

Philosophy and Teacher Education: An African Perspective

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Abstract.

The focus here is on the relevance of philosophy as a discipline to teacher education in Africa. The article admits that all the countries on the continent are developing and have high illiteracy rate and lack scientific and technological culture. The article attempts to define and explain the nature, and scope of philosophy of education and its relevance to teacher education. We argue that the theory and practice of education is concerned with ideas about human nature and the nature of reality that are ultimately philosophical in character. Philosophy of education is any reasonable coherent sets of values and fundamental assumptions used as a basis for evaluating and guiding educational practice. It is thus imperative on all teachers to appreciate it as their professional tool. Accepting the contributions of perennialism, essentialism, progressivism and reconstructionism as philosophies of education, the paper suggests that in order for Africa to benefit educationally, she should adopt eclecticism as its philosophy of education.

Introduction

The focus in this article is the teacher as a philosopher, educator and as an individual, with the existential experience of the African society as it pertains to education. The questions that concern here are:

- Why is the African continent in the 21st century still overburdened with those who can neither read nor write in any language (illiteracy); cannot count (non-numerical ability); cannot read fluently (proficiency ability)?
- Why are educational institutions turning out so many uneducated, unskilled and undisciplined young people (lack of scientific culture)?
- Why are all African countries ranked economically third world?
- Why is it that things do not function adequately and effectively when an educated African is in charge of matters demanding efficiency and development unless a non-African expert assumes responsibility?"

This is more worrisome in the provision of such existential needs as electricity, water supply, health delivery, food, shelter, mechanization in all technological contexts, in politics, economics, and so on.

We admit that the problem is in thinking out what practical contribution philosophy can make to the urgent task of bringing intelligent order, responsibility, efficiency and discipline into the African chaotic educational situation. That we admit the problem as educational is based on the premise that education is the only channel for the development of human species and that of all created beings, only humans need education for actual meaningful existence. Education brings about literate, numerical, proficiency ability as well as scientific and technological culture. Only education and can bring about intelligent order, sense of responsibility, efficiency and discipline in existential reality when rational beings exist. Having seen the undeniable place of education in relation to the essence and existence of rational beings, reason affirms that because of the complex nature of rational (mortal) beings, education would need other disciplines to achieve its purpose. One of such disciplines is philosophy, which would assist education to respond to the urgent task of bringing up young people to have numerical-literacy ability with proficiency and scientific and technological culture. Education needs psychology, sociology, history, and philosophy to encourage deep thinking and reflection by students.

This is why it is important that there should be solid background in general philosophy for specialization in philosophy of education. This specialization does not demean the fact that every teacher is a philosopher, but not in the sense, in which it is also true that every rational being is a philosopher. For a rational being to be a philosopher requires no special study in philosophy as a discipline, but requires that the rational being is educated and have memory of experience that enables interaction with reality both spiritual and physical. 'Spiritual' here includes reason, intellection, cognition, mind, ideas – mental activity is spiritual and 'physical' would mean all sense organs in human beings, anything that occupies space. But that a teacher is a philosopher implies that he/she has taken some course of study in philosophy. The intellectual activity that an African teacher through experience applies from the knowledge of these two disciplines (philosophy and education) in solving the problems of rational beings that threatens their existence both spiritual and physical as a system is the theory or philosophy of education. The known problem that threatens rational beings is ignorance in both spiritual and physical experience of reality. It is understandable then, that the traditional philosophies have their roots in four known philosophies or theories of education: perennialism, essentialism, progressivism and reconstructionism. Therefore, it is important that a teacher has knowledge of the traditional philosophies so as to have knowledge of the philosophies of education and practice one or use eclectic approach.

