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Friedrich Froebel's Pedagogy and the Quest for Moral Development in Modern Nigeria

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Abstract

The present moral bankruptcy in Nigeria is the primary impetus for this research. The moral bankruptcy which has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society manifests vividly through corruption, emergence of mentally and politically imbalanced individuals, lack of political will and the absence of the fear of God and respect for humanity. These have contributed to the decline of development in Nigeria across all fronts. On this note, it is urgent to give a critical examination and plausible solution to this problem in order to avoid a serious national catastrophe that may cause the end of Nigeria. This study uses the method of philosophical analysis to probe the moral foundation of Nigeria's problem and proposes Friedrich Froebel's concept of moral education as a feasible moral educational framework upon which Nigeria's moral problems can be reversed. Although this study agrees with Froebel's emphasis on teaching children at the tender age in Kindergarten, it goes beyond Froebel to recommend the importance of teaching morality and creative thinking to Nigeria's children even when it uses Froebel's pedagogy as fulcrum. A careful and faithful application of this method has the capacity to nurture the moral conscience and attitudes of Nigerians from infancy. When this pedagogy is applied, the result is the emergence of mentally and politically balanced citizens who can steer Nigeria toward attaining her yearning for social cohesion and stability.

Keywords: Friedrich Froebel; Moral Development; Nigeria; Pedagogy; Social Change; Moral Discipline

1. Introduction

The fundamental character of this study is to explore the pedagogy of morality as embedded in the reflections of Friedrich Wilhelm Froebel on discipline in formal education as can be applied

in Nigeria. As the scope of the study entails, it is the obligation here to discern in precise terms, what kind of moral education there is in Froebel's ideas that may serve as catalyst for Nigeria's quest toward improved morality and social cohesion. There is no doubt that there is a need for discipline and moral education within the space of Nigeria. This is the primary motivation for this paper. Before looking deeply into the issues involved in this work, it is essential to disclose the crux of education, finds expression in its ability to create a better society through production of individuals who are taught to uphold such virtues as: justice, integrity, love, truthfulness, and respect for human life, human dignity, discipline, kindness, hospitality, generosity, fidelity, altruism, hope, faith, equality, tolerance, and accountability. The achievement of these virtues by individuals guarantees a better human society which encourages societal growth and development. For moral development, education is an indispensable tool.

For the afore-stated aim to be actualized, this research begins with an exposition of the present state of moral development in Nigeria and why it is important to engage the topic. This is the focus of the next section. Afterward, attention shifts to the moral development theory of Friedrich Froebel as well as the ways that it can assist the quest for moral development through pedagogy that will inform socio-economic development. Essentially, the aim of this inquiry is to consider ways through which social change or what Karl Raimund Popper (1945) calls 'piecemeal social engineering' that is void of bloodshed can be achieved in society. The central questions that, therefore, guide this inquiry include but are not limited to: What is the state of the lack of morality and discipline within Nigeria's formal educational system? What kind of education is needed to correct moral anomaly that has eaten deep into the Nigerian system? What moral reflections are redolent in Froebel that may assist moral development and discipline within the formal education of Nigeria in the 21st century? How suitable and utilizable are Froebel's ideas for use concerning the Nigerian quest for stilling moral discipline through pedagogy?

2. Moral Discipline and the Nigerian Society

In this section, it is important to now entertain the lack of moral discipline in Nigeria's formal educational setting. We narrow our scope down to the place of cheating and the dent it has on human moral development of minds that soon enter society. Afterward, we contend with the non-negotiable place of moral education for formal education in Nigeria. Examination malpractices and related engagements have served as one of the unknown but serious impediments to inclusive development in Nigeria. The consequences of these kinds of realities have done more harm than good since the education sector in the country rather than being a haven for scholarship aimed to human and social development has been reduced to the production of minds that are not critical enough to challenge and improve the status quo. It is, therefore, not surprising why the country keeps lagging behind in matters of knowledge production and reproduction.

There is no doubt that "school examinations are a tool for measuring learners' mastery of content and instructors' effectiveness in delivering the content at different levels of schooling all over the world" (Nyamwange *et al*, 2013:13519). This idea has also been endorsed by Ongeru (2009:225) who opines that, "examinations are also used for placing students in various institutions and jobs and provide feedback in the teaching and learning processes and curriculum delivery in general". In Nigeria, examinations are conducted from nursery schools, through primary schools, secondary schools, tertiary colleges and universities.

