

ARISTOTELIAN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NIGERIAN CHILD

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Abstract

The paper analysed the societal values of Aristotelian philosophy of education for the development of the Nigerian child. It recognized that Aristotle, through his understanding of the works of Socrates and Plato, believed that the aim of education consists of an effort towards dispelling error and a process towards discovering truth that is innate in the human soul, indispensably linked with the values of the body in the quest of happiness and tranquility, rather than the pursuit of mere pleasure. The paper explicated the values of the contents of education that are dependent on the power or the exercise of the mind in attaining knowledge. Most of what formed Aristotle's thought today was emphatically influenced by the Socratic idealism and Plato dialectics in understanding of the human person and the world. In his Politics, it is arguably put that that the state is a plurality that should be made into a

community by education, where Aristotle insisted that states should be responsible for educating their citizens. Hence, the paper recognized the consciousness for the formation of the Nigerian Child, especially, in laying values of his/herself and then, to his or her societies. Adopting the expository method of analysis, the paper concluded that to achieve the courses of development which are dependent on the values of human person, the contents of education should be directed to educate an average Nigerian child as a sound mind in a very sound body, by the provision of human-friendly, conducive and peaceful environment that are adequate enough for schooling, in order to maximize his or her creative and innovative skills in love, trust and truth.

Keywords: Aristotle, Development, Human Person, Nigerian Child, Philosophy of Education

Introduction

As we survey the whole cause of human's developmental status from the earliest times to the present, and from the most primitive and simple to the most complex ways of living, we are strongly impressed by the fact that wherever men lived together, there has been some group interest in educational activities of the human person as a subject of lived experience and as the real agent of development (Uzomah & Isanbor 2019: 55). The economics of education indicates that as the group becomes more complex, this interest grows and institutions definitely charged with the task of teaching are created, thus the school comes into existence and an educational system begins to evolve for the development of the human person and his or her societies (Iyamu & Isanbor 2024^b). Considering this fact deeply, this study shall examine the concept of education from the different perspectives of some thinkers and most especially, the Aristotelian notion of education of the human person at the early childhood stage of development. Basically, for Aristotle, the goal of education is identical with the goal of the human person. Obviously, all forms of education are

explicitly or implicitly directed towards a human ideal and his or her quest for development that is sustainable and authentic. Aristotle considers that education is essential for the complete self-realization of the human person as an agent of development. The supreme good to which all aspire is happiness. For Aristotle, the happy person is neither a noble nor a savage in his or her natural state, but the educated individual. The happy person, the good person, is a virtuous individual, but virtue is acquired precisely through education. Aristotle proposed that education should ultimately seek to create a sound mind in a sound body (Iyamu & Isanbor 2024^b). This means that the three most sublime powers of the human person as a learner are the intellectual, moral and physical faculties, and these natures of the human person must be integrally formed by education.

The existing Nigerian education came in to being as an instrument "par excellence" for attaining the set national objectives and goals as enshrined in the country's National Policy on Education. But, the challenges are only being felt at the level of governmental willingness implementing the contents of such policies of development. Every sovereign nation has its goals aspiring to achieve and the process through which the goals would be achieved. Nigeria as a sovereign nation too has a system of education designed to respond to the needs of the nation in order to make possible achieving the objectives. The exploration juxtaposes the ideas of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle with the cultural and social context of the average Nigerian child and his

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or her quest for development (Iyamu & Isanbor 2024^b). This is meant to spark a thought provoking discussion that explores how Aristotle's philosophical concepts especially that of education can be used to explore the different experiences and worldview of an average Nigerian Child as an agent of development. His thoughts are applicably relevant in the lives of children in our modern day Nigeria and how adaptable his philosophy is despite the cultures and norms of the Nigerian people with which children are catered for. This work therefore seeks to answer the following questions; how can Aristotle's ideas on character development and ethics be applied to the moral education of Nigerian children? How can Aristotle's ideas be used to address the contemporary issues affecting Nigerian children such as education, poverty, and social justice? Therefore, the paper seeks to expose the possible adaptability of Aristotle's philosophy to the context to the training of Nigerian child for the purposes of maximizing his or her creative and innovative abilities for the achievement of the courses of development.

Meaning of Philosophy of Education

Education as a concept has been defined in various ways by different educationists based on their perspectives (Uzomah & Isanbor 2019: 49-51). There seems to be a general consensus from different definitions which can be grouped as seeing education as a process or as a product. For John Dewey, education is the reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience; he argues that education is a continuous process in which one step prepares the way for the next (Itedjere 1997: 10-11). Although not all experiences are educative, experience must be both direction and continuity. For Alfred North Whitehead, education is the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge. Whitehead recognized that the human person becomes different or transformed as a result of education. Socrates on his part sees education as a process towards discovering truth that is innate in the human soul. In other words, education aims at drawing out what is already within the student. But for Aristotle, education from the realist perspective is the creation of a sound mind in a sound body. It develops human's faculty especially his mind so that he may be able to enjoy the contemplation of supreme truth.

