

MEANING AND DISCIPLINE OF PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AND ITS RELEVANCE TO NIGERIAN EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper examined the meaning of philosophy of education in various perspectives or senses which include etymology, popular thinking as well as professional reasoning. It also discussed the discipline of philosophy of education. It also looked into the contents of Nigerian education in accordance with the 2013 National Policy on Education (NPE) and the practice of education in the present-day Nigeria. Following this, it shed light on the relevance and usefulness of the meaning and discipline of philosophy of education to educational development in the country. The relevance is conceptual, epistemological and socio-moral development. Finally, it suggested what Nigerians should do for educational and societal development in the light of the meaning and discipline of philosophy of education. In this paper, philosophical analysis is employed for logical, linguistic, critical, objective and expository standing of this work.

Keywords: Philosophy, Education, Philosophy of Education, Nigerian Education

Introduction

One of the disciplines of education is philosophy of education. It is an educational discipline that analyses educational issues, curricula, problems, methodologies and findings by applying the principles of philosophy such as logicality, objectivity and clarity. It also employs the logical and relevant thoughts of the renowned philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau and Dewey to solve educational problems, clarify concepts and statements in education, and critique an educational system through an in-depth analysis of its policy and practice (Abiogu, 2014). Considering these noble functions that philosophy of education performs in the educational system of any country, it could be argued that examining the meaning and discipline of philosophy of education in an attempt to see if the discipline truly aids good standing and progressive changes in the system of Nigerian education, if it truly caters for the needs of the people in Nigeria through education and if it truly prepares the people to defeat their challenges, is an activity with a priceless value.

Meaning of Philosophy

Understanding the meanings of philosophy and education before analysing the meaning of philosophy of education is a necessity. Philosophy, like other words, means different things to different people in different contexts. The meaning of philosophy can be discussed in three ways, namely; etymology, popular sense and professional sense.

A. ETYMOLOGY: Etymologically, philosophy is a greek term which consists of two words

philo and *sophia*. ‘Philo’ means love, while ‘sophia’ means wisdom. Hence, philosophy means love of wisdom. However, the fact that the love of something results in the pursuit of such thing permits us to interpret philosophy as pursuit of wisdom. Philosophy still in etymological perspective could be understood as pursuit of knowledge as there can never be wisdom without knowledge to be applied prudently. More, philosophy means pursuit of the truth because if there is no truth, there cannot be the knowledge (of the truth) (Abiogu, 2014).

B. POPULAR SENSE: Akinpelu (2005) notes that philosophy in popular sense is attitude or way a person responds to events. According to him, philosophy also means world-view which is the product of assumptions, beliefs and prejudices, whether inherited or acquired through experiences. He notes that the African society has its own worldview or philosophy. Africans' wise thoughts which are expressed in proverbs, incantations and oracular messages of divination are all elements of African philosophy. From this, it can be argued that there are personal and group philosophies. The group philosophy can also be a national philosophy, which comprises the goals that the people of a nation pursue with all the human and material resources of a nation. For example, the philosophy of Nigeria as a nation embodies national goals which include a free and democratic society; a just and egalitarian society; a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; and a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). These goals or Nigerian philosophy are yet to be fully realised due to weaknesses on the part of government and the citizens.

C. PROFESSIONAL SENSE: The etymological and popular conceptions of the term philosophy have been discussed; it is on these two that the professional sense will be based. It has been found out that in all descriptions given, there are certain common features. It is truly clear that philosophy has to do with thinking in a particular way as well as well as pursuit of knowledge and the truth. Since professional sense is attained after looking critically at etymological and popular views, it can be argued that it is the most accurate. In the technical sense, philosophy is logical thinking or reasoning about reality (man, world, etc), knowledge, value and even the language through which ideas are expressed about the contents of thinking in order to acquire understanding. In other words, philosophy is logical thinking about all things. It thinks even about nothingness! In line with this, Bamisaiye (2012) sees philosophy as a field of study characterised by logical, consistent, and systematic thinking so as to find out the truth. The process of thinking logically or thinking things through is called philosophising. She asserts that the most basic characteristic or the major issue in philosophy is logical reasoning which is understood as examining evidences dispassionately or objectively for or against any claim. Bamisaiye (2012) also clarifies that philosophical studies feature tentative conclusion like science, and welcomes sound skepticism at the absence of conclusive evidence.

