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JOHN DEWEY'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY: A SOLUTION TO UNEMPLOYMENT PHENOMENON IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The problem of unemployment has been a long-standing phenomenon which appears to have defied various approaches channeled towards solving this burning issue. A possible cause of the failure of these approaches is that these approaches are wrong and are devoid of the appropriate philosophy, hence the unending increase in unemployment figures in the country, which is also partly occasioned by yearly turn out of graduates into the labour market who pass out without the relevant philosophy of education tailored towards this purpose. This is where John Dewey's educational philosophy becomes the solution since it equips one with the skills to cope and to develop strategies for difficult economic situation. This paper explores this assertion in Dewey's philosophy of education which is a type of pragmatism.

Keywords: Unemployment, Education, Pragmatism.

1. INTRODUCTION

"That all people are equal, but some people are more equal than others is nowhere more true than in the experience of unemployment"

We begin our journey on a light of the above quotation by Acho, Orabuchi. This was just his lamentation over the scotch of unemployment. In any democratically governed states, nation, or society, government has it as a duty to ensure the welfare of the citizenry through its traditional functions of making the laws, implementing, executing the laws, and interpreting the laws as necessary channels for delivering its essential functions of providing the necessities of life such as health, food, and security. These are the basic needs of an individual citizen in any organized state.

However, in an economy in crisis, the above may not be possible, especially, where the private sector of the economy is not good enough to support the people through job opportunities, and where the country's revenue is going down, or where corruption takes the center stage, it becomes difficult for government to meet its obligation to the people, and with the loss of jobs as a consequence, then we are faced with a high-level unemployment situation as it is in Nigeria. This may be why Acho, says that "with the economic crisis in Nigeria, a country long plagued by the bifurcated economy, unemployment among all ages, particularly the youth unemployment that has reached alarming rate,

is grappling with unemployment policy conundrum” (17). Acho further opined that the complete absence of visible strategies to create jobs being advanced by policymakers, has worsened the situation. This calls for urgent attention.

It is, therefore, necessary for any responsible government to check unemployment to avoid any chaotic situation because the teeming youths who are unemployed can constitute an uncontrollable scenario. One of the solutions of unemployment in Nigeria is for the government to adopt a participatory attitude towards governance. According to Ucheaga, and Ncha, “participatory governance is a government that listens, gives attention delivers the good, and responds to emergency and provides pragmatic answers to socio-economic challenges of the individual” (101).

It is true that government must design policies for curbing the menace of unemployment. However, the government cannot eliminate unemployment through cosmetic approaches which are like taking a symptomatic approach to the issues. For instance, the N-power programme of the present administration of president Buhari, that provides short term job, or that of giving cash of 10,000 Naira to businessmen and women, cannot solve unemployment in Nigeria. Therefore, what is needed is a long term policy that introduces an educational scheme backed up by underlying philosophy that prepares the students with adequate skills that are enduring in any economic circumstances, given that the percentage of unemployed youths is higher among graduates of secondary and university institutions. It is, therefore, to this end that John Dewey’s educational philosophy becomes relevant. In this paper, we x-ray Dewey’s pragmatic approach to education with a view to providing a long-standing solution to the unemployment phenomenon in Nigeria.

John Dewey

John Dewey was born in 1859 in Burlington, Vermont. He studied at the University of Vermont. He gained admission into the University of Hopkins where obtained his decorate degree in philosophy (Lawhead, 417). Stumpf reports that Dewey lectured at the University of Michigan, Chicago and later at the University of Colombia. He was Head of Department of Philosophy, psychology, and education. Here he became very popular for his pragmatic concept of education where he introduced and experimented a more permissive and creative atmosphere for learning as against the traditional and form method of learning. He published on a wide range of issues such as logic, metaphysics, epistemology, etc. His pragmatic experiments were more in the social realm rather than the individual realm, and command influence in areas like education, democracy, ethics, religious and art (366).

Dewey was also a widely traveled man who went about delivering lectures and selling his ideas to people all over the world. He lectured in places like Japan, China, Turkey, Mexico, and the Soviet Union. He retired in 1929 and died in 1952.

