

PHILOSOPHICAL EXAMINATION OF EDUCATIONAL THEORIES AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper dwelled on the structure of the curriculum both at the pre independence and post-independence in Nigerian Education with the analysis that methods of teaching in pre-independence Nigeria encouraged creativity as students learned informally through imitating and practicing the roles of the elders in contrast to the methods adopted from the colonial masters which appeared to be strange to the learners. It is observed through the method of philosophical analysis that the theories propounded by the psychologists of learning were predicated on idealized theoretical positions and experiments outside the human culture. The earliest psychologists carried out their experiments on animals and these became the foundations of human learning. The paper criticized curriculum built as a result of one's experience on animals since the brain structures of animals and that of human beings are different. The paper submitted that curriculum should be a reflection of what the people think, feel, do and believe within a given society. This will reflect their ways of developing and shaping an individual, in terms of skills and attitudes. Therefore, each culture will have different philosophy, which results in different ways of doing things especially in educating the next generation.

Keywords: *Philosophy, Teaching, Learning, Educational Theories and Curriculum Development*

Introduction

Curriculum development is defined as the process of planning learning opportunities intended to bring about certain changes in students and the assessment of the extent to which these changes have taken place. Curriculum comes from the words (race) meaning to run a course and refers to a sequence of steps or stages in teaching and learning. It is a total guided learning experience

design to facilitate learning for establishing quality relationship between what is learned and what is operated outside the school system. John Dewey defined curriculum as a continuous reconstruction, renewing from the learner's present experience out into that represented by organised bodies of truth (Dewey,1944).

Ralph Tyler (1949) defined Curriculum as learning experience planned and directed by the school to attain its educational goals. It is a comprehensive overview of what students should learn, how they will learn it, what role the instructor is playing, and the framework in which learning and teaching will take place. Curriculum is developed according to a set of guidelines, it may be characterised by centralization or decentralization depending on the culture of an educational institution in a country. Curriculum development is a planned, purposeful, progressive and systematic process to create positive improvement in the educational system. Whenever there are changes or development happening around the world, the school curricula are affected. There is a need to update them to address the society's needs and aspirations. This is evident as one observed that during the ancient times people taught their children knowledge and skills to survive. They had no formal education during that time. People at that period had a curriculum that another educator regarded as the saber-tooth curriculum. This type of curriculum refers to a kind that existed during the ancient time in which the purpose for teaching was for survival.

However, when the effect of discovery and innovations became inevitable, ancient people's way of life has changed accordingly and as a result, education becomes formal and curriculum development involved systematic, planning and purposeful.

Pre- Independence Curriculum Theory and Development in Nigeria

Prior to the advent of the missionaries and introduction of formal school system in Nigeria, the people of this country had their traditional way of educating themselves (Fafunwa, 1974). There were varieties of institutions where learning did take place, where knowledge, ideas and code of behaviour were transmitted. Training for a particular function within society either in economic and non-economic basis were very common and still persist till today. Family life, work play, initiation rites, ceremonies and other public functions, discussion at meetings, peer groups/age group ceremonies were all avenues of learning during the ancient days. Traditional musicians, dances, and songs set pace for the cultural standards and ethics of the people. Most of these songs and other moon night

stories conveyed genealogy and stories of the past and to most cases set a warning signal to their listeners. Most adults and youths during this period had their memories exercised and learnt something following the accepted techniques of communication as well as absorbing the mythological of historical content of these stories. Arotiba (2004) said the most significant and perhaps crucial aspect of traditional education was its relevance to Nigerians in contrast with what was later introduced. What was taught in traditional education was put into use immediately.

The practice of education or rather methods of learning then were very effective. This is because during that time there were no passive classrooms where learners could doze away into sleep or be wearied into tiredness and boredom by the continuous talk of unwilling and uninterested teachers. What existed then was learning on the job through imitation, mimicking, learning to do things by watching those who could do it right where the real job was. Brown and Hiskett (1970) commenting on the method of learning among indigenous traditional societies said that the indigenous method of learning was not training people for a futuristic society or imagined hypothetical case but for life as it is lived in the present and for a real situation. The curriculum was based on learning by doing which involved active participation and physical involvement.

