



Philosophy, Education and Human Existence: The Nexus

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Abstract:

The work discusses how philosophy contributes in shaping education for the overall benefit of mankind. In this vein, some philosophical theories are argued to have influenced and continue to influence education in various ways. Also, indisputably, philosophy has produced some of the greatest educators that ever lived. As a philosophical investigation, and by way of philosophical analysis, some concepts were clarified. Based on that some recommendations were made such as to be motivated by our worldview and social justice, the encouragement of some virtues that anchor on principles of freedom, equality, hard work etc., while all and sundry on the country should involve in educational management.

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INTRODUCTION

Philosophy and human existence would have been greatly appreciated since as Socrates said “life” is not merely living but to live well and to live well requires critically examining the life we live, for indeed, an unexamined life is not worth living (Etim, 2013).

Man at the base is a creature formed by the divine for a consummate purpose, that of learning to live in harmony with one another so as to live in harmony. If we therefore fail to facilitate this mutuality in our existence through parochial cleaving, we are bound to limit the power that lies in integrative resourcefulness. In this paper, we are going to put forward the nexus between philosophy, education and their contributions to human existence. This will be done through our intellectual activities whether at the level of theory or practice, formulation or implementation, vision or mission, articulation or execution of cognitive human and extra human activities.

Cicero in Akaruese (2020:1) asserts that philosophy is important to mankind as then ‘we are turning to, thou we are asking for help’. On philosophy, ‘the lodestar of life, neither we nor human life itself,

could exist without you’.

By this assertion, the philosopher is expected to study widely so as to be conversant with the extant theories and to see how to integrate them for a better view of reality. This is human –centered theory because it is interested in furthering human, earthly and external wellbeing. It holds that man is a being unto eternity and as such argues that only a comprehensive wellbeing will conduce to man’s ultimate happiness. It is a rational construct that attempts to vouch safe man’s ultimate happiness through proper and authentic earthly existence. To live well in this life is to live in harmony with others through integrative understanding of the nature of those with whom you relate in your earthly existence. It is to strive to be an agent of penetrating and pervading harmony in the community of humans whether at the family, village, state, tribe, national, continental or institutional levels.

Furthermore in this paper, some conceptual clarification would be carried out through some questions that border on what philosophy is and what philosophers do, the purpose of existence and how philosophy uses education as an instrument for authentic existence.

What philosophy is,’ And” what philosophy Do”

Introducing philosophy is not an issue most philosophers would be glad doing, especially, when such an introduction is for a person without any previous acquaintance with the discipline. There are hundreds of views of what philosophy is. This accounts for the various perspectives some have chosen to view philosophy either as “conclusions” “speculative” “personal view” or “presentations” but to mention but a few. Interestingly, renowned philosophers of old hardly ever formulated definitions of philosophy in the sense demanded presently, but their activities exemplified philosophy. The intention for making the above remarks is not to scare anyone or stress the indefinable nature of philosophy, but rather to lay stress on the fact that, understanding philosophy (apart from having a definition) requires certain level of commitment or even devotion.

It is instructive to note that the word philosophy comes from two Greek words “phileain” and “Sophia” meaning to love “wisdom respectively. Philosophy, therefore, is the love of wisdom. Consistent with this meaning of philosophy a philosopher is or should be a lover of wisdom. Wisdom in this case does not imply the acquisition of facts or information for the sake of dispelling general ignorance.

As the level of wisdom, philosophy is concerned with the question of the meaning of human existence and the significance of the world in which man findshim. Answers to these questions touch the more specific and general concerns of man, for Aristotle once noted “all men by nature desire to know” (Etuk et al 2013).

Elaborating further on who is wise, Etu notes:

A man is wise if he is able to give counsel concerning some problems of human life, and the counsel is seen to spring from a combination of sound knowledge and wide experience (Etuk, 2013).

According to him, the ability may come with years of contemplation of the human situation, and the drawing of lessons from what happens to people, societies and nations. Philosophy therefore, is an attitude of mind, a method, and an activity.

As an activity of the mind, it is marked by the ability to be puzzled and to wonder at even the ordinary and common place experience of life. As a method, it teaches one how to raise the right types of questions and to look for the right answers. And as an activity of the mind, it affects the behavior outlook, reasoning speech, and even the interest of its practitioners.

