

JULIUS NYERERE'S EDUCATIONAL IDEA AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR LEARNING IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Observation has revealed that the Nigerian system of education revolves majorly around theories, with emphasis on scores, grades and certification at the expense of abilities, skills and competences. As a result, education in Nigeria, in practice, is not as problem-solving as it should be. Therefore, this paper advocates the type of education that is problem-solving, and enhances self-reliance and character, adopting Julius Nyerere's educational idea. This paper is qualitative in nature and philosophical in orientation. It adopts the analytical, the speculative and the prescriptive methods to deal with issues and problems such as constructivism, self-reliance, ujama, negritude and consciencism, among others. The paper depends on library sources for its data collection. This paper examines education as a social process aimed at solving societal problem. It analyses Julius Nyerere's philosophy of education in terms of its relevance to Nigeria's education system. The paper conceptualises African philosophy as the rigorous discourse that emanates from the indigenous African critical thinkers on African issues. The paper takes interest in constructivism, a problem-based learning theory. This study found out that Negritude, Consciencism, Ubuntu and Ujamaa are parts of the discourse that constitute the African philosophy. The paper reveals that socialism, agriculture, self-reliance and character constitute Tanzania's Ujamaa, the pillar upon which Nyerere's educational philosophy is hinged. The paper concludes that the adoption of Julius Nyerere's educational philosophy in Nigeria is a possible way of preparing the educated in the country to be problem-solving, self-reliant and of good character.

Keywords: African philosophy, constructivism, self-reliance, socialism, Ujamaa.

Introduction

Julius Nyerere may be regarded as one of the most impactful African philosophers in history. The success story of what is known as the *African philosophy* today may be arguably described as incomplete without his contribution, particularly in the area of education. Nyerere was a Tanzanian philosopher whose major aims were to promote agriculture, self-reliance, the Tanzanian culture and address the ills of the Tanzanian society. According to Evans (2012), the national philosophy and developmental goal of Tanzania, an African society, are based on the policy of socialism and self-reliance enshrined in Ujamaa and popularised in the Arusha Declaration of 1967. Nyerere does not condemn western education in the outright sense, but faults book knowledge that cannot be translated into action. He believes in the type of education that encourages problem-solving, self-reliance, good attitudes and character. This

paper takes interest in constructivism, a problem-based educational theory that emphasises learning by doing.

Education as a social process

Education may be perceived as a process because it occurs gradually, in steps, stages, phases and, in all, by experience. Dewey, (as cited in Gwyer & Laurita, 2012), conceives education as a social process. Bamisaiye (1989) seems to illustrate Dewey's view in her description of education as "a cumulative process of development" (p. 9). In the same spirit, Arogundade (2003) describes education as a systematic process. Education as a process implies the systematic development of the educated. This explains why Whitehead (1966) has argued that education should be aimed at producing "men who possess both culture and expert knowledge in some special direction" (p. 1), and frowns at what he calls "inert ideas" in education. For Whitehead (1966), inert ideas are ideas that are "merely received into the mind without being utilised, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations" (p. 2). Similarly, Aboluwodi, (as cited in Ibukun, 2018), points out that education should be designed to help the educated to be self-reliant. To develop to the level of being self-reliant, no doubt, takes a process.

Western education in Nigeria

The claim that western education was introduced in Africa to facilitate imperialism could be substantiated by Aboluwodi's (2015) submission that "the post colonial education experienced in Nigeria does not differ markedly from that of the previous colonial years" (p. 123). Ibanga (2016) and Ezeanya-Esiobu (2017) contend that the model of education in Africa at present, patterned after that of the European countries, is alien to the Africans who are the recipients even in their own land. According to these arguers, the foreign model of education does not find its meaning in the dignified reality of the African culture and heritage.

However, Nigeria's National Policy on Education has been designed by government in an attempt to achieve certain national developmental goals using education as a tool. This explains why it is stated in Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2014 Edition) that "Education is an instrument for national development; ...; Education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society" (p. 4). It follows, therefore, that no policy on education can be formulated by a nation without first identifying the overall philosophy and goals of that nation. That is, the rationale behind the educational policy of a nation is to achieve certain set goals of that nation using education as a tool. This implies that western education in Nigeria has greatly influenced the developmental process of the country in the positive sense.