Meaning, nature and scope of philosophy of education:

The need to understand the meaning, nature and scope of the philosophy of education is imperative on all professional teachers involved with the school system. Philosophy of education is any reasonably coherent sets of values and fundamental assumptions used as a basis for evaluating and guiding educational practice (Phenix, 1965). Philosophy of education is institutional process philosophy. It is a reflection on the aims of actual organisations and the practice of established institutions that are involved in some official or semi-official way in educating people. It is for this reason that courses in Philosophy of Education are not usually found in philosophy departments and this explains why the Philosophy of Education Society arose out of the efforts of a group of educators to ensure that philosophy as a discipline turns its ultimate concern towards school system and the process of educating people (Giarelli and Chambliss, 1991).

Educational philosophy is normative, prescriptive and analytic in nature. As a theory, it includes in its system statements about aims, principles and methods of a normative character, some data of empirical fact, and metaphysical, epistemological, and theological assumptions. In nature and scope, it should be systematically empirical in its foundations and have comprehensiveness in its outlook. As a discipline the different departments should be consistent, practical and fulfilling to its adherents. That philosophy of education should be systematically empirical in its foundations would imply that it should be derived from experience, that it should comprehend and bring into a synthesis, not only science and metaphysics, but ethics and aesthetics as well. In its scope educational philosophy should bring into comprehensive synthesis various theories:

- nature of the individual;
- learning and educative process;
- growth of personality;
- special function of the school;
- the structure and processes of society; and
- meaning of life.

On being consistent in its several departments and being practicable in its provisions would imply its adaptability to a particular time and place, being couched in the most general terms imaginable to possess universal validity.

The relevance of philosophy

Can philosophy be relevant to education? If philosophy is understood, by some as that abstract activity that its practice is not significant in human existence, then it cannot be relevant to education. But when philosophy has its determination of proper object as ordinary and scientific knowledge, then it is relevant to education, education being the wise and diligent way to

acquire ordinary and scientific knowledge. Philosophy as a discipline (as against philosophy as a way of life - world view) goes beyond other humanities, social and empirical sciences to ask more ultimate questions about human beings - who *de facto* need education. Questions like what is the value of the intellect in general? What meaning is to be given to an experimental datum? How are matter and form (body and spirit) distinguished and what are their relationships? What are their respective origins and destinies? What are the limits, significance and possibilities of the positivistic sciences? These are questions raised in philosophy in relation to the acquisition of human knowledge. It is the only human academic discipline that studies material things considered as beings and substances abstracting from quantitative, spatial and temporal qualities. Philosophy with the science of metaphysics studies things in their intelligible aspects. It is 'love of wisdom', and wisdom is the right guide for human existence, the task of education. Philosophy is relevant when it guides education to a responsible conception of what it is; the functions it ought to perform at each of its various stages, its possible dimensions, and for what classes of persons.

It is pertinent to mention that the relevance of the traditional philosophies of idealism, realism and pragmatism to education is a matter of fact. On the relevance of philosophy to education, Okafor (1992) states that it is equally fundamental that every system of education is based on some philosophy or outlook of life. This would ensure that through education, the accomplishments of past civilizations are preserved, the spiritual life of the race or people are propagated, and social heritage of language, literature, as well as philosophies and its institutions is transmitted to the youth. The aspect of education that philosophy only can contribute to is either through reforming or improving the educational system.

. . . that only philosophy can contribute to it (education) becomes evident too when one bears in mind that whereas the practical utility of the natural sciences, in so far as they have any, consists only in the power they give man to predict or control the course of events; the practical utility of philosophy, on the other hand, when it has any, consists in the power it then confers on man to use wisely and responsibly, instead of foolishly and arbitrarily, such powers of prediction or control of events as he happens to have on given occasions. That is, in so far as philosophy has practical value, this consists in making clear what, in given circumstances and on the whole, is the best use to make of such powers as one happens to have, or what is the best means to employ, out of several at one's command, in order to achieve a chosen end (Ducasse, 1968: 10).