In the view of Udoidem in Etuk et al (2013; 13), philosophy as the love of wisdom is “the irresistible desire to search for foundation or universal principle of all things”. Philosophic wisdom therefore, is the insatiable rational quest for truth and understanding of reality in totality, as well as the application of such discoveries to the perennial problems of human existence. It begins in doubt, wonder and curiosity and manifests in the ability to consistently ponder, rethink, question, reason and reflect on the familiar and uncommon (unfamiliar) experiences of life disinterestedly and non-dogmatically. For Herman Randall in Etuk et al (2013: 13), philosophy is a human and cultural enterprise to be inquired into, rather than a mere term to be defined as:

The criticism of the fundamental beliefs in any man's great cultural enterprise, science, art, religion, the moral life, social and practical activity, when some altered experience has impinged upon them and generated intellectual tensions and maladjustment.

The above definition shows that the subject matter of philosophy is extremely wide as it touches all human and non-human situations. It follows that philosophy is concerned not just with identifying problems but with a rigorous and systematic effort to understand these problems and proffer rational suggestions that can aid in their resolution. Such problem could be social, religious, moral, scientific or even non-physical.

In his contribution, Harold Titus in Etuk et al (2013:14), highlighted five possible understanding of what philosophy is:

1. Philosophy is a personal attitude towards life and the Universe. He noted that, the mature philosophical attitude is the searching and critical attitude. It is the open-minded, tolerant attitude expressed in the willingness to look at all sides of issues.
2. Philosophy is a method of reflective thinking and reasoned enquiry.
3. Philosophy is an attempt to gain a view of the whole. It seeks to combine the conclusions of the various sciences and human experiences into some kind of consistent world view. That is, it attempts to unify the various fragmentary views of life.
4. Philosophy is the logical analysis of language and the clarification of the meaning of words and concepts.
5. Philosophy is a group of problems as well as theories about the solution of these problems.

Taken together, Titus view approximates in a significant sense what philosophy is, but quite a number of philosophers will dispute its adequacy as an absolute definition of philosophy. Apart from the above exposition. It should be noted that Socrates taught that not only is the unexamined idea not worth having, but that the unexamined life was not worth living. There is no doubt that the way one thinks and acts can affect the quality of one's life. Russel also link philosophy to both science and theology. In his words.

All definite knowledge so I should contend belongs to science, all dogma as to what surpasses definite knowledge belongs to theology. But between theology and science, there is a no man's land, exposed to attack from both sides; this No man's land is philosophy.

One important point to note is that irrespective of what definition a philosopher is willing to accept as adequately characterizing the discipline, Esikot (Etuk, 2013:15) has argued that every philosopher will

subscribe to the view that philosophy is:

- i) A crucial/rational investigation or inquiry
- ii) That such investigation may be analytical or logical and speculative in nature
- iii) The goal is the discovery of truth or attainment of knowledge concerning issues in question;
- iv) Finally, that in carrying out such investigation nothing is taken for granted. There is “no sacred province” in the realm of philosophical investigation.

Philosophy through its various branches such as logic, epistemology, axiology, and metaphysics accomplishes many of her tasks.

Undisputedly, philosophy has produced some of the greatest educators that ever lived. Plato, Aristotle and Dewey to mention a few are notable philosophers whose views have had significant impact in educational development globally for centuries. In the same vein, philosophical theories have impacted greatly on education. Just like doing philosophy involves speculation, analysis and prescription, so also the effect of philosophy on education.

Education

Many things make the concept of education unique. Hence there is no consensus on the etymological root of the concept. Some scholars of education contend that education is derived from “educere” which means “to lead out or to uphold”, however such disagreements over the etymological root of education disappear when attention is focused on reforms or possibilities which societies can attain through education or improvements in human affairs which education can bring about:

According to Ekanem (2009).

Just as in general philosophy, speculative philosophy of education seeks to establish theories of the nature of man, society and the world by which to order and interpret the conflicting data of educational research and the behavioural sciences. It is prescriptive philosophy of education which it specifies the ends and means education ought to follow. And it is analytic when it seeks to clarify the speculative and prescriptive statements.

Thus, philosophy contributes in shaping education by examining the consistency and rationality of ideas it employs. It also examines such concepts as “education” “discipline” “curriculum” “punishment”, to mention but a few.