Education

Giving a meaning, interpretation or a definition of the term education is usually an uphill task, reason being that the word is ambiguous giving itself to so many views as there are many people giving different meanings to the term. Basically, as a branch of philosophy, it suffers this setback in definition just like philosophy itself. Accordingly, from the ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary epochs, the term education has been subjected to a good number of definitions.

Plato, according to Anibueze defines education as that training which is given by suitable habits to the first instincts of virtue in children when pleasure and pain are rightly implanted in non-rational souls (167). Interestingly, a contemporary social philosopher Jeremy Bentham describes pain and pleasure as “sovereign masters” who not only determine what we shall do, but they also point out what we ought to do. These are key aspects of Bentham’s theory of ethical hedonism, which is the theory that the moral rightness or wrongness of an action is the function of the amount of pleasure or pain it produces (Lawhead 404).

Perhaps, Plato wanted emphasis on these phenomena as essential ingredients for building a sound educational system for children. Again, this may be why etymologically, as Egbeke puts it, the term education is derived from the Greek word “educare” which means to lead out, it also means to form or to train (18). A very interesting contemporary definition of education is the one given by Ukele, quoted by Oshita, he says that “education is a process by which people are acclimatized to the culture into which they are born in order that they may advanced it”. On his part, Oshita, gives that education is an indispensable aspect of the social realities of a nation, it involves all aspects of the society from the material conditions to the cognitive and psychological states of the individual with a view to promoting knowledge (15). Also interesting is Nwigwe’s definition of education which is seen in four perspectives or aspects, thus;

- ✓ The act or process that leads a person to better understanding of the situation in life.
- ✓ The process of importing and acquiring knowledge and mental capabilities so as to make a mature decision in different situations.
- ✓ The learning process by which any knowledge can be obtained.
- ✓ An enlightening experience (59).

For Socrates, education is related to virtue. According to Oshita for Socrates, a man is educated who knows what virtuous life is all about. In this case, Socrates was preoccupied with pedagogy aimed at midwifing knowledge and wisdom for the purpose of enthroning a virtuous life (17).

Unemployment

This has been a disturbing phenomenon for most countries all over the world. In developed countries, the percentage is very low and in some cases is not existent or significantly low to the extent that its effects may not be felt. However, in developing or underdeveloped countries like Nigeria and most African and Asian countries, the phenomenon of unemployment is a worrisome one.

The term unemployment is given as an economic situation in which a large or small number of able-bodied individuals are not employed, or there are no jobs to engage people for meaningful living. For Ojo, unemployment refers to a situation where one is willing and able to do work that is capable of doing but non is available to him. Technically, unemployment occurs when the productive capacity of the employed labour is not fully utilized (296). Basically, it is a condition that occurs when a person who is actively searching for employment is unable to find one (<http://www.businessdictionary.com>).

The following are types of unemployment: mass unemployment or cyclical unemployment, unemployment structure, voluntary casual unemployment, frictional unemployment, seasonal unemployment, etc.

Our concern in this paper is not to discuss all these, but to proffer solution to this disturbing phenomenon using John Dewey’s philosophy.

Nigeria as a country has passed through rough times as a result of this phenomenon over the years and is worse by the corruption that pervades the economic, social, and political climate of the country. Consequently, Nigeria is heavily grappling with insecurity situation with its attendant dire consequences of armed robbery, kidnapping, yahoo and internet scam, among other vices. Ironically, the youths who form the major workforce of the economy are the very ones who are going through the agony and pains of joblessness. Tessy Igomu, a columnist with Daily Sun, paints a gloomy picture about this when she recalled what happened in 2014 during recruitment into the Nigerian immigration services. She says:

At the end of the exercise 16 of the applicants met their untimely death due to overcrowding, stampede and exhaustion” (18).

According to her, these deaths were like a window into the alarming degree to which Nigeria's unemployment crisis which has plagued the country for decades had reached.

The Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) released on Wednesday, December 19, 2018, for the fourth quarter of 2017 and the third quarter of 2018, shows that 3.3 million Nigerians suffered job losses. According to Tessey, the bureau report indicated that unemployed Nigerians rose from 17.6 million to 20.9 million, and the unemployment rate increased from 18.8% to 23.1% between the third quarter of 2017 and the third quarter of 2018.

