

Reflections on the Role of Philosophy of Education in Social Reconstruction: The Nigerian Perspective

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Date Received: March 16, 2015; Date Revised: May 29, 2015

Abstract - *Our society is currently facing startling issues of underdevelopment that requires enlightened understanding to overcome. Like the eras of renaissance, reformation, industrial revolution that gripped Europe, so we are challenged by globalization, ICT, insecurity, socio-political upheavals, natural disasters as well as marked malpractices characterized by breakdown in social consciousness, dysfunctional public utilities, reckless and disgraceful disposal of refuse on our highways and perversion of justice. Hence the inescapable role of philosophy to provide, convincing blueprint of social order sufficient enough to command the political commitment and will. Moreover, philosophy establishes theories of the nature of man, society and the world by which we order and interpret conflicting data of educational research and behavioural science using arguments and conceptual analysis. This paper lays bare that philosophy of education can usher in the desired social order and develop social construction that can enhance development. This is perfected through a criteria nurtured on the basis of philosophical principles that provide an enlightened understanding of current issues like ICT, globalization, MDGs, security challenges and a host of others.*

Key words: *Reflections, Philosophy of Education, Social Reconstruction, Nigerian Perspective*

INTRODUCTION

Currently, Nigeria like any other society is tensed by reasons of changes that have already taken place in the area of science and technology, trade and commerce as well as democracy and good governance. Even most disturbed are we, by, the prospects of future changes that must take place if society is to cope adequately with changes that presently existed (Jimba, 2009). It is also the case that

ideas and values that once seemed workable for religion, for the family and for education no longer appear to be viable (Jimba&Odanwu, 2009). Thus, fresh and strategic planning of the Nigerian society has to be charted, and the basis which most communities argue, should be educational in nature. Interestingly, the practice of education in every society is coloured with philosophic webs (Jimba and Okpanachi, 2001). Kneller (1971) also perceives the role of philosophy as that which seeks to establish theories of the nature of man, society and the world by which to order and interpret the conflicting data of research and behavioural sciences. Moreover, philosophy is concerned with system building. These attempts have yielded quite a number of philosophic platforms like idealism, realism, existentialism, pragmatism (Jimba, 2003) and a host of others. Clearly these systems of thought are expounded to exemplify the genuine aspirations, realities, ambitions and needs of society (then). The theories of materialism of Marx, existentialism of Nietzsche and pragmatism perfected by Dewey represent such landmarks.

To this end, the application of philosophy of education, indeed a branch of philosophy will be explored to establish the relationship between society and current social constructs, where our conclusion will derive. The methodology for realizing our goal in this dispensation may be quite different. This is because there are perceptions that no two philosophers concerned with questions of methods are interested in exactly the same thing (Jimba, 2006). But there are common platforms that usually inform their consensus. For instance the marked malpractice characterized by breakdown in social consciousness, dysfunctional public utilities, reckless and disgraceful disposal of refuse on our highways and perversion of justice in Nigeria, ingeniously are articles of philosophizing. It is in this light that we perceive

philosophy of education as providing a searchlight to our examination of social reconstruction rather than been scared of the diversity of methods.

From the time of renaissance that led to information revolution the pragmatic philosophy of the Americans, after independence, indicating their firm belief in change rather than permanence as a feature of human reality, there has been agitation for one form of reform or change in the political, cultural, social, economic and even religious. This thought is derived from the fact that society is not static. Imperatively, philosophers have not failed over the years to look at issues critically and reflectively using the canons of reason to lay bare the geography of the subject matter like (the reconstruction of society); then philosophy builds-up phenomenon following the pattern of logic, where a premise is necessarily followed by a conclusion. This connection as a matter of fact helps make our explanation intelligible, comprehensive, consistent and cogent (Jimba, 2006). Thus, philosophy has something to offer in system building and explication of existing theory in order to come up creatively with another theory.

The paper relies on argument as tool of philosophy to explore the explication of social reconstruction, education and its relationship with philosophy itself. Interestingly, argument will help us establish criteria or logical conditions as the framework for social reconstruction.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Social Reconstruction

According to Howard and Sam (1976), reconstruction is a social phenomenon potent in progressive talk as progressive educators frequently lay claims to such concepts as curriculum reforms, human experience and cultural renewal. The focus of human development globally is changing from wealth economy to knowledge economy. Thus, human development exigencies need to be reconstructed to meet our natural resources and material capital, which are largely determined in a significant degree by the knowledge and understanding of its citizen. This is in line with Adewole (2000) who says:

Unless the individual is capable of exploring and mastering fresh frontiers of knowledge and skills, he becomes incapable of surviving... our focus should be on the development of skills of inquiry... that is, development is not logically to be conceived of, in terms of how much has been acquired by an individual. Rather, it should be that of the skills and abilities that can facilitate further development.