Constructivism

The roots of constructivism, as revealed by Brooks (1999), can be traced back to the Greek philosophers Socrates, Heraclitus, Protagoras and Aristotle, among others. Subsequently, the term was used by the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard in 1934 in his claim that "Nothing proceeds from itself. Nothing is given. All is constructed" (n.p). Brooks notes further that constructivism was, however, first popularised by Jean Piaget in the expression *Constructivist Epistemology* in 1967. According to Brooks (1999), Piaget contends that "people produce knowledge and form meaning based upon their experiences" (p. 3). This implies that we construct our own understanding of the world we live in by reflecting on our experiences. As

pointed out in Unit 1-Pedagogy Strand (2018), Jean Piaget's presentation of constructivism is that knowledge is not simply transmitted from teacher to student, but actively constructed in the mind of the learner. This is learning by doing.

Constructivism identifies two of the key components that could help an individual to create the construction of new knowledge. They are *accommodation* and *assimilation*. For Piaget, assimilation causes an individual to incorporate new experiences into the old experiences, and aids him to develop new outlooks, rethink, consider and re-consider what used to be misunderstandings, and evaluate what is important, thereby having changed perceptions. On the other hand, accommodation is positioning newly acquired experiences within the framework of the already existing knowledge.

The focus of constructivism, as submitted by Brooks (1999), is how learning actually occurs. Instead of giving a lecture, the teacher, based on this theory, functions as a facilitator and aids the students to construct their own idea based on their personal understanding. Therefore, there is a shift in focus from the teacher and lecture to the students and their learning. Instead of telling, the teacher must begin by asking. The facilitator allows students to come to conclusions on their own during lessons. The essence of Piaget's constructivism is for teachers to challenge the students and make them effective critical thinkers. As further argued in Unit 1-Pedagogy Strand (2018), constructivist learning is to foster critical thinking, create motivated and independent learners, have lessons that include guided discovery (in which the teacher points out inconsistencies in students' thinking and allows them to build understanding by resolving conflicts), and include minimal amount of direct instruction.

Problem-based learning is driven by identified and defined problem, and requires students to present the result and conclusion of the process involved in solving the problem. The argument here is that the African educational philosophy should be aimed at meeting the needs of Africa and solving the problem of the African continent. It should be designed and guided within the confines of the Africans' interest and deployed for the progress and improvement of the African continent. Nigeria, of course, is not an exemption in this case. This conception of the African educational philosophy seems to have been the agitation that has characterised the indigenous African philosophies over time.

Determining the African philosophy

What constitutes the African philosophy might have made it clumsy to define. This, of course, should not suggest in any way that it does not exist. According to Chimakonam (2005), what makes a philosophy African has been viewed by two groups of actors, namely, the Traditionalists and the Universalists. The traditionalists are of the stance that the studies of the philosophical elements in world-view of the African people constitute African philosophy, but the universalists believe immutably that it has to be a body of analytic and critical reflections of individual African philosophers. The debate on what actually constitutes African philosophy eventually produced two contrasting criteria. The first is that a philosophy would be African if it is produced by Africans. Oruka (1975) and Hountondji (1996) believe that African philosophy should be the philosophy done by Africans. Higgs (2003) reveals that people like Paulin Hountondji, Odera Oruka, Godfrey Ozumba and Innocent Asouzu subscribe to this criterion.

The second, a traditional criterion, according to Chimakonam (2005), is that a philosophy is African if it is non-racial but focuses on Africa or Africans as a solidarity term with the approach deriving inspiration from African cultural background or system of thought. As further explained by Higgs, for this group, it does not matter whether the issues addressed are African or done by an African, it is African philosophy if it is universally applicable and projected from the viewpoint of African system of thought. Actors in this group include Joseph Omorege, Udo Etuk, C. S. Momoh and Jonathan Chimakonam (Higgs, 2003).

What could be deduced from the two criteria discussed above is that African philosophy is a critical discourse on issues that may or may not affect Africa by African philosophers. In the light of this, Ukpokolo (2017) conceives African philosophy as the African philosophical discourse. The idea of African philosophy reflects in such works as Negritude, Consciencism, Ubuntu and Ujamaa, among others. These works have emanated from the African thought system. Negritude, according to Thiam (2008), has to do with the cultural values of the Blacks as expressed by the Blacks. Ajei (2017) describes Consciencism as an ideology that expresses the vigorous African search for freedom, unity and identity. In the case of Ubuntu, the common good of the African society (communalism) is emphasised (Elza, 2004). As discussed in Speeches and Statements (2008), the idea of Ujamaa is to ensure that the people care for each other/one another.

