

HOLISTIC LEARNING: GUARANTEE FOR JOB CREATION AND SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

If indeed Nigerians are anxious to get on as a virile and dynamic country, there is no other alternative than to make the education process attractive and sufficiently competitive, to be able to elicit the best and so raise the standard of teaching and learning. By so doing, learners will be influenced beyond the limits of their mental culture as to think in divergent manner and thus, be able to exhibit qualities of inter and intra-disciplinary transfer of knowledge, which ultimately would make for the togetherness and enhancement of mankind. This paper therefore examines the process of holistic education of learners for sustainable national development through job creation

Introduction

Holistic learning as its name implies, is a term made up of two concepts: *Holistic* and *Learning*. The former represents something that is “whole”, “being” and “completeness,” rather than a collection of parts; whole phenomenon rather than just the symptom; while the latter (learning), involve a process of knowing something through reading and studying; a process of finding out about a subject or phenomenon.

There are several definitions of the concept of learning (being an independent variable as applied in this discourse) as there are several scholars. According to Curzon (1980), learning is considered as the apparent modifications of a person’s behaviour through his activities and experiences so that his knowledge, skills and attitudes, including modes of adjustment towards his environment are changed, more or less permanently, Ekeruo (1989) defined learning as a relatively part

permanent change in behaviour as evidenced by a change in performance through practice, training or experience.

Current realities of the Nigerian situation have summed up to provoke a discourse of this nature because our educational experiences have completely proved to be inadequate in preparing its beneficiaries for the increasing difficulties associated with a fast changing world. These among others informed Nwankwo's (2006) comment that "there are two things that now guide the reaction of an average Nigerian and none of the two has to do with honesty, integrity and fairness. The two things are related to personal advantage; it is either money or power... "This is a statement of fact because many Nigerians lack holistic or an all-round education that liberates the mind, body and soul from the shackles and manacles of poverty, hunger, disease and ignorance. Eduwen (1999) defined learning as a relative permanent change in behaviour resulting from practice or experience. In this wise, learning is essentially considered a process of adapting to and improving the environment.

Holistic learning therefore, is predicated upon Prof. Laird's Holistic Learning Theory (cited in Wikipedia O.J.'s book, Applied Behaviour Analysis), which states that the individual personality consists of many elements... specifically... the intellect, emotions, the body impulse (or desire) intuition and imagination (Laird, 1985:121). He further stated that all the above elements require activation, if learning is to be more effective. This will lead them to place emphasis on importance

of experience, meaning problem solving and the development of insights. He went further to note that this theory has developed the concept that individuals have different needs and concerns at different times and that they have subjective interpretations in different contexts.

It has been asserted at several fora that the present education experience in Nigeria, and by extension, in the African continent, are lacking in essential quality. The curriculum everywhere as currently conceived is restrictive or not purposeful enough to awaken the inner resources of our youths. At best, the curriculum is like a mechanical device for mass production of rote-learners. It hardly evokes an educational experience.

At the primary and secondary levels where the unfolding energies of the child should be enhanced and anchored in wholesome rhythms (such as music, stage drama, poetry), he is rather exposed most of the time to matters that affect only the memory and not the mind; hence, the need to examine the subject of students' all-round learning as panacea for job creation and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Nigeria's adoption of the 6-3-3-4 system of education in the 1980's gave an indication as it were, of our realization of the utilitarian value of holistic education. But, as it has been in all other sectors of the Nigerian life, the endemic problem of the "Nigerian factor" of non-commitment, corruption and haphazard implementation of all programmes initiated in the country to bring about positive advancement in the country's fortunes; the 6-3-3-4 system

suffered the fate of failing even before actually started. There was dearth of qualified personnel to handle most of the sophisticated equipment imported and distributed to our schools, there was the problem of irregular supply of electricity which most of the equipment depended on; there was the problem of poor storage facilities and lack of security etc.

At this point, product of the system from their cumulative academic records, would have been properly categorized into areas where they have aptitudes and capacities based on their individual abilities (performances) to either proceed to complete the remaining 3-4 years which are for the senior secondary school and university education: whereas, the other group who cannot proceed would still be useful to themselves and society by picking up a vocation in any trade in which their aptitude would have been determined.

Fantastic as the 6-3-3-4 system of education seems on paper, and after several years of adoption as the country's system of education, our education experience has never shown any marked improvement. Some scholars have argued that the system failed not because parents and students did embrace it, but due to government's inability to adequately prepare teachers who were going to implement the system at the school and classroom level.

