

Friedrich Froebel's Philosophy of Education and its Implications for Secondary School Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study analysed Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education and its implications for secondary school education in Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to analyse Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education and its implications to secondary school education in Nigeria. Data were collected through the use of philosophical literature and interview schedule. The study sample was made up of executive selected from two associations namely; Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) and All Nigerian Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPSS). The data were analysed using philosophical analysis. The findings of the study revealed that Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education emphasises self-realisation, child's natural abilities, child-centred approach, motivation for learning and discovery; Furthermore, Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education is relevant to Nigerian secondary education in policy and in practice; The implications of Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education on the Nigerian secondary education places emphasis on moral, social and spiritual developments, self-realisation, motivation for learning, education for unity of man and its relation with God. The study concluded that certain amount of emphasis on Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education is essential for secondary education and societal development in Nigeria. It is therefore recommended that Nigerian secondary education should pursue to a greater extent child-centered education that focuses on moral, social, spiritual developments and education for unity of man and its relationship with God.

Keywords: *Friedrich Froebel, Philosophy, Implications, self-realisation, Secondary Education*

INTRODUCTION

There is no nation in the world today, be it developed, developing or underdeveloped, without philosophy guiding its lifestyles. This is because a nation's philosophy serves as a blueprint for achieving the overall goals of a nation. Among its components are philosophies of politics, laws, sport, education, among others. The philosophy of education serves as thinking about worthwhile education of a nation and it is expected to emerge from the overall philosophy of a nation. The philosophy of education in Nigeria, according to the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2014) is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the basic, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system (FRN, 2014).

It is worthy of note that a nation's philosophies are most of the time determined by individuals' philosophical thoughts. Plato, Aristotle and Rousseau are some of the renowned thinkers whose thoughts have influence on education and other important sectors in their respective societies (Adesanya, 2015). Akinpelu, Fafunwa and Awolowo are some of the known indigenous thinkers whose thoughts influence Nigeria and Africa in terms of national and educational development (Akinsanya, 2015). On this note, it would be worthwhile to examine the thoughts of Friedrich Froebel national lifestyle and particularly on education for national development, and the implications of his thoughts for Nigeria secondary Education.

In this regard, the thinking of President Muhammadu Buhari about reviewing the educational system could be gathered from this statement "... we shall continue to invest in education, health, water and sanitation, as well as food security to ensure that basic needs are met, while providing learners with every opportunity to live peaceful, prosperous and prospective lives" (Buhari, 2020). Friedrich Froebel's philosophy is derived from his thinking about religion. According to Akinpelu (1981), Froebel's philosophy is simple and is coloured by religion; he was known to be a deeply religious man. Froebel saw the whole universe as a Unity, with God at its heart and its moving spirit.

All things have an element of the divine in them, and it is this element that unites all things. This type of religious thinking is known as

pantheism. The divine element in all things is the inner principle or law according to which all things necessarily grow. Froebel thinks about the means through which education is acquired. Froebel takes a sustained interest in natural scientific knowledge. To him, man is only educated if he practices science. Man, practices science when he is aware of the fact that the human conscience is the point at which man and external reality meet and is understood. Man, practices science when he penetrates his own living world and the practice of his everyday existence, with the wealth of phenomena in the living world, to arrive at the underlying structures and laws.

By recognising the characteristics of an object, one also comes to understand that human being is capable of knowing all things that exist in his/her environment as it links with certain characteristics. Science, as knowledge of the structure of (internal and external) things, defines man's ability to know. Froebel's philosophy suggests that there is a unity of man, nature and God. He thinks that "nature and man" seem to be a "mutual development". Man", he said, "received from knowledge of natural objects, despite their immense deep-seated diversity, a foundation for and guidance towards the knowledge of himself and life and preparation for the manifestation of that knowledge" (Taneja, 2008).

Moreover, Froebel prescribes that man should become conscious of the Absolute Unity of the universe. He should also know more about the diversity of things and appearances which are perpetually unfolding within that unity (Taneja, 2008). Each object, in Froebel's view, is progressive and the basic power of the progress is inherent within it which grows on the basis of certain fundamental principles. According to Froebel, to familiarise oneself with the progressive development of matter and beings is knowledge, and to realise that God is the basic cause of their development is true knowledge. In his view, morality is not relative to individual, society or country, time and place, but it is determined by God and it is eternal, universal and perennial. In his view, truth, beauty and goodness are external values; and man should continue to learn about them (Akinpelu, 1981).

