Philosophy of Education and National Development: A Philosophical Appraisal

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Abstract
Education, no doubt, is the key to socio-economic and political development of any nation. This is based on the philosophy of the nation's education system, which encapsulates her needs, goals, objectives and aspirations. This paper observes that Nigeria has no Philosophy of Education she could call her own because of the eclectic nature of the philosophical ideas expressed in her National Policy on Education. It also observes that some aspects of education were not provided for in the nation's educational Magna Carta of 2004, and further highlights some of the impacts of Philosophy of Education on national development. The paper therefore calls for remedial steps to be taken to redress the inconsistencies and contradictions that hinder smooth and rapid national development.
Key words: philosophy of education, national development, long-life education.

Introduction

The issue of national development has always been a subject of great concern to both developed and developing nations of the world. As a result of its importance to the socio-economic and political well-being of its citizens, no nation has ever failed to place her overall development on the front burner of her policies and programmes. The policies and programmes are expected to touch every facet of societal needs and aspirations in terms of human and material resources development. It is known that development in any society begins with its human elements, which in turn develop the material resources. And the development of the human resources cannot be devoid of education in all its ramifications. For this reason, every nation that has the development of its human and material resources as her greatest priority usually develop a blue-print of how they can go about to achieve her goals and objectives.

The blue-print encapsulates the guidelines, aims, needs and aspirations of a given society, which contains the philosophy from which the educational guidelines were derived. In other words, the development of any nation, to a large extent is predicated on its philosophy of education. This implies designing an adequate philosophy of education which must take into consideration all the essential ingredients that would be almost flawless. This could be possible in some countries that have their philosophy as an off-shoot of an ideological revolution, e.g., Bolshevik's Russia, Fidel Castro's Cuba and Mwalimu Julius Nyerere's Tanzania (Akinpelu, 2005). But this is quite different in the case of Nigeria that follows the British gradual evolutionary approach, and even borrowed from most western philosophies. This eclectic nature of her philosophy of education has a lot of implications for national development.

Conceptual Analysis

The key concepts of this discourse: philosophy of education and national development need to be examined in the context of this paper.

The Concept of Philosophy of Education

The concept of philosophy of education has been viewed from several perspectives by many scholars and great thinkers. As a result, a plethora of definition has also been attempted. Hence, it has been difficult to arrive at a universally acceptable definition of philosophy of education, since there are four perspectives from which it could be approached. This includes the traditional, analytic, technical and non-technical definitions – definitions of which we do not have time and space to pursue here. But it has been noted that Philosophy of Education mirrors the needs and aspirations of the society for which it was formulated (Apologun, 2012). It is in this regard that the Nigerian Philosophy of education is essentially rooted in the national goals and objectives of the Nigerian state.

However, some eminent scholars defined philosophy of education as applied philosophy primarily concerned with the application of philosophical principles, to the practical conduct of education (OKoh, 2003). In other words, philosophy of education has a wider scope that touches virtually every sphere of education in that it performs a central but critical function for all segments of education. In simple terms, philosophy of education "oversees the activities of other aspects of education, by providing them the necessary tools or instruments and techniques for a clearer conception of their roles and operations" (Nwafor, 2007). For Akinpelu (2005),

philosophy of education could be seen as "an attempt to articulate the ideological commitments of the society through a set of programme designed to realise and perpetuate their commitments".

From this view, it is categorically clear that philosophy of education must have an ideological base, and as such must contain the ideals and aspirations of the society. In short, philosophy of education should spell out the national educational objectives; it must analyze, examine and evaluate how consistent, integrated and comprehensive the educational programmes are; and also assess the extent to which the nation's hopes and aspirations could be realised.

The Concept of Development

The term development could be used interchangeably with evolution depending on the contexts in which it is being used, either positively or negatively to refer to situations, trends, or issues.

Development, ordinarily means "man's effort to make the necessary impact on nature; his environment, and on himself with a view to transforming and improving himself and his environment" (Nwafor, 2006). It is clear therefore that development and improvement are synonymous. When something has been made to wear a new look from what it was before, we can say that a development has taken place. The words "growth" and expansion" are coterminous with development, and they suggest positive development. These words equally denote progress being made from one stage to another, which do not denote negative development like retardation, degeneration or decline.

