

A Philosophical Approach to Education for the Transformation and Humanization of Africa

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Abstract

Education is one of the paramount instruments for awareness, civilization and development. No wonder Plato noted that no man should bring children into the world who is unwilling to persevere to the end in their nurture and education. A cursory analysis of the teacher-student relationship in most African (Nigeria) educational institutions reveals that education in Africa is suffering from narration sickness. This paper argues that the pedagogical system of education in Africa is a hurdle to development; it examines the challenges and the agents responsible for the peril in the educational system. And finally, it adopts an evolutionary approach to education by proposing an andragogical system of education for Africa.

Keywords: Education, transformation, humanization, philosophical, Africa, Pedagogical, Andragogical.

Introduction

In recent times, the quality of education in Africa, particularly in Nigeria has continuously depreciated. Our system of education, dominated by the banking or pedagogical system has drastically drained the joy of learning out of our educational institutions. With its tragic weapon of 'monotony control', it keeps weeding out students because they do not conform to the arbitrary standards, which do not facilitate the development of the human person into an independent and active citizen. In Africa, no doubt, we are still held under the clutches and pangs of the colonial policy that was targeted at teaching us how to read and write without reasoning. Our educational institutions, rather than being incubators from where dynamic students are hatched, nurtured and challenged in socially desirable directions to grapple with economic, social and technological situations that are rapidly changing, the otherwise is the norm.

The core of this piece lies at its effort at stinging the African to an awareness of his epoch, where change has become the tradition. This would be realized by assessing

the two dominant methods of leading students through the winding road of learning, namely, the pedagogical and andragogical systems of education. If the dominant pedagogical system of education has not brought about the anticipated desirable transformation of Africa, then this work is all about proposing a trial of the andragogical system of education for Africa. In this process, Plato's idea of education would be employed as a reliable framework for an analysis of the issues of concern here. Meanwhile, we would look at the philosophical aims and objectives of education.

Philosophical Intent and objective of Education

One of the primarily aims of education is to bring to the awareness of the human person, the knowledge of the world around him. This includes the knowledge of alternatives from which to freely choose. The National Policy on Education states that, education is said to be an instrument "per excellence" for effective national development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). Education enables one to attain the greatest possible harmony, internal and external, spiritual and material, for the fullest possible development of human potentialities and capacities and therefore national development. Education facilitates social transformation. It equips an individual to adjust to the customs and conventions of his society, and enables him to bring desirable changes to the society. It also creates opportunity for modernization and helps in the acquisition of certain basic values such as respect for others, responsibility, solidarity, creativity and integrity (Noddings, 2003). Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world (Arendt, 2004).

Plato in his work *Republic* argues that the object of education is to turn the eye which the soul already possesses to the light. The whole function of education is not to put knowledge into the soul, but to bring out the best things that are latent in the soul, and to do so by directing it to the right objects (cited by Hare, 1989). The problem of education, then, is to give it the right surrounding; nothing was more important to Plato in human life as education.

Aristotle believes that the purpose of education is to produce a good man. Education must therefore, aim at the development of the full potentialities of each man. It must seek the development of man's intellectual capacities to their fullest extent. It must aim also at developing each individual's body to its highest level of health and strength. Aristotle placed habit high in the learning process. Man learns by nature, by habit, and by reason. Consequently, the teacher would organize materials according to the laws of reason (cited by Wikipedia, 2011).

Plato's dialogical method of teaching is a foundational background for the andragogical system of education. One of the significant features of the dialogical method is the emphasis on collective, as against solitary, activity. It holds that, it is through the to and fro of arguments amongst friends (or adversaries) that understanding grows (or is revealed). Such philosophical pursuit alongside and within education allows humans to transcend their desires and sensualities in order to attain true knowledge and then to gaze upon the Final Good. Plato thinks that an individual's motivation and interest are important in the learning process. He is against the use of force in education. He argues that bodily exercise, when compulsory, does no harm to the body; but knowledge which is acquired under compulsion obtains no hold on the mind (cited by Kahn, 1996).