Aptly this line of reflection motivated the movement labeled Reconstructionism, which coincided with the days of economic recession in America and elsewhere (Kalusi, 2000). The need to restructure social pattern and articulate its conception in a distinct philosophy. Brameld in Kalusi (2000) reports is borne:

Out of the weakness of our present economic and political structures which must draw convincing blue print of new social order adequate enough to inspire fervent devotion; to fit as an achievable idea and implemented by a method powerful enough to reach the objective.

Obviously new ideas and needs inform restructuring of social patterns in Nigeria. For instance, the incidences of corruption globally and in Nigeria have been blamed on the idealistic oriented society. Akpotor in Dukor (1998) and Edimeh (2007) have respectively asserted that there is a relationship between corruption and development in terms of the nature of social and moral values prevailing in the society. Put simply, Edimeh¹⁵ says that idealists see and interpret corruption on the basis of the traditional belief system where:

An incumbent ruler should be wealthy enough through tributes and services from the people. This condition is to enable the incumbent carry out such obligations as sponsoring traditional festivals, doling out gifts and largesse to visiting dignitaries; give alms to the poor and the needy; donating generously at fund raising and other social functions as well as equipping fighting forces. (Edimeh, 2007)

Suffice to say that any nation that is serious at attempts to tackle this monster will inevitably think of how to reconstruct her education. Reconstruction denotes improvement in the existing structure or transforming of an old pattern or facilitating a process of rebirth. This is to say that any society with the potential to reconstruct its present to a better future is progressive. And the place of education in reconstruction is apparent. This is because education is the greatest stimulus for national development; as it trains the required manpower on which other development depend. Any nation that neglects education will not be ranked high among developed countries of the world. Thus, there is a logical and causal relationship between education and social reconstruction which functional education can engender. Therefore search for a more efficient way of

achieving educational objectives may lead to proposals for either a new way of doing the same thing or reconstructing the existing provisions to enable development of the same set of goals.

The Role of Philosophy of Education in Social Reconstruction

Philosophy is a rational activity according to Bamisaiye (1989), Okoh (2003) and Jimba (2009) whose objective is to formulate and articulate system building for the resolution of human problems. Thus philosophy and philosophy of education must be perceived as being central to social reconstruction. In the context of system building, philosophy performs the functions of providing conceptual clarity, articulation of values and enunciations of policy guidelines (Okoh, 2003).

And in relation to social reconstruction, philosophical analysis will force open the contradiction and vagueness inherent in the construct which can give rise to conflicts between systems of similar status. Philosophy provides an enlightened understanding of social reconstruction; because in contrast to other forms of inquiry which concentrate on particular aspects of experience, philosophy seeks to establish meaning and coherence among all fields and sees life as a whole. It is to this extent that we can see our globalized world, the ICT, as integral part of the social perspectives which, man has a future rather than the bare synthesis that are often demonstrated in overselling of these great phenomena.

Another role of philosophy is that of value enunciation. The current emphasis on globalization, information and communication technology and democracy would appear bizarre because of the complexities they harbor. The “hopes” and the “promises” must be anchored on a philosophical platform. For instance both ICT and globalization can ravage a people whose leadership is not committed to moral and intellectual values. Okoh (2003) stresses that man is fulfilled only to the extent that he can create (or reconstruct) his own world and connect such with values and morality. This is why philosophy is worth its keep in a democracy. Philosophy and indeed philosophy of education must think out procedures for assessing the glittering vanities of globalization, moral, economic and political scandals associated with information, communication, technology and governance. This is where philosophy of education fits into the social reconstruction of Nigeria and elsewhere. Suffice to say that apart from promoting knowledge and understanding through the

exercise of reason, philosophy and philosophy of education links knowledge of facts with the ability to act on the basis of factual epistemological rationality in order to foster the common good. It is instructive to state that we live in a world where problems we face in our daily lives do not always require ready-made answers but require constant thinking to overcome. So reflective and clear thinking we acquire from philosophy is relevant to any individual than the body facts from the globalised world driven by internet services.

In policy making process, philosophy is not a strange bedfellow. “Unless leaders are philosophers and philosopher leaders”, the crisis of development will continue to haunt Nigeria. This explains why many commentators believe that Nigeria is long impoverished because, the policies designed to enhance national development and growth did not contain philosophical principles and tint so that the unpredictable and highly sophisticated and competitive vortex of ICT cannot be discerned. Nigerian philosophers can/should create the guidelines for a new social order, creating individual citizens with the capacity to exercise the mind in which they do not take the conventional and customary for granted. The habits of intellectual scrutiny inculcated in individuals make the person equipped with knowledge to evaluate all knowledge claimed. These habits too prevent us from being dummies in circumstances that require decision making.

By nature, philosophy according to Omatseye (1992) is a value system constitutive of man’s experience in a world in which man lives and out of which he seeks meaning, having subjected the totality of his beliefs to reasoned evaluation logically processed (Dewey, 1966); and thus establishing a perspective hardly envisioned before. And where the issues of theory and practice are prominently at stake, philosophy brings in its analytic judgment to resolve (claims and counter claims). For instance, what Enoh (2013) calls educational wastelands can be summarily explored, examined and constructed to authentic valuables. The identified areas of educational wastelands according to Enoh (2013) rightly are:

- (i) The confusion between education and socialization.
- (ii) The confusion between education and training.
- (iii) The confusion between needs and interests.
- (iv) The confusion between relevant and quality education.
- (v) The confusion between teaching and research.