More so, some of the philosophical theories that have influenced and continue to influence education are as follows; idealism, Realism, Pragmatism, Existentialism etc.

The several of philosophical schools of thought exist according to Ekanem (2009) to: provide the right atmosphere and proper direction for the development and growth of individual personality.

- Provide the right and proper atmosphere for the development and growth of individual.
- Increase the intellectual knowledge of the student.
- Development of the zeal for truth, love of knowledge for the tender mind.
- Cultivate the habit of aesthetic skills in order to stimulate the appreciation of beauty.
- Literacy and numeral skills initiate the individual into his culture that is in unwritten form.

- The scientific skills which will reveal to him the laws of nature and develop his ability to enter into nature.
- The humanities as represented in the great classical literature which are the products of great minds and consequently repository of wisdom.
- One of them emphasizes the inevitability of change, the relativeness of value and that knowledge is always a means to an end, merely instrumental and never an end in itself.
- Some of these schools of thought recommend the curriculum that fosters spiritual and intellectual potentials of the child. Hence approve principally a teaching method that includes the self-learning activity of the child, and the positive influence of the teacher on the child. From all these teachings and from these schools of thought, education would be seen as the process of developing a problem solving habit.

For them, teaching must be child centred taking cognizance of the child's present needs, interest, and ability. The teacher is more or less an organizer and moderator in the learning process.

Another important school of thought which relate to this subject matter is existentialism.

Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophical attitude which is opposed to what is describes as traditional system (idealism, realism, pragmatism) or method of philosophizing that tends to be abstract in nature. It emphasis on man and his existence. It holds as one of its principal tenet that "existence preceded essence" that is to say that man first exists before he becomes. In otherwords, that becoming is secondary and existence is primary.

It emphasizes the relationship of man and the world, that man is inseparably linked to the world and gives meaning to it. Though man finds himself in the world, he is not an article or finished product but in a process of becoming. Just like Darwin theory of evolution" which brings to focus (among others) the fact that "human" of today is the inevitable. Product of evolutionary histories and occurrences that span over 5 million years ago. The "human" who is a descendant of Homo erectus remain the only surviving member of a sub-family of apes known as "hominis" which is believed to have split from the chimpanzee branch of the age family tree about 5-6 million year age. (Akaruese, 2020:18). Man's essence is realized through his projects which he freely chooses for himself. Man cannot avoid making choices. In fact, he is a decision maker whether or not he realizes this.

For every choice man makes, however, there is an inescapable responsibility attached it. Man gives meaning to the world through the choices, in fact, values or what is valuable is determined by him. Many of evaluation" which bring to focus among others) the fact that "human" of today is the inevitable product of evolutionary histories and occurrences that span over 5 million years ago. Man realizes, however that he is like speck in an immense Universe. He realizes the contingency of his being and the fact that he will certainly die. This brings fear, anguish, and despair. It in fact brings to fore the absurdity of human existence. This notwithstanding, man is solely responsible for his life without any possibility of excuses.

It follows from our discussion above that the primary aim of education for the existentialist is to enable man live an authentic life. To create in him the awareness of the peculiarity of his condition and help him to live a unique and meaningful life. According to Ekanem in Etuk et al, (2013:26), "education is

to help the individual develop his initiative, to help him search for and discover himself and to cultivate self-reliance as a key character trait". For these objectives to be realized existentialists recommend or favor subject centered curriculum. The emphasis of the curriculum among others is on total freedom for the pupil to work alone or in groups, recognition of individual differences and pupil's interest as the basis of planning and activity.

What is Existence?

Questions that need be asked and answered are: what is existence? The second question is: What does authentic existence means? And the third question is: What has philosophy got to do with authentic existence.

What is Existence?

The subject of "existence" has constituted a matter for debate since the time of the sophists in ancient Greece. Then Aristotle came along and attempted, to put some meaning into it. For our purpose to be alive, to be part of the reality of this world, to have some form of being, existence could be physical and material; for instance, you exist, and I exist, or it could be immaterial and non-physical for instance, millions of people all over the world accept that God exists. This is what drove philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas, St. Anselm of Canterbury and others to want to rationally prove or show by logical arguments that God exists. We will not enter into the arguments to establish the existence of God here, although in themselves they are quite interesting. Human existence as we have defined it is limited to, or restricted by time and space.

