

# ***THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES***

## **The Relevance of Philosophical and Ecumenical Education in the Nigerian Educational System**

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### ***Abstract:***

*This article aims at emphasizing the significance of philosophy and ecumenism into the Nigerian educational curriculum in all levels of the educational system. Philosophical and ecumenical education enhances critical, creative and analytic thinking, an education where teachers are teachers and students are students and teachers at the same time (Emefoh I. 2012). The paper recommends that inculcating philosophical and ecumenical education in the Nigerian system of education at all school levels will aid the children towards a better living in the society. It will foster a community of inquiry where teacher and students search for the truth together. Ecumenical education brings about interconnectivity between epistemology, cultural and religious dialogue in the community of inquiry, which is the school. It is a unifying community where everyone, both teachers and students seek to know. According to Nwodo T. (2013), it is a unifying community of being, the being for others and for oneness. A metaphysical attribute of being that is characterized in agreement and common purpose.*

### **1. Introduction**

On close observation of the behavioural pattern of today's youths, one question that comes to mind is, did these youths actually passed through the four corners of an institution? Emefoh I (2012) asserted that one of the missing links in the Nigerian curriculum of studies is philosophical and ecumenical education. Therefore, you see youths who are not capable of critical and analytic thinking, who are not able to evaluate their actions and the logical consequences of their actions. "If students can reason and think critically, they will not destroy the school facilities provided for their education because of one problem or the other. People who can argue for their positions will prefer dialogue to picking stones, knives and guns."

Nwuzor and Ocho (1982) defined education as a process "established by the society to assist the young to understand the heritage of the past, to participate productively in the society of the present and to contribute to the future." Giving a critical analysis of this definition, and judging from the inefficiency of many of our youths, is it that the methods of imparting knowledge in schools are defective or the youths themselves constituted the problem? Is it that education did not impart positive change of attitude in them or they were not open to positive change?

This article will seek to respond to some of these challenging questions by proposing philosophical and ecumenical education to the Nigerian Educational system. The kind of philosophy that will be adapted to different schools levels. For instance, classical or scholastic philosophy cannot be taught to children in the primary or secondary schools. By so doing, the following aspects will be examined: the meaning and functions of philosophical and ecumenical education; paradigm of philosophical education: critical, creative and analytic thinking; and paradigm of ecumenical education: epistemic, religious and cultural dialogues in education.

### **2. Explanation of Terms**

#### ***2.1. Philosophical Education***

Philosophy is etymologically derived from the two Greek terms *philo* - love/desire and *Sophia* - wisdom/knowledge. Philosophy etymologically means love or desire for wisdom. It is the desire, the inclination and the love to know through reflective approach.

There are various classical definitions of philosophy. However, this article will subscribe to the definition of philosophy as a science that systematically studies in reflective manner, the various branches of human and natural dimensions (Ani H. 2008). In relating this to education as one of the branches of knowledge, we can talk about philosophy of education.

Education is an ongoing process, a progressive process of human formation. Through this process one learns and acquires new knowledge. For every school and every teacher there is a set of related beliefs or philosophy of education that influences what and

how students are taught. Philosophy of education therefore, “represents answers to questions about the purpose of schooling, a teacher’s role, and what should be taught and by what methods” (McGraw 2005).

Philosophical education is based on preparing students to think for themselves, and be creative. Giving them tools to fish for knowledge and be resourceful, not giving them already made knowledge to download. Critical thinking is not limited to mental processes but also as strategies, and representation that help in problem-solving, making of decisions, and learning new concepts.

## 2.2. Ecumenical Education

For a better understanding of ecumenical education, it is important to know the meaning of the word “ecumenism.”

“*Ecumenism* comes from the Greek word *oikoumenē*, which in turn comes from *oikēō* [to inhabit] and finally, from *oikía* [house]. In ancient Greek, *he oikoumenē ghē* indicates all earth inhabited by humanity or the whole of humanity as opposed to the uninhabited regions of the earth. Therefore, *ecumene* indicates the world of the Greeks and that of the Barbarians. This term was extended to the Roman Empire where it assumed a clear political colouring. The *ecumene* became the empire and the emperor was her lord and defender. But also in the entire Roman Empire and beyond, *ecumene* assumed another significance for Christians. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century the *Oikoumenē* had become the “Christian world”, with the double (political and religious) meaning of ‘Christian empire’ and ‘whole church. It became the Christian world that is united under one church... (Kunuba A. 2012).