The African philosophers

The frustration generated by slavery, colonisation, racism and the myth of white man's superiority that characterised European philosophy, according to Ruch and Anyanwo (1981), birthed the African philosophy. Granted the argument of Ruch and Anyanwo here, the African philosophy actually began with frustration. This frustration must have led to angry questions and answers and the responses from which what is known as the African philosophy today emerged. Fundamentally, the African philosophy is concerned with such sensitive issues as the identity of the African people, their place in history and their contributions to civilisation. African philosophers, according to Higgs (2012) and Jagire (2014), include Aimé Césaire, Leopold Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kwasi Wiredu, Henry Olela, Obafemi Awolowo, William Abraham, John Mbiti, and certain expatriates like Placid Tempels, Janheinz Jahn and George James, among others. Onyewuenyi (1994) and Oyeshile, (as cited in Aabdullateef, 2022), reveal that these African philosophers aim to dethrone and undercut the colonially-built episteme and expose the heinous crime of slavery against Africa.

Nyerere's Philosophy of Education

Julius Nyerere hailed from Tanzania. His philosophy of education was influenced by happenings in the Tanzanian society during his time. In other words, Nyerere's ideology was in line with the culture and history of his society. His major aims were to promote the Tanzanian culture, ensure self-reliance among the youths and address the ills of the Tanzanian society and, by extension, that of the global community. As such, an understanding of Nyerere's philosophy of education may not be easy without first studying the Tanzanian ideology, being the society he hailed from. It is, therefore, worthy of note that the national philosophy and developmental goal of Tanzania, an African society, "were based on the policy of socialism and self-reliance enshrined in Ujamaa and popularised in the Arusha

Declaration of 1967” (Evans, 2012: n.p). It could be logically argued that achieving these socialist goals is the rationale behind the formulation of Nyerere’s philosophy of education. Kenton (2023) explains *socialism* as a doctrine of “economic and political system that is based on collective ownership of the means of production of goods that aim to directly satisfy human needs” (p. 1). Nyerere believes that the doctrine of socialism “was to build a society in which all members have equal rights and opportunities” (Sheikheldin, 2015: n.p). For Nyerere, as further explained by Sheikheldin, such a society would be “socially harmonious, ..., without suffering or imposing injustice” (n.p). Nyerere believes that the development of a country is brought about by people and not money, socialism, in the context of Ujamaa, places emphasis on the mobilisation of human resources for the development of self-reliance (Ibanga, 2016). Ibanga also claims that the Tanzanian socialism aimed to develop a particular quality of life which is people-centred. To this end, the focus of development is rightly put on the rural areas where majority of the citizenry live.

The commitment to socialist and self-reliant ideology required participation of the people in the entire developmental process. For this to happen, people must live together in a cooperative basis. To achieve this goal, education becomes a veritable tool. This explains Nyerere’s (1986) declaration that “the education provided by Tanzania must serve the purpose of Tanzania ... encourage the growth of the socialist values we aspire to” (p. 252). Therefore, it is safe to describe Nyerere’s philosophy of education as pro-socialist in the context of the Tanzanian Ujamaa.

According to Aboluwodi (2008), Nyerere is of the view that education should be targeted at transmitting accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society from one generation to the next. That is, education is meant to prepare the young people for their future membership of the society they belong to. Nyerere is not comfortable with the education provided by the colonial government because it was designed to inculcate the values of colonial society and train the individuals for the service of the colonial government. Nyerere (1982) argues that, before the introduction of the colonial government, learning in Africa was by living and doing. Nyerere, (as cited in Aboluwodi, 2008), faults the colonial education system as he observes that it encourages inequality and intellectual arrogance among the students. He does not despise western education, but was not comfortable with a system whereby the well-educated despised others who did not have academic abilities. For Nyerere, the Western education places exaggerated emphasis on ‘book learning’ and certification at the expense of attitudes and character. However, Nyerere believes that the book-man should not be under-valued just as the man with traditional knowledge and wisdom should not be under-valued. He reasons that the book-man can translate his knowledge into action.

Nyerere’s philosophy of education was inspired by and premised upon the principles of Ujamaa. The principles, as highlighted by Aboluwodi (2008), are “equality and respect for human dignity; sharing of the resources, which are produced by our efforts; and work by everyone and exploitation by none” (p. 81). These principles are African culture-bound, but are not addressed by the colonial education. The logical consequence of this colonial education is that Africans are alienated in their homeland. Nyerere contends that the new educational system should prepare the young people to be able to shape the society. As could be inferred from the principles of Ujamaa, the values inculcated should stress a sense of commitment,

commonality, loyalty, equality, communality, responsibility, cooperative endeavour, enquiry mind and democratic mind.

