

# Exploring Ecopedagogy for the Attainment of Education for All in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Despite the progress so far recorded on the Education For All (EFA) programme in Nigeria, vulnerable children such as students with disabilities, street children referred to as 'almajirai', nomadic Fulani children, orphans, the girl-child particularly in Northern Nigeria are yet to qualitatively access and benefit from the programme. Thus, this paper explores ecopedagogy (an approach to an education of the earth and its citizens) in achieving EFA in the country. In doing this, it critically reviews EFA initiatives in Nigeria vis-à-vis various issues in ecopedagogy as a critical theory in education. The paper concludes by recommending among others popular education and planetary citizenship via the ecopedagogical approach for the attainment of EFA goals in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Ecopedagogy, Education, Education For All (EFA), Pedagogy, Nigeria.

## Introduction

Historically, ecopedagogy began in a Latin American educational context, growing out of discussions conducted at the Second Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. In this movement, intellectuals desired to make systematic statements about the interrelationship between humanity and the Earth and to formulate a mission for education universally to integrate an ecological ethic (Wikipedia, 2011a).

Specifically, the ecopedagogy movement is an outgrowth of developments in critical pedagogy, a body of educational ideas and practices influenced by the philosopher, Paulo Freire. Following Freire, ecopedagogy mission is to develop a robust appreciation for the collective potentials of being human and to foster social justice throughout the world, but it does so as part of a future – oriented, ecological political vision that radically opposes the globalization of ideologies such as neoliberalism and imperialism, on one hand, and attempts to foment forms of critical ecoliteracy, on the other. Additionally, ecopedagogy has as one of its goals the realization of culturally relevant forms of knowledge grounded in normative concepts such as sustainability, planetarity (i.e. identifying as an earthling) and biophilia - i.e. love of all life (Gadotti, 2003; Wikipedia, 2011a).

It is regrettable to note however, that the developmental challenges facing many developing countries in sub – Saharan African (Nigeria in particular) are both daunting and multidimensional. While it is true that action is required on many fronts, cutting across all these challenges and central to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is the monumental task of achieving Education For All (EFA). For instance, by estimates of the Nigerian government itself, over 7million children remain out of school (Abani, 2003). From this standpoint, the ultimate goals of this paper are;

- To review Education For All (EFA) initiatives in Nigeria.
- To analyze issues involved in ecopedagogy as a critical theory of education.
- To explore the valuable roles of ecopedagogy via the attainment of EFA goals in Nigeria.

## Conceptual Issues and Clarifications

From a broader perspective, education can be referred to as an act or process of developing and cultivating, (whether, physically, mentally or morally) ones mental activities or senses; the expansion, strengthening, and discipline, of one's mind, faculty, etc; the forming and regulating of principles and character in order to prepare and fit for any calling or business by systematic instruction (Osokoya, 2003, Wikipedia, 2011b). Education is connected with space and time where relationship between the human beings and the environment actually take place. They happen primarily at the emotional level much more than at the conscious level. Thus, they happen much more in our subconscious; we do not realize them and many times we do not know how they happen. So, eco-education is necessary to bring them to the conscious level. Indeed eco-education requires pedagogy. These days we need eco-education and eco-pedagogy (Antunes & Gadotti, 2011)

Education For All (EFA) is an international initiative first launched in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 to bring the benefits of education to “every citizen in every society” (World Bank, 2011). Basically, EFA movement is a global charge to provide quality basic education for all children, youths and adults. The global commitment of EFA emerged as a reaction to the increasing phenomenon of child labour, child trafficking, child exploitation and child related abuses that tend to deprive children of basic education and an insured future (International Center on Child Labour and Education -ICCLE, 2011). In order to realize this aim, a broad coalition of national governments, civil society groups, and development agencies such as UNESCO and the World Bank committed to achieving six specific education goals, namely;

- Expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
- Ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, those in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
- Ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life – skills programmes.
- Achieve a 50% improvement in adult literacy by 2015, especially for women and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
- Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieve gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.
- Improve all aspects of the quality of education and ensure the excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (World Bank, 2011).

However, it is worthy of note that the Nigerian constitution calls for the provision of free, compulsory and universal primary education, when it is practical. In 1999 Nigeria enunciated a new basic education plan making the first nine years of schooling free and compulsory. The aim of the plan is to improve the relevance, efficiency, and quality of schools and to create programmes to address the basic education needs of nomadic and out of school children, youth and adults and vulnerable children generally. In the area of funding, in 2000, 46 billion Naira (equivalent to US \$460 million) was appropriated by federal government of Nigeria, to support the basic education plan (Central Bank of Nigeria - CBN, 2000; ICCLE, 2011).

