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EXISTENTIALISM AND ITS IMPLICATION TO EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines existentialisms and its implications to Education in Nigeria. The success and failure of any educational system in the world largely depends on the teachers, for they are the hub of the educational system. There is, therefore, no doubt that the services of teachers in schools are indispensable and critical to the nature future, and the kind of individuals required of the society. Existentialism examines the role of individual play in terms of his or her feeling thoughts and responsibilities. The paper x-rays the concept of existentialism looked into existentialism in Nigeria cultural context and attempted the aims of socialism process in Nigeria schools as well as its application in Nigerian schools. The paper examines the roles of the

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school teacher and made some useful recommendations that the Nigerian society, Schools must provide and create an enabling environment for the learners to grow, be it at low levels or advanced levels. Thus, the curriculum teachers, teaching ads resources, buildings, amongst others must be structurally in place for the sustainability and transformations of the learners.

Introduction

This examines issues of social facts and the application of existential philosophy for education in Nigerian educational system. It examines the contents problem which discusses the reactions in attitude against restrictions on individual freedom impose from outside by society, history and nature. These restrictions pose a fundamental sociological challenge of the system of running of modern education and the teaching - learning process in Nigerian schools. The philosophy is at variance with the network of social relationship which exists between individual and other individual and groups and the fact that educational institutions such as schools and colleges do not operate in isolated empty space. This function or roles school as a socialization process in transmitting the norms, attitudes, values etc that can help preserve the society's culture has come under heavy criticism and scrutiny. Using these philosophical concepts, it is hoped that this paper will illuminate the knowledge and the understanding of our students, teachers and scholars generally on how it relates to the running of western education in Nigeria. This could be used as a useful guide to life in our quest to provide the best education in our schools.

Several societies have been influenced by philosophical, ideas of other people. A critical examination of educational concepts and practices can serve as a guide to the understanding of what is going on in our schools. They have much to do with the resolution of educational standards, the content of education, academic freedom, the nature of

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discipline, students' expression, the aims of the school, its social relationship and the teaching learning process in our educational system. The specific goal of this paper is to examine the understanding of the essential relationship in Nigeria's educational programmes and the content problems in the existential philosophy. Beyond this is the understanding of the concepts, its analysis and application in the Nigerian educational system.

THE CONCEPT OF EXISTENTIALISM

Existential writers tried to justifies in some ways the freedom and importance of human personality. They do not constitute a single school of thought rather there are differences and conflicts among them. Patterson (1980) noted that the differences exist in continuum ranges of human experiences. While philosophers such as Satre (1952) and others emphasized the "non - being end"; Marcel (1955) and others at the other hand emphasized the "being" in the range of human experiences.

Howick (1977), Mason (1972) and Leo (1977) noted that in the philosophical concepts, the individual is free and therefore he suffers as his future depends in part upon his free choice which is not predictable. Omeregbe (2001) opined that since the 14th Century B. C. Socrates conjectured to change the concept or philosophy from the cosmos (physical universe) to human person and others such as St. Augustine and Blase Pascal. Kierkegaarak (1944) has popularized their views of human person. They treated the human person and human existence as the focal point of philosophical inquiries. Soren and others believed that philosophy should be centred on human person, his existence with all the predicaments, problems and constraints. He was credited as the father of existentialism) Omeregbe, 2001, Amaele, Amaele, 2003).

Existentialists occupied their thoughts and inquire by examining and analyzing the brevity of human life, the vicissitudes of life man power and

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weakness, his dignity and misery, his joys and sorrows, his experience and suffering, sickness, disease, death and decay. His anxieties, fears and worries became the starting point of the philosophy (Butler, 1968, Omeregbe, 2001). Omeregbe further noted that the reflection on these phenomena of human life give rise to some fundamental questions about the nature or purpose and meaning of life on earth. That the why questions about the "being of being" allows us to examine our lives as we work, eat, drink, struggle for money and wealth, marry and beget children. He also opined that man has a natural desire for continued existence and his strongest instinct is that of self-preservation and self-perpetuation in existence.

Thus, the existentialist concepts stemmed a philosophy whose principle is predicated on the ideas that human beings have existence and that each individual is unique and inexplicable. It stressed that existence is always particular and that an individual is always concerned about his existence (i.e. my existence or your existence).

Also, that existence precedes essence in individual development where a person exists and then becomes (Howick, 1971; Mason, 1972, Clark, 1977 and Leo, 1977). It is therefore a philosophy on individualism where the commitment and decisions the individual makes determine the kind of person he becomes (Omeregbe, 1991. Amaele, 2003).

