

Examination of Aristotle's Philosophical Ideas in Relation to Nigerian Education System

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Abstract: This paper critically examined Aristotle's philosophical ideas in relation to Nigerian education system. The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384 – 322 BC) was a disciple of Plato in his school called "The academy" and later established his own school called "Lyceum" where he taught for twelve consecutive years. He professed ideas in different fields including education that agree and disagree to certain degree with the Nigerian Education system that came in to existence after the 1969 National Curriculum Conference in a document called National Policy on Education first published in 1977, with four subsequent editions in 1981, 1998, 2004 and 2013. As the founding father of Realism school of thought, Aristotle stresses that education is the only tool for virtue and happiness aims at promoting one's reasoning ability which is the highest element in man; thus, knowledge is possible because human mind is capable of acquiring any sort of it. To him, drill stands to be the appropriate process of education, curriculum of which includes literacy and numeracy, natural sciences, physical education and humanities; all in teacher-centered method for that the learner is just a passive receiver while the teacher stands authoritarian. The education itself is categorized: the "intellectual and political pursuit" for free citizens and "vocational" for slaves; all, acquired and transmitted in five stages and strictly controlled by the state. Aristotle's views are presently found in Nigeria's Education system, though with some differences to some extent.

Key words: Examination, Aristotle, Philosophical Ideas, Nigerian Education System

I. Introduction

Education is of different systems and contents. Nigerian education has relevance and similarities to different and many philosophical/education ideas of various systems and philosophers.

Aristotle was one of the ancient philosophers of the Greek city of Athens. Like every other philosopher, Aristotle has his own ideas in many aspects of life as recorded by history. Those ideas influenced many systems of politics, economy, ethics and values, metaphysical/religious thoughts, social order and education though there are discrepancies in some areas. Nigerian education too has area of agreement and disagreement with Aristotelian philosophy in the sense that there are aspects that are influenced and have relevance with the ideas. In this paper, Aristotle's philosophy would be examined critically to analyze its relevance to Nigerian education and the extent to which they are in harmony and clash.

Brief Life History of Aristotle

Aristotle was born in the year 384.B.C in family of a physician called Nicomachus but there are divergent views as regards his place of birth. He was said to be born in 'Stagire' in Macedonia (Yusuf, 1996). However, there is contradicting view also of his birth in the some Stagire but in northern Greece (<http://philosophypages.com/ph/aris.htm>). On the same axis, Sulaiman, (2001) called him Athenian philosopher without being explicit of his meaning of Athenian whether he by so means place of birth or otherwise. Maina, (2008) takes a stand that respects other views as he maintains that Aristotle was born in Greece but spent his childhood in Macedonia with his physician father of king Amyntas of Macedonia; this view is more admittable and acceptable for compromising and harmonizing the conflict.

Aristotle came back to Athens in 366 B.C at the age of eighteen and got enrolled into Plato's school "the academy" for which he was his disciple (www.cals.ncus.edu/agexed/aee501/aristotle/html). Plato, a student of Socrates, influenced the philosophical thought of Aristotle and regarded him (Aristotle) as brilliant and referred to him as the "nous" or "the mind". Aristotle stayed in the school till the death of the master (Plato) in 374 B.C. when he went searching for knowledge in his field of interest like biology in Asian and Mediterranean provinces and neighborhoods.

In 343 B.C. Aristotle was invited by king Philip of Macedonian to teach his child who was later known a Alexander (the great) (Yusuf, 1996). The king was assassinated which resulted the emergence of Alexander as the king for which he had no time for the study again; consequently Aristotle returned to Athens and established a school named "Lyceum", which was also called peripatetic school of philosophy where he taught for consecutive twelve years. He went on exile to Chalcis in 323 B.C. sequel to the risk at which his life was

following the anti Macedonian aggressions by Athens, being having diplomatic tie with Macedonia. He died there in 322 B.C. (Maina, 2008).

Nigerian Education System

The existing Nigerian education came in to being as an instrument “par excellence” for attaining the set national objectives. Every sovereign nation has its goals aspiring to achieve and the process through which the goals would be achieved. Nigeria as a sovereign nation too has system of education designed to respond to the needs of the nation in order to make possible achieving the objectives.

During the pre-independence days, the educational system in operation in Nigeria was brought by colonial masters which after the independence turned to be irrelevant and not suitable to meet the demands of Nigerians for that it didn't suit our economy, culture, polity, social set up, desires and aspirations, potentialities, needs and other considerable factors. This led to the consideration of the system as irrelevant (FGN, 2004). Hence, the first National curriculum conference was held in 1969 attended by cross section of Nigerians so that every sector's interest would be respected.