Development in a wider context deals with socio-economic and political life of the society; it connotes the fulfillment, realisation or actualization of goals and objectives, hopes and aspirations of that society. The process of actualization begins when a society recognizes its inadequacies, and sets goals for itself, and decides to make deliberate efforts to remedy perceived deficiencies in order to attain desired goals (Nwafor, 2006). In this regard, Nyerere in Ezimah (2004) views development as having an emancipator goal, i.e., it liberates man from shackles of ignorance, superstition and oppression in all its ramifications. Consequently, all forms of development have to some extent a reasonable dose of educational process. For that reason, the development of the intellectual frontiers of the individual cannot be left untouched. By extension therefore, the development of the individual's intellectual capacity and capability empowers him socially, economically and politically; thereby giving him not only a sense of self-fulfillment, but also a sense of belonging and commitment to the overall development of society.

Main Developmental Factors

The main factors that influence development are education and science. This is because education essentially stipulates the quality of human capital, on which depends the development of the available material resources. As a result of the ever increasing significance education has for national development, coupled with increased scientific, technological and social changes, educational systems of all countries tend to improve and to adapt to the requirements of the present age. These laudable changes can only be feasible through the strategies of long-term objectives and the means of achieving them. In this regard, "the most general method by which national objectives of education can be achieved are ingrained in the implementation of the concepts of "life-long education" and the development of a learning society.

In essence, education should contribute to the realization of three most important objectives:

1. The development of the individual;
2. The development of society; and
3. The development of the national economy.

This could be done in such a way that skills of the individual in the labour market would be in tandem with the needs of business organisations, companies, government parastatals and private employers of labour. These objectives highlighted above are *mid-wifed* by education through philosophy of education, which encapsulates the societal goals and objectives, needs and aspirations.

Nigeria's Philosophy of Education

The national curriculum conference of 1969 marked a turning point in the history of Nigeria education. The conference under the auspices of the Nigerian Educational Research Council (NERC) was not only concerned with curriculum development, the objectives of education, among others, but also with the task of reviewing the old national goals and identifying new ones (Nwafor, 2009). The conference did not ignore the

function of education in preparing Nigerians for the task of living in the 20ᵗʰ century and beyond. According to Ezewu et al. (1981), "three statements of belief about the role of education emerged. They are:

i. The belief in the value of individual child and in the development of all Nigerian children for the development of society.
ii. The belief in giving every child equal educational opportunity so that he can develop according to his ability.

iii. The belief in a functional education that can promote the development of an effective and informed Nigerians.

Indeed, the conference remains a watershed in the educational landscape of Nigeria because from the totality of its recommendations a national philosophy of education, among others evolved, as a result of subsequent seminars and conferences. Many have questioned the appropriateness and adequacy of what we call "Nigerian's Philosophy of Education." They argue that the participants of the various conferences imported "lock, stock and barrel" foreign philosophical ideas into the Nigerian educational system (Adesina et al., 1983). Others argued that the contents of the National Policy on Education (*including its philosophy*) could at best be described as mere objectives of the system (Daramola and Jekayinfa, 2007). Some other critics contend that the eclectic nature of Nigeria's philosophy of education makes implementation of the educational policy on which it is based relatively difficult and unrealistic (Nwafor, 2007).

However, since the first edition in 1977, the National Policy on Education has been reviewed three times, i.e., in 1981, 1998 and 2004. A critical observation shows that in each edition, some vital ingredients of the documents are either lost or rendered contradictory, or inconsistent. We shall cite one or two of such examples later. It is in view of these lapses that Okoh (2005) observed that Nigeria cannot boast of her own philosophy of education because she is yet to have a national ideology, which should form the basis of her national philosophy of anything we do as a nation. Casting a dispassionate look at the Nigeria's educational scene, Akinpelu (2005) states that there is a considerable discontinuity, jarring inconsistency and disharmony which Professor R. Freeman-Butts, has characterized as "educational disjunctivitis; a highly inflexible educational system. These are some the characteristics of the Nigeria's philosophy of education, but it will be necessary to state it as contained in the 2004 edition of the National Policy on Education, which spells out four statements of belief thus:

"In Nigeria's philosophy of education", we believe that:

(a) education is an instrument for national development; to this end, the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education;
(b) education fosters the worth and development of the individuals, for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society;
(c) every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities each according to his or her ability;
(d) there is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria; to this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive; while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction in education.