After several weeks of learning and teaching, it is important to assess how the learner has fared for the duration of the period of knowledge acquisition (Graves, 2008:17). This assessment is calculated to indicate how well the learner can reproduce that which has been taught him/her as well as to unclad the adequacy of the tutor. By the adequacy of the tutor, we mean how the tutor is able to transmit knowledge to the learner. Impliedly, it is not the case that the teacher necessarily and sufficiently passes on knowledge to the learner in a way that the latter can grasp. In other instances, the

learner may just be too poor intellectually to comprehend what is being taught or just lackadaisical (Mitukaa, 2001:15). In spite of these glitches, examinations are still employed as the yardstick for knowledge comprehension and acquisition. Consequent of examinations, learners are introduced to society as persons with mastery of what they have been taught (Harris, 1988: 129). This is properly captured by E.B. Castle (1961:200) thus:

On leaving school, many of them will enter the world of the conveyor belt. In this world, young persons are living two lives at the same time – a nut-tapping life and a dream life. The problem for teacher is: how shall we enrich young workers' dream life? And the solution thoroughly probably lies in rightly-educate emotions, so that while he is turning his screws and she is filling her cigarette packs, day dreams arise from healthier subconscious.

In society, learners are expected to make theoretical assumptions of that which they have learned and examined over. Society too has placed premium on certification over competence. It is the case that certificates serve as a kind of determinism, restriction which assumes that one has not improved beyond what is stated on paper. To make our point clear, someone who graduates with a Third Class is not recognized in society because of that class of certification even when he has better ways of approach to issues, practical and technical skills in her field. Premium is placed on what the certificate says about the ability of the person implying that the possibility of improvement is foreclosed. This is not meant to override the importance of certification. Our point is that the craze for it has led to the miscarriage in the educational system. The standard of Nigeria's education system is currently on a downswing. The case of examination malpractice and the conferment of certificates to cheaters need serious theoretical and practical intervention.

Hence, it is no longer news that the assessment criterion, examination, has been compromised. Cases of examination malpractices and cheating have not only become widespread and accentuated but have also become the social norm. In Nigeria, the cases of 'special centre' for examinations – where schools aid and abet cheating and examination malpractices are tolerated and unchecked have become rampant. What is most demeaning is that teachers, the supposed guardians to knowledge comprehension, production and reproduction permit this cerebral taboo, paying less attention to what kind of learners they churn out for public use. Cheating and examination malpractice are horrors that stare Nigeria in the face. If unchecked, they become a catalyst and recipe for national disaster. At this juncture, it is not inappropriate to demand: what motivates cheating and examination malpractice?

Perhaps it is instructive to begin with the knowledge that cheating in examinations is a worldwide phenomenon (Nyamwange *et al*, 2013:13519). Nearly 21 percent of students who say cheating is bad still engage in the behavior (Kiogotho, 2009:15). For instance, cheating in school examinations is on the increase among students in secondary schools and colleges in Kenya. According to Siringi (2009:23-5), over 60 percent of the students in colleges and universities in Kenya admitted having cheated in examinations. This is also the case among Nigerians. This is endorsed by Jekayinta (2006 45-8) that "when students are poor, they are tempted to cheat".

Other reasons have been adduced for cheating in examinations. Another plausible motivation for cheating is "pressure to produce good grades because students have to pass before they can proceed to the next level of schooling" Nyamwange *et al* (2013:13520). It needs no elaboration that in Nigeria for instance, students face a lot of pressure to pass: from parents, teachers, peers and society in general. This pressure forces a number of them to cheat so as to be seen to be working hard. Parents want their children to score high marks and join prestigious schools. Teachers want excellence in their subjects so as to get as many awards as possible during prize giving. Society expects a student to do well regardless of the methods they employ Nyamwange *et al* (2013:13520). In a separate research but related to the present discourse, McCabe *et al.* (1999) have chronicled factors that can influence cheating such as a perceived need to get high grades, parental pressures, a desire to excel,

laziness, lack of responsibility, lack of character, poor self-image, and lack of personal integrity. Kerkvliet and Sigmund (1999) also found that instructors or lecturers were influential since students believed that their lecturers or instructors were concerned about them and were involved actively in the learning process, and therefore these students tended to cheat less. It is not to be contested at this juncture that examination malpractices and cheating are rife in almost all parts of Africa. Furthermore, citizens who have had certifications through a shoddy intellectual atmosphere will likely stumble on sensitive positions in the country. How will these minds thrive in such sensitive positions where grades but human lives and aspirations are at stake? It is necessary to take this key poser seriously given the finding of Graves (2008:17) that “students who cheat on tests are more likely to engage in dishonest activities in workplace than those who do not. Furthermore, such activities may harm not only their colleagues...but also the organization in which they work”. This claim is not only striking but very revealing of the current state of distrust, corruption, and tendency to be morally culpable in Nigeria.