Philosophy is relevant when it helps education to achieve its chosen end – for mortal rational beings both physical and spiritual. This philosophy would achieve if it abandons itself as one of the liberal disciplines and becomes literally directive of human affairs. Philosophy as a discipline functions as a liberal discipline as well as a practical discipline particularly when it puts itself to the service of other disciplines. As a liberal discipline it is esoteric and ivory tower oriented and irrelevant to the urgent concerns of human existence, but as a practical discipline it deals with ultimate commitment, doctrinally conceived, and effectively directive of the practical affairs of human existential needs. This is process philosophy in practical wisdom. To this therefore, an African teacher as a reformer in school system must respond to the idea that a system of philosophy can be used as a reliable adequate instrument to checkmate the confusing, inconsistent and conflicting forces of the human enterprise with special interest in philosophy of education. Philosophy is what any culture and finally the world desperately needs as an over-all system of thought, an integrating world-view, which would establish a common purpose for humankind and mutually consistent self-actualising goals. When this happens, human beings would enjoy a community of mind and spirit, social harmony would be approximated and the brotherhood of man would become a reality on this earth (Kircher, 1968).

The relevance of philosophy of education

The relevance of philosophy of education can be seen in that the theory and practice of education is concerned with ideas about human nature and the nature of reality that ultimately are of philosophical in character. It is to recognize that differences in educational practice, in courses of study, teaching methods, administrative procedures, and patterns of support and control are generally reflections of differing beliefs about such matters as human nature, knowledge, values, and the good society and that these are the foundation of different philosophies of education. Hence, Phenix (1965) asserts that decisions about education can best be made intelligently and consistently in the light of a mature and reflective philosophy of education. The educational philosophy that is important to every rational being is not necessarily an abstruse technical discipline open to those trained in the field. Anyone who consciously has ideas about basic values and assumptions in education has a philosophy of education. The current state of the continent and debates in education whether it be Universal Basic Education, comprehensive school system or qualitative scientific and technological education provide an unparalleled opportunity to take stock of ourselves, as individuals and as a society, in respect of the values by which we live and our guiding convictions about persons and the world, the sources from which they spring, and the destiny toward which they tend.

In relation to the teacher, philosophy of education is the basic instrument in his/her professional training. In this discipline the teacher seeks for the meaning of the educative process as it takes place in the mind of the pupil and for the goal towards which it should be directed. The teacher turns to the same source for the fundamental principles, which should guide him/her in the selection and arrangement of the materials of the curriculum and for the educative values of the different disciplines to be employed. In Africa where there are obvious rapid and deep-seated social, economic, political and religious changes, where the work of the school is also undergoing a corresponding change in character and in aim, a process philosophy is imperative. These changes in the African continent and school systems make unusual demands on the philosophy of education and place added emphasis on its necessity in the training of the teacher. The essence of educational philosophy is to lighten the burden which the lay-person, through his/her vote, exerts a controlling influence on the school and upon the relationship which should exist between it and other social institutions of such fundamental importance as the home, religion and state.

Philosophy of education has the same characteristics as general philosophy and therefore it is speculative, prescriptive and analytical. Accordingly Kneller, (1971:5) states:

Like general philosophy, educational philosophy is speculative, prescriptive, and analytic. It is speculative when it seeks to establish theories of the learner, the teacher, and the school by which to order and interpret the conflicting data of educational research and the behavioural sciences. It is prescriptive when it specifies the ends that education ought to follow and the general means it should use to attain them. It is analytic when it clarifies speculative and prescriptive statements. The analyst . . . examines the rationality of educational ideas, the consistency with other ideas, and the ways in which they are distorted by loose thinking. He tests the logic of our concepts and their adequacy to the facts they seek to explain. Above all, he attempts to clarify the many different meanings that have been attached to such heavily worked educational terms as "freedom," "adjustment," "growth," "experience," "needs," "and knowledge"

Okafor (1992) asserts that it is evident that the task of definitions and clarifications regarding ends and means is within the purview of educational philosophy and that the task concerning ends and means in education, which is not simple but complex is extremely important. Furthermore, to the relevance of philosophy of education there is need to constantly broaden our

horizon, whether in terms of early childhood, primary, secondary, technical/vocational, tertiary, or education of the exceptional child, not only with regard to the means, but also in the domain of ends.