According to Froebel (1826), "education consists in leading man, as a thinking, intelligent being.... into self-consciousness.... conscious and free representation of the inner law of Divine Unity, and teaching him ways and means there to (p. 2)". The belief that "God is present in all-

natural things'' influences Froebel's thinking. He believes that man is endowed with spiritual goodness and enjoys unlimited unity with the Devine. He thinks that if the purpose of existence is to reveal God, then education should aim at leading man to be more conscious of God (Aladejana, 2009, p. 61). Froebel thinks about the child as an agent for the realisation of God's will in human nature. He thinks that spirit of the child can be linked with the Absolute through education. To him, education is a development by which the individual realises that he is one unit of the all-encompassing unity (Taneja, 2008).

The aim of Froebel is to introduce the spirit of play in educational institutions. He believes and advocates that the best way for a child to learn is through the medium of a guided play in a friendly natural, environment. Nigerian education features Froebel's philosophy of education as the country's system of education encourages development of the child's personality, total development of the child, unity in diversity, child-centred education, discovery method of learning and so on. Also, the country's system of education encourages provision for basic education, free and universal basic education for every Nigerian child.

However, despite the fact that the Nigerian education emphasises the total development of the child, which is in line with Froebel's philosophy of education, the extent to which his idea is reflected in Nigerian education is limited. For instance, Nigerian education still gives preference to science and vocational education over and above moral and religious education. This brings about moral and religious problems in our society whereas training capable of instilling the fear of God and high-level moral standards in children should be given preference. Moreover, many teachers restrict freedom of the child by making their teaching more theoretical. Such practice results in their failure to relate their teachings to the practical needs of the child.

From the above, education at all levels (primary, secondary, and tertiary) are not properly funded by the government of Nigeria. This and many more have caused Nigeria's failure to accommodate fully Froebel's philosophy of education into Nigerian education system. To find out more about these challenges, the researcher would examine Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education and its implications for Nigerian education especially the secondary school education system.

Many developed nations of the globe develop rapidly because of the great value placed on the education of children. The overall inspirations in the socio-political and cultural systems of these nations have considerable impact on their educational setup in terms of providing the kind of education that is aimed at developing human personality. For instance, Froebel's philosophy of education features in the education system of Germany where the existence of good governance and better socio-economic system have created conducive learning environment for education. The Nigerian government has also made numerous policies towards ensuring qualitative education at all levels. It is, however, saddening that, in reality, much has not been achieved in Nigerian society as compared to other countries.

Froebel's philosophical thought also features in the Nigerian education, as evident in the National Policy on Education. It has been stated in the National Policy on Education (NPE) that education is designed to develop the individual child into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen (FGN, 2014). Also, it is indicated in the policy that the Federal Government instituted a Universal Basic Education (UBE) which is, by law, made compulsory for all children of school age in Nigeria. It is also stated in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999,) that Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy; and to this end, Government shall as and when practicable provide free, compulsory and universal primary education.

However, the goals of Nigerian education, as stated in the national policy and other documents, have not been fully achieved due to the fact that the necessary measures to facilitate such achievements have not been fully implemented. As a result, education in Nigeria, which is expected to be free and compulsory for each child, is now unaffordable. Many children who are of school age are running errands for their parents, family and relatives due to lack of parental and government responsibilities. Also, those in school are faced with many problems in the areas of teaching and learning. These and many other problems in Nigerian education could be solved if proper attention is given to Froebel's philosophy of education.

Various researchers have conducted studies on Froebel's philosophy of education. For instance, Brehony (2001) focused on 'the origin of nursery education, Friedrich Froebel and the English system. Bowlby (2016) studied Froebel Education in practice, while Watts (2021) worked on

'Friedrich Froebel: interpolation, extrapolation, mother songs. To the best of these researchers, none of the previous studies have conducted research on analysis of Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education and its implications for Nigerian secondary school education. Thus, this is the gap this study intends to fill.

It is on this note, that the following questions are formulated to guide this study. That's what is Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education? What is the relevance of Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education to Nigerian secondary education?

METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on analysis of Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education and its implications for Nigerian secondary education. The study is interested in analysing Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education; the extent to which Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education is reflected in Nigerian secondary school education and the implications of Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education for Nigerian secondary school education. The population of this research consists of Heads of all Basic Education Schools and Post Basic Schools in Nigeria who are members of Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) and All Nigerian Confederation of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPSS). Meanwhile, the target population would comprise all executives of NUT and ANCOPPS. An executive from each of NUT and ANCOPPS was interviewed to collect relevant data. Interview schedule and philosophical analysis were used in the study. The data gathered in this study were analysed through the use of philosophical analysis. This includes: logical, linguistic, expository and critical analyses.