Now that this section has been able to establish the basis or grounds that examination malpractice, the lack of intellectual discipline and lack of honest in Nigeria as one of the banes toward a viable society, it is important to consider the theory of moral development as provided by Friedrich Froebel to state how it can be useful for Nigeria’s moral and social development.

3. Friedrich Froebel’s Idea of Moral and Mental Development via Pedagogy

For Froebel, education depended on the unity of the family. The most important virtue for the mother was gentleness, while the father had to guide wisely. A home united by love would be the best institution for human progress. When the home failed in its responsibilities, the educator had the duty to instruct the parents in the paths of virtue. This does not imply puritanism. To Froebel, moral laws were reflections of the Absolute and our human understanding was limited. Humility was a primary virtue. Still, God was our inspiration and we could find him through the study of man, of nature, and of the universe (Sharma, 2002:369).

Like Emerson, Froebel believed in a fundamental unity. To study oneself and to study nature would lead to the same result: a recognition of the moral nature of the universe. The wise man was the good man, for virtue and knowledge were identical. Our moral education, according to Froebel, is strengthened through association. Hence, children should be brought up in a wholesome environment. They should be imbued with the ideals of co-operation.

To Froebel, play activities had primary significance; when a child played, he revealed his inner nature and at the same time developed patterns of socialization. We learn best by doing; theorizing is a minor aspect of education, according to Froebel. For example, we can talk about the good life to children and yet we will not influence them; what matters is that we live the good life and that our school activities are constructive.

For Froebel, mental growth is organic. In order to make a plant grow, we induce it to become active in its own natural way. We may seek to abridge the time or modify the result but we have to act through the plant’s own activity. The activity of a thing’s self may be called self-activity (Froebel, 1891:9). Knowing, feeling and willing are the three major activities of the mind (Sharma, 2002:370). Exercises directed towards mental development must be in complete accord with the process of knowing, feeling and willing, and at the same time proportionately balanced accordingly to their strength. We find the result better if the activity is that of the whole mind. In other words, knowing, feeling and willing must all take their rightful share in the exercise, and in particular, feeling and willing—the mind’s powers of prompting and nourishing, of maintaining and directing its own activities—must never be neglected. As Carlyle once said: “A divine message or eternal regulation of the universe there verily is, in regard to every conceivable procedure and affair of man; faithfully following this, said procedure or affair will prosper...not following this...destruction and wreck are certain for every affair” (Quoted in Sharma, 2002:370). These words of Carlyle aptly

express Froebel's thought on education. We must first of all ascertain the divine message before we attempt to educate. Froebel believes that this divine message may be learnt by studying the nature of organism. As a result, each human being for Froebel (1891:12) must "develop from within self-active and free, in accordance with the eternal law. This is the problem, and the aim of all education is instruction and training; there can be and should be no other." In the term, self-activity may be summed the general method advocated by Froebel. To him the soul itself is an activity. To be active is inherent in our nature. With our birth we bring certain tendencies which always prompt us to action. Thus mind is a purposive activity. Froebel believes that mind is a unity just as life is also a unity. Mind has no independent faculties. All its powers and forces are organically related like branches and leaves to a tree.

For sound mental growth of the child, Froebel suggests that there should be no gulf between home and school. The influence of the two should be organically connected, otherwise purpose of education is sure to be defeated. Froebel contends that the unity between the various stages of mental growth—infancy, childhood, youth, manhood—should not be lost sight of, otherwise education would be of no avail. There should be a connection between the various activities of the mind and the various aspects of life. Froebel (1891:14) calls this relation between the two 'interconnectedness'. The realisation of this interconnectedness should constitute one great aim of education.

With the ideas of Froebel on morals and mental development now articulated, it is now important to return to how one may see the usefulness within the Nigerian space of formal education. This is the focus of the next section.