A critical appraisal of the above elicits questions on some of the issues raised. First, one may ask: what forms the basis of the ideas to be formulated and integrated: the indigenous or foreign ideology? Who formulates the ideas: anybody irrespective of his/her academic or professional background, competence and inclination? Again, how can a child whose social class has denied access to education "have rights to equal educational opportunities"? What genuine efforts has government made to bridge the gap that marginalizes the Nigerian child? What efforts are being made to translate the "need for a functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria" into reality? The questions Nigeria's philosophy of education generates are interminable. However, the national policy on education has remained a road-map for the practice of education in Nigeria and the cornerstone for its national development.

Impact of Philosophy of Education on National Development

Nigeria's philosophy of education as enunciated and revised over the years is geared towards the actualization of national development goals and objectives, some of which have been achieved to some extent,

while others are still in limbo, and utopian in nature. Hence an evaluation of its impact (positive or negative) on the development of the nation is necessary.

The national philosophy of education has contributed reasonably to national development since its inception in 1977. The philosophy of education at that time came on board with the 6-3-3-4 system of education, which was greeted by population explosion in student enrolment, especially at the primary school level, as the Universal primary Education (U.P.E.) was equally introduced. Although, there were many problems resulting from poor implementation of the programme because of lack of foresight, and ineffective planning. Akinpelu (2005) observes that a rationally planned educational system "cannot afford to plan for universal coverage at the primary level without making corresponding plans for the secondary and tertiary levels." There is no doubt that most products of the U.P.E had no placements in the post primary institutions because students who completed their U.P.E. programme were not given automatic admission into the Junior Secondary Schools as planned (Adesina et al; 1983). Hence, Akinpelu (2005) pungently states that U.P.E. will not be effective and beneficent within a rationally planned educational system, in which the other levels and aspects hang together like a seamless robe. However, by the time measures were taken to arrest this situation, U.P.E. had collapsed. But it led to the establishment of more post-primary and tertiary institutions with a view to developing "the individuals into a sound and effect citizens" (Nigeria, 2004).

Another bold step taken by Federal Government in her mass educational policy was the introduction of Universal Basic Education (U.B.E.). In spite of the huge financial commitment and vigorous enlightenment campaigns, the U.B.E. seems to be a replica of the U.P.E. as schools are over-crowded with unanticipated student enrolment. It was designed to be "free and compulsory," but this is far fetched because apart from free tuition, every other thing is yet to be in place. Students learn under trees, some sit on bare floors, and teachers have no offices and furniture. Laboratories, technical workshops for practical demonstrations, instructional materials and teaching aids are conspicuously absent in most schools.

In order to meet the increasing admission demands by students into higher institutions of learning, many more universities were established; both public and private universities. The situation in the lower rungs of our educational ladder equally manifested itself in the tertiary institutions. They include inadequate funding, dearth of qualified personnel, poor infrastructural facilities, epileptic payment of teachers' salaries, and so on. It is for this reason that Adah (2009) lamentably observes that:

> *The entire Nigerian educational system is bedeviled by a myriad of problems and the situation is getting worse by the day. These problems include: poor funding, shortage of quality staff; dearth of infrastructure, inadequate classrooms and offices, inadequate laboratories for teaching and research; shortage of journals; indiscipline among staff and students; inconsistent and ill-conceived policies; corruption in high and low places; cultism; irregular payment of salaries; examination malpractices as well as politics in the appointments of heads of many tertiary institutions.* (p.11).

The problems are as a result of the frequent policy somersaults arising for social and political instability. These problems notwithstanding, the education sector has continued to produce the manpower requirements needed for national development to a reasonable extent, but there are certain critical issues in the national policy vis-à-vis Nigeria's philosophy of education that shall be examined later.