Another seminar of experts held in 1973 to decide the national objectives and the educational system as the only tool for the realization of the goals. The fruit of the seminar was successfully a document drafted as the National Policy on Education (NPE) which carries all provisions, steps, stages, management, control, funding, pre-requisites, results and everything of Nigerian education. It was first published in 1977, but subsequent editions followed in 1981, 1988, 1998, 2004 and the current one of 2013 (FGN, 2013) all to update the existing (previous) ones due to usual innovation and change.

Therefore, the Nigerian education as stipulated in the national policy on education is rich in terms of curriculum, areas, processes, methods and other attributes. From its outlook also, it is cosmopolitan in nature for that it is influenced by the diverse educational ideas in almost all aspects (Sharma and Hyland, 1991). If followed sincerely and practically, the Nigerian education will really give Nigeria the desired dream and best take her to the aspired destination.

Aristotle's Philosophical Ideas and Nigerian Education

Aristotle professed his ideas on many aspects but this paper emphasizes on his philosophical ideas concerning education.

Aristotle's Realism

Aristotle formulated a system of thought called “realism” which had in some aspects a clash with the thought of his teacher (Plato) that is, idealism. From the name even, realism stresses emphasis on material world that is, physical and real realm of things. Things we can see, touch, taste, hear and smell are real and exist independent of mind; because even the mind knows through the perceivable material things (matter) (Maina, 2008).

This theory of Aristotle seems reasonable only that it reduces the power of mind in recognizing “matter”. Whatever is not recognized by mind is not known at all. However, Nigerian education considers both, that is, spiritual and material domains where there are subject responding to our material and immaterial desires.

The Concept “Education”

To Aristotle, man could learn to use his reason to arrive at virtue, happiness and political harmony only through the process of education (www.cals.ncus.edu/agexed/aee501/aristotle/html). This means that education is the only tool for all- in-all of man, just like Nigerian education declares education as the instrument “par excellence” for attaining the national objectives. This Aristotle's notion of man's using his reason is the basis for his claim that man is rational animal for that he has capacity of the rationality and no other specie has (Hospers, 1970).

Aim(s) of Education

To Aristotle, the following are the aims of education (Akinpelu, 1981).

“...to develop the child so that he may become the best adult of its type;... to promote the reasoning ability of the person since that is the best and highest element in man, ...to inculcate in all wisdom for practical living, good moral conduct and concern for the social welfare of his fellow citizen;... and most importantly, to foster in the individuals who were capable of it, the ability for intellectual and theoretical engagement”.

The aims of education according to Aristotle correspond with Nigerian's education goals which were stated in the National Policy on Education by FGN, (2013) as:

- Development of the individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen;
- Total integration of the individual into immediate community, the Nigerian society and the world;

- Provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education, within and outside the formal school system;
- Inculcation of national consciousness, values and national unity
- Development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and sociability and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society.

However, one problem with Aristotle's aim is there is no clear vision for the aims (of education) unlike Nigeria's.

Sulaiman, (2001) also describes Aristotle's aim of education as to help the child to realize his potential form that will make him a full and happy adult. It is like that in Nigerian education too, only that Aristotle did not tell us what type of growth and happiness a child would attain through Education.

Aristotle was also said to have considered nature, habit and reason to be the three equally important forces to be cultivated in education (www.K12academics.com/educational-philosophy/aristotle). Also producing good and virtuous citizens for the polis is one of the most important missions of education. This assertion fails to tell us the yardstick for the virtue and goodness unlike the Nigerian education that clearly mention the attributes.

From the above, it can be deduced that both Nigerian education and Aristotle's education aim at emphasis on practical and physical development as well as morality.

II. Method of Education

To Aristotle, drill is the appropriate method of teaching as child "must practice what he has learned repeatedly until it became a part of him, or second nature. Akinpelu, (1981) said that Aristotle was of the view that repetitive drill would be used to reinforce what was understood by reason, so he considered repetition to be a key tool to develop good habit. Drill is of course relevant in Nigerian education as it is one of the method/processes but not absolute unlike in Aristotle's view. It is even doubtful if drill can be applied in aspects like morality as Aristotle emphasizes.

In Aristotle's theory also, it is not enough to tell a child what he should know or do, but the teacher needs to make him do the good act repeatedly until he cultivates the habit of doing it naturally (Akinpelu, 1981). This is teacher-centered method where the learner is passive. The teacher is also authoritarian and autocratic unlike in Nigerian system of education where there is limit to the authority of the teacher and the application of teacher-centeredness; because it denies learners autonomy, freedom and individually as well creativity which are very important in making learning permanent in learners.

Curriculum

In Aristotle's ideas, the content/curriculum of education should be of four (4) broad categories (www.cals.ncus.edu/agexed/aee501/aristotle/html).

- Basic: To include reading, writing and mathematics
- Natural sciences: to include astronomy, biology, physiology, zoology, chemistry and physics.
- Physical education: body training for physical well-being
- Humanities: to include rhetoric, grammar, poetry, politics and philosophy.

