

**ADOPTION OF PRAGMATIC APPROACH:
A MAJOR AVENUE FOR REVITALIZING
EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Education is a vital tool needed for the growth and the desired progress for individuals and the society at large. However, for education to attain this goal, the need for the adoption of pragmatic oriented strategies cannot be over emphasized. This paper looked into what pragmatism is, the brief history of pragmatism, and pragmatic ideas with educational implications. The paper also gave a critical look into the Nigerian education from the Christian missionary era to the present to see and ascertain how pragmatic the approaches adopted for education have been. The paper concluded by examining comprehensively how basic pragmatic approach can be adopted for the revitalization of education in Nigeria by drawing out vital pragmatic steps to be taken by the Nigerian government and the classroom teacher.

Introduction

Nigerian education has for long been heavily criticized for its theoretical nature, while the need for the adoption of practical oriented approach has been stressed and clamoured for by the citizenry (Adaralegbe, 1985). Nigeria as a country would have advanced sporadically and gallantly in all spheres of life if theories are backed up with actions. The general attitude to education by the government and the classroom teacher has been mere theorization and verbalization.

It is to be noted that the various educational policies formulated over the years have always been found laudable and progressive in nature but the unfortunate thing is that such policies have not been fully and practically implemented. The goals of such laudable policies were truncated for one reason or the other. Sometimes, reasons for the truncation are flimsy. The importance of education and the need to carry out the goals to reasonable conclusion through the adoption of action oriented strategies were played down as a result of the implementors', selfishness, ignorance or lack of vision for the emancipation of the society through the adoption of viable implementation strategies.

The time has come to revitalize education in Nigeria by adopting practical steps that will help in moving the education industry forward and aid the production of developers for the nation. Undoubtedly, practical approach and action oriented strategies will go a long way in revitalizing education in Nigeria. Before the practical or pragmatic approach needed for full development of education in Nigeria is considered, efforts will be made to define the concept pragmatism and revitalization. The history of pragmatism and pragmatic ideas with educational implications will be considered too. Critical examination of Nigerian education in the past and present will also be considered before analyzing the various pragmatic strategies that can be adopted for the revitalization of education in Nigeria.

Revitalization

According to Collins advance learner's dictionary, new edition, revitalization refers to making something or anything that has lost its activity or its health healthy or

active again, it refers to means of strengthening and empowering what has become weak and unattractive.

Pragmatism

The term pragmatism derives its origin from a Greek word "pragme" meaning to do, to make or to accomplish. Hence, the use of words like action or practice or activity. Action is seen to be of higher priority than theory and ideas are irrelevant as long as it cannot be practically proved or displayed for all to see, observe and tested out (Sule, 1987). That is, ideas are always accepted as being real and true if it works or can be verified or validated, if not, such ideas will be thrown over board.

Pragmatism had an ancient philosophical history. The idea existed as early as the period of the sophists who stressed man rather than the universe and also emphasized the fact that truth is constantly changing and remain relative. Charles Pierce Sander its American founder saw pragmatism as a method whereby ideas are clarified. Mayer (1966) gave a comprehensive analysis of pragmatic views. Some of such views are explained below:

1. Pragmatists all felt that theorizing should lead to practical results if at all it will be useful to mankind. Dewey (1938) stated that ideas are not real if it has no practical consequences. According to him man should seek out the process of doing things which will eventually help him to attain all desired goals. Truth is equally seen to be relative since the universe is constantly changing and judged by what is objectively observed.
2. On the nature of man, pragmatists see man as an organism who is in constant interaction with his environment. He is seen as a growing organism that has his general and peculiar needs, interests and desires. Man sets his own goals and with the employment of his intelligence he struggles to attain the set goals. Reality is mastered by man as he interacts meaningfully with the world that surrounds him. Man is also believed to be a social and biological being while these dualism should be recognized and helped to develop.
3. Pragmatists believe that change is dynamic and what is real would be in error or completely dead without a change. Values for instance, change because what may be good in the past may be bad or obsolete today. Hence precepts should not be regarded as universally binding no matter the circumstances that surround it. Since human experience changes reality will have to change too. (Nweke, 1989).
4. Knowledge, according to the pragmatists, is synonymous to human experience. Man is said to acquire knowledge as he interacts with the living and non-living things that surround him. Experience gained in life is adopted for solving the problems of the environment that man is confronted with daily. It is the consistent application of the knowledge acquired from the interaction with the environment that places man in the position to master his environment.
5. The pragmatists stressed the place of intelligence in processing experience into knowledge. Without intelligence it will not be possible for all experiences gained to be transformed into knowledge and no quality thinking or rationality will be involved in solving the practical problems of life.
6. What is more valuable in life are the needs and desires of man and the society at large. However, what ever is desirable or important must be subjected to