From all available evidences, the content of Education given to the people during the colonial period was nick-named "The 3R's. The 3R's consisted of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. Owoseni (2006) described the 3R's as a humorist coinage of the curriculum contents which the colonialist taught the people. This coinage was to express the inadequacy and irrelevance of the content which were so apparent then that very many concerned people even among the Europeans and Americans criticized very seriously. The Phelps-Stoke Commission (1920 - 1921) that visited Nigeria among many other African countries then commented on the type of education being offered in a very critical manner.

Though educational facilities in African are largely credited to missions and a great service has been rendered by them to the native people, many of the missions have yet to realize the full significance of education in the development of African people. The defects in the Educational programme, so far as they exist have usually been due to their concept of Education. For the masses, they provided the 3R's for the catechists, literature, including, of course, an interpretation of Religion.

The beginning of the development of educational content or curriculum for educating the colonised masses was traced to the missionaries who started active evangelization of the South Western Nigeria around September 1842. The content was based on the main need to train interpreters of the English Language to the Yoruba Language and vice-versa among the people. The interpreters were to help the missionaries carry out their objectives of evangelization quickly and effectively. Thus, reading and writing were thought necessary and when the European traders moved in after missionaries, it was conjectured that Arithmetic should be added to the existing syllabus to help boost trading. It was later when some of the Nigerian converts were found responsible to hold the office of teachers for the Europeans in remote interiors or in those places where they could not venture to, "Literature" along the line of interpretation of religion was added to teach those few brilliant and trusted native teachers who were called Catechists (Akinlua 2002). Even with the narrow and deficient content of Education, the depth of the syllabus in each area emphasised British and other foreign ideas. Lewis (1976) explained that by 1933, when various concerned analysts and commissions had succeeded in expanding the school curriculum to include some other subjects, these subjects were the traditional British History and Geography of England. Lewis said that "The content of the syllabus placed emphasis on British history and geography, approaches were based on the rote learning of facts such as the lists of kings of England, names of rulers, mountains, rivers and their heights.

The development of primary, secondary and tertiary education was reluctantly embarked upon by the colonialist government over a long period of time and with much pressure and coercion by many progressive forces. From 1842 to 1949, the feat was finally achieved. The progressive forces were the members of the colonial government, other concerned European and American bodies and later the pressure group of Nigeria elites though the three levels of education were reluctantly put up, the curriculum of learning never at any time and at all levels departed much from the mainstream of the 3 R 's' though the memorandum of education and other reviews before and after then [1923 up to 1948] had suggested a much diversified and culturally rich curriculum for educating the people, the situation did not so much improve that even by 1952, the Nigeria press was quoted as saying that the content of higher education and of course all education in Nigeria was not related to the needs and culture of the Nigerian society.

The methods of teaching during the period were also not suitable and effective. The pragmatic learning on the job modes of the pre - colonial periods were totally

discarded and much attention was crowded under learning. Learners were crowded under the nee or mud - walled classrooms and were subjected to chorus shouting and memorization of insignificant strange items all the day long. Some of the successes that were recorded then were assumed to be only due to the dedication of the native teachers, the determination of the "aged" learners and the novelty of the whole learning art by the period then and not to any syllabus or methods of learning.

Post- Independence Curriculum Theory and Development in Nigeria

According to Lewis (1976) as late as 1961, the syllabus and methods of learning were still seen as alienating the students from their environment. Lewis mentioned that "one gets the impression that the pupils were just sponges imbibing knowledge not understood or digested, for the sole purpose or regurgitating it for examinations".

Attempts to provide vocational courses and practical learning were to some extent successful by 1955 when the secondary modern school was inaugurated to provide the key to vocational and professional training at the lower levels. The successes were however not tangible as most of the schools established were said to lack adequate staff and that very few offered the vocational courses. It was reported that "most of them (the modern schools) offered purely academic courses which provided only a polished type of education received at the primary school. Secondary grammar schools were also introduced, but were reported to neglect any technical or practical education in their curriculum. It was reported that the grammar school graduates were so removed from the realities in the syllabus and methods they employed was good for manual work only. The little science that was taught then was dismissed as being out dated and not related to the students' environment and societal needs.