To this end, it must be pointed out that the dream of achieving holistic learning for students would be a mirage, if the role of teachers were not adequately addressed. It must also be stated that curriculum in the Nigerian educational system, should be made more sensitive to

the higher needs of the human personality. It ought to be so organized as to prepare the youth, to opt not only for greater versatility in an increasingly complex world, but also for better cultural empathy with different religious and political system.

The second need is related to the first: that is the need for an adequate teacher training programs. This is because no matter how well developed or properly interpreted the curriculum is, it will come short of our expectations,, unless it is applied by teachers who are themselves, products of such educational philosophy.

Though there were several factors that affect learning either positively or negatively- scholars have opined that students' holistic learning can be achieved if teachers who are major stakeholders in the education industry contribute their own quota by providing motivation through:

- (a) Getting students into a situation in which learning can occur (arousal)
- (b) Help keep students' attention directed on one part of the situation rather than another;
- (c) Energizing or activating learners to be mentally alert;
- (d) Help to make learners readily influenced by whatever reinforcement (reward) that is available, etc.

Elements of the Learning Process

The learning process consists of many elements. Curzon (1980) identified these elements as follows:

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1. **The Learner**

A learner whose nervous systems, senses and muscles are operating in sequences of patterned activity which we may speak of, as behaviour.

2 **The Materials to be Learned**

A teacher selecting and organizing instrumental methods, consciously planning and controlling a situation directed to the achievement of learning. This, of course, relate to a series of objectives geared towards anticipated behaviour changes.

3 **The Learning Technique or Method of Instruction**

Learning technique essentially, involves a sequence of stimulus- response situations, response situations, resulting in persistent and observable changes in the behaviour of the learners, reinforcement of that behaviour put up by such learner as well as monitoring, assessing and evaluating the learners changes in behaviour in relation to the objectives.

It was Robert Einstein who propounded his famous Law of Relativity and over night, Time, Space and Matter became related concepts and any of them became describable only in terms of the other. Thus, the whole dynamic equilibrium of nature with the effects of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, late in the 19th century, took on an increasingly revealing meaning. Darwin had shown that complex and living things evolve from simple ones or even from single cells in a balance of progressive interactions.

Individually in this regard, this proposition took on a much greater meaning than ever than ever in subsequent years.

The worth of an individual subsists in the context of the value of his interaction with the elements of a given environment. This may be in form of his relationship with his colleagues, the performance of his duties, his treatment of his subordinates, his sense of judgment or the care of his home. Whatever the event, it is the outcome that determines its meaning. This is when we will be right to judge a person's action as having acted in an "educated manner".

Imperatives of Holistic Education

Implied earlier in the discourse, is the view that education is a synthetic experience, which consists of a variety of events. For example, the literacy critic, the student of the performing arts, the sculptor, the poet and the historian; are also engaged in the manipulation of their environment. They are all subject to the basic, indeed universal demands of patience, system, proportion and humility itself; hence, we can in fact, state that any field of interest that fails to evoke these elements of character cannot be considered a worthwhile subject for study.

The point being made here is that while undergoing training in one field, one is simultaneously exposed to a variety of influences. All these will exert their total pressure on one's capacity for feeling, experience and judgments. The ultimate meaning is reflected in kind of taste, outlook, motivational level that one carries from a schooling situation into life. One's

education therefore, can be understood more appropriately in terms of these elements of character, taste outlook, motivation, etc. They are the permanent effects of learning.

Factors Enhancing Holistic Education

Holistic learning as aforementioned has been said to be a complex and dynamic process that requires the assistance of competent teachers. Among other, Eduwen (1999) classified the factors affecting learning into eight and they are as follows:

- 1 **Intelligence:** The more intelligent the child, the more easily will he spot relevant relationships between objects or ideas and apply them to new, but similar situations.
- 2 **Age:** The age of a child affects his educational ability. A child needs to attain the maturation level of schooling before being confronted with tasks that are relevant to his academic pursuit.
- 3 **Relevant Experience:** The experience acquired in previous situation has direct meaning with learning. This facilitates the learning of a new task in that particular field or similar event.
- 4 **Motivation:** The degree to which a child is motivated, determines the energy, he will put into the learning process. In fact, motivation with interest facilitates learning and easy recall.
- 5, **Reinforcement:** Reinforcement increases the likelihood of a response recurring. This refers to

knowledge of results. Reinforcement in the classroom can take the form of reward to encourage the individual. If a learned activity is not rewarded there is the possibility that the activity may not reappear in future behaviour.