The problems with the Educational System in Africa

Africa today is facing a multi-factorial educational crisis. Many people have questioned the authenticity of our educational standard following the decline in the sector. Under-funding of our educational institutions has remained a great concern, in Nigeria for example, the fundamental questions are, what percentage of our national budget is allocated to the educational sector in the recent past? What percentage of funds allocated was actually spent on education? And how judicious are school administrators in spending their allocations and the internally generated revenue? Most infrastructures have become dilapidated in our campuses. University laboratories and libraries are poorly equipped; no reagents and useful books; University lecture halls are overcrowded, lacking essential features that can make learning conducive (Rotimi, 2007). Some students receive lectures standing and others sit on broken stools or on the windows.

Commitment to the teaching and learning processes is fast declining. The executive and productive capacities of university system in most cases fall short of conventional and international standards, as academic positions have been

politicized and professorial chairs become chieftaincy titles. The general state of education in Nigeria and Africa as a whole is pathetic.

An Assessment of the Pedagogical or Banking system of Education in Africa

Pedagogy is derived from two Greek words "paid," meaning child and "agogos," meaning leading. Thus, pedagogy has been defined as the art and science of teaching children. In the pedagogical model, the teacher has full responsibility for making decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, when it will be learned, and if the material has been learned (Knowles, 1984). Pedagogy, or teacher-directed instruction as it is commonly known, places the student in a submissive role requiring obedience to the teacher's instructions. It is based on the assumption that learners need to know only what the teacher teaches them. The teacher has nothing to learn from the student, even when we all know that the teacher sometimes learns more from the student than the student does from the teacher. The result is a teaching and learning situation that actively promotes dependency on the instructor (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990).

The pedagogical system of education, which is popular in Africa has created a scenario of 'a narrating subject (the teacher) and patient, listening object (the student); the contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified'. The student is charged with the primary responsibility of memorizing mechanically the narrated content. In this process, the student who is supposed to be a receiver, an observer, a synthesizer and an internalizer, is turned into a mere container. Like a tunnel which is less affected by the fluid, the content passes through him and he does not pass through it. In this process of learning, the more completely the teacher fills the receptacle, the better a teacher he is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better student they are (Freire, 1972). In this process, words are transmitted without any reflection on them. And since creativity is born out of reflection, this kind of knowledge has no place for creativity.

In this narration process, with the teacher as the narrator, our children are thrown into a kind of ecstasy detached from reality. They enjoy the beauty of the synthesis of the concepts involved which are devoid of a transforming power. In Africa (Nigeria) we witness a scenario where we read and read but are still not beneficiaries of the dividends of the liberating process of education, we are yet to conquer our environments. A sound system of education must involve a free interplay between the basic elements of change and permanence, but the banking system allows only

for a monologue of permanence which closes all doors to breakthroughs. We are mainly good at patiently receiving, memorizing and repeating what we have memorized. How we are to translate them into objective reality does not matter, and the question as to whether what we are memorizing has anything to do with our environment does not make any sense to us. We can boast that our graduates are literates, but we are also aware that they are unemployable. Many graduates cannot practically defend the certificates they are parading. There are graduates of computer science with strong theoretical foundation but without much practical import. Many of our literature students pass through the university, cramming poems and beautiful lines from prose writings, but with no knowledge of creative writing. The same caliber of people are found among graduating doctors, engineers, etc. They have it upstairs not down stairs. An intellectual schizophrenia is another name for this.

The consequence of the banking method, is that the African student is turned into a depository and the teacher a depositor and an issuer of communiqués rather than a communicator. And as a result of what we may refer to a colonial hangover, the teacher expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the student. His task is to fill the student with the content of his narration-contents which are detached from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated and alienating verbosity. This process of receiving, filling, and storing the deposits limits the entire process of education. The student is turned into a robot or an automaton and denied his right to the ontological vocation of being human, since the automation of the human person is irreconcilable with the vocation to be fully human. The end result of this misguided system is a galaxy of impotent literate men and women filed away through lack of creativity and transformation. They cannot be said to be truly knowledgeable since true knowledge comes about through intervention and re-intervention, and a charismatic, synergetic enquiry within a community of inquiry. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the crucial consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformer of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them (Freire, 1972). The pedagogical or banking system of education goes well with the colonial scheme of the oppressor. So that they would remain as lords to the oppressed; they neither provide the elements that reveal the world of the oppressed or the facilities that

