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PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIAN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Freedom can be regarded as one of the top values for good life all over the world, but not every society understands its deep philosophical meaning. However, the deep philosophical meaning of freedom can help to use the concept properly in various aspects of life in a society. Ineffective access to education is the consequence of dearth of understanding of the concept of freedom. Therefore, the paper analyses the concept of freedom, concept of freedom in education and its implications for Nigerian education. Language analysis of concepts like concept of freedom, concept of freedom in education, was done in order to clarify their meaning, and to determine the implications of the concept of freedom for Nigerian Education. In this paper the findings revealed that the concept of freedom and freedom in education help to have great insight into the policy and practice of freedom in education in Nigeria. The paper concluded that Nigerian education as presently constituted is in disarray because different levels of public schools suffer from poor conditions of learning, high student-teacher ratio, overcrowded classrooms and they also have to pay money for uniform, buy books and so on in their process of having education. It is therefore recommended that Nigerian education should create adequate access to education by making adequate provision for school buildings, staffing, books and equipment that facilitate acquisition of knowledge and automatically make education accessible to every citizen.

KEY WORDS:

*Freedom,
Freedom in
Education,
Restriction,
Choice, Access,
Action*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development in science and its influence on people's ways of thinking and beliefs make the analysis of the concept of freedom and its implications for Nigerian Education an important concept to explain. This is because educational discussion is informed by freedom to analyse any issue and the way freedom is used will definitely influence what people thinks about

education in any society. Therefore, in the current democratic practice in Nigeria, freedom is held as a supreme value, because ideas about it directly affect the policies, practices, language and thought in relation to the curriculum of schools and issues of who makes educational decisions. Thus, the importance of analysing the concept of freedom and its implications for Nigerian education has become an essential condition in handling the numerous changes taking place all over the world in every field of human endeavour today. These changes show that an individual need free mind to comprehend what is going on in the environment in order to discover the factors that determine the changes all over the world with specific reference to Nigeria.

As it is in most countries of the world, Nigeria is equally passing through some changes and challenges, such as information explosion, human rights reform in all aspects of our national life and revolution in all aspects of human knowledge. Being free means the liberty to develop and grow in a free and democratic society. This raises the following questions: Is education free in Nigeria? If yes, to what extent? Going through Nigeria history, one would discover that the type of education given to an average Nigerian has not given him/her the necessary tool for freedom. This, therefore, establishes the justification for this paper. Moreover, from the basic level of education through secondary to tertiary, learners in Nigeria are not given full freedom to determine what is being taught to them, how it is being taught and what goal is being targeted. This idea may prevent learners from getting an ample opportunity to contribute to educational goals of their country. It is in the light of the above discussions that the paper undertakes a philosophical analysis of the concept of freedom and its implications for Nigerian Education.

Concept of freedom

Freedom is one of the most important concepts of intersection between the traditional branches of theoretical and practical philosophy. Freedom is of theoretical interest because people can wonder what freedom is, and whether or not they are capable of being free. And it is of practical interest because, given that they are capable of being free, and that being free is desirable, one can wonder how to live in such a way that this capability is mostly realised. What, therefore, in essence, is freedom?

It is interesting to note that to be free, in a simple sense, to be able to act without any hindrances (Ogionwo, 1972). Among different kinds of hindrances or obstacles to one's actions only some of them are considered as obstacles to freedom because being in police custody is a typical case of obstacle. But being ill is not in general regarded as being unfree. Being prevented from going abroad by the law enforcement agency is a case of lack of freedom, but being hindered by the Atlantic Ocean to go to United State of America by car is not considered to

be a kind of obstacle or a threat to the freedom of, say, a Nigerian (Ogionwo, 1972).

Similarly, the New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language (2004) sees freedom as exemption or liberation from slavery or imprisonment. It further explains it as an exemption from political restraint or autocratic control: independence, liberty of choice or action. "What every right-thinking being resents is an obstacle to effective choices, more so when the obstacles are as a result of the free action of another person. Usually, man regards himself as free in proportion to what he does or thinks and what he chooses without any restrictions from other people. In other words, he is free when he effectively carries out his desires within a range of alternatives without hindrances. One is held to ransom, to lack of freedom, when the range of one's choices is narrowed down by external barriers, such as law, authority or custom. Moreover, Peters (1966), sees freedom as a social principle where man is seen as a chooser, who has alternatives open to him, to choose from and who is autonomous with self-regulatory capacity. Being autonomous suggests that a person accepts or makes rules for himself. Hence, an autonomous person is expected to be authentic, which can be traced back to Socrates' "care of the soul." This asserts positively that there must be some features of a course of conduct, which an individual regard as important and which constitutes a non-artificial reason for pursuing it as distinct from extrinsic reason provided by praise and blame, reward and punishment artificially created by the demands of others. Peters (1966) reiterated further that a real man is a free or autonomous man who is expected to possess a rational reflection, to be aware of rules as alterable conventions, which structure his social life. He subjects them to reflection and criticism in the light of principles and gradually emerges with his own code of conduct. An autonomous, real and rational individual is expected to be heterogamous in his point of view; he is expected to be a strong-willed man, like the independently minded man and he sticks to his principles in the face of ridicule, punishment and bribes.