After the division that tore apart the Christian world that was united under one Church, the term ecumenism assumed another meaning. Ecumenism now means everything that brings Christians of all churches together into ever greater unity of faith, worship, mission and action in building up the Kingdom of God (Kunuba A. 2012).

In this work however, ecumenical education can be referred to an education that accommodates all fields of knowledge. It seeks and emphasizes the inter-connectedness of knowledge. Hence, the unity-in-diversity of religions cannot be limited to Christianity but ought to be extended to all other sectors of life especially in education (Emefoh I. 2012).

Ecumenical education gives people ample opportunity to express their thought pattern. This can be done in the context of mutual exploration and openness, and listening to others. Ecumenical education is education for the truth done through collective inquiry. It enables the students to speak the truth at any given situation (Emefoh I. 2012).

In ecumenically oriented classroom, room is created for enabling environment for teaching and learning, workable team spirit or co-responsibility, dialogue, mutual respect, sharing and exchange of ideas, etc.

## 3. The Paradigms of Philosophical and Ecumenical Education

### 3.1. The Paradigm of Philosophical Education: Critical, Creative and Analytic Thinking

Philosophizing begins from infancy where children inquire about the things they observe around them or see in their environment. Nwodo T. (2013) notes that “the little African children by the fireside in African village are inquisitive with questions.” In asking questions and telling questions oriented stories and expecting answers, they want to know and clarify their ideas.

These children who ask many questions at home when they come to classroom cannot ask questions. The point is that the teacher does not allow them to think, but rather thinks for them. Dewey “argues that thinking is a natural automated act, just like breathing and heartbeat are, and therefore it is impossible to teach someone to think. However, it is possible to help develop someone’s thinking, by helping develop a creative, curious and questioning mind. To do so we do not need to teach information in schools, rather encourage stimulus in the form of challenging the external reality” (Dekel G and Dekel N. 1933). That is why, Lipman (in Emefoh 2012) in his philosophy of education encourages teachers to help the students to think well, not just for their social utility but more so because it is giving them their right. The right to think well, and the right to be helped to think well. Students pass through three models of private and public institutions in the society – the family, the state, and the school, and the school epitomizes the fusion of both the family and the state. The school is the most important of these three models. Hence, the school should be a community of inquiry, a community searching together. The product of a school must be reasonable and the only way to achieve this is to treat our students in a reasonable way. The school should be a community of inquiry that is teacher-guided, a student centred, and an active-teacher active-student. A community of inquiry is a democratic classroom where students and teachers inquire together.

According to Sharp (in Emefoh 2012), children should be taught philosophy with a method that raises philosophical issues concerning such concepts as authority, morality, religion, justice, truth, knowledge, beauty, and goodness. It is not using traditional philosophy textbooks that cannot offer the human experience that will help children in critical, creative and caring thinking. Teaching children philosophy can be done by using stories and philosophical novels, since stories can motivate children to think and search if they are based on issues or events that are fascinating and contestable by their own judgment. This educationist also noted that philosophy for children does not tell the child what to think, but gives him/her the intellectual, social and emotional tools that he/she needs to think well, to think judiciously and reasonably by means of the classroom community of inquiry. It is this classroom setting that gives the child care, commitment and courage to act on his/her thinking.

Dewey (1916) is of the opinion that thinking should be linked with experience. “Hence the first approach to any subject in school, if thought is to be aroused and not words acquired, should be as unscholastic as possible. To realize what an experience, or empirical situation, means, we have to call to mind the sort of situation that presents itself outside of school; the sort of occupations that interest and engage activity in ordinary life.” For Dewey, teachers should bring their subjects home and not leave it in the lofty terrain, for what is education if not life itself. Students should be given what to do and not what to learn, because in doing, they will be thinking, but in learning they will depend on the thinking of others. Hence, “giving of problems, the putting of questions, the assigning of tasks, the magnifying of difficulties, is a large part of school work.”

In essence, it is important to note that age and level should be put into considering when teaching philosophy in all school levels.