What Does "Authentic Existence" mean?

The word "authentic" simply means "real, genuine, not copied or fake. When something is said to be authentic, it stresses fidelity to actuality and fact, it shows that the thing in question is not counterfeited or adulterated.

One of the questions that we need to ask ourselves is: "Do human beings actually work and strive for genuine and true living and want to avoid what is false and fake and a charade? And what has philosophy got to offer in such a quest?

The role of philosophy in our quest for genuine and true existence: For our purpose, we can say philosophy is first of all, an attitude of the mind, secondly, it is a method, thirdly, it is an activity, and it is a product of all of the above.

First as an attitude of the mind, philosophy is characterized by the ability to be puzzled; to wonder at even the ordinary and the common place. The love of wisdom is integrally associated with the quest for truth. Truth is very high on the agenda of philosophy. That is why it asks deep and searching questions - has human life got any meaning and purpose? Philosophy is the open and tolerant attitude which shows itself in the willingness to pursue truth vigorously and having found it, to be willing to live by it and even to die for it, if necessary; For a person to develop that kind of attitude is a very good and positive thing in itself because it certainly helps to build one's self-understanding.

Secondly, philosophy is a method – a method of asking questions and looking for answer, a method of checking facts against fantasies and opinions. There are specific disciplines in philosophy that help its votaries to develop both the capacity and the skill to do critical thinking. Logic, for example is the most outstanding philosophical subject that seeks to develop skills in reasoning and in sharpening the students' critical faculties. Once you have acquired this skill in yourself, you can no longer be easily

fooled or led astray by demagogue and charlatans. What gives a person a better feeling than to be able to stand his/her ground when discussing the various problems that confront us?

In the third place, philosophy is an activity of the mind with wide ranging applications. It is an activity that seeks to combine the findings arrived at by the various branches of human knowledge into some consistent worldview that we can live with. Philosophy, being a perennial quest for meaning and purpose, seeks answers to the fundamental questions of life that present themselves anew to each generation, race and culture.

Broad, a British philosopher in Etu et al (2013:9), says:

...The objective of speculative philosophy is to take over the results of the various sciences, to add to them the result of the religious and ethical experiences of mankind, and then to reflect upon the whole. The hope is that by this means, we may be able to reach some general conclusion as to the nature of the universe, and as to our position and prospect in it.

Philosophy is the product of all the above attitude, method, and activity, all combined. Philosophy is many things to many people. There are philosophers who devote their time to clarifying the meanings of words and language as it occurs in different disciplines. Their aim is to remove a great deal of ambiguity in ordinary language. This is what philosophers call “philosophical analysis or linguistic analysis”.

There are also philosophers who attempt to find solutions to man’s everyday problems in the areas of education, economics, politics, medicines and the business world. All these are on a quest to make our lives more loveable to find meaning in our existence as unique individuals and people.

Philosophy has influenced the development of the society from the ancient period till date. It contributes to the quest for meaningful and authentic existence from different angles of life. This perhaps could be as a result of the fact that all other disciplines emanated from philosophy just after the industrial revolution that struck in Europe in the tail end of 19th century. Hence, it is said to be the mother of all disciplines. For example, great scientists like Aristotle, Galileo etc., were philosophers in a way. All their efforts were geared towards human existence. For meaningful and authentic existence by borrowing what are stated as the objectives of teaching philosophy at the early stages of this program: According to Etuk et al (2013:10):

- To train people to think critically and constructively.
- To give people some insight into the moral, aesthetic, and religious values of their culture and those of other cultures, so as to enable them to make wise and rational choices
- To equip people to be able to live their lives constructively and usefully in a society which claims to be free;
- To provide people with the intellectual background necessary for success in the business and professional areas of life.

On the final analysis, it should be noted that understanding philosophy requires some trouble, but it is desirable effort given the fact that it remains one of the most important ventures ever undertaking by man as it is consistently needed as the only vehicle that integrates our ideas. No question in philosophy can be considered as simple because in speculating endeavor to find answer, a whole range of diverse

areas of knowledge will be required and deployed with the attendant questions and answers including precipitating new ones in the process of answering the original ones (Akaruese, 2020:50).