Philosophy shares certain features with other disciplines; the features include logical reasoning, speculation, concept analysis, questioning, prescription of values, scepticism and tentative conclusion, critique of ready-made ideas in their own fields. However, philosophy has distinctive features which comprise study of certain philosophical concepts such as metaphysics, epistemology, etc; study of schools of thought such as idealism, realism, etc; and thorough analysis of ideas of other disciplines (Enoh, 2012). Bamisaiye (2012) affirms that philosophy gave birth to other fields of knowledge such as psychology, sociology, science, etc. That is, all departments of knowledge were in one department called philosophy before it disintegrated into many fields but yet it stands as a separate discipline. It is logical to say that philosophy is

universal since it has to do with thinking things through. Thinking takes place everywhere and at every age. There is Greek or European or Western philosophy, this means thinking from or about the Greek, Western or European life. This does not mean that only the Western world philosophises. So in philosophy, eurocentrism, afrocentrism, white supremacy, etc are ruled out. Philosophy is not about who thinks, where the thinking comes from or the time thinking takes place, but it is about the logicality, clarity and objectivity of the thinking and how such thinking can be applied in improving the quality of life and solving its problems. However, the Western World especially the Greeks have made impressive move in the professionalisation of philosophy and have recorded their remarkable philosophical ideas on many vital issues of life. Among the leading philosophical figures from ancient Greece are Plato and Aristotle (Mango, 2011).

Concept of Education

Education is a concept, process, practice, product and discipline. As a concept, according to Schofield (1972), education is derived from a Latin word 'educere' meaning to lead out or from another Latin word 'educare' meaning to form or train. The first meaning is held by the naturalists who argue that children possess certain natural ability to acquire knowledge and skills and maximize their potentials with the guidance of the teacher. While the formalists claim that children should be trained and made into specific people through their education, not that they have natural ability to develop on their own. Looking at these two etymological definitions, they lay emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge and skills but their methods of knowledge transmission and skills acquisition are different.

Furthermore, Plato sees education as training in respect of pleasure and pain which makes a child hate what he ought to hate and love what he should love. This idea of Plato on education indicates that education involves training, and training leads to knowledge and skill acquisition. It also shows that the training should be aimed at instilling discipline into the child so that he could be a righteous person and become a responsible member of his family and his society (Schofield, 1972). It has been learnt that knowledge, skill and character development are the products of education. In addition, Umo (2005) is of the view that education involves teacher, learner, content or aim and method. The teacher may be anybody or anything; the learner may be oneself or another; the content may be disposition, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs desirable for the learner and his society. According to Okoh (1998), the method employed in the process of education should consider interest, willingness, personal integrity and active participation of the learner. It can be deduced from this Okoh (1998) thought that the aim of education or what should be the product of educational practices comprise knowledge, skills, and attitudes useful to an individual and the society. Education aims at total development of a person and the society.

Education has many disciplines which are offered at the various institutions of learning in the world. The disciplines include educational psychology, sociology of education, curriculum and instruction, history of education, science education, language education, philosophy of education and teacher education. Teacher education is a separate course but it is also embedded in all courses of education because producing sound and qualified teachers at the Basic, Post-basic and Tertiary levels of education is the general aim of all disciplines of education.

What does Philosophy of Education mean?

Before analysing the meaning of philosophy of education, it is necessary to look at the related terms which are 'philosophy education' and 'philosophy and education'. These terms differ from philosophy of education. Philosophy education is teaching and learning of philosophical ideas and studies. Philosophy is the central focus in philosophy education; this can be likened to such terms as science education, mathematics education, teacher education, counsellor education, and many others. 'Philosophy and education', as noted by Akinpelu (2005), indicate that there are two separate disciplines not one. Philosophy is logical thinking while education is a process of cultivating and enhancing the quality of thinking.

From etymological sense of the term philosophy, philosophy of education can be seen as pursuit of knowledge of the process of facilitating acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes desirable to individuals and the society. This means general study of the theory of education as affirmed by Shabba (2010) in his definition of philosophy of education. More, philosophy of education can be defined as the systematic analysis of the concepts of education so as to ensure lucid understanding of the concepts and apply such understanding to enhance educational system. The philosophers of education that subscribe to this meaning of philosophy of education are known as 'analytic philosophers of education'. Among them are Richard Stanley Peters, Paul Hirst, Israel Scheffler, and many more. These philosophers argue that language analysis should be the focus of philosophy of education, not speculations about the world and man. However, the weakness of their intellectual standing on this is that they do not advocate application of results of the language analysis (Akinpelu, 2005). But to correct this important weakness, Akinpelu (2005) has stressed that the result of the language analysis in education should be applied to improve the quality of educational system and solve its problems.