The individual being finds himself alone in an indifferent universe, where he must choose what is significant and what is meaningful for his life. This means that the interrelationship of existential concepts with education and school is like subject which can never be separated from the object. More so that the meaning of objective fact depends solely upon the subjects' relationship to it hence human beings exist in a world of which they are a part (i.e. being in the world). Therefore, the fundamental character of existential analysis in education is concerned with the science of being (i.e. ontology). This requires the understanding of the structure of

human being and his experiences to enable learners receive appropriate knowledge. Thus, the objective of education to the existentialists is specific and focuses on the individual so educated. Education is as well to serve as a guide to the learner leading to the awareness of his condition in life (Camoy, 1974). It is also to promote his successful commitment to a significant and meaningful existence. In this regard, the important specific goals of education to the existentialist as noted by Callaham and Clark (1977) are to:

i. Develop the sense of individual awareness and commitment.
ii. Provide opportunities for ethical choices.
iii. Encourage the development of self-knowledge
iv. Develop a sense of responsibilities

This means that, the broad aims of education have been narrowed by the existentialist to specific i.e. "existence, essence and persons".
The concepts of "existence", "essence" and "persons" point to the fact that human beings live in three worlds simultaneously. These as noted by Patterson (1980) include the following:

1) The umwelt i.e. the biological world without awareness
2) The mit-welt world of interrelationship or encounters with other persons and involving mutal awareness
3) The eigewelt or the world of self-identity or being in itself

Perceptibly, since existential educators think of man not only as being in itself, a person is thus free and what he makes of himself (hereditary environment, up bringing and environment, upbringing and cultures) are considered alibis (Patterson, 1980). The paradox being that, it is impossible to think of the subject and the world as separate from each other.

EXISTENTIALISM IN NIGERIAN CULTURAL CONTEXT

In most Nigerian societies, the purpose of life on earth is to procreate, which means that as one is begotten so also should he beget. A person is a being who dies and when he died childless, he is considered as a "being" not "being" and his life is perceived as frustrated and unfulfilled. In this respect, the more wives and children one has, the more fulfilled and worthwhile a life he is considered to have lived. Life itself is presumed to have a purpose and man is bound to find a purpose for his life (Omeregbe, 2001).

Religion becomes a way out of the human predicaments. As he is threatened and hunted about his essence in life, his philosophical mind urge his quest for answer to his problems. He seeks to worship objects such as stones, rivers, mountains, trees, inanimate objects and animate objects (such as animals, fish and reptiles) to address the predicaments and purpose of his life. He enters into an interpersonal relationship with his presumed creator which he adores with reverence as the alpha and omega of his life (Amali, 2000). Omeregbe (2001) asserted that some persons would resort to hedonism "let us east and drink for tomorrow we may die". Some take to cultism while others maintain an attitude of indifference about the essence of life. The individual goes through life through continuous probing about the meaning of life and its ultimate. Such probing questions arise for example at funeral or at interment of beloved one. Each individual has a different method to suppress his worries about his life predicaments.

AIMS OF SOCIALISM PROCESS IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

The school as an agent of socialization provides the necessary ground for the provision of relevant experiences, knowledge and values for the learner to use as a tool for survival (Daramola, 2003). It provides a way of life for the individual in the society and guides the learner to find answers to his hitherto unanswered questions which will make his

meaningless life become meaningful to him. It provides experience about man's ways of life, his cultural values and the way an individual is expected to behave in order to maintain and sustain the essence of his life and society of which he is a part. This is crucial because man is not alone in life and in his environment. He exists within a family and he occupies an environment into which he was born. He is a nature who requires to be nurtured to become a being. Therefore, the acquisition of relevant knowledge, attitudes, skills and insights from daily experience in his environment is a necessary ingredient in his essence of existence which education provides.

This is done through socialization process whose aims are to preserve and consolidate the collective values of our culture passed from parents to children and from one generation to the next. In the pre - literate Nigerian society's opportunities for choice of vocation and life was highly limited and struggle for life existence was not as challenging and tasking as it is at present. The emergence of new life phenomena brought by western education has created a new social order which has impacted on the ways of life of the indigenous Nigerian people (Amali, 2000). These further compound existential predicaments for the individual. Consequently, these address the existential conditions in the objectives of Nigerian National Policy on Education. An existentially based philosophy which seeks to integrate the individual into a sound and effective citizen. One of the policy statements shows that the objective of education given to learners in our schools is to incubate the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society (Nigerian Policy on Education, 1981). This involves the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around. The acquisition of the appropriate skills, abilities and equipment for the learner to line and contribute to the development of his society (Fafunwa, 1971).