4. Friedrich Froebel's Theory of Moral Development via Pedagogy and Nigeria's Educational System

The place of Froebel's philosophy of child development has great potential and utility for use to developing moral and disciplinary outlooks in Nigeria. Since we have already highlighted the lack of morality and discipline in Nigeria's formal education in the second chapter and also discussed the essence of moral development in Froebel's reflections in the present chapter, it is now imperative to draw plausible inferences for pragmatic utility.

It is important to understand that the notion of a balanced life or individual is essential in Froebel. Froebel does not rule out the fact that there are bad and negative traits that are natural or original to us. His point is that it is pertinent to cultivate the good aspects as to be able to overcome the bad aspects. In the words of Froebel (1891:289):

Man is by no means naturally bad, nor has he originally bad or evil qualities and tendencies, unless, indeed, we consider as naturally evil, bad, and faulty the finite, the material, the transitory, the physical as such, and the logical consequences of the existing of these phenomena, namely, that man must have the possibility of failure in order to be good and virtuous, that he must be able to make himself a slave in order to be truly free. Yet these things are the necessary concomitants of the manifestation of the eternal in the temporal, of unity in diversity, and follow necessarily from man's destiny to become a conscious, reasonable, and free being.

The above is a very good description of the human condition which allows one to understand that there is no individual that is wholly good or wholly bad. In this connection, Froebel expatiates:

A suppressed or perverted good quality—a good tendency, only repressed, misunderstood, or misguided—lies originally at the bottom of every shortcoming in man. Hence the only and infallible remedy for counteracting any shortcoming and even wickedness is to find the originally good source, the originally good side of the human being that has been repressed, disturbed, or misled into the shortcoming, and then to foster, build

up, and properly guide this good side. Thus the shortcoming will at last disappear, although it may involve a hard struggle against habit, but not against original depravity in man; and this is accomplished so much the more rapidly and surely because man himself tends to abandon his shortcomings, for man prefers right to wrong... (Froebel, 1891:291)

These excerpts speak a lot not only to morality and discipline in general but to the Nigerian status quo where indiscipline, mediocrity and docility have been elevated to the status of the ideal. As we mentioned in chapter two, there are cases or instances when the morally culpable individual who graced the questionable place of moral education and discipline in Nigeria may serve family and society negatively. It is also instructive to explain that there have been attempts to overcome this angle from a strictly philosophic dimension by Oladele Balogun (2008). We shall engage him critically and point out the problems with his recommendation and why the use of Froebel's method and his style to teach morality and discipline (even if it will be from African tradition and culture) is pertinent. Balogun is fairly certain that "philosophy can rescue contemporary African culture from its diminished moral values by ethically engaging in the construction-and-reconstruction-of new values [*sic*].

Three of such inter-related values are motherhood, fatherhood, and education" (Balogun, 2013: 39). Impliedly, Balogun sees a very deep connection among these terms in his articulation of the process of human development in any society. We shall, within the paragraphs that follow, engage the reflection of Balogun on parenthood and education. For Balogun, the emergence of a well-nurtured and trained mind to occupy social roles must take cognizance of the role of parents. It is his insistence that "many of the causes of the problems of social degeneration and decay could be avoided if there are good fatherhood and motherhood in place to nurture, protect and guide the child for moral goodness and positive greatness" (Balogun, 2013: 40). He continues that "good motherhood and fatherhood produce politically balanced candidates of good leadership qualities in politics. In a state where there is a strong consciousness towards authentic motherhood and fatherhood in nurturing leadership qualities of citizens, there is always a visible presence of political development" (Balogun, 2013:41).

Furthermore, Balogun (2013: 41) insists that "the more the number of these nurtured citizens the better the economy of the state." Again, the implication to be drawn is that if properly given the right attention and devotion, parenthood can serve as a platform that will nurture minds that will consequently inform national development. However, it is important to stress that between positive parenthood and the emergence of the nurtured minds that will effect social upliftment, ideology plays a very crucial role. It is not enough for parents to just impart positive values. The society must be willing and ready to also assimilate these minds as well. There is an ideology in every society which determines not only the kind of education but also parenthood.