transform it. The interest of the oppressor lie in changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them. For, the more they are made to be content of a partial view of reality, and a non experimental education which is supposed to stimulate their crucial faculty the more they are easily ruled, dominated and exploited. The colonial masters who exploited Africa made no effort at providing infrastructures that would help technology transfer to Africa. There was hardly any long term investment or setting up of a university of science and technology to help build local capacity. When their exploitation was challenged, they employed 'humanitarianism' as a cover to preserve a profitable situation, just as China is doing in Zambia and many parts of Africa. In the process, the oppressed receives a euphemistic title of 'welfare recipients'. The truth of the situation is that the oppressed are not in search of peripheral structures that make them 'beings for others'; what they need are transferring structures that would make them become 'beings for themselves'. This process, kills rather than help society develop.

Proposing the andragogical system of education as a way to meaningful development in Africa

From the concept andragogical, the *andragogue* represents the mid-wife who is humane, self-effacing, caring, non-authoritative, collaborative and academically unassuming. This already speaks about a dialogical system of education within a community of enquiry that gives proportionate places to the teacher and student. It allows for the free interplay of the values of critical thinking, creative thinking, caring thinking, lateral thinking, higher order thinking, systemic thinking and synergic thinking in the entire process of learning (Anih, 2004). Here the teacher becomes the *educatore* (facilitator-learner), and the student *educandi* (student-learner). In this dialogical process, both parties are learners, however with a facilitator of the process. Dialogue is here an existential necessity. Although the andragogical system may sound unindigenious, it is an interactive approach to learning. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education (Freire, 1972).

This system of learning provides the basic atmosphere for free high extension capacity thinking. The teacher is not placed at an intimidating ivory tower, he is part of this community of enquiry, and they work together for the overall good of the whole through a critical and creative thinking that eliminates biased, distorted, provocative and prejudiced reasoning. Within such a learning process, there are dimensions for reflection and action, and they hold themselves in a radical and

dependent interaction. This is so because, on the one hand, once reflection is dichotomized from action it alienates into a verbalism or an idle chat. This explains why we have students who are actually schooling but without education (Ojakaminor, 2004).

If in the classroom system, there is need to mention the educational implications and practices related to the andragogical principles. A sense of community is indispensable as part of the process and its implication is that activity is very paramount because no one can be a passive participant. Differences of opinion must be tolerated because it is a booster to the dynamism in enquiry, and in this regard, changing one's thoughts and attitudes is more important than changing that of others. This process of enquiry must be broadly based so that it considers issues not only of reasoning and logic, but also patronizing the fields of ethics, aesthetics, politics and the spiritual. The expression of one's ignorance is as important as the expression of knowledge or insight. A wide space must be provided for individuals to formulate ideals and purposes.

For this to be actualized, facilitators must learn to place new knowledge for students into a context that they already understand and appreciate. This could be done in such a way that what is of relevance to their lives is linked with their personal experience. In this regard, the programme content of education is elaborated not according to what the teacher thinks best for his students but by taking into account the *people-in-situation*.

There is eagerness in every living person to learn, and facilitators must nurture this by putting into consideration and also respecting the individual differences, self-image and emotional states of their students. If these are assured, students will respond positively because they find in their facilitator one who they believe sincerely cares for them personally, and who values interest and talents. At the point of encounter, there are neither utter ignoramus nor perfect sages; there are only men who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know (Freire, 1972).

It is only this andragogical system of education that can bring effective learning to the African (Nigeria) system of education that is already frustrated and suffocated by the monotony of control and standardization. It is only this system of education that can bring about the desired economic, social and political development; and it is important to note that adults learn best when they have control over their learning (Conner, 2004).

Conclusion

It is through the andragogical system of education that we can alter the mental models of our children through the recurring processes of systematic and synergic thinking approach. Only this can lead the citizens of our continent to perceive the relevant changes in our environment. If we must make sense of the variables in life to forge meanings out of the chaotic-complexities of life which must be reduced into elegant simplicity in order to evolve plans with coping with the hard facts in this earth-planet, then the andragogical model is indispensable. On a final note: the basic aim of proposing the andragogical or dialogical system of education for Africa is to create an avenue that enables for Africans to be masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world. This alone can give birth to a continuing transformation of reality for a continuing humanization of Africans.