Tanzania is an agrarian society. Therefore, Nyerere believes that farming should constitute part of the school activities. He contends that the sole aim of elementary education should not be to prepare the pupils for the secondary education, but to also prepare them for life and service in the village and rural areas of the country. The most essential aspect of Nyerere's educational ideas is the link between theory and practice. Nyerere's educational policy is unique because he believes that a well-planned educational system should enable the students to relate theory to practice. That is, students must be able to translate the knowledge they acquire in their various grades into action. Since the Tanzanian society is the agrarian one, the only way to be part of the village life is to combine classroom work with farm work.

Imperative of Nyerere's philosophy of education for Nigeria's educational system

As earlier discussed in this study, Nyerere's philosophy of education was based on cultural context of Tanzania and designed to address the need of Tanzania at the time. However, some of the principles outlived the time and have gone beyond Tanzania's context. One of the underlining principles of Nyerere's philosophy of education was that it was based on the social, economic and political system of Tanzania which was essentially socialist. Relatedly, Tanzania was predominantly a rural population whose basic economic activity revolved round agriculture. It had so few schools that could not accommodate all the people that were interested in getting enrolled (Nyerere, 1986). These principles formed the basis of Nyerere's philosophy of education.

One should not forget that Nigeria's situation today is not completely the same as that of Tanzania that time. Nonetheless, much could be learnt from Nyerere's educational philosophy which may be applied in reforming Nigerian educational system, as they both inherited their system of education from the same colonial master, Britain. Therefore, what helped is the reformation of the Tanzanian educational system could help in reforming Nigeria's educational system. For instance, just like it was in Tanzania, the system of education in Nigeria should be designed to serve the interest of Nigeria first, before anything else. Azenabor (1999) observes that achieving this would require an overhauling of the existing system of education.

Putting a stop to proliferation of schools in Nigeria is another way of making Nigeria's educational system viable. The fewer the schools, the easier to fund. Schools were so few in Tanzania that not all the people that showed interest could be enrolled. As such, funding the few available schools was not too hard for the Tanzanian government. Certain schools in Nigeria may have to be merged, while proliferation needs to be controlled. Besides, the seeming exaggerated emphasis on certification at the expense of skills and abilities needs to be ended. The bookman should not be recognised and preferred over his counterparts with non-academic passions in the society. Every individual should be respected for who they are. None should be made inferior to another because of academic disparity.

Relatedly, education in Nigeria, at all levels, should be designed towards achieving self-reliance among the learners. For Ogundowole, (as cited in Ibanga, 2016), self-reliance encompasses "competence, dedication, confidence, national awareness and, above all,

originality” (p. 26). Education for self-reliance is a way of preparing learners for the life beyond the classroom. That is, from the primary school level to the tertiary institution level, competences and abilities must be emphasised and rewarded accordingly. The emphasis should not be totally on scores and grades for success in schools. Schools curricula should be designed to accommodate all kinds of talents, skills, abilities and competences. As such, creativity, innovation, construction, reconstruction and invention might be encouraged in the schools.

The problem of unemployable graduates seems to have become conspicuous in Nigeria. Even a lot of the employable ones are unemployed. To solve these problems, Nyerere’s educational philosophy may serve as a guide. For instance, his educational philosophy could be adopted in Nigeria towards enabling the students to be self-reliant in the area of agriculture. Schools could, as well, produce part of the food eaten by the community and help in the area of funding through their farm produce. Through agro-based entrepreneurship, schools are likely to produce part of the needed raw materials in the society.

Conclusion

The improvement of the society is one of the major educational aims. Therefore, education should be considered good for all men in all societies. According to Ezeanyan-Esiobu (2017), one of the primary educational aims is to expose the learner to an appreciation of his environment and the curiosity to explore more, so as to add value. Improving or adding value to a society will take the joint efforts of the citizens. As could be inferred from the analysis above, Nyerere’s educational philosophy may be adopted to actualise the participation of almost every citizen in improving Nigeria. This explains why Shilgba (2018), considering the educational problem in Nigeria as systemic, suggests the collaboration of all the Education Agencies in Nigeria as a way of improving the sector. He argues that that will enhance harmonious development of the various elements of the education given to citizens in the country. The joint efforts of these agencies could help in fixing the education issues in Nigeria. Above all, to ease funding and facilitate the production of raw materials by Nigerian schools, agricultural activities should be accommodated in the schools’ curricula.

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