- (vi) The confusion between punishment and discipline.
- (vii) The confusion between teacher training and teacher education.
- (viii) The confusion between authority and power.
- (ix) The confusion between information and communication.

(Source: Enoh, 2013:13-14)

The crux of the matter is, even normative values are carefully and diligently sorted out by philosophy of education (like the case of these educational wastelands).

Philosophy and philosophy of education as generally agreed is the logical analysis of language and clarification of the meaning of words and concepts. Nearly all philosophers according to Jimba (2009) have used philosophical styles namely speculative philosophy to establish means-end relationships; prescriptive philosophy to prescribe logical policy guidelines and analytic philosophy to lay bare the geography of words and language used. Therefore, clearer decision making mechanisms are put on ground to facilitate articulation of the process. According to Akinpelu (2002) most problems of life might be as a result of confusion and misinterpretation of important concepts and the misleading ways in which the problems are framed. And Enoh (1995) states that the duty of philosophy is to expose confusion and nonsensical in order to clarify the meanings or use of terms in Art, Science and everyday affairs. As an activity, philosophy involves speculating, prescribing and analyzing of our present activities in order to ensure a better future for mankind. For instance, FGN (2009) has enshrined a statement thus; not only is education the greatest force that can be used to bring about redress, it is also the greatest investment that the nation can make for the quick development of its economic, political, sociological and human resources, is obviously value loaded. The assumption implicit in this creed is that anyone that is deprived of the opportunity to be educated in any manner or form may be disadvantaged not only in acquiring some of the desirable values to be inculcated by education, but would also be incapable of contributing rationally and meaningfully to the development of the nation (Baiké, 1999:XV). To say the least, the political and social impact of educational imbalance and inequality (therefore an article of trade) particularly in Nigeria have been largely responsible for the (one step forward and two step backward) hence introduction of

non rational, educational parameters, like the introduction of “quota system” into the vocabulary of the country (Baiké, 1999).

Education as a Mechanism for Social Reconstruction of Nigeria

Our country cannot be indifferent in global affairs hence the palpable need to see social reconstruction (the ultimate good of society) as an end and education as a means. Surely, global competition has great impact on children because it demands for high quality thinking and problem-solving capabilities. In point of fact these ingenuous potentials have to be fostered today to enable Nigerian children use their developed skills to compete with the best in the world or else they will compete for low ages or low skilled jobs as schools no longer hold the monopoly of access to learning. Children now have access to high quality education through satellite and internet sources. The emerging scenario is a perspective that calls for human’s resource development that will result in shift in curriculum design, physical facilities, methodology, instructional technology and even administration of schools in order to conform.

Reconstruction is a social science concept indicating progress, but not indicating what direction and how. This will affect all fields of human endeavour, apply it to their different disciplines. Enoh (2003) posits that right before the strong wind of globalization (for instance), economists of education had postulated a perfect link between general educations by the populace with economic development. Similarly, current trends in the education sector is the presence of globalization with multinational companies dictating the pace, Nigeria has become dependent on them. Hence, for Nigerian education to be relevant, it must be restructured to meet the demand of the future. We are generally agreed that philosophy of education is the application of the knowledge of education to the solution of educational problems, clarification of concepts and classification of theories. Philosophy of education in this way yields a comprehensive understanding of reality, emanating from borderless society, which when applied to educational practice lends direction and methodology. In this way, the whole gamut of philosophy is drawn together for the purpose of identifying relevant, objective and consistent solutions to peculiar problems but in education.

Currently in the country, there is much talk about the need for achievable democracy and popular participation. But unless attention is paid to human

development the people will be perpetually unable to put themselves in the position that they can suitably express their individual wishes. And to this extent, sustainable participatory democracy will be elusive. In this case, there is need to restructure the educational system in line with the principles of disciplines that care for human values like philosophy. Increased valuable knowledge will help rational political participation and this will enhance the growth of democracy. Education being a sorting agency can/should promote political, social, economic, cultural, religious and even scientific goals of Nigeria as a nation. This is germane in Nigeria's search for self-reliance and global recognition. Without mincing words, politically enlightened citizenry asserts to democracy. This is because the people will be both conscious of their civic duties and critical of government's efforts in meeting up with its obligations (in later life). Nigeria will be able to secure her borders in terms of negative ideas and services from abroad in order to protect its good cultural practices – where it is argued current security challenges are propelled by manufacturers of light and heavy weapons; sponsoring of Boko Haram by dissidents from other nations. The logic is that since our country benefits from the good of advanced nations, its borders and also open to the “bad” and the “ugly” of these cross-cultural breeds.

CONCLUSION

Efforts at developing human beings should underscore any attempt at social reconstruction. It is also logical to think of education that can foster the development of the capacities that make up human excellence.

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