Philosophy of education is thus a statement or set of statements that identifies and clarifies the beliefs, values and understanding of an individual or group with respect to education. Defined in this sense, it may be thought of as a more or less organized body of knowledge and opinion on education, both as its conceptualized and practiced. A philosophy of sort is critical in defining and

directing the purposes, objectives and focus of a school. It should also serve to inspire and direct educational planning, programmes and process in any given setting. Philosophy of education can also be seen as the branch of practical philosophy concerned with the nature of education, as well as the philosophical issues that can arise from educational theory and practice (Uzomah & Isanbor, p. 56). Therefore, the major philosophies of education can be divided into three main types: teacher-centered philosophies, student-centered philosophies, and society-centered philosophies. Philosophy of education also refers to the examination of the goals, forms, methods and meaning of education. The term can be used to describe fundamental philosophical analysis of these themes and analysis of practical pedagogical approaches. Its subject matter includes both basic philosophical issues, such as the nature of knowledge that is worth teaching and learning and the state of educational justice as well as problems concerning practical educational policies and practice, such as standardized testing or the social, economic, and legal implications of school funding.

Aristotle's Concept of Education

Aristotle was born in 384 B.C. in Stagira in northern Greece. Both of his parents were members of traditional medical families, and his father, Nicomachus, served as court physician to King Amyntus III of Macedonia. His parents died while he was young, and he was likely raised at his family's home in Stagira. At age 17, he was sent to Athens to enroll in Plato's Academy. Aristotle was a teacher of Alexander the Great, and also, a philosopher, scientist and realist. Arguably, he was the greatest thinker in psychology, politics and ethics in his time. Aristotle became a disciple of Plato for about twenty years. Nevertheless, as a philosopher, his mode of philosophizing and his temperament were quite different from those of his master, Plato. While Plato was inclined towards rational speculation, he was inclined towards empirical research on the nature of realities. Within the thought development in the *Academy*; Plato held that the concept of education is to select men for the various duties of different social groupings or civilization. In each case however, he sought to pick men in terms of their abilities as discovered by a system of education. It is evident that Plato held education to be a matter of state concern. It was supported and controlled by the state and its function was to select and train men for service in the state. Plato believed that if the state would adopt this system of education, it would produce an ideal society in which everyone would be doing the work for which he was suited and trained and thus would be happy (Frost, insert year p. 211). However, Aristotle left the *Academy*

and found his school known as the *Lyceum*. He died in 322 BC.

Aristotle's philosophy on education was rooted in his belief that education is a key component of a good life. According to Aristotle, the main goals of education should be to develop virtues and practical wisdom (Aristotle 1976: 10-16). He believed that education should involve both theoretical and practical learning. Here are some key aspects of Aristotle's philosophy on education (Kosman 1985). Aristotle's virtue ethics, an ethical theory, is that which emphasizes the importance of developing good character traits, such as honesty, courage, and justice, in order to lead a good life. In his virtue ethics, Aristotle believed that education should focus on the development of virtues like courage, justice, and temperance. Aristotle believed that education should teach students how to use their knowledge in practical ways to solve real-world problems. This is also referred to as practical wisdom. This for him means the wisdom that would help or enable them to live a morally good life.

Unlike Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, Aristotle's treatises do not contain lengthy discussions on education. His most explicit discussion of education, in Books 7 and 8 of *The Politics*, ends without being completed. Yet, like Plato, Aristotle's educational thinking was inseparable from his account of pursuing the highest good for human beings in the life of a community. The science of politics takes into account the conduct of the individual as inseparable from the conduct of the community. Thus Aristotle holds that ethics is a part of politics; and equally, politics is a part of ethics. This leads him to argue that the end of individuals and states is the same. In as much as human beings cannot realize their potentiality apart from the social life that is necessary for shaping their mind and character, an investigation into the nature of society is a necessary companion to an investigation into the nature of ethics. The good life is inescapably a social life, and this is the expected life of conduct in a community. For Aristotle, "*The Good of man must be the end of the science of Politics*" (Aristotle 1975). In community life, the activity of doing cannot bring into existence something apart from doing; it can only "end" in further doing. And education, as one of the activities of doing, does not produce anything apart from education, but must be a continuous process that has no end except further education.