Aristotle would have the state legislature to censor the materials which would be treated by children during their early school days. The content/curriculum of Nigerian education too is diverse and universal. That of Aristotle matches Nigeria's to a large extent only that there are short comings in the former as it lacks religion (for the claimed moral conduct), law, vocational and medical science. Besides, taking curriculum to legislature every now and then signifies lack of official documentation of the educational system which may warrant anything.

Types of Education

To Aristotle, the society is divided into two categories, that is of free citizens and slaves, so education is categorized: intellectual and political pursuit of education is for the free citizens while vocational education (for daily bread and wage earning) is for the slaves as they are depended upon for the maintenance of the free citizens (Akinpelu, 1981).

Pursuit of practical education for the welfare of the general society is regarded prestigious in Nigerian education for its relevance (sciences and vocational education) though it handles both the "free citizens' and slaves" (all citizens) but in Aristotle's idea reverse is the case; in fact it is discriminating because Nigerian education all fields are open to everyone regardless of his status, there is even Universal Basic Education (UBE), unlike in Aristotle's idea.

The Teacher and the Learner

To Aristotle, learner is just passive receiver of knowledge with obedience while the teacher is “the creative agent who moulds the child’s life in accordance with the ideal pattern and the ideal virtues of man (Enoh, 1995). Again, for learners to learn effectively, they are expected to be hardworking and self discipline (Suleiman, 2000). This correspond to Nigerian education system where learners are supposed to be hard working and self disciplined. On the other hand, the teacher is to do his job authoritatively based on Aristotle’s view. However, in Nigerian education system, the teacher is to guide the learners and bring out the potentialities in them. Therefore, the FGN, (2004 and 2013) in the national policy on educations (NPEs) signify the greater role of learners which tilts the system towards learner-centered. Besides, we don’t know to whose standard is the ideal pattern and virtues let alone to justify its worth and infallibility.

Stages of Education

Aristotle divided education into stages though philosophers differ slightly on the number of age range of some stages.

Maina, (2008) recorded six (6) stages but merged stages 4 and 5.

- **Stages 1:** Infancy at which child receives habit training, only involved in bodily movements and should be hardened for military through exposing him to cold.
- **Stage 2:** This is up to age of 5. Here, the child should be introduced to physical activities, prevented from harmful things; and controlling music and tales to be presented to the child.
- **Stage 3:** Between age of 5 and 7 where children continue with the tasks of stage 2 but watch and learn from the older ones.
- **Stage 4:** and 5 cover ages of 7 to puberty, and from puberty to 21 when children are taught basic subjects including gymnastic, reading, writing, music and drawing.
- **Stage 6:** From 21 years till death when individuals learn the core subjects like mathematics, politics, aesthetics, music, poetry, rhetoric, physics and biology. This level is more than attending formal school.

Sulaiman, (2000) also gives same stages only that the last stage he says starts from the age of twenty five (25).

Yusuf, (1996) also maintains same stages but the last stage starts from the age of 21 as Maina puts.

These divisions of Aristotle correspond with Nigeria’s educational stages of pre-primary (kindergarten, nursery), primary, secondary (junior and senior) and higher institution. There is also non-formal education (outside the four walls of school) as Aristotle provides. The only problem with his (Aristotle) stages is that the range years of some stages are below and above normal range of developmental task (in children) since the stages are meant to take care of change in development in the children at every point. For example, there would be insignificant differences between stage 2 and 4 because the 3rd stage period is only two years. Also stage 4 is wide for that it covers childhood, adolescence and puberty (7-puberty). Stage 5 also is narrow because from puberty to the age of 21 could not make much difference in individuals. Besides, Aristotle did not clearly say the age he precisely means by puberty, and there is need because it can manifest at 18,17,16,15 even 14.

Control of Education

Aristotle professes that education should be under state control (Enoh, 2000). This perfectly corresponds to Nigerian educational system, but he (Aristotle) is silent on the details of the control. In essence, no much is said on the responsibility of the state and role of the citizens in terms of creation, development, management, implementation and evaluation of the educational policies and programmes.

Epistemology

In his theory of knowledge, Aristotle believes that child’s mind is capable of receiving any sort of knowledge. Almost the same with Nigerian education for that all categories of education are open to all, though not so dogmatic as Aristotelian idea which didn’t take in to cognizance of heredity, individual differences and things alike.

III. Conclusion

Aristotelian philosophy of education takes care of almost every aspect expected to be touched though, in contrast with Nigerian education in some areas. However, the moral conduct, self awareness and self realization Aristotle talks about can be cultivated of course in his theory of education but conformity is highly possible in the learners since they are taught authoritatively by disciplinarian teacher. Not only that, the society is divided along professional line for that there is type of education for free citizens and slaves; but the irony is that going by the fixed stages, state control, teacher centeredness and legislature’s censor of curriculum almost turn even the free children to slaves as freedom, autonomy and individuality are absent in the system.

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