

PHILOSOPHY: A TOOL FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a philosophical inquiry on the relevance of philosophy in educational development. It maintained that philosophy and education are inseparable entities. Such assertion is based on the fact that education includes philosophy but, philosophy controls education. From this angle of thought, the paper stated what philosophy is, as well as its distinction and relationship between education and philosophy of education. It discussed the elements of philosophical foundations of education. It also pointed out the co-ordinative nature of philosophy and education, and how philosophy serves as a tool for educational development. Implications of the study were drawn, and some suggestions for improvement were proffered. One of the suggestions is that the government and educational practitioners should create awareness of the indispensability of the knowledge of philosophy of education in teacher education programme

INTRODUCTION

The meaning of the term “philosophy” has hardly been a product of *a consensus ad idem* (general agreement) even among professional and academic philosophers. The question of what is philosophy ended up in a cacophony of ideas and acrid disagreement. To the layman and the untrained academic, it is rather more problematic. To this end therefore, there are diversities of opinion which have given rise to varied definitions. Be that as it may, Scheffler (2005), considered philosophy as that which is essentially about the search for guide of life. It provides theoretical framework for perceiving, feeling and transforming reality: whether social, moral, political, or religious. For O’Connor (2008), philosophy is nothing but a critical theory, challenging prevailing descriptions of our situation and ourselves and offering new descriptions that may perhaps, engender new discourse, new science, new philosophical research programmes, and new objective truth. All these are related to the concept of philosophy as a tool for educational development.

The importance of philosophy in solving educational problems is obvious. Philosophy of education depends on general or formal philosophy in as much as the problems of education are of general philosophical character. There is no way one can criticize existing educational policy or policies or suggest new ones without considering the general philosophical problems such as: the nature of man, the society, the good life and ultimate reality. Any attempt to answer such question as, “What is man and what really is his purpose in life” has philosophical implications. Philosophy gives education the thoughts and education gives philosophy an outlet in practice. This means that philosophy and education go hand in hand with each other, or they are mutually reconstructive. Philosophy of education is concerned with such issues as the problems of education, life and final outcome of the learner and of learning strategies. Most issues in education are based on philosophy and philosophy of education. This is not to suggest that the philosopher is a retailer of practical solutions to sundry human and educational problems. The point at stake is that philosophy, more so philosophy of education is nothing unless it serves as a foundation tool for educational development.

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION OF EDUCATION

Philosophy as a foundation for educational development tries to establish something significant and something beneficial to the theory and practice of education profession. The fact remains that in the main task of philosophical enterprise, the most crucial question for many philosophers, is, “what is man?” Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) indeed regarded such anthropological question as the most fundamental of all philosophical questions. On the part of David Hume (1711-1776) he postulated that the knowledge of human nature is the key to all other sciences or knowledge. Such postulation is based on the ground that any human enterprise or education practice that is devoid of a well articulated philosophy as substratum, would certainly be blind and directionless. This is undeniably a fact because, there is need to constantly

sharpen the focus in every facet of any educational enterprise (whether in terms of early childhood education, elementary education, secondary education, education of the inclusive child or even tertiary education), not only with regard to means, but also in the domain of ends. Each of these aspects of education is important, and has been essentially given adequate consideration and mature clarification, through philosophy of education.

Logically, unsound philosophy leads to wrong education. Literature abounds regarding intellectuals and practitioners who lost the needed balance, and tended to emphasize one aspect of education at the expense of the other. For instance, Machiavelli (1469-1527) an Italian political philosopher, and Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) an existentialist political professor, exceeded in some extent the limits of discretion. They emphasized the achievement of ends, which has given rise to the wrong education notion of “the end justifies the means”, instead of the means justifying the ends. Educational philosophy seeks to comprehend education in its entirety, and interprets education by general concept that will guide the choice of educational aims and policies. The above considerations might have perhaps informed the federal government of Nigeria, in its National Policy on Education to acknowledge that, “... no policy on education, however, can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and goals of the nation” (FGN, 2004:6). Concurring with the above policy statement, Okafor (2006) submitted that all the fundamental questions in education have a philosophical base and hence, the greatest articulators of the principles and practices in the education profession have philosophical foundation. In this treatment of philosophical foundation of education, one is no longer bemused as regards what is the role of philosophy in education, but one is somehow left in the wilderness of what is the function of education in philosophical practice. In other words, how is philosophy and education co-ordinative.

THE CO-ORDINATIVE NATURE OF EDUCATION AND PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy concerns itself with the analysis of concepts or ideas; with truth and meaning of those concepts and with the means by which human beings abstract to form new concepts. The fundamental problems of philosophy and that of education are closely interrelated. This is a fact without any prejudice to the point that education includes philosophy as a discipline of knowledge, but philosophy controls education. Buttressing the above, Adaeze (2005) affirmed that philosophy is a guidepost for education, and it directs education. To this effect, changes of consequence introduced in education which by intention or accident failed to consider the philosophical problems involved, are likely to run counterproductive and to hit the rock.

