maina (2006) alleged that unlike Britain and America, the Nigerian government with its educational planners and administrators relied more on lofty educational policies, political inanities, spurious data and unrealistic budget proposals. For this reason the country began to experience constant degradation in the direction of sub-human and under-development. Global exploitation, misrule, ignorance, poverty and diseases seemed to have become a recurring decimal in the order of the day. Thus, the *argumentative pontum ponti*. The interest point of this paper lies in the fact that Nigerian education practice appears to have failed to provide its recipients with the required creativity, to take their place in society as self-supporting individuals.

The Apparent Failure of Creativity in Nigerian Education Practice

The Federal Government of Nigeria in its educational policy (FGN, 2004:8), among other things, acknowledged the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competences, as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of his society. The Nigerian educational goals are only good on paper and theory but not in practice. Buttressing the above, Nwafor and Nwogu (2006) maintained in their research report that no genuine effort has been made, or is being made to create the required creativity in Nigerian education practice, as it is being done in Japan, China and other industrialized countries. The creative aspect of its educational system has gone to the dogs, and the survival of its educands and the larger society is on the brink of

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disaster. The practical value of any education can only be enjoyed by the services it renders.

Within the rank and file of educational philosophers of different postulations, as Okafor (2006) articulated, series of ideas have arisen from what education is expected to be and to accomplish. For instance Plato (427 – 347 B.C) in his idealism treated education as the training which is given to suitable habits to the first instincts of virtue in children, when pleasure and pain are rightly implanted in non-rational souls. It is that particular training in respect of pleasure and pain, which leads one to hate what one ought to hate and love what one ought to love. For Aristotle (384-322 B. C) the realist education primarily is the transmission of inherited culture from one generation to another, which has accumulated over the ages and contains the best of the wisdom of past generations. The naturalist, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778) was of the view that the purpose of education is to encourage the learner to develop his own capacities in a natural fashion. John Dewey (1859 – 1952) from his pragmatic point of departure submitted that education is meant to help its beneficiaries become intelligent problem-solvers.

Analytically, education seeks to refine man by developing his potentials and equipping him to live meaningful, or productive and responsible life in society. Education, therefore, is a leading adage for reforming outmoded economic and political institutions. According to Ruwa (2006) and Maduabum (2006) education as it is today in Nigeria, is running short of the meaning, and consequently is a disappointment to social expectations and the esteem in which it is held. Education is meant to help its recipient develop his abilities, skills, initiatives and other forms of behaviour that are of positive value for the individual and his society. It was at this wake of thought that Maina (2006) argued that any nation that seeks relevance in the global economy, cannot afford to neglect education for creativity. It is human resources – not income or material resource that constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations. Capital and natural resources are passive factors of production. Human beings are the active agents who co-ordinate and

mobilize capital, exploit natural resources, build social economy and political organizations, to carry forward the national development. It therefore follows that any country which is unable to develop the skills or the creative knowledge of its people and to utilize them effectively in its national economy like Japan and China, may not develop anything else. In other words, the apparent failure of Nigerian education can be traced to its misconception and misplacement of general knowledge and vocational literacy (Duruamaku-Dim, 2006).

Value Misconception and Misplacement in Nigerian Education Practice

Nigerian education system has suffered quantum crisis since its inception. *Ab initio* (initially) the problem is rooted to the fact that Nigeria was under the yoke of colonial masters. After its independence on 1st October 1990 the story is tinged with the claim that Nigerians are still suffering from the after-effect of their liberation from their colonial masters (Ocho, 1995). With political instability, corrupt government and cricking economy, the problem grew in an increasing differentiation and hierarchic integration. The attempt to review the educational system from 6-5-4 system to 6-3-3-4 and now to 9-3-4 for a more functional education does not seem to be working. The crisis persisted as to affect the system and consequently its products. Education cannot be realistically evaluated without reference to a society for which that education is being developed. Japan, America and China are case in point. The system, which persisted in most areas in Nigeria, is that which tends to produce people for employment but not those who are to create the opportunity for employment. Much thought is not given to the problem of equipping the learner for life outside the classroom.

This type of education is certainly not what is needed in a developing country like Nigeria. It is now clear that mere literacy or academic knowledge is no longer a guarantee for a good job. Present day Nigeria is in demand for people who can do things. Unfortunately

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the earlier years of a warped concept of education have left a bad impression about what is to be educated. The situation developed a class of people who regard education as a preparation for a clean job. The educated man according to this view as Adaralegbe (1985) observed does not work with his hands. The educated man cannot be a farmer, a mechanic, a driver, a painter or even a brick layer. This is value misplacement and misconception in Nigerian education practice which has created a missing link between its products and the needs of Nigerian society. One may suggest that it is high time now Nigeria appreciated the role of vocational education which is based on pragmatic philosophy of “real world situations”. The philosophy of pragmatism among other things deals with the practical issues of vocational education. Even Plato (427–347 B.C.), in his philosophy of idealism, particularly in one of his five great Dialogues named *The Republic* (374 B.C.), cherished the idea of training some people for practical or technical skills and ability. His idea is informed by the fact that some people are born as slaves to work, while others are born to rule as philosopher kings. Those born as “kings” develop leadership with inherent leadership abilities while slaves assume the role of workers and servants.