FINDINGS

Analysis of Friedrich Froebel's Philosophy of Education and its Implications for secondary education in Nigeria were analysed based on the interview conducted on some people involved in the policy and practice of secondary education in Nigeria. These people include executive members of Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) and All Nigerian Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPSS). Their responses helped in the analyses of the policy and practice of education in Nigeria, whereby the implications of Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education for the policy and practice of secondary school education in Nigeria were seen more realistically.

Analysis of Statements by NUT Executive

In the interview conducted with the NUT executive, it was gathered that education at this level emphasises development of child's natural abilities to a very large extent in terms of physical development. It was revealed that the school physical activities such as games and sport enable the child to interact with others which in turn bring about development of child's physical abilities. It was also revealed that education at this level emphasises development of child's physical abilities in terms of development of the senses to a very large extent. It was gathered that some subjects educate a child about his natural growth with respect to sense of development, -for instance, sense of touch, of taste, and of sight. It was also revealed from the interview that the curriculum at this level of education emphasizes development of the child's sense of coordination to a very large extent. Almost all the subjects offered emphasizes child's development of senses of coordination in terms of handling materials for the purpose of writing. Also, it was revealed that the curriculum enables the teacher at this level of education to build on the child's habits and encourage externalizing the child's internal dispositions to a very large extent. For instance, most of the classroom activities are structured in such a way that enable the child in pronouncement of certain words habitually, singing certain songs habitually, handling certain objects habitually; all these under the guidance of the teacher.

From the responses, it was gathered that at primary school level, education takes the form of play-way to a little extent. It was revealed that the play-way method of teaching is more peculiar to nursery pupils. That is, most of the subjects offered do not require the play-way method. It was also gathered that at the primary school, the children are given very close guidance by the teachers to a little extent because of unhealthy interference of some parents. It was revealed that some parents do not give the teachers freedom to fully guide the children due to fear and lack of awareness of the evil their interference can cause.

It was gathered from the respondents that education at this level encourages child-centered learning to a very large extent because priority is given to the learners. In primary schools, some subjects require play-way method and some discussion method. These methods encourage child-centered learning. From the responses, it was also gathered that education encourages cooperation among children in their play-way activities to a very large extent. The play-way activities in the school

create an enabling environment for the children to cooperate and interact freely among themselves.

It was also gathered that at primary school level, education emphasizes recognition of the child's development of speech process and helps the child to pronounce letters and words clearly to a great extent. An aspect of English studies such as pronunciation develops the child's speech process. It teaches the child how letters and words are being clearly pronounced. It was revealed that the subjects taught are largely according to the level of the child's mental development. The curriculum at primary school, as it is in other levels of education, is planned and implemented in such a way that the developmental stages of the learners are put into consideration. It was added that subjects taken at this level is in accordance to what they can comprehend.

Moreover, it was revealed that education at this level encourages the development of the child's natural virtues to a little extent because some of these qualities may be hiding and difficult to develop at this level of education. At this level, teaching and learning processes focus more on teaching general basic knowledge while less attention is given to the latent development. Education encourages engagement of children in basic / fundamental educational activities in terms of basic literacy, numeracy, civic and spiritual activities to a very large extent.

Finally, the interview revealed that at the Primary school level, the children are taught subjects that help them to have all-round development (the arts, the social sciences and the sciences) without hindrance. It was revealed that the subjects offered at this level help the children to have basic knowledge and skills in the fields of arts, social sciences and sciences. Examples of these subjects are Basic Science and Technology, Religion and National Values, Pre-vocational Studies and Cultural and Creative Arts.

Analysis of Statements by ANCOPSS Executive

In the interview with ANCOPSS executive, it was gathered that education at the secondary school level is child-centered. The natural abilities of the child are taken into consideration. Also, it was revealed that education at the secondary school level is curriculum-centered to some extent because what the child needs to know is also gradually emphasised.

According to the respondent, subjects that are taught at the secondary school level do not help children to have detail occupational dispositions. Majority of students who graduated from secondary schools hardly use the knowledge acquired to find themselves jobs. It was gathered that the subjects are taught by qualified teachers who can expose the students to definite learning activities in systematic manner to a large extent. It was however revealed that due to lack of enough teachers in some schools, teachers who studied related course(s) are asked to teach related subject(s).