critical thinking and examination in order to ascertain the consequences such desires might have for the individual or the large group.

7. Society according to the pragmatists, is far more important than the individual hence, loyalty and commitment to the aspirations and the course of the society are very imperative. Since man is said to be a social animal and finds expression through group life, he cannot live solitary life or behave in ways that are detrimental to the existence and development of the society.

The above and several other views with educational relevance are expressed by the pragmatists.

Brief Examination of the Nigerian Education (past and present)

The Nigerian education, especially in the past, was not seriously pragmatic in nature according to Cooley (1985). The kind of education given to Nigerians by the Christian missionaries who brought western education to Nigeria and the colonial government that came later produced majorly people who could read, and write and pass examinations which only qualified them for employment as clerks, interpreters and cooks. The literary education was the order of the day while the white man and woman were seen as gods to be slavishly initiated (Alloy, 1988).

Pragmatic approach to education was hardly given any serious consideration during the colonial era. Manual work was played down because such work was seen as undignifying while ability to qualify for white collar jobs was the main focus of Nigerians.

The education given to Nigerians as expressed by Taiwo, (1982) was an amputated type, nothing seriously concrete or practical in nature was pursued. Also, policies were not backed up with actions. For instance, the curriculum given was narrow, and irrelevant, and highly theoretical, to produce people that would be good only for menial jobs. What could make the people self sufficient were sparingly attended to. Moreover the textbooks used were such that were written for Britain (Alloy, 1988).

Also majority of the schools, either assisted, unassisted, or government established, were poorly funded, materials for teaching were inadequate and there was no enough qualified personnel to handle teaching (Alloy, 1988; Osokoya, 1987; Taiwo 1982).

It is sad to note that educational policies such as the 1882, 1887 educational ordinances and several others that followed were not given the desired action that would have aided the sporadic development of education in Nigeria. The report of Revt. Metcalfe Sunter given in 1883 after inspecting sixty-eight (68) primary schools attested to the unpragmatic nature of colonial education. His findings revealed that teachers' salaries were in arrears and the school curriculum until close to 1960 continued to follow its English counterpart and books used were those written for English children. In addition to this, local culture and customs were not used as the basis for the education of the masses. All these flaws were heavily criticized by Nigerian elites through the then popular dailies namely, the Lagos Times, and Lagos Observer. The denationalizing tendencies in the education proposed and pursued by the colonial government was seen as unacceptable and unpragmatic.

While the colonial government kept on emphasizing the need to give the best to the people, grants given continued to be very meager, no liberality was displayed since the intention of the colonial master was to make the people perpetually dependent on their colonial masters who came primarily to siphon everything

siphonable to their country. In addition to this, to get the meager aid was equally highly cumbersome, and found unworkable and ridiculously complicated as expressed by Metcalfe Sunter the school inspector in the early 1880s.

Bottle necks such as inadequate classroom accommodation also confronted education before 1960. According to Fafunwa, (1974) except for the King's College, Lagos, schools lacked qualified teachers and classrooms. The ratio was one qualified teacher to 148 pupils in government schools and in the non-assisted schools the ratio was as low as 1 teacher to 800 pupils. How can any meaningful interaction with the environment take place under such a deplorable situation.

The Phelps-stoke's recommendations of 1924 and others like the Ashby reports which were very laudable were almost left at the theoretical level since nothing too practical were done about them. What Nigerians needed to develop technologically and the needs and aspirations of individuals were not given appreciable attention. Truth of ideas were not seriously analysed as a result of lack of facilities like laboratories and workshops.