Concerning education, Balogun (2008) is apt when he asserts that "the prevalent understanding of an educated person in contemporary Africa is that of a pure Western conception. In such a conception, an educated person is often construed as having academic qualifications, as well as possessing some capacities such as prowess, technological compliance, among others" (Balogun, 2008:123). While these are in themselves necessary, given the rise of the continuous fostering and integration of the people of the world, they are not enough. Balogun (2008) laments the neglect of the traditional African understanding of education which has the capacity to initiate a holistic and pragmatic sweep for development in Africa. Balogun (2013:122) stresses this point clearly thus:

The contemporary neglect of the African notion of an educated person has made literacy education a basis for the cultivation of abysmal ignorance, greed, individualistic acquisition, and all sorts of vices. In view of our craze for formal education without due consideration for the ethical dimension, social vices have escalated at a rate of geometric progression. Thus, all eyes are on paper qualifications, without consideration for

moral probity, intellectual creativity or problem-solving capacity. The resultant effects of these are obvious: examination malpractices, nepotism, mediocrity at the expense of meritocracy, in public, private and corporate places, corruption, unemployment, and high crime wave with the long-run effects of all these anomalies leading to political instability, social disorder, and stunted growth.

Balogun's showing in the foregoing contains the truthful, the untruthful, the exaggerated and the doubtful. We refuse to concede to Balogun's stance that the lack of the African idea of an educated person is an efficient causation for the spate of poor parenthood among contemporary Africans. This is not entirely true as there are cases of greed and domination. There are traditions that depict kings who take the wives of their subjects at a snap. For instance, the *Ibadan* leaders, when asked to give up *Ekiti* as a subject in 1885 responded crisply: "the Ekiti were their wives, their slaves, their yams, their palm oil, etc" (Awe, 1973:68). As a matter of fact, kidnapping of members of one town by another were so rampant that "a special gag was invented for the mouth of human beings to prevent any stolen from crying out and being discovered...so bad were those days at Ibadan and so callous had the people become that if a woman or child was heard to cry out...O help me, I am taken, the usual answer from indoors was...you can go along with him" (Johnson 1921:245-6).

Much as there were corrupt officials schooled in ancient Greece but intrepid to sentence Socrates to consume the hemlock, so were traditional Africans trained in the traditional education that Balogun praises so much but morally culpable too. Kings, kingmakers, chiefs and even the citizens in traditional Africa display these fallible aspects of human nature. Supposedly, these persons would have had the kind of education that Balogun (2008) recommends for contemporary use. It is doubtful if the admission of education that Balogun (2008) recommends for contemporary use. It is doubtful if the admission of traditional African notion of the educated into contemporary scholarship can serve as a dais for the emergence of educated mind envisaged by Balogun. Throughout his thesis, Balogun (2013; 2008) did not demonstrate in practical terms how this may be achieved. His analysis reminds one of the utopian approach that has been leveled against Plato by Popper (1945).

In as much as it is true that there is great emphasis on paper qualification and degrees in contemporary Africa as discerned from Balogun's analysis, it is not completely true to say that formal education places not enough emphasis on morals. Social vices and morally blameworthy individuals and acts are parts and parcels of any society. Hence, to say as Balogun does that "formal education" accounts for "social vices" that have "escalated...rate of geometric progression" (Balogun 2008:123) is nothing but exaggeration. There is no African country among the list of the most peaceful places with minimal crime ratios in the world (Locke 2018). Is this also a consequence of formal education at the expense of African traditional education? Without formal education and its undue emphasis on certifications and qualifications, wars, political instability, the fall of empires obtained in pre-colonial Africa (Falola, 2018).

We can see from the above analysis that merely returning to Africa's glorious past without taking cognizance of the reality of civilization and globalization of ideas is like failing to admit to reality. The world has moved beyond merely returning to traditional ideals in a bid to attain moral development and discipline that will function within the specter of Nigeria's formal education. The use of Froebel's discourse on moral and child development as well as discipline therefore is more appropriate and relevant. This is not because Froebel dissects the human agency and condition, naturally, but because he also provides the ways or methods through which one can teach these to the younger minds. In effect, the formal educational system of Nigeria will gain a lot from Froebel's philosophy of child development. Specifically, Froebel's ideas find articulation through instruction concerning how it can filter and provide its relevance within the Nigerian space.

5. Conclusion

Assuming education is really to benefit the individuals and the society; it must be imbued with morality in a very high degree. Education must not be separated from morality. Education should

promote values of the society in the learners so that they will have a greater appreciation of their cultural heritage. There should be a proper implementation of value and value judgment in the school curriculum as stipulated by the National Policy of Education. It is therefore pertinent to check through education from a tender age, the wane in moral discipline in the Nigerian society using Froebel as cue.

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