6. **Practice:** There is need for continuous practice to make the learning process interesting and easy. Practice is synonymous with repetition that makes learning easily assimilated and reproduced at the time of need.
7. **Observation:** Learning comes through observation and serves as a guide towards better performance. Children should form the habit of exploring the environment through the observation of relevant instructional materials.
8. **The Teacher's Role:** The role played by the teacher is a crucial aspect of students acquiring holistic learning. As a result of the teacher's professional training, he is able to identify the learner's needs, interest, aptitudes, problems etc. and then design instructional programme to cater for individual differences in the classroom.

Categories of Learning

Learning as an act, come in various forms, which Gagne (1970) classified into eight different categories. The eight categories are hierarchical in the sense that the higher level types of

learning, are assumed to depend on lower-level materials before progressing to higher ones.

These levels and conditions for each are as follows:

- (a) **Type I: Signal Learning.** This is the simplest form of learning, which involves primarily diffused emotional reactions. It is particularly appropriate for explaining the acquisition of fear responses in young children.
- (b) **Type II: Stimulus – Response Learning -** This can be seen as the formation of a single bond between a stimulus and a response. A good example of this is the trial and error form of learning as propounded by Thorndike.
- (c) **Type III: Chaining –** This deals with the formation of sequences of motor stimulus – response link.
- (d) **Type IV: Verbal Association –** Verbal Association. These are chains of verbal expressions which involve developing the ability to use words in sequence.
- (e) **Type V: Determination Learning -** which involves learner's ability to respond differentially to similar stimulus input.
- (f) **Type VI: Concept Learning:** This results from the ability of learners to respond to similarities.
- (g) **Type VII: Rule Learning –**Rules are statements relationship among related concepts. It is a chain that enables an individual to respond to

different situations in similar, rule-regulated ways.

- (h) **Type VIII: Problem Solving –** This involves the “thinking out” of a solution to a problem by combining old rules in order to form new ones. An essential condition necessary for problem solving is the presence of the appropriate rules in this learner's repertoire.

Utility Value of Skills and Knowledge

It must be noted however, that the facts of skill and knowledge do not in themselves, educate or determine the quality of a country's level of educational progress. Education on its own, grows from the experiences gained by the acquisition of skills and knowledge; hence, the popular saying that “non-dynamic and un-generative level of skill and knowledge, sustain their own repetitions and cannot therefore raise the level either of a nation's culture or of its educational quality. Any field of study or discipline pursued in sufficient depth and breaths, evokes its own interactive experience with other disciplines which create their own virtue and humility.

At this point, it needs to be asserted that complete education implies development in seed; just as the process of germination are internal to the seed (the nutrient materials merely provoking that intense activity), the process of education remains the self activity of each individual person., All factors of the external environment – namely teaching of skills and knowledge, experience of great virtue

and humanity, contact with the first rate and objects of excellence in art and life; etc, if appropriately presented and sufficiently dynamic in their evocative impact, would aid the personal process of being holistically educated.

Conclusion

Ultimately, holistic education imbues in its beneficiary a homo-ecstatic feeling (an equilibrium between his internal and external environment). By so doing, such an individual will have a sense of fulfillment 'that he exists'. When this happens, he then has the knowledge that he breathes and talks. At this point, he then begins to ask questions, think, search, experience, learn, grow, wish, find, doubt, understand, know, be curious, and would want to know more.

Consequently, Essien (1975) opined that holistic education helps the individual develop and radiate a healthy energy field called the aura even as it allows him to exude a positive mental attitude, which are prerequisites for survival in this present world of uncertainties. At this level, he will be able to generate employment and become an employer of labour with a corresponding effect of guaranteeing a sustainable educational and overall national development.

Recommendations

To achieve the nation's dream of attaining the millennium development goals upon which our current vision 2020:20 is predicated, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is the need for policy formulators to go back to the drawing board to assess and reassess the state of education so as to get our priorities right.
2. More seminars and conferences as presently being organized by stakeholders in the education industry should be held so that a proper position as to the desirability of the present system of education as being implemented would be determined.
3. John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy of education which a country like the United States of America has been operating and which has given them their present status of the world's greatest in all human endeavour, is highly and strongly recommended for the Nigerian system to grow and get out of the woods.
4. The 6-3-3-4 educational system needs to be properly and diligently implemented for its products to have the full benefit of holistic education.

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