The negative impact of Nigeria's philosophy of education on national development stems largely from the contradictions and inconsistencies in the National Policy on Education as well as poor implementation strategies. For example, the planners of U.P.E. made provision for mass promotion to new classes without any consideration for what would be the after effects. The result was that many students dropped out before the end of their secondary school. Most of these drop-outs heightened the crime wave in society: armed robbery and prostitution took frightening dimensions; drug trafficking and addiction, kidnapping, acute unemployment, youth restiveness, and militancy became serious social problems. These problems are antithetical to meaningful national development, hence Nigeria at the moment seems to be reasonably far away from the redeeming edges of the philosophy that informs her education system.

Critical issues in Nigeria's Philosophy of Education and National Development

It is evident that no nation desirous of rapid socio-economic and political development in this science and technological era can toy with education. But if education must be the bedrock of all developmental strides of any nation, then there should not be room for loopholes or lapses as in the case of Nigeria's National Policy on Education, which has many contradictory and controversial issues.

Controversial Issues

Admittedly, since education is viewed as "an instrument par excellence for effecting national development"(NPE, 1977), it is expected that through it the five national goals:

a.   a free and democratic society;

b.   a just and egalitarian society;

c.   a united, strong and self-reliant nation;

d.   a great and dynamic economy; and

e.   a land full of bright opportunities for all its citizens;

could fast-track the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria.

These are crucial issues in national development which philosophy of education, and education in general should address. The educational system is yet to create national consciousness and patriotism among students at all levels because citizenship education exists more on paper, and not in practice. Hence, the Nigerian society is enveloped by insecurity and near absence of freedom and democracy, because Nigeria is yet to conduct a free and fair election. The education system that is morally decadent cannot engender "a just and egalitarian society"; a society in which everyone is relatively equal. This is because lip service is paid to moral education. Politically, Nigeria is highly in disarray; unity has eluded her as there are incessant crises in every part of the country. The conflicts in the Niger Delta, the Boko Haram religious uprising, and pockets of conflicts here and there, have almost torn Nigeria into shreds; all because citizenship education only exists on paper. Again, the education system is too elitist, and therefore made just little provision for technical and vocational education. Hence, self-reliance and economy sufficiency are mere illusions. As a result, majority of Nigerians are yet to see "a land full of bright opportunities" which education can give. These anomalies have to a great extent slowed down the pace of national development.

Dropped and Misinterpreted Ideas

One vital issue in national development through education that was dropped from the National Policy on Education editions of 1977 and 1981 respectively is the idea of "lifelong education". The two editions stated that: "Long life education will be the basis for the nation's educational policies". In one other imperative, this idea was framed differently and thereby created room for inconsistency and contradiction stated thus:

> *At any stage of the educational process after junior secondary education,*
> *an individual will be able to choose between continuing full-time studies,*
> *combining work with study, or embarking on full-time employment*
> *excluding the prospect of resuming studies later on (Nigeria, 2004).*

Evidently, in the 2004 edition, the statement on life-long education was expunged, even though it is implied in the provision cited below. It could be argued that the general national educational objectives can be attained through the strategy of life long education, which has to overcome the traditional division between formal and informal education. The two main objectives of life long education are the improvement of active citizenship and employability. In recognition of this inescapable hard fact, Akinpelu (2005) asserts that:

> *It is the basic idea in the concept of lifelong education that provision*
> *should be made for the individual to develop himself at any level of his*
> *present experience. This is not adult education, and this is not remedial*
> *education for drop-outs, because "drop-outs" is a non-concept in life-long*
> *education.*

It is therefore argued that the idea of life-long education "as contained in earlier editions of National Policy on Education was not translated into a feasible policy possibly because of misinterpretation, and hence it was dropped and was replaced with "functional education" without any elaboration. Unarguably, there are lapses in the entire education sector, which are traceable to the philosophy and practice of education vis-à-vis national development.

Conclusion

In this discourse, it was observed that national development will be a far cry without education anchored on sound philosophy of education, and that the various education programmes and politics in Nigeria were not truly Nigeria in nature and content as the ideas underlying them were essentially foreign. Hence, there are some inconsistencies, contradictions and controversies over some of these ideas. As a result, national development did not progress as envisaged and enshrined in the National Policy on Education. It is hoped that when some of these lapses like integration of all aspects of education, re-organisation of the entire education system, and the concept of life-long education are taken into consideration, and the programmes and policies religiously implemented, Nigeria will experience accelerated national development.

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