Supportively, Akinpelu (2005) highlighted that from time immemorial, the process and practice of education have ever been retarded by philosophical implications. Such is evidently true of Nigeria education practice which has left its end products in a pathetic environmental antagonism as Abiogu (2006) contended in his research report. The process of education involves research, teaching and learning. It is through such process that the learner seeks special type of wisdom, which is certainty about the true nature of reality. From the above angle of thought, education is both a profession and a discipline, or indeed a field of human activity which applies philosophical principles, tools and methods for researching and to acquire the knowledge of ideals. Philosophy enables education to have direct access to true reality, which is distinct from the inspired guesses of a poet or a sage. As man reflects on certain questions regarding reality, value and knowledge, philosophy comes on board.

Analytically, it is through philosophy that man easily arrives at the conclusion of his educational problems or questions about the “how” and the “end” of realities. His conclusion may suggest that the problem of reality cannot be finally solved because realities are facts, and facts are obstinate things, they refuse to quit. On the other hand, it is through philosophy that man can realize the changing nature of values and knowledge with age and time. Corroboratively, Babarinde (2001) maintained that philosophy reflects over educational issues and problems; and that philosophical theories have served as the bedrock upon which education is planned. Predictably, education in its present condition of tension and bewilderment, particularly in Nigeria quite desperately needs the thought and clarity, which only philosophic ideas can provide for educational development.

PHILOSOPHY FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Philosophy may seem to be essentially theoretical, yet it is not a mere intellectual fantasy. From the perspective of Akinpelu (2005), philosophy is a product of rational reflection founded on human experience. Thus there is need for the teacher to study philosophy of education. It is through such study that the teacher becomes armed with the tripartite tools of speculation, prescription and analysis. By the use of the above tools the teacher will be better enabled to reflect, criticize and analyze educational issues. A simple application of principles without finding out what has given rise to the principles does not qualify a teacher as a professional. The teacher must critically examine the validity of the principles. On the part of Okafor (2006), philosophy of education prepares the teacher in his approach to reality, to things and to situations where he is expected to distinguish between subjective assertions and propaganda in contradistinction from objective evidence. An intelligent teacher is one who is equipped with the philosophical insight, and who considers things and events in perspective on a rational basis. For example the use of analytic techniques in philosophy of education enables the teacher to apply the technique of linguistic analysis to the examination of educational concepts and ideas. This is very vital in the process of imparting knowledge to students. What is more, the knowledge of metaphysics helps the teacher to consider questions of ultimate meaning. It prepares the teacher for careful reflection. It sharpens the teacher's views about the nature of the universe, the destiny of man, the natural and supernatural, permanence and change and the ultimate purpose of things. Hence, the teacher is able to prune the child.

Corroboratively when the teacher deals with such epistemological topics as human knowledge and learning, he will certainly need to equip himself with what philosophers of different periods have stated on such topics. In other words the ideas of the great thinkers such as Plato (427-347BC), Aristotle (384-322BC), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274AD), and John Dewey (1859-1952) can throw light in many contemporary issues on education. For the teacher to succeed, he needs the help of philosophy and philosophy of education. Indeed, philosophy of education enables the teacher to develop in the child some rationality and reasonableness, ethical and aesthetic principles that have guided man in his society through the ages. The knowledge of philosophy of education makes it possible for the teacher to put order, harmony and meaning to the different and conflicting data which may emerge in an effort to solve some educational problems encountered. The teacher through the knowledge of philosophy of education will be in a better position to interpret and specify the aims and objectives of Nigerian education in concrete terms. Notably, Socrates (470-399 B. C.) gave teaching its meaning. His search for truth by the use of his own mode of inquiry known as Socratic method or irony, gave rise to the use of deductive research in education practice (Okafor, 2006). Through such method the learner or the researcher reaches conclusion by reasoning from general laws to a particular case. This very method is applied in qualitative research work.

Likewise, Plato (427-347 B. C.) the father of idealism gave the first clear philosophical justification of the theory of education. His *Republic* (375 B C.) which is based on ideal or utopian society, and means of attaining it is a description of a complete education system. For the idealists the essence of the school is the cultivation of the mind. Mind cultivation should be done primarily through the medium of symbols since it is through the medium of symbols that the human mind operates. The teacher on the part of the idealist should be a good character moulder. To this end, Plato according to Scheffler (2005) prescribed death sentence for those teachers or artists who seduce the learner with immoral pictures, stories or examples. Thus, it was the idealists who established in education practice that, conducive environment is *a conditio sine qua non* (necessity) for the education of the child. Consequently, Aristotle (384-322 B. C.) the father of realism initiated the aphorism of "practice makes perfect" in the domain of human practice. One becomes temperate by doing temperate acts, or becomes a brick layer by laying bricks (*Faber fabricando fit*). Thus, learning by imitation is based on the philosophical theory of realism. Another major contribution of philosophy of realism in the development of education is its much emphasis on the need of using factual data in teaching and learning practice. As O'Connor (2008) portrayed, the use of teaching aids by teachers to illustrate their topics has made learning less difficult. It is through the advocacy of the realists that inductive tests and measurements, and other empirical methods began to be applied in educational research (Scheffler, 2005). The realists' empirical method has also aided scientific breakthrough in many fields of learning and research.