Nigerians continued to clamour for more viable educational policy and practice until 1969 when the national curriculum conference was organised to address the age-long problems of education. It was this conference that gave birth to the first purely indigenous educational policy of 1977.

The idea was to ensure that relevance is brought into the school curriculum and to make education in Nigeria as pragmatic as possible. The National Policy on Education made provision for relevance and practical approach to education (NPE, 2004).

For instance, books were to be written by Nigerians to focus on Nigerian values and needs, government was to provide the needed fund, facilities, and train teachers for all levels of education, inspect schools regularly to catapult education to an enviable position in Nigeria. However, it is easier said than done, up till today, education in Nigeria is yet to be fully pragmatized. The environment that the child interacts with is not rich enough to allow for any meaningful learning; societal values, are yet to be firmly entrenched into the lives of Nigerian youths who constitutes the recipients of education.

In addition to these, selfishness, corruption and other vices have consistently bedeviled education in Nigeria. To implement educational policies have been difficult as a result of mismanagement of funds or inadequate funding of education on the part of the government.

Although teachers are being trained for the job yet, out of laziness and divided interest they have not done the job with the desired action. The lofty educational objectives of primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education itemized in the national policy on education are sound enough to bring about the desired development of individuals and the society at large if they are given practical consideration and are pursued with the necessary realizable and workable pragmatic strategies. Adoption of pragmatic approach will go a long way in revitalizing the Nigerian education.

Pragmatic Approach and the Revitalization of Nigerian education

The need for adopting pragmatic approach in the revitalization of education in Nigeria cannot be under estimated. What are the pragmatic strategies needed for empowering and strengthening Nigerian education? Some of such strategies are explained below under the following headings:

1. Aims of education;
2. The school curriculum;
3. Methods of teaching;
4. Teacher's classroom activities
5. The role of the government

Aims of Education

As means of revitalizing education in Nigeria, education should hence forth wear a practical outlook. The education given should help learners to discover more facts by themselves and make exploration into all hidden facts and ideas possible for this to be attained. Government should be ready to adequately supply all materials and funds to schools. Promises to supply needed materials have to stop, while concrete efforts will have to be made to make exploration and discovery possible and easy for learners.

What learners are exposed to should help them to effectively coordinate their environment. Since education according to the pragmatist is not preparation for life but life itself, whatever is taught should relate to the immediate life of learners in the religious, cultural, political and social life of the child. Education should be a tool for learners to employ now for meaningful living.

The kind of exposure given to each child should be such that truth is not dogmatically adhered to. Rather, room should be given to learners to question, investigate, probe and reject facts that cannot be supported by factual evidence.

The type of education needed and desired for should equally be such that will make learners good enough to solve their present and future problems, hence, the need to develop their intelligence to solve all forms of problems.

School Curriculum

Subjects that will allow for practical learning, exploration, discovery, and self learning, and self reliance such as the sciences and vocational education should be given priority in our schools. Babafemi (2000) stressed that no nation can ever rise above his technological education, hence the need to promote all technological oriented courses. Although Nigerian schools are offering these subjects, it is at the peripheral level nothing seriously intensive is done since the facilities for effective teaching of such subjects are inadequately supplied. Since the essence of the new system of education is to promote self reliance, there is therefore the need to put in place all that will aid the realization of such objectives.

The school curriculum should be diversified and broad to cater for a wide range of human needs and aspirations. Every child has needs which should be met.

Methods of Teaching

Methods of teaching to be used by teachers should be based on the workability of the method to promote practical results during and after teaching has taken place. Verbalization which does not promote meaningful learning should be discouraged.

There is equally the need to vary the methods adopted in the classroom to avoid boredom on the part of learners. Experiential learning should be encouraged since reality is the sum total of man's experience which emanates from his interaction with the environment. Ail that the child will interact with for meaningful and lasting learning to take place should be provided and made available to them.

Learning should also be by doing. Dewey (1938), stressed that learners should be able to employ the five senses in the teaching and learning process.

