

National Philosophies of Education and Impact on National Development

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Abstract *Way back in Greece of the 3rd century BC, the role of definitive national philosophy of education as a basis for teaching of young people was recognized and effectively applied. Nations in the contemporary world that have recognized the need for a definitive national philosophy of education as the springboard for national development appear to be at the forefront of development and those with vague national philosophies of education appear to experience developmental problems. This paper attempts a comparative study of some national philosophies of education and how they have impacted on development effort. It submits that developing countries should make effort to adopt focused national philosophies of education and suggests self-reliance with entrepreneurship at the core as one of such.*

Keywords: *Philosophy, education, national, development, entrepreneurship*

Introduction

Greek city states in antiquity were distinguished polities basically because of their education systems. Athens was particularly important, having hosted such popular institutions as the Academy of Plato and the Lyceum of Aristotle. Each city state had a defined philosophy of education that guided teaching and by extension, learning. Aristotle, in his *Politics* as quoted by Howie (1968) stated, "Thus in Sparta and Crete the educational system and most of the laws are directed towards the establishment of military power for the purposes of war" (p. 95). Sparta in particular was known for war and thus body building and gymnastics which in today's world constitute health and physical education) were the focus of the education system. In Athens, the focus was on the humanities and logic and democracy were of prime interest.

Why is it necessary to have a focus particularly in education? Peters (1980) notes, "To ask questions about the aims of education is therefore a way of getting people to get clear about and focus their attention on what is worth while achieving" (p. 28).

One of the achievements of a system could be the development of the national economy. Peters (1980) presents a metaphor when he saw education thus: "Just as gardens may be cultivated in order to aid the economy of the household, so children must be educated in order to provide them with jobs and to increase the productivity of the community as a whole" (p.28). There is a positive relationship between level of education in a country and the level of socio-economic development. This is why Campbell (1964) in Maduewesi (1998) holds that "the leading nations are the reading nations." In the specific area of entrepreneurship, research by the Global Economic Monitor (2003) has shown that there is a positive correlation between entrepreneurship and economic development as well as positive correlation between entrepreneurship education and total entrepreneurship activity in a nation.

One approach to national development is to develop the citizens by way of making them self-reliant. Self-reliance implies independence that can be achieved through private effort in entrepreneurship. This is the situation in capitalist economies where private entrepreneurship has been allowed to flower. Socialist economies such as China and Russia have subtly and slowly but surely embracing private entrepreneurship which, in China in particular, has had a salutary effect on economic growth. Developing countries should consider having definite national philosophies of education with self-reliance at the core. Some national philosophies of education and the impact on national development are discussed here.

Singapore

Discussing education under comparative studies with respect to the East Asian country of Singapore (one of the four 'Asian Tigers' or economic miracles of the world) should fittingly start with its modern history, reason being that colonized countries in Africa and less progressive, formerly colonized countries in Asia need to drop the excuse of colonialism as the cause of their sustained underdevelopment. Singapore became a British colony in 1819 and remained colonized for nearly one and half centuries. In 1963, the country, as part of Malaysia, became independent. It became a Republic in 1965 after separating from Malaysia.

Although the population is small (about 4.6 million in 2006), the country should be expected to be underdeveloped not only because of her colonial past but because it has no crude oil, imports all her energy needs, and only 0.9% of the country's land mass is available for agricultural production. Yet, as at 2006, Gross Domestic Product was \$132 billion, per capita national income was \$29, 474, life expectancy stood at 81.9 years and literacy rate was 93.9%. In terms of human development index, Singapore is put in the High Human Index group as it was at the 27th position (UNDP, 2010). Nigeria, a republic two years before Singapore, colonized for a little over half a century, the world's 6th largest exporter of crude oil with a land mass that is 55% cultivable and a resourceful population of 140 million by 2006 (FGN, 2006) could by 2006 boast of GDP of \$115 billion, per capita national income of a paltry \$797, life expectancy of 47.8 years, and literacy rate of 70.7%. Nigeria's Human Development Index position was 142nd (out of 169 countries) in 2010 (UNDP, 2010). Could the education systems have played a part in these divergent indices?