Indeed, EFA policies and /or reforms put in place by government have not been as effective as anticipated, as the sector is faced with challenges of poorly paid teachers, dearth of trained teachers, poor and inadequate infrastructure, making teachers less motivated. This consequently contributes to poor or irregular school attendance among children in the country. Ironically, Nigeria adopted the Universal Basic Education programme in 1999, ahead of the Dakar World Education Forum. In principle the UBE programme should broadly enable the achievement of what is defined as the EFA framework. However critical issues like the aforementioned have remained unresolved as the right to basic education of good quality for all remains elusive (Abani, 2003).

### **Issues in Ecopedagogy**

Ecopedagogy is an approach to an education of the earth and its citizens (Action, 2011). As pointed earlier, ecopedagogy is a discourse, a movement, and an approach to education that has emerged from leftist educators in central and South America including Paulo Freire, Moacir Gaddotti and Leonardo Boff that seeks to re-educate “planetary citizens” to care for, respect and take action for all life. Thus, it is open and fluid to be defined in the movement by anyone who engages critically with it (Action, 2011; Practicing Freedom, 2011).

Indeed, ecopedagogy is a pedagogy centred on life; it includes people, cultures, modus vivendi, respect for identity and diversity. It is based upon a planetary understanding of gender, species, kingdoms, formal, informal and non formal education. The point of view is more comprehensive – from an anthropocentric vision to a planetary understanding, to practicing planetary citizenship and to a new ethical and social reference – planetary civilization (Antunes & Gadotti, 2011).

As a form of critical theory of education, ecopedagogy works at a Meta - level to offer dialectical critiques of environmental education and education for sustainable development as hegemonic forms of educational discourse that have been created by state agencies that seek to appear to be developing pedagogy relevant to alleviating our mounting global ecological crises. While environmental education strategies undoubtedly accomplish much that is welcome and good from an ecopedagogical perspective, ecopedagogy questions the ways in which environmental education is often reduced to forms of experiential pedagogy and outdoor education that may deal uncritically with the experience of “nature” proffered therein – an ideological zone of wilderness representations that are potentially informed by a mélange of racist, sexist, classist and speciesist values (Wikipedia, 2011a).

A growing number of texts utilize the terminology of ecopedagogy, without a clear relationship to the ecopedagogy movement described earlier. These include works by Ahlberg (1998); Jardine (2000); Payne (2005); Petrina (2000); Yang and Hung (2004). Indeed, at the same time it was coined by Freire's friend – cum – critic Ivan Illich (1988) to describe an educational process in which educators and educands become inscribed in abstract pedagogical systems, resulting in pedagogy as an end and not a means.

It is noteworthy that the Ecopedagogy movement is best perceived as a loosely knit, worldwide association of critical educators, theorists, non – governmental and governmental organizations, grassroots activities and concerned citizens engaged in ongoing dialogue and political action that is attempting to develop ecopedagogical praxis in relation to the needs of particular place, groups and time periods (Wikipedia, 2011a). On the whole however, some of the questions that are asked by ecopedagogy, which it attempts to respond to are;

- How can we, as citizens of the planet, participate in the creation of a world that we want instead of simply observing those who are profiting off of extraction and exploitation create our world for us?
- What does an education look like that can encourage people to face what is happening, take responsibility for ourselves and work to create healthy, vibrant resilient communities that serve everyone, no one excluded?
- What kind of education is really relevant today, given our current globalized condition cum social and ecological crisis? (Action, 2011; Practicing Freedom, 2011).

### **The Roles of Ecopedagogy in the Attainment of Education for All in Nigeria**

As a movement and an approach to education, Ecopedagogy is alive; it is open and fluid to be defined by its practitioners who engage critically with it. In this way it remains continuously relevant. There are however, some basic principles outlined in the Ecopedagogy charter, which have been elaborated and interpreted by subsequent works and are very useful for achieving Education For All in Nigeria. Some of these principles as pointed by Action (2011) and Practicing Freedom (2011) include;