Charles De Montesquieu, a French philosopher and great political thinker quoted by Okaneme (2013) states that freedom is the right to do what the rules and regulation permits and this explains the rational perception of what freedom is all about. A nation that is free is the nation whose individuals have the unrestricted power to take their destiny in their hands and who are ready to chart their own course without recourse to external interference or being teleguided directly or indirectly from outside environment. Such a nation could be a self-defined, and self-driven one, owing no allegiance whatsoever to any foreign domination.

In addition, Freedom also implies that the citizens of a given society live most responsibly within the confines of the law because it is the right conduct of the citizens in a society that can guarantee law and order in that society hence, the degree of freedom that is available to citizens in any given society is a function of the degree of responsibility displayed by the citizens of that society.

Forexample, one cannot hope for a free society where citizens conduct their affairs outside the norms of their society. Such a situation could only lead to lawlessness and anarchy as it is in Nigeria today. One's freedom must not infringe on the freedom of another citizen; the freedom of a citizen should begin where that of another stops.

In the same vein, Berlin (1969) & Crittenden (1973: 79) assert that the term freedom has been used in many different senses and they classified these senses of its usage into the negative and the positive concepts. External negative freedom involves moral value that features removal of restriction, hindrance or coercion that can prevent an individual from claiming human right. Russell (2002) asserts the same opinion by saying 'freedom, in general, may be explained as the absence of hindrance to the realisation of a desire. That is, a man is free only when he does exactly what he wants to do, without any form of hindrance (Macmurray, 1932). In another dimension, external positive freedom involves presence of external conditions that make it possible for a person to do or possess certain things that can be regarded as human right. Berlin (2002), argues further that positive freedom is associated with the notions of self-realisation, self-perfection, self-governance, sovereignty, recognition, equality, and justice in a harmonious whole. Similarly, Crittenden (1973: 79) asserts in support of the above that external positive freedom also implies the presence of external conditions that make it possible for a person to do or possess certain things that can be regarded as human right. Therefore, Safaa Ahmed (2002) argues that, for an individual to be self-governing, it, at least, must be the case that the person is not moved by desires and values that have been oppressively imposed upon her, even if she faces no barriers in performing actions such desires motivate. Hence, the only true method of attaining freedom in the opinion of the researcher is by the use of critical reason, the understanding of what is important and what is contingent. It is on this note that the analyses of the concept of freedom in Education become imperative.

Concept of freedom in Education

Freedom in education in a simple sense implies that learners should have the right to determine their own lives as adults. Therefore, the concept of freedom in education, according to Amaele (2013), means the role of freedom in the achievement of education as a fundamental human right of the learner. Hence, education is one of the fundamental human rights in the United Nations declaration of human rights. Article 26.1 of the United Nations declaration of fundamental human rights states that:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to

all on the basis of merit (p.13).

Therefore, the above declaration does not only stress the needs for education but also considers education as a positive freedom. It means that if the position of freedom and its conception is anything to hold on to, then all member countries will not only have free and compulsory education but also make it accessible to all citizens of their countries. It also suggests that all those within the age limit of the primary and pre-primary will have equal education. Amaele (2013) stresses further that this declaration is based on the general belief attached to the importance of education.

Similarly, freedom in education implies that learners need the right to be choosers; they need help at the beginning to be good choosers, especially at an early age when they are still immature. These learners need open options and a variety of opportunities and suggestions from adults. Hopkins (1979), in his philosophy of freedom in education states that learners should be left free to choose and decide for themselves all matters that affect only them. Others may make suggestions that influence their decision but the individual learner makes the final choices. What one learns significantly affects only oneself. Therefore, learning can be seen to affect how one fulfils one's responsibilities to others. However, there are many ways of fulfilling one's responsibilities by choosing from a multitude of possibilities available to one.