### *3.2. The Paradigm of Ecumenical Education: Epistemic, Religious and Cultural Dialogues in Education*

Ecumenical education is the type of education that places emphasis on three areas of dialogue: epistemic, religion and culture. This implies that ecumenical education is a type of education that aims at the promotion of unity of knowledge, promotion of dialogue among different religious denominations, and the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

The praxis of religious dialogue within the school comprises both ecumenical dialogue and interreligious dialogue. That is, relations between Christians, and relations between Christians and believers of other faiths. Religious dialogue can be expressed through spiritual ecumenism, dialogue-of-life, dialogue-of-action, and dialogue of religious experience. In spiritual ecumenism, students can be made to pray together (like general school prayer, hostel prayer) irrespective of their denomination or religion, and it is a way of attaining Christian unity. Through the dialogue-of-life, the students can engage in friendly co-existence that enriches one another. It entails collaboration instead of confrontation, small gestures of love, etc (Kunuba A. 2013). The students through their daily activities interact with one another; engage in sports, students' week, burials, and other ceremonies outside the school. Through dialogue-of-action, the students can also collaborate to promote moral values, and be educated on the need for peace and respect for one's environment, solidarity with the poor, and promotion of social justice and integral development of peoples (Kunuba A. 2013). The dialogue of religious experience is all about the mutual enrichment of religions. Students can share their spiritual riches with one another. It will help them to know about others' religious beliefs and practices, and appreciate other's spiritual values.

Epistemic dialogue emphasizes dialogue involving different areas of knowledge. Students are made to think for themselves and also think about others' good. According to Lipman (in Emefoh 2012), to make one's reasoning a good one, the person must be creative. Hence, in the community of inquiry, dialogue is a core educational methodology. Epistemic dialogue as the unity of knowledge implies that the courses taught in school must be relational, and must be related to life. According to Dewey (in Emefoh 2012), any education that is not related to life is no education at all. For instance, in teaching Mathematics, it should be taught in such a way that it is related to life. Cooking at home needs Mathematics. One should be able to know the proportion of salt, water, oil, fish, etc. needed.

Ecumenical approach to education puts into consideration intercultural dialogue. We are cultural beings, and our culture reveals our identity. The cultural factor in us makes us capable of sharing our beliefs and accepted way of life with others. According to Anieke C. (2011), Ecumenical education puts into consideration two great forces operating in every society in other to promote cultural understanding. These are forces of inclusion and exclusion. The forces of inclusion underline the fact that every society needs the experience of other societies in other to exist. No society can exist independent of others. On the other hand, every society tries to preserve its identity by a form of exclusiveness that ensures perpetuation of the society. Also, each society tries to relate with others because it needs them for its continuous existence. Hence, it is the operation of these two forces that makes intercultural dialogue possible.

The above assertion makes intercultural studies and intercultural communication vital in the educational system. Intercultural dialogue brings students of different cultures together, to study together, and makes them open to multilateral relations within and outside the school environment. It aims at a kind of universality that transcends all boundaries, cultures and languages. Interculturation helps students to think globally.

The philosophy of education of a given society has a very significant relationship with the cultural values of the people. It is important to note that the content of the philosophy of Nigerian education is based firstly on full integration of the individual into the community. This implies that education must seek to orientate the individual into full active membership of his community. And secondly to live in unity and harmony as one indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice (Whawo D.D. 2011).

## **4. Conclusion**

The contemporary behavioural and attitudinal orientation of many Nigerians will leave one without much doubt that the educational system in Nigeria lacks some basic knowledge of critical thinking. Basic rules of reasonable thinking should be part of compulsory subject in primary and post primary schools, and advanced philosophy as an essential part of the general courses in tertiary institutions.

The advantage of this will be rewarding as far as socioeconomic and political development in Nigeria is concerned. Youths trained in line with this educational system will be capable of critical and analytical thinking. They will be able to evaluate their actions and the logical consequences of their action. It so follows that if our youths can reason and think critically, they will not engage themselves in wanton destruction of lives and school property. People who can argue for their position will prefer dialogue to picking stones, knives, guns and clubs.

Moreover, preparing our youths to think for themselves is concomitant to giving them tool to fish for knowledge rather than giving them knowledge. if a person gains the facilities to acquire knowledge, he or she will keep on acquiring knowledge till the end of his/her life since education is not restricted to the four corners of the school system.

Moreso, ecumenical education seeks and emphasizes the inter-connectiveness in knowledge, bearing in mind that there is a common factor that unites all knowledge. This, John Dewey called life. Our global village needs ecumenical education, an education that will help us to further the principle of democracy, dialogue, unity, and humanization as against dehumanization. Ecumenical education will help us learn that the variances in our epistemological and theological statements are much more the result of political conflict that epistemological and theological differentiation.

Finally, philosophical and ecumenical oriented education will provide our youths the background for logical, critical, creative and holistic approach that will eliminate narrow-mindedness that makes us easy prey to manipulation.

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