The aims of educational philosophy both for the teacher education and the teacher in the field are to:

- discover the place and significance of education in human experience;
- furnish a systematic interpretation of the presuppositions and results of educational experience;
- furnish a progressive organisation of the principles presupposed and ascertained by the sciences in their relations to educational experience;
- trace the relations of education to other activities of civilization in the modern world;
- determine the relation of the educational process to reality, to become the theory of the nature and development of educational experience and the system of the organisation of principles in education.

The aim of educational philosophy for the African student teacher and teacher in the field raises the conscious awareness of the most important responsibility of education – that of guiding civilization forward into a fruitful existence. For real educational progress should bring about fruitful existence. It is essential for the students and practitioners of education to note that the more closely one studies the actual situation of education system in Africa, the more one becomes convinced that its structure is a copy of a philosophical prototype and that educational systems are but reflected images of philosophical creeds. Unarguably in the field of education, more than any other discipline, theories are determined by the conception of life that one holds. There is no gainsaying that modern educational movements are ultimately associated with movements in the domain of philosophy.

The school system is neither a progressive nor a creative force. On the contrary, it is a stronghold of conservatism. Students and practitioners of education must not ignore the fact that school never takes the initiative in any movement; it only follows the lead of others and hands on to posterity the great ideas, which have revolutionized existence in the world when it is effective and functional school system. This is true also of the theories of education, which have no motive of their own; neither are they primarily creative, but rather conservative agencies. The student teacher, and the teachers in the field are such followers; it is the thinkers within them or perhaps outside of them, who lay the foundations of their educational philosophy.

In furtherance to its relevance, philosophy of education is concerned with the facts ascertainable with regard to (a) the nature of human beings (body, mind and spirit) and the nature of society, uniting these two to make

a unified whole, (b) the nature of God in relation to human beings working out their eternal destiny in a socio-political and economic milieu. An African teacher in the field must not forget that religion (God and human beings), biology (body), psychology (soul-mind), and sociology (society) are the four fundamental applied sciences of education. It is the unification of these disciplines through the formulation of principles directive of the education process (curriculum, method, objectives, etc.) seeking means and ends are what we mean as philosophy of education – the hinge of educational system. To make our point clearer about the relevance of philosophy of education for both student teacher and the teacher in the field is to be conscious of the fact that all cultures are undergoing rapid transformation and that education broadly understood, is a fundamental agent of culture. It is to this, that one necessarily agrees that:

Any philosophy of education that attempts the task of interpreting our times and setting a future course must utilize as many of the resources of knowledge and art as possible. Such a philosophy cannot afford to ignore any possible solution for our perplexities, however novel, distasteful, or unpopular it may seem. To an unusual extent, therefore, a meaningful philosophy of education must be interdisciplinary and integrative as well as analytical. Its own contribution, if it makes any, will spring from its capacity to learn from as many sources as possible and to fuse what it learns into a reconstructed theory that can be tested on a small or large scale in educational practice (Brameld, 1956: 4).

Given therefore, the nature of education and the rapidly changing culture of the entire globe it would be difficult to speculate what would be the philosophy of education for African teachers. It is important too, to mention that no one individual can determine a philosophy of education for a nation or continent. Such an endeavour has to be a collaborative work of experts. There is one thing certain, every teacher must have a philosophy of education on which to hinge his/her professional expertise in the field of education particularly the education of the young. This position presupposes also that every teacher has knowledge of the existing philosophies of education (perennialism, essentialism, progressivism and reconstructionism) that would enable his/her to choose either a particular philosophy or be eclectic in approach.

Perennialism

This is rooted in the doctrine of idealism, neo-Thomism or neo-scholasticism and understood as having a cultural outlook profoundly regressive in character. It has five ends for education:

- The enhancement and promotion of the superiority of the past and the permanency of the “classics”.
- Human nature is constant, its most distinctive trait being the ability to reason to be nurtured through education.
- Promoting the development of the rational person through educative process.
- Teaching is an art, which helps students to use their inherent power to think rationally, and employs exhortation, explication, Socratic discourse, and oral exposition.
- The curriculum centres on the seven liberal arts and the “great books” of human history.