While education spending in Singapore usually makes up about 20 per cent of the annual national budget such that public education is subsidized and there is government assistance for private education for Singaporean citizens, the Nigerian Federal government has over the years made an average budgetary provision of 0.9% for education. The national philosophy of primary education of Singapore places "a good grasp of English Language" as number one item, followed by mother tongue and mathematics. That of Nigeria (FRN, 2004) requires teachers and pupils to wait till Primary 4 before using English Language for teaching and learning. The 'language of the environment' (with or without orthography) is expected to be used for teaching from Primary 1 to 3 even when such languages do not have words that can accommodate science and most other fields of study (Ubong, 2009).

Another philosophy that is central to the Singaporean education system is that of Confucianism. The central concept is *ren (jen)* which to Confucius meant that "the good life is an endless aspiration for ethical perfection." Morality is thus a crucial part of Singaporean education system just as it is in Japan. In Nigeria, moral instruction is still subject to debate and is mentioned in passing in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004). Probably the emphasis on moral education in the national education policy accounts for the reason Singapore. The main language of instruction in Singapore is English, officially designated the first language within the local education system in 1987 (The Strait Times, 2009). English is the first language learned by half of the children by the time they reach preschool age; it becomes the primary medium of instruction by the time they reach primary school. The foundation stage is the first stage of formal schooling and includes four years from Primary 1 to 4 during which a foundation is established in English, mother tongue (Chinese, Malay, Tamil or a Non-Tamil Indian Language) and Mathematics. Other subjects taught from Primary 1-6 include civics and moral education, arts and crafts, music, health education, social studies, and physical education. Science is taught from Primary 3 onwards (Inca, 2006). Singapore has consistently held the first position in international education scores in mathematics and science for several years. Singapore Primary Mathematics series and other national textbooks have been adopted and used in the United States of America (USA) and other countries.

Japan

Way back in 1951 when a whole lot of countries in the world were yet to taste independence and take on the myriad tasks of development including the education of the citizenry, F. N. Kerlinger wrote of Japanese education. He saw the Asian nation's educational system as being based on the philosophy of *shūshin*. The principles that *shūshin* embodied in the opinion of Kerlinger (1951) "were the centre of the Japanese curriculum. They were the centre of Japanese life itself." What was *shūshin*? Kerlinger (1951) summarizes it as "morals, ethics, moral science, moral training, morality." In essence, morality was, and is still the central philosophy of Japanese education.

One way of establishing whether this has impacted the society is among others, looking at the way the world sees Japan with respect to morality. Of 178 countries, Japanese stood at number 17 on the Transparency International scale of nations with respect to corruption in 2010. Denmark, New Zealand, and Singapore took the first position as the least corrupt nations of the world in 2010. Nigeria was at the 134th position while Somalia took the last position of 178th.

Shūshin is said to have started during the Meiji era in Japan. The Meiji period (1862-1912) appeared to have been the most eventful period in Japanese history. Emperor Meiji engineered changes in all aspects of Japanese life including education. In 1872, a new educational system was set up known as the Gakusei with emphasis on mathematics, science, and culture as well as Japanese language and morality. Although examination was top priority, examination malpractice was unheard of as well as other acts of immorality in the education system. This has largely been sustained to the present. Apparently because Japanese philosophy of education has morality as the central issue, a number of other things follow including discipline which has led to high levels of achievement.

In summary, Japanese education has had a focus since the Meiji era and that focus – morality - has reflected in diverse ways that have had positive and enduring impact on the entire Japanese society. Morality means a high sense of discipline which is reflected in the life of the youths who see education as a path to the good life and put in so much that drop out rate is low and graduation rate very high. It follows that a disciplined youth population grow up to be a disciplined adult population. This is the famed *multiplier effect* theory in economics which holds that one action that has linkages touches several aspects of life in a positive manner generating cumulative effects that are greater than the individual acts (also described as social action in sociology).