Child-centered method should equally be used. According to Sule, (1987) teachers should never be slaves to the subject matter or coverage of the syllabus at the expense of learners' understanding or concrete assimilation of facts.

Group method should be used to develop the social life of the child. Man can never exist in isolation, he is a social animal and the social ability and demands are to be developed through interaction (Molagun, et al, 2000). Easy adaptability, tolerance, social cohesion, and cooperation are equally catered for through this method.

Teacher's pragmatic roles

Adesina, (1980) and Nweke, (1989) spelt out the practical roles of teachers as follows:

- 1 Teachers should ensure that all learning centres on the needs, interests and aspirations of learners.
- 2 Teachers should guide and moderate child's learning activities; He should not be a polarizer through the attitude of favoritism.
- 3 To respect the freedom of learners and allow them to freely express themselves in the classroom will allow their natural endowment to flourish.
- 4 To always draw practical, relevant examples from the society on topics taught thereby helping learners to see the close relationship between what is learnt and the needs and nature of the society.
- 5 Teachers should constantly monitor the attitude and character of learners in the classroom to guide against the production of untamed individuals. This, if seriously done will help in curbing the problem of indiscipline such as cultism, examination malpractice, and other social vices exhibited by Nigerian students:

As stressed by Dewey (1938), teachers should beware of absolutistic attitude since teachers and man in general is fallible. Teachers should therefore be guides, friends, encouragers and motivators to learners. On no account should a teacher be a castigator rather, he/she should be kind and understanding. All these practical steps will aid total trust and confidence in the teacher and promote positive development.

- 1 Teachers should always secure learners interest. According to Olatayo, (1997) securing the child's interest is the starting point in education. Interest displayed in the lesson and the teacher aids speedy understanding and retention of facts being passed across.
- 2 Learners' work should be supervised on a regular basis. Failure to do so will aid laziness and laizefaire attitude to class work. Akanbi, (1989) stressed that classroom supervision is one of the practical steps that aids meaningful learning.
- 3 Finally teachers according to Nweke (1989) must provide rich and attractive experiences for learners by:
 - motivating them,
 - guiding them to formulate solutions to problems;
 - planning with them class objectives that solve problems;
 - assisting them to collect relevant data on facts;

- assisting them to analyse data for the attainment of most suitable solutions; and
- helping them to get feed back on progress report etc.

Government pragmatic roles

Government is undisputably the major provider of education. Nothing concrete will be attained in education if government involvement is negligible hence, the government should:

- Ensure that everything needed for effective implementation of policies are made available to schools.
- Give free and compulsory education which will make it possible for poor students to acquire education with ease.
- Later for training and re-training of teachers who are the disseminators of the needed skills and knowledge.
- Ensure that relevant textbooks are written and supplied freely to learners. This should not be in theory but practically carried out to prevent teaching and learning in abstraction.
- Take drastic steps or punitive measures on examination malpractice, cultism, hooligalism, and all other anti-social behaviours serving as impediments to the acquisition of meaningful and sound education in Nigeria.
- Admission policy being currently adopted should be continued with. Results of general examinations used for entrance into colleges and universities should be subjected to serious screening by conducting additional individual institution based entrance examination. Full accommodation should be provided for students at higher level of education. The feeding of learners while in school should be catered for by the government. Feeding according to Molagun, et. al. (2000) has much to do with students' academic performance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is no gain saying the fact that that Nigerian education needs to be revitalized. The situation of education in Nigeria has not been too encouraging, practical strategies that carry weight have not been given enough attention in the past especially during the colonial Era. The paper has looked into what the situation looked like in the past, and the present and has successfully explained different pragmatic strategies that can be adopted for the revitalization of the Nigerian education

The school's aims and objectives will have to be re-addressed, the school curriculum will have to be broadened and be made more relevant to the needs, interests and aspirations of the learners and the entire society. Teachers as explained will need to practically carry out their classroom activities and be sure that the environment is made rich enough for learners to display their best.

The government has to ensure that empty promises, theoretical efforts are discarded while practical steps are taken for education to make appreciable impact on the society at large. Adoption of practical and action-oriented strategies given above will definitely help in the revitalization of education in Nigeria.

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