Essentialism

Essentialism has its root grounded in the classic philosophies of idealism and realism. It has been considered as a contemporary policy and programme of cultural conservation (Brameld, 1956) and has five achievable goals for education:

- Preserving the “best” of the cultural traditions of a particular society and civilization.
- Promotion of the intellectual growth of the individual through educative process.
- Providing a curriculum composed of “essentials” subjects with intellectual substance and basic skills.
- Explicit teaching of values, those traditional values prized by a dominant class.
- Teaching should be the most effective and efficient transmission of “essentials”.

Progressivism

This is a philosophy of education based upon the belief that the key to reality is dynamic experience. The universe is in motion and ever changing. All nature, including human nature, is to be understood in terms of experience, and the most important power the individual possesses is the capacity to participate in experience by seeking solution to the many problems that experience presents with the instrumentality of natural intelligence. Since progressivism has its root in pragmatism, values too emerge out of the matrix of experience. Accordingly, moral life is fashioned from the more enduring choices that a person tries to make intelligently in the course of transaction with ever-changing events. Pragmatism as a philosophy through which progressivism took its origin does not intend to provide “final answers” to human problems, but it does provide a way of coping with them that and in the long run, is held to give the individual

more control over self and environment and therefore, more satisfying consequences than other philosophies which seek “final answers” (Brameld, 1956).

Progressivism as a theory of education emerges as a consistent elaboration of these underlying pragmatic beliefs with the following goals for education:

- Education is growth and development, the continuous reconstruction of experience, a living/learning process rather than a preparation for later adult life.
- Democratic social living includes democratic education, being both participatory and emergent.
- Learning is active and leads to change in behaviour.
- The curriculum emerges from the needs of students and of society and involves the application of intelligence to human problems.
- Teaching is the guiding of inquiry.

Reconstructionism

As educational this philosophy is deeply indebted to others, having taken its root from the philosophy of pragmatism. According to one of the proponents of reconstructionism, it could not repudiate them even if it wished to do so; no contemporary philosophic outlook can disregard them any more than it can disregard the cultures from which they have sprung and which they have in turn influenced. Reconstructionism appreciates the abundant contributions that have been made by progressivism, perennialism, and essentialism, and incorporates many of them into its own pattern (Brameld, 1956). The goal of education for the reconstructionist is that:

- Education has the mission of leading society to realize its values through goals and programmes of social betterment.
- Schools should become the agents of change of and social reform.
- The curriculum should be based on an image of the ideal society.
- Learning is active, and leads to involvement in programmes of social reform through citizen political action.
- The school, the teacher and the students should model the new, more perfect democratic society.

It is pertinent that all professional teachers have fairly good knowledge of these philosophies of education and see their relevance to educational process with particular reference to the education of the young. It is important that a teacher knows clearly the difference between philosophies of education and ideologies such as socialism, communism, capitalism, materialism, developmentalism and so on.

The African situation

The form of existence of rational beings, just like other form of life, must make a satisfactory adjustment to their natural and social environment if they wish to continue effective living. One can therefore, infer that life adjustment is the universal philosophy of education. Education being the means by which older generations pass on to younger ones the accumulated wisdom culture about how to survive a particular environment and live successfully. Life adjustment education as a universal philosophy of education is a positive response to the great needs for universal education in an industrial democracy, in contrast to elitist education. On life adjustment education Stratemeyer writes:

Life adjustment education has come to have many meanings, some educationally sound, some unsound. As I conceive it, life adjustment education has two essential elements: first, to help children and youth develop the skills, the knowledge, and the attitudes basic to dealing intelligently with immediate situations of everyday living; and second, at the same time to help them understand the persistent aspects of those situations which recur throughout our lives (Stratemeyer, 1965:27).

It is, therefore, the situation concerning children and the young in relation to developing the skills, the knowledge, and the attitudes necessary to dealing intelligently with immediate situations of everyday living that recur throughout existence that must necessarily determine the philosophy of education for African teachers.