Furthermore, there have been a lot of innovations and discoveries which eventually affect human beings in all ramifications. These include among others television, biotechnology, air travels, globalization, mineral explorations, genetic engineering, human cloning, stem cell, artificial intelligence, pornography, in-vitro-fertilization, sport abortion, euthanasia, surrogate motherhood, lolling die, nuclear, space travels etc. along with these new indices of development are new challenges especially such that are axiological in nature and precipitating confusions among humans and practitioners alike as some of these are in confrontation with already held beliefs and world views and with the potential to either advance human civilization, or obliterate humanity depending on the usages into which they are put.

It is the business of philosophy to clarify and identify sources of such confusions and bringing into being the required clarity and consistency into the underlying confusions associated with these respective innovations and possible usages and thus evolve relevant ethical theories within which all can be accommodated and applied for the enhancement of humanity. Also, it is the task of philosophy and philosophers to construct and deploy the requisite ethical and logical frameworks with a view to educating and arming practitioners to confront diverse challenges that may besiege them in the course of their efforts. Thus, philosophy through education explore all aspects of the universe, breaking ground to critically engage and investigate all that affects human existence at any point in time.

Philosophy and Education look at Authentic Human Existence:

Philosophical – GSM education vacuum

Education - For Authentic Human Existence

Technically speaking, it could be argued that philosophy of education is the application of the principles and methods of philosophy to the various fields of education. It generates an outlook, an attitude and values to the theories and practices of education, making education intelligible, meaningful and purposeful. Philosophy of education attempts to determine what kind of life a person should live, giving purpose and life to human actions or existence.

As Nweke in Amaele (2019:67) asserts, philosophy of education: It is a critical analysis of the past and a search into the unknown with a view to improving the standards of education... it can be considered as a coherent set of values and fundamental assumptions used as a basis for evaluating and guiding the practice of education.

Unfortunately, some countries like Nigeria find it difficult to match the philosophical assumptions both in the past and the present to their original pattern of doing thing. For example in the Ancient Greek Culture and America, there were some known schools of thought identified with them such as idealism, realism and pragmatism respectively while some part of Europe, existentialism prevailed.

But in countries like Nigeria, it is difficult to explain some concepts that seem to anchor the assumed philosophy of Nigerian education such as sound and effective citizenship, equality, freedom, self-reliance, free and compulsory education or justice. Such embarrassing development made Nduka (1982), Okoh (1989) and Amaele (2017) to argue that Nigeria is yet to have a philosophy of education. For Nduka (1982:10) "what now poses as a philosophy of Nigerian education is a non-starter in the philosophical stakes". While Okoh (1989:241) argues that "what we have does not reflect neither does it stand grounded on the metaphysical epistemological and axiological assumption of the Nigerian

people. Okoh went further to stress that:

No genuine effort has been made to identify the Nigerian philosophy of life on which to base recommendations about the theory and practice of education as a means to the “good life”.

From the above analysis, we can see that there is great nexus between philosophy and education and people's existence, but it should be maintained that such relationship must be anchored on pure indigenous foundation, unfortunately but the plethora of philosophical conjuncture that influence and inform the so-called Nigerian philosophy and education have foreign foundation which negates our way of thinking about reality, knowledge and values. These negative happenings adversely affect our overall development.

Conclusion

Having convincingly established the nexus between philosophy, education and human existence in a given society like Nigeria, it become necessary to see that in a globalized world today interaction becomes more closer and complex as a result of technology. Hence virtues like tolerance, inclusion and understanding amongst others emerge as imperative for the survival of humanity. To tackle this emergency of human relations, globalization has also emerged as the catchword for intercultural union. To what extent it had lived up to its name becomes another focus of intercultural philosophy. Some say it has so far globalized cultural differences.

Recommendations

1. For better human existence or survival, we must be motivated by our Afro-centric world view and social justice mindset in all what we do.
2. The present reality of our Nigerian education negates our “philosophy” which is centered on “communalism” government at any level should as a matter of urgency encourage via education basic virtues founded on human principles of freedom, equality, hard work, sincerity etc.
3. Since education in Nigeria is an instrument “par excellence” for affecting national development, there should be active participation of all and sundry in the business of education such as non-government agencies, communities and individuals as well as government intervention (FRN 2004:111)
4. Any Government pronouncement on education should always go with implementation.

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