United States of America (USA)

Early education in the USA followed the European (British) tradition. Major changes were however effected, the most important fall out being the public school system. Education was, and is still being seen as the basis of a free society based on the principles of democracy. Given its crucial nature, education, in the opinion of Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), should be the responsibility of government.

Horace Mann (1796-1859) was the first American to introduce reforms into the educational system principally, by advocating public education. He is also credited with establishment of the first school for teacher education in the USA. He extended the position of Jefferson, positing four ideas:

1. Universal popular education if the Republic is to endure;
2. Education should be free from sectarian religious influence although morality must still be emphasized;
3. Education is the primary responsibility of the state;
4. The state has a right to raise taxes to finance public education.

John Dewey also had an enduring impact on American education through his writings and the philosophy of pragmatism cum instrumentalism. Two other American philosophers, Charles Sanders Pierce and William James were also pragmatists.

The philosophy of pragmatism has been the backbone of American education and life generally. It is what has seen the landing on men on the moon and what has informed the superlative developments in science and technology, and the basis of the American Dream.

Russia

Russian history has a lot of twists and turns but the country shot more into the world stage when it became the de facto laboratory for a new experiment in governance known as communism with the economic philosophy of dialectical materialism developed by Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1885) as the basis. Before the Marxists shot onto the stage however, there was the Czars or emperors, who saw education as dangerous for the masses. The Bolsheviks followed after the 1817 revolution; they saw education as the power base of the nation although how that was to be done was not articulated. The Bolsheviks also aimed at rooting out inequalities and religion. These were the basic educational aims of the revolutionaries in Moscow. Shulman (2001) however notes that "Beyond this, they had no developed educational philosophy, only a collection of vague and often conflicting ideals and objectives" (p. 415). In evaluating the Soviet educational system during the days of communism, Shulman (2001) submitted: The educational system adequately served Stalin's purpose by quickly turning out cadres with basic literacy and skills. Now it is struggling to provide young people with the higher and more comprehensive knowledge needed to meet the goals of today's Soviet leaders ... The educational system faces problems that mostly relate to the question of how to take full advantage of advances in science and technology (p. 418).

It is necessary to recall that the Soviet Union successfully launched the first manned mission into space with Astronaut Yuri Gagarin making history. Yet it was the USA that made the greatest foray by landing men on the moon. To date, Russia, what is left of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), is yet to make any big move beyond Gagarin. This, aside from slow development of the economy (HDI position is 65, life expectancy 67.2 years, and per capita national income at \$15, 258.00 – nearly half of that of Singapore - all in 2010) slow development of democracy among other things, show that the lack of a definitive national philosophy of education has been a disadvantage to national development.

Nigeria

Section 1 of the 4th edition of the Nigerian National Policy on Education (NPE) (FRN, 2004) treats the "Philosophy and Goals of Education in Nigeria." The introduction outlines the basis of Nigeria's national policy on education, stating that it is derived from the nation's five main national goals as listed in the 4th National Development Plan (1970-75).

The document (FRN, 2004) then goes on to provide a further backdrop to Nigeria's national policy on education by making an attempt to provide a foundation by way of a national philosophy of education. The document therefore states in Section 1 sub-section 4: "In Nigeria's *philosophy of education* (italics in the document), we believe that:

- a) education is an instrument for national development; in this end, the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education;
- b) education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society;
- c) every Nigerian child shall have the right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his or her ability;
- d) there is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria; to this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical, and comprehensive, while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction in education.

Above are omnibus provisions on what should be the country's philosophy of education. Within these provisions are philosophical concepts such as Dewey's multiple approaches to education delivery in a); humanism in b); egalitarianism in c); progressivism, pragmatism, and individualism cum humanism in d). It is pertinent to note that this sub-section is a *believe* and believe, although regarded as one of the conditions of knowledge, is not a confirmed position in philosophy. Okoh (2003) has contrasted belief and knowledge or truth, noting that among other things, believe is but a state of mind (in spite of the commitment to it) and is not performative, justifiable, and is not a product of a scientific-rational process. Thus although the government may be committed to the principles outlined in the philosophy of education, they need not justify or actuate them.