It was discovered that students are taught religious studies in the secondary schools to a very large extent. Students at this level offer either Islamic Studies or Christian studies as general subject. It is however noted that only those that wish to study one of these subjects register it in the external examination. It was also revealed from the interview that students in the secondary schools are taught language acquisition to a large extent. While one of the Nigerian major languages is made compulsory, Arabic and French (as foreign languages) are optional. It is however gathered that none of the external examination bodies makes either of these language subjects compulsory during the registration.

From the interview, it was gathered that students are taught natural sciences in the secondary schools to a very large extent. The respondent, however, mentioned that the natural sciences such as physics and chemistry are offered only by a group of students (science students) in the senior secondary schools. Also, it was revealed that students in the secondary schools are taught mathematics to a very large extent as it is made compulsory for all students.

According to the respondent, students are taught technical/vocational subjects in the secondary schools to a little extent. It was revealed that although the aim is to educate students to think and transform knowledge through technological processes into wealth and a broader economic base, resources that will facilitate the achievement of this aim are inadequate. In the secondary schools, according to the information gathered from the interview, students are taught subjects that help them to have all-round development to a very little extent. This is because, some of the secondary schools are structured to have three categories of class: arts, social sciences and sciences. A student can only belong to one of these

three and not the three at a time. This makes it impossible to have all-round development.

Finally, it was gathered that the secondary schools have the required facilities to help the teachers teach the subjects very well to a large extent. For instance, classrooms, library and laboratory among others are in place to help the teaching and learning process. According to the respondents, however, the schools have been provided with equipment to help the teachers teach the subjects very well to a little extent. It was gathered that the secondary schools encourage the students to have self-realisation (to attain the realisation of their potentials.) to a little extent because emphasis is not made on subjects that promote self-realisation in the secondary school students.

DISCUSSION

Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education emphasises that education should be characterised by respecting child's individuality and freedom, having his/her own opinions and needs. He advocated that the children should be allowed to live out their lives in freedom, gain strength for mind and soul. He therefore protested that both indoor and outdoor environments must fulfil children's basic needs for freedom. This means that since Froebel's philosophy emphasises on child's freedom, the curriculum should be child-centred. In line with this, FRN (2014) states that "educational activities shall be learner-centred for maximum self-development and self-fulfilment" (p. 3).

Another important aspect of Friedrich Froebel's educational idea to the Nigerian educational system is the division of child's education into four stages. Akinpelu (1981) maintained that of the four stages of education envisaged by Froebel, the infancy and childhood stages are, by far the most important. This may be as a result of the fact that the infancy "prepares the child for the primary level of education" (FGN, 2014:7); while the childhood is to "lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking" (FGN, 2014:10).

Moreover, the implementation of Froebel's philosophy of education in the Nigerian education system varied due to the fact that some schools in Nigeria have incorporated some elements of Froebel's ideas, such as play-based learning and child-centered approaches, there are challenges in fully integrating his philosophy across the entire education system. Some

of these challenges are cultural differences; resource constraints; curriculum and policy and so on as identified in the course of this research

Despite these challenges, Froebel's philosophy has positively influence Nigerian education by providing a more nurturing and supportive learning environment for children. Some schools and educators in Nigeria are already experimenting with integrating play-based learning and other Froebelian methods into their teaching practices. Expanding these efforts and providing the necessary support could lead to a more widespread adoption of Froebel's philosophy in Nigerian education.

Finally, the implications of all these are that Nigeria needs to lay more emphasis on moral development, spiritual development, religious development, self-realisation, motivation for learning, discovery all-round development and education for unity of man and nature with God.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussion of findings, certain amount of emphasis on Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education is essential for individual, educational and societal development in Nigeria. Nigerian secondary school system of education needs to accommodate to a greater extent, Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education with emphasis on physical development, religious/spiritual development, moral development, social development, technical/ technological development, vocational development and education for unity of man and nature with God.

Based on the findings and conclusion in this study, it was recommended among others that:

- i) Nigerian secondary school education system should pursue Friedrich Froebel's philosophy of education more by laying greater emphasis on moral development, religious/ spiritual development, education for self-realisation, vocational education, technical/ technological development, education according to the natural ability of the learner and education for unity of man and nature with God.
- ii) In order to attain better performance of teachers in the Nigerian secondary schools, there is urgent need for the Nigerian Government to fund all-round education especially the basic and secondary levels of education. It is established that for better

performance of the teachers as Froebel suggest, more of the needs such as; provision of improved facilities, modern equipment and increment in the salaries and allowances of teachers are non-negotiable.

- iii) The teachers are thereby ensured to be more committed to the attainment of students' quality academic performance in all ramifications of education.

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