The estimated 200 million Nigerians, it is believed that it is predominantly youth population below 40 years. Given this scenario, the situation is worse for youths that constitute a significant percentage of the population.

By analysis, Nigeria's 18.8 percent official jobless rate is believed to be the world's third highest after South Africa's 27.7 percent and Greece's 20.9 percent by the third quarter of 2018. With this gloomy picture of Nigeria's unemployment figure, what then is the solution to this menacing phenomenon? One analyst says that, with the recurring ugly decimal of youth unemployment getting worse, a sustained pragmatic intervention should be top priority.

This paper agrees with the above suggestion that government must adopt a policy of creating jobs and sustaining them in order to bring a long lasting solution to this menace. However, all the approaches government may follow must be grounded with the right philosophy of education. Therefore, our education system must be premised on an enduring philosophy that would enable the millions of youths being churned out yearly by Nigerian higher institutions into the labour market. John Dewey's philosophy, therefore, comes in here as an available remedy.

2. SOLVING UNEMPLOYMENT THROUGH DEWEY'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

The aspect of John Dewey's philosophy of education that this paper is concerned with is pragmatism. Pragmatism was founded by Charles Sanders pierce but was popularized by William James and John Dewey. According to Soccio, founded this philosophy in an article entitled "how to make our ideas clear" and published in a popular magazine in 1878. He coined the term pragmatism from the Greek word "pragma" meaning "an act" or "consequence". This was to show that the meaning of words is dependent on some form of action, and their ideas are meaningful only when they translate into actions and predict experiences associated with action (439). For Lawhead, pragmatism reflects the spirit of American culture. It is a down to earth philosophy which negates abstruse abstractions that have no "cash value" but oriented towards experience, action and practical issues. The position of the pragmatist is the outcome of the dissatisfaction with all the other options in philosophy at the time such as rationalism, empiricism, Kantianism, and Hegelianism. To the pragmatist, the assertion of the rationalist that the ultimate truths are eternal and necessary and that there is a certain way the world must be, and that we must discern through logic, does not hold water. Rather, the pragmatist is of the view that the world must be accessed through a sense of openness and the spirit of experimentation (461).

John Dewey, following sanders pierce, introduced his strand of pragmatism in education, progressive education as a consequence of pragmatism in education. The idea is to ensure that students come out prepared for the challenges of our complex world. The pragmatic method is relevant to many areas of human concern. In this paper, we are interested in the aspect of pragmatic education as a strategy for coping with the unemployment phenomenon in Nigeria.

Basically, education and philosophy are close knitted in Dewey's understanding such that they have an intimate relationship. Aja opined that the application of this method in education has become for him the most penetrating definition of pragmatism which is that "pragmatism is the theory of education in its most general phrase" (15). This means that education is the laboratory in which philosophical distinctions become concrete and tested. This philosophical position, according to Aja,

Dewey calls experimental idealism because he believed that with the evolution of his intelligence, man had acquired an ability to control and shape his social environment. His idea of pragmatic education brought tremendous influence on American education which was majorly note for memorization of a mass of factual information and historical classics, was outdated and should be replaced by a form of education in which the goal of education should be assisting students to develop effective problem-solving methods and skills for social interactions.

This is the kind of education with an underlying philosophy that we need in Nigeria. Given the facts that large number of students are released from universities with poor management skills-without the right frame of mind to steer through the harsh economic climate-into the labour market, this enabling Dewey's philosophy becomes a useful one in this circumstance. This fact becomes real when one juxtaposes the fact that Nigerian university graduates perambulate the length and breadth of the country searching for non-existing jobs. Dewey's pragmatism rather prepared them as self-dependent, self-employed, graduates who have the relevant environmental ability to fashion out ways of surviving in a situation of joblessness. Dewey places emphasis on the process and not the content and learning through pragmatic education gives the teachers the role of not providing information but to bring the students to the point of discovering truth for themselves.