In our contemporary time, the contribution of the pragmatists in the development of education cannot be treated as a side dish. Pragmatism as Okafor (2006) alleged, is the only philosophy which has

made education its major task. Thus, to discuss educational development without any reference to pragmatism would be like staging "Hamlet" without the Prince of Denmark. The front-line pragmatists include Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), William James (1842-1942) and John Dewey (1859-1952). The best known representative of this theory of philosophy of education is John Dewey. His educational catch phrase, "learning by doing" has become a motto for educators and educands. The pragmatists tried to offer an education where things are learnt actively and materially by seeing, touching and by discovering for oneself. According to Dewey as sustained in Okafor (2006) education is the constant reconstruction or re-organization of experience. The pragmatists recommended the use of practical means to solve problems than embarking on pure theoretical formulations. Their major contributions for educational development is that they extolled practice over theory; experimental inquiry over speculation; and action over contemplation. Owing to their emphasis on education as a continuous reconstruction or re-organization of experience, their educational methods are known by such appellations as: "reconstructionism", "instrumentalism", "experimentalism" and "functionalism".

PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on the foregoing discussion regarding philosophy as a tool for educational development, the following implications are made.

Philosophy considers man as *animal rationalis* (a rational animal), and the concept of rationality is of central importance to education practice. This explains the rationale behind the characteristic role of philosophy of education to examine the rationality of our educational ideas, their consistency with other ideas and the ways in which they are distorted by loose thinking. This implies that philosophy as a tool for educational development tests the logic of educational concepts and their inadequacy to the facts they seek to explain.

In education practice, unless a philosophy of education is scientifically demonstrated, futile wandering and doubtful tendencies of educators will endure. If such tendencies are allowed to go unabated, education practice by implication, will **per force** (by force of circumstance) continue to follow the primeval paths of eminent theorists.

The choice of aims and policies in education practice is guided and interpreted by educational philosophy, which intends to force the assent of the intellect and anything less than this, would imply misguided effort in the arena of learning and teaching.

There is an intrinsic philosophy in every discipline without which that discipline would not even exist in the first place. In other words, philosophy is the driving force of progress in any discipline, science, or arts. By implication, other human sciences or educative enterprise are subject to philosophy in the sense that philosophy judges and governs them and defends their postulates precisely as the *regina scientiarum* (queen of all sciences or knowledge).

Since unsound philosophy leads to wrong education, any education practice that is devoid of sound philosophy leads to wrong education, as its base will by implication, tantamount to building one's house on quicksand, for such education will certainly lack logical starting point, consistent direction and worthwhileness.

CONCLUSION

This paper is an attempt to establish the relevance of philosophy to education. It holds that education and philosophy are not strange bedfellows, because humanity is faced with yester years problems which require the solution of educational philosopher practitioners. The problems of education are of general philosophical character and philosophy has educational implications. The findings of the paper *inter alia* (among other things) portrayed that man is a central issue in philosophy and education practice; that the complex and extremely important task of definitions and clarifications regarding ends and means in the discipline of education is within the purview of educational philosophy; and that many innovative changes in education were brought about by philosophy. Thus, philosophy is a critical discipline whose influence cannot be dispensed with, in any meaningful education practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the paper's discussion and the implications drawn, the following suggestions are proffered:

1. Since all the fundamental questions in education have a philosophical base, and the greatest articulators of the principles and practices in the education profession have philosophical foundation, the government, as well as educational planners and practitioners should emphasize the indispensability of the knowledge of philosophy of education in teacher education programme. The student teacher should not know less about his onerous task in philosophy of education to guide the learner in his ceaseless incursion against the tyranny of ignorance.
2. Teachers, intellectuals and educational practitioners should be intimately aware of the important role of philosophy in education practice, so as not to emphasize one aspect of education at the expense of the other. The child or the learner who is to be formed and informed through education is a metaphysical or psycho-physico entity. For according to Abiogu (2001), it is not only in a chemical laboratory alone that wrong labelling could lead to serious disaster and death. It could do so too in wrong education process.
3. Educational philosophy among other things deals with the important issues as the final nature of the learner and of learning (the purposes of education), thus the government and educational policy makers should desist from such practice of resolving the "shoulds" of education without philosophical analysis, for such tendency cannot ensure the envisioned end or dividend of any education practice.

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