Moreover, philosophy of education means logical reasoning about the nature of man and his society, knowledge and values desirable to him and his society in order to design and implement teaching and learning processes for the individual and the societal development. As put by Abiogu (2014), the philosophy of any educational system must put into consideration the nature of people in the society, knowledge considered important in the society as well as values cherished by the individual and the society. He stressed that the philosophy of education of a nation should be more than educational slogans or motto of an educational institution. Having intellectually journeyed through the meaning of philosophy of education, it is time to briefly examine the discipline of philosophy of education, the features of Nigerian education, and later see if there is usefulness in the meaning and discipline of philosophy of education to Nigerian education.

The Discipline of Philosophy of Education

Philosophy of education is an applied philosophy and one of the most important disciplines offered at the faculties of education in the Nigerian universities and other universities in Africa and beyond. Philosophy of education as a discipline is offered at the postgraduate level in Nigeria to obtain Master of Education and Doctor of Philosophy awards. Among the Nigerian universities that offer the course include Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Ibadan, University of Ilorin, Usman Dan Fodio University Sokoto, and others. Besides universities, philosophy of education is offered as a course at colleges of education, National Teachers Institute, and more.

At the university level, many specialists have risen to the rank of professorship and doctorate. One of the most active professors of philosophy of education was Emeritus Professor Jones Adelayo Akinpelu of blessed memory, who wrote extensively on the discipline. His works have been widely used as references in the philosophy of education books and other academic works such as journals, research projects, and others. Beyond Nigeria, there are other philosophers of education whose intellect, imagination and writings have enhanced learning among the students and the researchers.

Philosophy of education does not employ empirical method of research and statistical method of analysis in some Nigerian universities and probably other parts of the world. The common topics of philosophy of education include meaning of philosophy of education, methods of philosophy of education which are speculation, prescription and philosophical analysis; components or branches or problems of speculative philosophy of education which are metaphysics, epistemology and axiology. More topics include schools of philosophy of education, ideas of individual philosophers on education, educational concepts and statements and their analyses, philosophical research methods and the implications of philosophical ideas for education. The relevance and implications of all the topics are very great both educationally and socially as this will be discussed later (Amaele, 2005).

Among the professional bodies of philosophy of education are Philosophers of Education Association of Nigeria, International Network of Philosophers of Education (Worldwide), Philosophy of Education Society (USA), Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain (UK), Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia (Australia), and Canadian Philosophy of Education Society (Canada) (Philosophy of Education Society, 2020). In Nigeria, philosophy of education as a discipline has many challenges. The challenges range from dearth of specialists in the field, negative perception of the discipline by people, low number of applicants into the field, to teaching of the course by lecturers who are not specialised in it. These challenges should be tackled by the government and other stakeholders in philosophy of education (Bamisaiye, 2012).

Features of Nigerian Education according to the National Policy on Education

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) states that philosophy of education shall be as follows: Education is an instrument for national development and social change; education is vital for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria; education maximises the creative potentials and skills of the individual and self-fulfillment and general development of the society; education is compulsory and a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenge; and education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society. This philosophy of Nigerian education reveals what the Nigerian government thinks about education. It shows the nature, function and characteristics of education in a nation. Upon this philosophy of education, the goals of Nigerian education are founded. The goals are as follows: a. Development of the individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen; b. total integration of the individual into the immediate community, the Nigerian society and the world; c. provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education, within and outside the formal school system; d. inculcation of national consciousness, values and national unity; and e. development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to

empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society. The goals of Nigerian education are very rich and even universally valid. They embody total development of individuals and the society. To achieve these goals, all educational materials and personnel must be directed towards the realisation of the goals.

Nigerian education is structured into the Basic, Post-basic and Tertiary levels with different goals. Basic education in Nigeria encompasses the Early Childhood Education (0 - 4 years) and 10 years of formal schooling. For the purpose of policy coordination and monitoring, the Federal Government instituted Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). Goals of Basic education include development of entrepreneurial knowledge and skills; development of patriotism in the children, enhancement of moral excellence and independent thinking, literacy and numeracy skills. The curriculum of basic education comprises subjects like mathematics, English language studies, basic science, information technology and others (FRN, 2013).