A critical assessment of the African situation with Nigeria, as an example, reveals a high rate of illiteracy among the population (Akujuo, 1990, Isichei, 1991). An illiterate person in modern industrial democratic society cannot develop any skill, knowledge or attitudes to deal intelligently with the immediate environment for meaningful living. It is to eradicate illiteracy and moral decadence in ancient Greek world that perennialism originated from idealism as a philosophy of education. In order to achieve this through educative process it had in its curriculum the seven liberal arts of grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. The African educational situation is still at the level where it has not been able to transform Africa into being a full literate, scientific, technological, industrialized and democratic society. There is no one developed country in Africa. The best we can say is South Africa that is emerging as a first class nation in a third world. This situation of Africa is obviously an educational problem, which can only be resolved through a meaningful application of a philosophy of education in the practice of education.

In view of the African situation and the philosophies of education – essentialism, progressivism and reconstructionism – it is important to relate their positions to perennialism and the educational problems of the continent. The three philosophies accept the perennialists' position that all must be literate and study the material world with eyes on evolution process. In order to achieve this, essentialism expanded its curriculum to cover both liberal arts and science subjects at both elementary and secondary school levels. Through the expansion of its curriculum the modern world was born giving birth to scientific, technological and industrial revolution.

The progressivists saw the educative process of industrial revolution as an infringement on the freedom of the child to learn and wondered why perennialists and essentialists should force a child to study a set of problems that are of the adult concern when the child has not indicated that they are problems. Therefore, they advocate that the perturbed curious child in a given environment should be allowed to choose freely what to study so as to solve a perceived problem, hence child-centred educational programme of progressivism. The reconstructionists, on the other hand, did not understand why so much attention should be given to the child to the detriment of the society. They, therefore, advocate that the teacher who represents the society before the young should teach what would transform the society and so came up with society-centred educational programme. All nations of the world have gone through perennialism and essentialism in the process of educating the young. But not all nations have applied progressivism and reconstructionism. These originated in the mid-twentieth century American nation. While perennialism and essentialism date back to B. C. and A. D. Greek and Western world. What then would be the philosophy of education for African teachers as to graduate from developing to a developed continent?

The way forward

To attempt an answer to the above question is not an easy task. Given the African educational standard and problems that have kept her perpetually developing and one would suggest eclecticism to be adequate for African teachers. Eclecticism, derived from Greek word meaning to 'select', 'single out', 'choose', is a term used specially in philosophy and theology for a composite system of thought made up of views chosen from various other systems. Eclecticism is suggested here as an approach rather than a philosophy of education. As an approach, eclecticism recognised in its essence the refusal to follow blindly one set of formulae and conventions, coupled with a determination to recognise and select from all sources those elements, which are good or true in the abstract, or in practical affairs most useful *ad hoc*.

An eclectic approach is thus an attempt to find a workable combination of previously conflicting attitudes by regarding their principles in a less rigid and more conciliatory manner. This is to say that an African teacher, in an effort to educate the young in the practice of education, would borrow from all four major philosophies of education. The teacher in the practice of education seeking ways and means to eradicate the high rate of illiteracy, to develop in the young the conscious awareness of cultural transformation through scientific, technological and industrialization would need the teaching methodology of the four major philosophies of education. For the eradication of illiteracy there would be need to apply the teaching method of perennialism. That there be a cultural transformation through science, technology and industry, resort should be made to the teaching methodology of essentialism, progressivism and reconstructionism. Since philosophy of education is to help solve educational problems within a given cultural milieu, educational needs of that cultural milieu would be the determining factor for appropriate choice of philosophy of education. While this position does not rule out the fact that some teachers may have or profess a particular philosophy of education, it reminds teachers that they should be critical about their positions; aware that the educational needs of the society is more important than their professed positions. All positions must seek relevance rather than mere professionalism as a way forward to seeing Africa being educationally transformed into scientific and technological culture of 21st century standard.

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