The socialization process in our schools creates diverse possibilities from which the learner has to make a selection and to which he has to commit himself. Schools as thus constituted were for the individual to project himself. Educational process in Nigerian schools is thereafter geared towards providing hope because with no aim, purpose, sense of meaning in life, there no essence to life. Schools set tasks for each person and meeting them, the person defines the purpose of his life. The tasks are different for each person and each situation is different requiring a unique response.

ITS APPLICATION IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

An examination of the following components of existential philosophy will reveal efforts of Nigerian educators to apply education in our schools to the existentialist concepts.

i. Existential epistemology: This agrees with the dictum which states that experience is the best teacher. Human beings are aware of the past, present and future as a continuum. This awareness makes choice and decisions possible. Truth is always relative to an individual judgment. Absolute truth is non - existent, therefore a person is thus responsible for his decisions as what he chooses for his life. Instructional method in our schools is considered not necessary because what is purported to be inculcated may not be the need of the individual learner.

ii. Existential value theory: It commends that values are neither absolute nor determined by outside criteria rather each value is determined by free choice of the individual because existence is the basic and universal value for all persons. One loses authenticity and humanity for the sake of conformity to social values and norms. Therefore, in Nigeria schools, education encourages the development of self-knowledge and provides

opportunities for free ethical choices for the learners. In this respect, the teacher is only a partner to create the awareness for the learners to become aware of his potentialities and to be able to act on his own on the basis of his potentialities.

iii. Existential curriculum: The curriculum is borne out of its epistemology and the value theory. Whatever is studied is an instrument by which the individual develops self-knowledge and self-responsibility. The existentialists curriculum would help the learner develop attitude or orientation of commitment especially the ones that involve decisions and actions in the learners' existence. Callaham and Clark (1977) noted that the existentialist curriculum would stress:

a. An activity curriculum
b. Pupils interest as the basis for planning an activity
c. Complete freedom for the learners to work in group or alone i.e. a curriculum based on immediate need i.e. individual needs
d. Recognition of individual differences i.e. experience

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL TEACHER

The role of the teacher offers the basis of a philosophy of teaching. They are typically less specific and direct than the practitioners might think. The existentialist teacher would take cognizance of existentialist epistemology, value theory and curriculum before adopting his method of teaching. The teacher must therefore be a democrat who must use an appropriate technique in the teaching learning process, being a democrat; the teacher never_ imposes his personal theory upon his learners. He acts only as a resource person because his plans are in consonance with the learners free will and choice based on their individual needs and goals.

Learners are grouped and classified on the basis of their natural abilities, interest, talents and free choice.

Dewey saw democracy as intelligent judgment and deplored the way in which subject matter and methods were dictated to passive teachers by way of officially approved and ready - made regulations. His lesson plan should be non - directive to avoid imposing adult interest and values on the learner. His plan is only to encourage and sensitize the individual with freedom to develop his purpose and work out his own learning. Where an individual learner directs a problem to the teacher, the teacher in turn reflects back in such a way to arouse the learners' insight into the nature of the problem to allow the learner use his own freedom to develop the answers. The basic curriculum and its characteristics to the existentialist is that in which the teacher emphasizes individual learning where each learner works at his own pace and perhaps on a different subject all together. Children at school should experience a preparation for freedom in the sense that they would gradually become able and willing to exercise freedom of choice. Further, an existentialist teacher would prefer life and child centred curricula to meet the educational requirement. Some educators have seen this method as a kind of child power movement, where children control what goes on in the school (Larrant, 19 - 0). Others think of it as over sentimental attitude toward children that give them unwanted and damaging importance. However, to the existentialist teacher, it is a realistic response to what we know about children, their development, interest and characteristics. It is thus important that the following guiding principles are essential for the existentialist to note in teaching learning situation:

1) Acknowledge that children's needs should determine what they learn at schools

2) Recognize and respond to the changing characteristics that distinguish children of different ages.

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3) Select what is taught and the method used so that they are appropriate to the comprehension and experience of individual learner.

4) Utilize the strong motivational forces to control much of children's natural learning apply knowledge of child psychology and child development to the contents and method of learning and teaching (Furrant, 1980). Interestingly Russers ideal school is the one in which both teachers and students exercise freedom of opinion and in which open discussion on any controversial questions flourishes.