The problem we have in Nigeria is the problem of graduates looking for white-collar jobs, a consequence of the kind of education they get. They are trained in most cases to work on files or render sedentary services instead of initiating productive ideas that can transform their lives through practical skills, thus creating jobs rather than looking for jobs. Therefore, Dewey's pragmatic education should be encouraged in Nigeria because, it teaches a student how to solve problems, and if a student learns how to solve problems, presumably he would be better fitted for living in our ever-changing world with its manifold perplexities. According to Popkin and Stroll, Dewey submitted that rather than being trained in various disciplines, the child should be trained by being confronted with various situations in which he would have to develop methods for overcoming the difficulties that beset him. By so doing, he would learn how to make satisfactory adjustments to his environment, and to develop various means which would aid him in solving the larger problems of the social world in which he would have to live (270).

It is obvious from the above, that a Nigerian graduate grounded in this form of education, could go a long way in solving unemployment phenomenon in Nigeria. Dewey and other adherents of pragmatism hold that the ends and means of education should be flexible and open to constant revision. Given that education is both an end and a means, it should aim at improving the individual. Needs and interest of the students should be the focus of such education and should be separated from the child's real life, Aja, explains further, Dewey submitted that the classification of human activities for educational purposes and establishing a hierarchy of values would be wrong because values are not constant but changeable as the society changes as well. To this end, arranging things in their order of priority or superiority would be counterproductive.

It is worth mentioning that one of the contemporary problems of Nigeria is that of having an enduring and sustainable democratic tradition that delivers the dividends of democracy through job creation and respect for humanity to be able to eliminate unemployment in the country. Achieving this fact requires a system of education grounded in pragmatism as an enabling philosophy. This may be why Popkin and Stroll, suggest that this type of education would train people for living in a democratic society and would strengthen the development of this type of social and political organization. A democratic society is one that is better able to confront a new situation and try new solution since it does not have any rigid or preconceived ideology. It is essentially a system of social organization that is open to the exploration of new means for meeting difficulties. According to them, it is designed to evolve, to meet change and to adapt to new developments. The student trained in problem-solving will be able to be active citizens of such a society utilizing his techniques for dealing with unresolved

problems in corporation with the larger social group in their common search for satisfactory ways of dealing with the practical difficulties which hinder the best functioning of society.

3. CONCLUSION

From the basic tenets of Dewey's pragmatic education above, you would agree with me that Dewey's philosophy of education, if emphasized in our schools and universities curricula could be medicinal to the unemployment menace in Nigeria. This is so because, and as Aja, explains, that for the pragmatist there is nothing central and nothing peripheral, nothing primary and nothing secondary, nothing basic and nothing superficial.

The methodology of the pragmatist according to Aja, is openness, because learning takes places within the open phenomenon of interaction. This is done by ensuring that learning occurs by so doing where the learner is first provided with problems, who in the process of resolving such problems learn on their job. Further, he says that pragmatism in education lays emphasis on participation in, rather than preparation in life, and encourages practice over theory, experimental inquiry over speculation, action over contemplation. He emphasized that thinking arises out of practical needs and only through action is knowledge acquired and progress made (6). This type of education has enormous implication for social philosophy. Like Charles Sanders Peirce, Dewey believes that inquiry cannot be an individual subjective project, but a collective community effort that could bring success. Dewey says that the pragmatic curriculum should be a planned one with reference to placing essentials first and refinement second. This is an order of preferences, but not values in order of priority. These essentials and man's chief needs include food, shelter, clothing, house hold furnishing, and appliances. These are connected with productive, exchange and consumption.

Conclusively, one can say that any graduate grounded in the above philosophy of education would find it easier to cope with any economic and social circumstance. This may be why Kidzu and others opined that to achieve the type of education that could stand the ever-changing world with its complex and perplexing problems, modern Nigeria, and perhaps many countries of the world need a philosophy which is geared towards the individual student with the aim of providing him with the right state of mind and abilities to paddle his life's canoe outside the four walls of the classroom, and that philosophy is pragmatism (50).

Finally, whereas the Nigeria government, over the years, had applied different approaches towards solving unemployment, without succeeding, therefore, Dewey's philosophy of education using its basic tenets, could be entrepreneurial as well as therapeutic in curbing the phenomena of unemployment, and with more and more graduates with this frame of mind being released into the society, there would be fairness in the distribution of the burdens and benefits of social cooperation. For where everyone is treated fairly, unemployment would naturally disappear or be reduced to the lowest level.

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