Such Platonic idea in the study of Duruamaku-Dim (2006) represented the traditional or conservative school of thought. He pointed out that there is new progressive school of thought which differed slightly from Plato. These progressivists propounded that vocational education programme is to be made broad-based. This implied training the worker to acquire useful skills in addition to acquisition of broad-based general knowledge. By extension of thought this means that Nigerian government and its education stakeholders should learn to train, to equip and to prepare the Nigerian learner for the contemporary world of work. Such contemporary vocational education will bridge the missing link which exists as a result of misplacement and misconception of values in Nigerian education practice. This will ensure the relationship between vocational literacy and broad-based knowledge. With the contents, inquires and methods

of the current vocational education, the Nigerian learner will be better enabled for creativity and national development. The combination of general knowledge and vocational literacy will certainly produce well-trained, skilled, efficient and effective careerists, entrepreneurs, managers or leaders in different sectors of life.

As a matter of fact, vocational education is based on pragmatic philosophy. What the River Nile is to Egypt, is what pragmatic philosophy is to vocational education. Arguably, for Duruamaku-Dim (2006), to refer to Plato's idealism with regard to vocational education as being conservative, is not in the sense that Plato's idea is outmoded but in the sense that it is one sided, or favouring vocational education more than broad-based education practice. Thus, the new contribution of Duruamaku-Dim is his suggestion of the adoption of functional education that comprises two components of vocational literacy and general knowledge. However, the fact remains that there cannot be functional or creative education practice without pragmatic theory.

Pragmatism as Possible means for Educational Creativity

The philosophy of pragmatism holds that a theory or proposition is meaningful only if it can be shown to lead to some practical consequences for human life, otherwise it is meaningless. An idea or theory becomes a reality when it works in practice with some beneficial effects. Thus, the meaning and the reality of an idea or theory depends on its "cash value", that is on its function and practical effects when acted upon. The "cash value" of any idea or theory is the difference it makes, or the practical effects it has on one's life. Knowledge is not acquired for its own sake but for practical use in overcoming the problems, posed by the natural conditions of human existence. Education then is not an end but an instrument, intended to bring about the growth of the individual in society. From the pragmatists' perspective, man's education is to imbue him with the creativity similar to that of an artist who is not only familiar with the scene, but has the mastery of bringing into life the abstractions of his inspiration.

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The education system of Nigeria has only succeeded in producing “certificated” individuals who are only consumers of the economy, rather than producing educated people who ought to be more productive. For Ruwa (2006) education as a process involves development and this development is to have an overwhelming effect on those initiated into the process. The development demands a deep sense of commitment to what is worthwhile; cultivation of keen perception, and precision, which are only available to the initiate.

In the same trend of thought, Obanya (1992) in his valedictory lecture analyzed education in Africa with emphasis on Nigeria. He alleged that education in Africa is not yielding the desired dividend. The individual beneficiary of Nigerian education has not acquired the right knowledge, skills, values and attributes and so he is yet to make the desirable impact on society.

The above view must have informed Ukeje (1991) and Ndiokwere (2006) to concur that Nigeria has roads that wash away after the first rains; telephones that are perpetually out of order, taps without water and electricity supply that is most epileptic. Nigeria has no functional education system that can constitute the bedrock of technological development; instead it has a “certification system” in which graduates are turned out from institutions of higher learning, having learnt about technology but not technology qua technology.

Using the expression of Dore ((1976:7), “they have certainly been schooled but they are the victims of a system of schooling without education.” This attests to the need for Nigerian education practice to build up skills in its graduates that will enable them survive in the world of work, either as paid employees or as self-employed persons. Arguably, most of the Nigerian graduates, who roam the streets as unemployed, could have benefited from making a living by being self-employed individuals, if they had developed entry level skills in their respective areas of studies while in school.

Recommendations

Based on the ongoing discussion of this paper, the following recommendations are drawn:

1. In order to ensure equilibrium for national development in Nigerian education practice, broad-based knowledge and vocational knowledge should complement each other rather than being used as supplementary. This is to be emphasized both in the curriculum and in the school timetable of study.
2. All education stakeholders in Nigeria should be actively involved in the task of translating Nigerian educational objectives into reality. This could be achieved by emphasizing education for creativity rather than education for certificate and employment.
3. The government should honestly invest more on human resources since it is human beings that organize and mobilize other agents or factors of production with all their contingencies for effective production.
4. Experts in educational planning and administration are to adjust the curriculum to include the emerging realities in the new world order of creativity and national development.
5. Faculties and departments of Nigerian universities and tertiary institutions should organize conferences, seminars and other means of capacity building to correct in the psyche of Nigerians, their misplacement and misconception of values, which has left them culpably ignorant that the educated does not work with his hands (e.g., manual work or manipulative skills).
6. There is need for new philosophy of education for all Nigerians in the form of ethical revolution and value re-orientation. This is to correct the wrong mentality of Nigerians, since no education can be realistically evaluated without reference to the particular society for which that education is being developed for their build up.

Conclusion

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This paper endeavoured to establish the relevant relationship between education, creativity and national development. It maintained that any education which lacks creativity cannot be a veritable tool for national development. The paper concluded to adjudge that Nigeria is experiencing constant degradation in the direction of sub-human and under-development, because its government and educational planners, as well as the administrators relied more on lofty educational policies, political inanities, spurious data and unrealistic budget proposals. This has led to the failure of its education practice to instill creativity into its recipients for their self-survival and as supporting members of the society.

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