Freedom in education equally depicts that no unjustified punishment should be exercised by teachers in the classroom where the learners learn. According to Downy and Kelly (1979) and Silk (1976) if the teacher is responsible for cultivating knowledge, arranging examinations and management of the learning situation, this would automatically give him or her a certain degree of authority. This means that the teacher is an authority in his or her subject (White, 1985). For instance, a language teacher of either Yoruba or French is expected to exercise his or her authority in deciding what aspect of the language should be taught first. Consequently, the more knowledgeable a student is in a particular subject, the less the authority that is needed to be exercised over him. Therefore, the need for authority here becomes a function of the opportunity to choose between the two languages; he or she does not have the right to exercise his or her authority on what language they should choose.

Russell (1870) stresses further that a great degree of freedom in education is derived not from man's natural goodness but from the effects of authority, both on those who suffer it and on those who exercise it. Those who are subject to authority become either submissive or rebellious, and each attitude has its set-backs. What is needed is neither submissiveness nor rebellion but good nature and general friendliness both to the learners and to new ideas. An unduly authoritative education turns the pupils into timid tyrants, incapable of either claiming or tolerating originality in words and deeds. Excessive highhandedness is often the effect of too much authority on spirited pupils. If the children are to grow into friendly adults, it is necessary that their environment in

most cases should be friendly too. This gives rise to consideration for others, not only in great matters but also in an everyday affair, which people know is an essential element in civilisation without which social life would be intolerable. Hence, the need to examine the extent to which the concept of freedom is reflected in Nigerian Education

The Extent to which the Concept of Freedom is Reflected in Nigerian Education

The history of modern education in Nigeria saw education at its embryonic stage as a private enterprise, established and nurtured by the missionaries. After the first missionary school was established by Wesleyan Methodist in 1842, by Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman at Badagry, others sprung up gradually in different parts of Nigeria before the state intervention in 1882, (Willson, 1977). In short, all through colonial era, education was heavily privatised and it was meant for the privileged few whose parents could afford it. At that time, great emphasis was placed on the liberal arts subjects, and the choice of the discipline to specialise on was restricted. This hampered the development of the individuals' freedom since the aim of education then was the production of teachers, clerical officers, priests and so on. The trend continued until independence when new policies were put in place.

The implementation brought about the establishment of more government schools at various levels of education. Based on the above discourse, radical educational programmes were introduced, such as universal free primary education in the South, especially in the West. Moreover, free education has always been re-echoed in every education document in Nigeria. For example, the national policy on education which was first launched in 1977 and revised 5 times and the latest one was that of 2013, states clearly that... "in pursuance of the above objectives, Government has made primary education free and universal by implementing the UBE scheme in September 1976" (FGN, 2013): Section 18 (3) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states that: Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy and to this end government shall, and when practicable, provide:

- a. free, compulsory and universal primary education;
- b. free secondary education; and c. adult literacy programme.

Therefore, the implication of all these is that there is a national belief that education should be made free, at least to the junior secondary school level in Nigeria. But, is education free? To what extent is education free in Nigeria? In reality, the so-called free education in Nigeria cannot be said to be free, because in primary schools the pupils still buy books, uniforms and other materials too. Also, in secondary schools, the students buy books, materials and uniforms, while only tuition can be said to be free. So, in reality, primary and secondary education in Nigeria does not manifest the implementation of the concept of freedom. In furtherance to the extent to which the concept of freedom is reflected

in Nigerian education as found in the national policy on education, provides that the philosophy of the Nigerian education shall among others be based on the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country. In order to realise equality of access to educational opportunities, the policy framework provides that government shall undertake the following measures:

- a. education activities shall be centered on the learner for maximum self-development and self-fulfillment;
 - b. education and training facilities shall continue to be expanded in response to societal need and progressively accessible to afford the individual a few more diversified and flexible choice;
 - c. universal Basic education in a variety of forms depending on the needs and possibilities shall be provided for all citizens;
 - d. educational assessment and evaluation shall be liberalised by their being based on whole or in part on the continuous assessment of the progress of the individual;
 - e. modern educational techniques shall be increasingly used and improved upon at all levels of the education system;
 - f. opportunity shall be provided for religious instruction as no child will be forced to accept any religious instruction which is contrary to wishes of his or her parents;
 - g. physical and health education shall be emphasised at all levels of education system; and
 - h. mass literacy programmes shall be provided free by government to the beneficiaries
- (FRN, 2013).