Post-basic education and career development takes place after basic education; it includes senior secondary education, higher education, and continuing education given in Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs). Among the goals of post-basic education are to provide trained manpower in the applied science and technology and commerce at sub-professional grades; and to provide entrepreneurial, technical and vocational job specific skills for self-reliance, and for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development. The curriculum of post-basic education includes the fields of studies of science and mathematics, technology, humanities and business studies. In specific, the curriculum includes subjects like English language, general mathematics, trade/entrepreneurship subject, civic education, biology, chemistry, physics, and to mention but a few (FRN, 2013).

Tertiary education comes up after post-basic education, takes place at the tertiary institutions such as universities, inter-university centres like the Nigerian French Language Village, Nigerian Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages; colleges of education, polytechnics, and more. Among the goals of tertiary education are to contribute to national development through high level manpower training; provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interests of all Nigerians; and promote national and international understanding and interaction. Among the courses of study offered at the undergraduate level in Nigeria include philosophy, history and international relation, medicine and surgery, economics, to name but a few. At the postgraduate level, courses like philosophy of education, Islamic studies, educational psychology, etc are studied. In National Policy on Education, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) also states other programmes with their goals and procedures of operation. The programmes include Mass and Nomadic Education, Open and Distance Education, and Special Needs Education.

Relevance of Philosophy of Education to Nigerian Education

Philosophy of education employs logical reasoning in dealing with ideas, events and issues of education and other related matters so as to improve the position of educational system and put its problems to a halt (Donald, 1994). By this, policy makers, curriculum planners, teachers, students and other stakeholders in education who have knowledge of philosophy of education would be able to employ logic to deal with educational matters. With this, they would cease to be at the

receiving end but actively participate in the process of decision making in education at the policy-making level, curriculum planning stage, school management level and classroom setting. Teachers, using logical reasoning and their professional knowledge and experience, find it easy to arrange the themes sequentially to enhance learning. They also find it easy to identify and correct the weaknesses in the educational system (Abiogu, 2014). Outside the formal school system, logical reasoning is a valuable tool for good life, for defeating many life challenges, for great organisation of life affairs, and for critical evaluation of choices and their possible consequences (Oyedepo, 2000; Adaeze, 2003). It is with logical reasoning the parents' guide their children, elders help their younger ones, experts assist the novice, and just governments can turn around the miserable situations of their people. To succeed and excel in all life endeavours, there is need for persistent logical flow of ideas and the need to apply such ideas for realising selfless and great aspirations. Logical reasoning, if selflessly applied, can defeat the problems of terrorism and insecurity, corruption, economic recess, ignorance, and many other social vices; and can bring peaceful coexistence among the people of diverse identities, patriotism, economic prosperity and educational advancement.

Philosophy of education enriches teachers, students and other educational stakeholders with the knowledge of philosophical analysis of concepts, statements and issues in education so as to have clear understanding of these items and utilise their findings to elevate educational policy and practice. Understanding of the concepts results in understanding of the contents, while the knowledge of the contents can ensure proper grasp of the values and objectives of education in the policy. This would lead to the pursuit of individual and societal values to be achieved through education. Concept analysis and understanding of the concepts are important in the comprehension of any topic. Philosophical analysis also encourages critical review of ideas of various fields of study and careful evaluation of claims of people and government so as to reach a well-informed conclusion and make a beneficial decision. Critical review of ideas of other disciplines would broaden the knowledge of students, teachers and others who engage in the exercise beyond their fields of study and professions. Their broad knowledge is a key instrument in the development of education in particular and in the development of a nation as a whole (Abiogu, 2014).

Philosophical and educational ideas of great thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Dewey, R. S. Peters and Akinpelu help teachers, students and other stakeholders in education to understand the nature of education and the root and historical development of educational practices, how to tackle the perennial problems of education, how to identify and correct the ills of educational system and improve the quality of life. Educational problems are the most important problems of the society and they need serious attention and adequate competence of the intelligent minds who are versed in educational philosophy to solve them. The philosophical ideas of these intellectual giants assist in the understanding of realities such as man, world; knowledge and the truth as well as personal and public values (Amaele, 2005).

Conclusions

Philosophy of education and its relevance to Nigerian education has been discussed from the points of philosophy, education, philosophy of education and relevance of philosophy of education to Nigerian education. It was affirmed that philosophy of education enhances sound

reasoning, good life and effective teaching-learning processes. Based on the relevance of philosophy of education to Nigerian education both within and outside the formal school system, it is suggested that teachers, students, parents, policy makers, curriculum planners, ministers of education, school management team and other key people in the educational system study philosophy of education and apply their knowledge and skills acquired in the discipline to promote educational and social progress.

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