CONTENDING SOCIAL FACTOR

The contending factors between education as a harmonizing agent of the individual and the existentialist philosophy is that education will absorb the individual so that he gets lost in society and never find himself. The existentialist, therefore contend that education must view pupils with actualities of life and make them what is the actual circumstance and condition of their lives. In the existentialist's viewpoints, mass or group teaching has been criticized because instead of focusing on the individual as a learner, it is focused on the learning programmes. It is opposed to mechanization and impersonality of instructions such as use of T. V., radio, computerized cards and the other processing procedures. Its assumption is that education should be aimed at protecting and encouraging the freedom of will, choice, self-reliance and self-determination. Paradoxically, education in the modern time has become a task only to provide each child with a basic skill for serving in the modern world time and also for him to develop some useful marketable skill that will be of use to others and to ensure that he has employment. Today's world is much more complex and the tendency is for much more educational specialization. In this regard, to the existentialist

teacher, education must lead the individual to independence of belief, thought and action. The possibility of reinterpretation of basic ideas the righty awareness of controversy and of seeing it in new perspectives. Man unlike any other animal created by God (Allah) is a rational being, therefore he could create his own for himself. This implies that physical law must have to be applied. Urge and needs sometimes endears him to a group where there is a choice and choice itself is a fact of human existence which must come from a community or the school, which are institutions from which an individual gets influenced or educated. In this regard, man is not in an uncaring world. The implication is that it would have been impossible to obtain the kind of human society as conceptualized by existential philosophers, not to talk more of predicating its future state.

Further, there exist an existentialist thought that there are certain uniqueness and mystery about an individual perceived as an embodiment of emotion, feeling and perception. Arguably, if man is made of these stated staff, then no man can solve all problems alone. This is where educational institutions play vital role in the existence and essence of man. Therefore, in the Nigerian educational programmes, psychology, guidance and counseling are science of education that are used to help in addressing personal, social, vocational and education problems of the individual.

The readymade concepts of "existence", "essence" and "being" forced on the individual by existentialist philosophers cannot be ideally considered since education can give the individual the freedom to shape his own life and destiny. We cannot view individual as if he is a machine or robot. A philosophy with no belief in the natural social harmony and no hope in man's perfectibility cannot adequately be applied to the Nigerian cultural scene and educational settings. However, the Nigerian educational programmes are organized to be a play of interdepend

factors or activities which guarantee the independence of the individual to develop on his own within the school programmes and being mindful of existentialist concepts. The significant others perform these roles in our schools and at home. It could be argued that if existentialist viewpoints are strictly upheld, it could be difficult to organize a school programme at all. Accepting the concept of extreme individualism will create an order - less society. Life is about the essence of life and it involves other competing forces which individualism cannot solve. It Is as well difficult to establish a one - to - one learning process because it would not only be expensive and baseless, but would create disorder, and time consuming amongst different persons. Also, with our ever-increasing population, coupled with our fast industrial and technological development and the complex nature of our ever-changing society, it is difficult to hold on tenaciously to the application of existentialist concepts of education in schools.

As rightly observed by Molnar (1961), our children in schools are not merely playful little animals; they are human beings created to pursue goals that transcend their animal nature. The first such goals should be the cultivation of their abilities to reason and apply their imagination to the pursuit of human values.

CONCLUSION

Existentialist truth and value were almost a human obsession. Our educational system attempts to relate aims and objectives of education to existential concepts. Issues of human predicaments and other subject object distinction are of existential concern and have been examined in the paper. There are thought provoking concepts involving the objectives, purpose and processes of education. The existentialist views appear to be somewhat impracticable but in education attempts are made to address the aims and objectives of education towards matters of existential

concern. The paper examined the leading views of this western philosophical thought in the light of how it relates to the running of western education as well as social and cultural activities in Nigeria. It is hoped that the examination of existential concepts will contribute immensely to help in solving existential problem of the individual learner to actualize himself through our system of education. The existentialist teacher will be better equipped to address existential problems of his pupils.

Recommendations

1. The schools should try to make existentialist curriculum more active to help the learner develop attitude of commitment.
2. School should select what is taught and the method use so that they are appropriate to the understanding and experience of individual learner.
3. Government should promote educational standards, programmes and the content of problem in the existential philosophy.
4. The school should enable learners receives appropriate knowledge and provide opportunities for ethical choices.
5. Schools must provide and create an enabling environment for the learners to grow, be it at low levels or advanced levels. Thus, the curriculums teachers, teaching ads resources, buildings, amongst others must be structurally in place for the sustainability and transformations of the learners.

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