The document continues, in Section 1 sub-section 5, again on the same issue of Nigeria's national philosophy of education, stating that it is based on:

- a) the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen;
- b) the full integration of the individual into the community, and
- c) the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system.

These are no more than a rehash of what was said in earlier sections, with provisions that can hardly be reduced to actionable parameters. The plethora of provisions continue till sub-section 8 (f) where self-reliance is specifically mentioned: "acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance" (p. 8).

The need for definitive statements is important particularly with respect to mission statements. General statements are hardly actionable and difficult for operators and other stakeholders to understand. As an example, the first goal of primary education of the State of Singapore is to give children a "good grasp of English Language" (Ministry of Education, 2005) while mother tongue and mathematics take the second and third positions respectively. Nigeria's NPE would rather that Nigerian children start school using the mother tongue till Primary 3! Section 4, sub-sections e) and f) state:

- d) The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the environment for the first three years. During this period, English shall be taught as a subject.
- e) From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of the immediate environment shall be taught as subjects.

It is evident that those who designed the policy forgot the impact of the mother tongue and vernacular English in the academic work of children. In some communities, particularly semi-urban and poor neighbourhoods in large cities, the major language of the environment is vernacular English or 'broken' or 'pidgin' English. One wonders what would be the product if pidgin is used as the medium of instruction in line with the expectation of the NPE, after all, majority of Nigerian local languages have no orthography.

The language provision in the NPE is of course the classic case of conflict theory (social reproduction theory) in which the education system ensures that low class children grow up to be low class adults since the NPE with respect to language of instruction is applicable – in practice – to community and public schools. No private school would dare to wait till Primary 3 before using English as the general language of instruction.

In essence, Nigeria does not really have a definitive national philosophy of education. This is evidently why Okoh (2005) warned of "The risk of an educational system without a philosophical base." A national philosophy of education should, among other things, "identify and clarify the justification for education" (Okoh, 2005) based on certain questions. Thus in the decade of the sixties, following the declaration of President John F. Kennedy that America must land a man on the moon in the 1970s, the education system was re-oriented towards science and technology, based on the long held philosophy of pragmatism that American philosophers William James, C. S. Pierce, and John Dewey canvassed. And America did land man on the moon ahead of the Soviet Union that challenged President Kennedy; Soviet Union was the first to send man into space in April 1961. President Kennedy had declared in 1961 that America's prime objective was that, "before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth." Apollo 11

landed men on the moon in 1969 and brought the three astronauts back to earth successfully. Interestingly, Soviet Union, represented by Russia, is yet to land man on the moon but is rather cooperating with America to set up and maintain laboratories in space.

Agenda for Action

Decades back, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere proposed an economic system based on the philosophy of self-reliance for Tanzania (Nyerere, 1967, 1978; Major & Mulvihill, 2009). There were problems in executing the proposals presented by this sage as detailed by Kassam (1995) yet the basics of his proposal remain valid till date: that one problem of underdevelopment is an education system that produces white collar workers chasing after non-existent jobs. Africans, nay developing countries, should have a philosophy of education that produces persons that can stand on their own after school. Practicum, in the spirit of pragmatism should be central to education particularly in the school system. There is an urgent need for a reorientation towards education for self-reliance rather than education for job-seeking. All schools should have their curricula to reflect a reasonable dose of entrepreneurship, after all, every discipline has the potential for business development and entrepreneurship education would enhance the actuation of the business potentials in every graduate of schools at all levels.

Conclusion

The structure of a nation's national philosophy on education can positively or negatively affect virtually all aspects of life and all sectors of the nation. Developing nations need to review their national philosophies to make them more focused and few and then design goals to actuate them. One focus should be entrepreneurship which can encourage self-reliance.

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