A critical expository analysis of the extent to which the stated philosophy of education in Nigeria has achieved the desired goals shows that the policy is more of theory than practical. There are clear indications that the educational programme implementation has to some extent not been very effective, because there is no practical evidence to show that all Nigerian children have equal access to education. In the words of Omatseye (2003), the fact that only those who can afford the cost of schooling send their children to school is anything but a just and egalitarian system. It has been impossible for government to eliminate situations in which the children of the poor are attracted to ill-equipped public schools and those of the wealthy to well-staffed and better-equipped schools. Until that day when the children of governors, ministers, commissioners and other highly-placed personalities in the society attend public schools which they

have built, shall the populace take government educational policies seriously. The national goal which stresses a united strong and self-reliant nation will remain a mere dream if every Nigerian child does not have the right to education. Mere policy statement and directive by the government is not enough, it should go further by matching words with appropriate actions. The Nigerian education as presently constituted is in a serious crisis because different levels of public schools suffer from poor conditions of learning, high student-teacher ratio, overcrowded classrooms, among the others due to lack of adequate distribution of budgets for different levels of education and provision of funding for national and local services by the state apparatus.

At present, many Nigerians do not have faith in the country let alone having faith in their leaders who embezzled the common wealth of the Nigerian nation and illegally send the looting funds to foreign countries. Nigerians have lost hope in themselves and they are becoming more suspicious of one another more than before because respects for culture, industry, honesty and values have been eroded. Compounding to these problems is the activities of Boko Haram insurgency have also posed serious security challenges to Nigeria in the sense that people in the affected region were been denied the choice of exercising their natural freedom to acquire education, due to destructions of life and property by violent Islamic sect. Therefore, the land is bright but not full of opportunities (NTI, 2006). However, considering the concept of freedom, it can be deduced that Nigeria still has a long way to go in ensuring the practicability of freedom in education because limiting learners' freedom still persists in various tertiary institutions, teachers' authority in decision making at the expense learners' right still features at all levels of education; over-emphasis on the science and technology-related subjects/courses, among others, portray the limit to which freedom is reflected in Nigerian education system.

Implications of the Concept of Freedom for Nigerian Education

An expository analysis of the concept of freedom and concept of freedom in education help to provide analyses on the conceptions of freedom and the conceptions of freedom in education. These help to have great insight into the policy and practice of freedom in education in Nigeria. For instance, the concept of freedom in Nigerian education shows that learners has

the right to be free to learn what is of interest to him with the help from other people, for example, a teacher, parents, and so on, but not controlled or under any influence. Teachers and parents should therefore, listen to the child in order to learn more about the child's views because freedom in education might help learners in Nigerian schools to develop their potentiality and make them autonomous, creative, self-learning, continuously learning, responsible, and to help them enjoy greater academic achievement.

Similarly, at the primary and secondary school levels of education in Nigeria the teacher do not have the freedom to teach what he considers more beneficial to learners because the curriculum which is the summary of all the school activities

handed over to him for implementation. The much he is expected to do is to organise the syllabus into a working scheme for the Head teacher or principal to cross-check and approve, while at the tertiary level of education, the teacher as a specialist in his area of specialization can decide to change the content of his course or modify the course after a period of time. His academic freedom as it affects teaching is not in doubt. But considering the situation in which it appears in primary and secondary schools the teachers are limited to what to teach.

Conclusion and recommendations

In this paper, it can be observed that freedom displays different pictures. These pictures seem to be in conflict with the liberal ideas of the free rational individual, choosing his own course in the light of reason or conscience and the plain fact that members of a society must understand that they need to forgo their own judgment and choices for what the society considers to be important. This is because they are expected to be in line with the values of the society, not because they recognise the society to be wiser or better, but because the society is in position of authority. Also, from the literature, freedom in education depends on a belief that children should have the right to determine their own lives in the process of education.

Hence, it is the argument of this paper that Nigerian education has not been successful enough in the provision of free education to learners as stated in the National Policy on Education (2013: 13) that education is a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenges. On the contrary education is not free across all levels of education in Nigeria to a large extent because Nigerian education as presently constituted is in disarray in fact, different levels of public schools suffer from poor conditions of learning, high student-teacher ratio, overcrowded classrooms, more so, students equally, have to pay school fees, buy books; they also have to pay for various things including admission constraint in their process of having education.

This implies that Nigerian education should adequately feature absence of hindrance and restrictions in relation to having access to education by making adequate provision for school buildings, staffing, books and equipment that facilitate acquisition of knowledge and make education automatically accessible to every citizen, such that every citizen could have access to educational provision to whatever level he choose to reach in life. Hence, if the right of every child to education is to be realized, the above mentioned provision needs to be sufficiently flexible and inclusive to address the learning needs of all children. It can, therefore, be concluded that for Nigeria as a nation to develop, freedom in education is the major necessity through which Nigerians could be equipped for the overall development of the nation.

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