The continuous state of irrelevant and inadequate curricula and methods for learning at all levels of education in Nigeria finally led to the 1969 conferences on education in Lagos. The conferences were held for the review of content and method of learning. The conference recommended among other things and for the first time, that the content of education should reflect the need, the environment of the people and the interests of professions like farming, blacksmithing, bricklaying among others. This was sequel to the Ashby Commission of 1960 which examined the inadequacies of the Nigerian educational content and practice to meet the need of Nigeria up till 1980. Akinlua (2002) said that the efforts of the

1969 conference did not yield so much results in changing the content and practice of education in Nigeria for the better. It was observed that the existing old structures were impediments to the new development and since the government was not wholly prepared to scrap these old structures and start on a new foundation, much of the suggested innovations were quickly swallowed up and forgotten. The 1979 conference that came later on with 6-3-3-4 curricula which stressed the importance of achieving meaningful and relevant education in Nigeria could be said to be achieving nothing today. According to Ehindero (1984), this new system was also built to operate within the poor structures of the old 8-5-2-3 and 6-5-2-4 system of the 1950's - 1960's.

The 1979 - 6-3-3-4 system of Education was borrowed from America, though was based on purely Nigerian utopian educational goals and aspirations, very little modification is seen in her operations. The syllabus for each subject in the traditional arts and sciences remained confined to names of things and facts about items which are much strange and incomprehensible to the learners. Practical science and business which the learners are familiar with their environments do not feature in the document and neither in the practice of the document. The most hindering factor is also the fact that the same old classroom, old science laboratory built to accommodate learning of rote nature are still being used by unwilling teachers to teach the less interested pupils. The accommodation in these 1979 curricula of vocational and technical subjects that are meant to train the learning masses in the society to bring about quick technological developments are without proper planning and there was lack of provision of the necessary resources that could make them effective. It has been observed that this American type of 6-3-3-4 curricular is very expensive in nature and practice and to make it successful, much money and resources must be pumped into it. The technical laboratories are not in existence in most schools today in Nigeria and where they exist, the government has perhaps forgotten to equip them. Hence, one is battling with massive problems of examination malpractices today at all levels of our educational system.

The Nigerian education system of 9-3-4 came to replace 6-3-3-4 system of education. The replacement came as a result of some development believed to enhance Nigerian education system and foster rational advancement (Athanasius, 2017). The 6-3-3-4 system of education did not meet the aspirations of Nigerians, it was not commensurate with the expectation of Nigerian citizen on education, the government had to intervene by way of implementing the kind of education

system that will suit into the yearnings of Nigerians. The government believed that adopting an excellent education will foster national development.

However, before 6-3-3-4 system of education, there were questions raised as to whether the existing education system was suited with the Nigerian nation's reality, in terms of socio-economic growth, political stability and the nation's cultural heritage. With the introduction of 9-3-4, Obioma (2012) reported that all local, national and global issues currently influencing the lives of Nigerian children are adequately reflected in the curricula. He said, "The curricular (subjects) are up to date with current demands and practices in the disciplines. This clearly departs from the vicious cycle of theory or mere memorization. The Curriculum content activities are presented in practical oriented steps by steps that enable the learners to see, touch, handle and feel. This will enable the pupils to truly learn, internalize what they learn, and use it for problem solving and for living. The curriculum encourages learning by doing and use of self-learning strategies'.

A functional curriculum, according to him, fosters national development and this informed the careful efforts put into the revision exercise. The school curriculum by its essential purpose is the mechanism through which the educational system will address the need, problem, religion and aspirations of a nation or society.

Conclusion

Certainly, it is expedient that Nigeria needs a curriculum review that will recognize all the factors that once made the nation succeed. A curriculum review that will include subject that enhance entrepreneurship; one that makes for functional education in a way that will involve the use of Nigerian cartoons, audio-visuals or software that emphasis Nigeria as an independent nation and as well recognize our cultural orientation as practiced in Russia, China, Japan, Indian among other countries. Nigeria needs a curriculum revolution that will trigger education for development. A revival of the old teacher training colleges is, of course, needed. Therefore, since government has started on a wrong premise, it should suspend the colonial controversial curriculum and start a process that will reflect Nigeria's need, diversity, culture and of course, lead to development that is globally acceptable and relevant. It is equally expedient to have curriculum that is going to target critical thinking, scientific discovery and empowerment.

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