- **Popular Education:** Ecopedagogy is an extension of Paulo Freire's seminal work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Many of the concepts of power and oppression are expanded to include the non – human world as oppressed as well. As an heir of Pedagogy of Oppressed, Ecopedagogy is grounded in popular education in which power is shared, participatory dialogue is the key methodology, learning leads to action, and learning starts from and responds to the learners' lived experiences.
- **Post – Issue Activism:** Issues of social and economic justice, democracy and ecological integrity intersect and are interdependent. Ultimately none of them are possible without all of them intact. Educators can choose which ever issue their learners are most personally connected with however as an "entry point" or location to start from to then move towards an integrated understanding of the others.
- **Planetary Citizenship:** Our lived reality is becoming globalized; we should globalize our sense of community, responsibilities and our commitments as well. We must recognize ourselves as earthlings, with all beings representing our brothers and sisters, and yet sound ecological practice will result only from bioregional acts and understandings of our location and dwelling.
- **Art Education:** Ecopedagogy encourages people to develop the capacity to feel, intuit, imagine, create, relate and express themselves. In this way we move from object to subject, able to participate in articulating and creating the world we want. This implies that the multiple languages/intelligences of theatre, music, visual art, photography, dance etc are fundamental to engage with as tools of expression and creation in the educational project.
- **Care:** Dis-care of each other and of the planet has contributed to our current planetary crisis. Care can "conjure the strength to search for peace in the midsts of conflict", "rescue the dignity of the condemned" and "permit a revolution of tenderness to prioritize the social over the individual".
- **Anti – Oppression:** Ecopedagogy is anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-sexist, and anti-speciesist. It is against the ranking of oppressions, and instead seeks to understand the complex ways in which various forms of oppression co-originate or intersect due to common causes. Yet, it also recognizes that in any given instance, some forms of oppression may be more primary than others, and so understanding how multiple levels of oppression arise or take historical precedence is equally important.
- **Transformation:** Ecopedagogy recognizes the need for societal and economic transformation. It understands that sustainability is in conflict with the current political, economic and cultural status quo that fuels the growth of a globalized society of militarism and transnational capitalist development.
- **Praxis:** Ecopedagogical learning is not complete until action is taken; Ecopedagogy encourages creative and emancipatory action based in reflection and dialogue with a collective of oppositional voices led by the voices of those most impacted by the situation the action is addressing.
- **Utopia:** Ecopedagogy is unabashedly utopian - not in the sense of idealistic daydreaming about the

possibility of another sort of world, but rather ecopedagogy is uncompromising in its refusal to accept the suffering of this one as de facto. Ecopedagogy intends to re-educate planetary citizens to become builders and shapers of this possible future sustainable world.

### Recommendations

Achieving the Education for All goals is critical for attaining the Millennium Development Goals due to the direct impact of education on child and reproductive health, as well as the fact that EFA has created a body of experience in multi-partner collaboration toward the 2015 targets. Although there has been steady progress towards achieving many EFA goals, challenges remain such as pedagogical concern, problem of access, gender gap, poor learning outcomes and low quality education (World Bank, 2011).

Consequently, there is the need to re – educate “planetary citizens” to care for, respect and take action for all lives. Thus call for an exportation of ecopedagogy as an approach towards achieving Education For All in Nigeria. This is because when effectively utilized ecopedagogy tends to address and respond to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and from within education.

Ecopedagogy within Nigerian educational system should facilitate learning environment where educators and educands, teachers and learners embrace and welcome the challenge and benefits of diversity. With ecopedagogy, educators must welcome all students. Their welcome and care should be the basis for ensuring sustainability and Education for All.

In welcoming and caring for all through ecopedagogy, there is the need for opening access for all in educational opportunities. For example there is the need to catch them young from the early childhood, ensuring 100% enrollment in all basic levels of education, ensuring adaptation of educational contents to peculiar environmental needs. However, there is the need to cater for the abled and the disabled in regular classrooms with adequate facilities. There is need to build up environmental friendly classrooms that are accessible to all regardless less of disabilities and there is the need to open up access for all in tertiary education based on abilities and potentialities.

### Conclusion

With an ecopedagogical approach, learning environment is fostered where individual needs are met and every student has an opportunity to succeed. Thus, this will promote meaningful friendships and respects for all people, increases appreciation and acceptance of individual differences, creates greater academic outcomes, prepares all students for adult life in an inclusive society, provides opportunities to master activities by practicing and teaching others, to mention just a few. Above all, the goal of protecting and providing Education For all in Nigeria requires the synergy of policy makers, non - governmental agencies, international agencies and the civil societies as partners in progress towards ecopedagogical – inclusive learning in Nigeria.

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