In Aristotle's explicit remarks about the aims of education, like all activities in pursuit of the good life, education is practical in that it is a way of conduct, of taking action. At the same time, in pursuing the good life, the aim is to know the nature of the best state and the highest virtues of which human beings are capable. Such knowledge enables us to have a sense of what is possible

in education. Educational activity is also a craft in the sense that determining the means appropriate for pursuing that which we think is possible is a kind of making as well as a kind of doing. It is commonplace to say that, in doing, we try to "make things happen." Education is an attempt to find the kind of unity of doing and making that enables individuals to grow, ethically and socially (Curran 2000). In *The Politics*, Aristotle ends by citing three aims of education, and that is: "*the possible, the appropriate, and the happy mean*" (Aristotle 1944).

The idea of a "happy mean" is developed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There, human conduct is held to consist of two kinds of virtues: moral and intellectual; moral virtues are learned by habit, while intellectual virtues are learned through teaching. As examples, while humans are not temperate or courageous by nature, they have the potentiality to become temperate and courageous. By taking on appropriate habits, their potentialities can be actualized; by conducting themselves appropriately they can learn to actualize their moral virtues (Aristotle 1975). Thus children learn the moral virtues before they know what they are doing or why they are doing it. Just because young children cannot control their conduct by intellectual principles, Aristotle emphasizes habit in training them. First, children must learn the moral virtues; later, when their intellectual powers have matured, they may learn to conduct themselves according to reason by exercising the intellectual virtues.

Meanwhile, Aristotle's enduring legacy in education may be characterized as threefold. First is his conception of distinct subject matters, the particular nature and conclusions reached in each to be determined as the facts of its subject matter take their places in the thinking and conduct of the investigator. Second is his insistence on the conjoint activities of ethics and politics, aiming to gain the practical wisdom that can be realized only insofar as citizens strive for the highest good in the context of a community of shared ends. This means that the end of ethics and politics is an educational end. And third, the education that states need is public education (Edel 1982: 45). Although thinkers may know in a preliminary way what the highest good is, that which is required by reason, they will not actually find out what it is until they learn to live in cooperation with the highest principles of reason. The highest good is never completely known because the pursuit of it leads to further action, which has no end but more and more action. The contingent nature of social existence makes it necessary to find out what is good for us in what we do; we cannot truly learn what it is apart from conduct. While reason is a part of conduct, alone it is not sufficient for realizing the highest good. Only by our conduct can

we find out what our possibilities are; and only by further conduct can we strive to make those possibilities actual.

Aristotelian Notion of Education for the Development of the Human Person

Aristotle held that the aim of education should be to make people virtuous. Thus, there should be three period of training fitted to the three periods in the development of an individual. Through the understanding of Aristotelian conception of the human person, we are convinced over the ages that among the Greeks especially the philosophers, the sophists were regarded as individualists. This is because they believed the training the human person as a subject of lived experience receives should be for the purpose and aim of taking care of himself or herself in the community at all cost. However, they advocated a system of education which could promote the happiness and also guarantee the success of such individual (Iyamu & Isanbor 2024^b). Another fact worthy of note is that the sophists wanted the young men who were trained to engage in arguments which were organized convincingly before their counterparts so as to win their cases. As such, the young individuals learned to build logical arguments which could not be broken down and these arguments were carried out in such persuasive manner for them to win their hearers (Frost, p. 209). But, the reasoning for the realization of authentic living, he assigned the duty of educating his citizens to the state was his conviction that even if virtue aligns with human nature, yet it is not innate in the human person. So, for Aristotle, it is the duty of the society at large to develop and cultivate moral virtues and help its citizens internalize them through education. For him, the first period from birth to 7 years of age should be consigned wholly with the training of the body in preparation for formal schooling.

The second period would be that from formal schooling from 7 to 21 years age, this would consist of training in literature, music, gymnastic among others (Frost 1942: 212). For Aristotle, education was a state matter and should be controlled by the state; he would have the state determine what children should live and what ones should be destroyed soon after birth because of physical deformities. Furthermore, he would have the state determine who a man should marry, so that desirable offspring would be assured (Frost 1942: 212). The state, as Aristotle proposes, should use education in order to develop citizens who would defend the state and make it habitable and a better place to live in. It should be noted that the position of Aristotle on the use of education by the state as a means for training good citizens, did not have wide influence in the life of Athens in their day, rather the sophists maintain that education

was for individual interests dominated. The individualism of the times was not to be suppressed by a few philosophers. The people listened to the philosophers, but they followed their own interests and demanded a type of education which would make them most successful and happy. They were carried away with visions of personal success and individual happiness and were in no mood to listen to philosophers who suggested that both success and happiness in the long run depended upon the welfare of the group.

His main thesis is that; "a child is a potential adult; the ultimate aim of man is to be happy and thus education should essentially seek to make the child a happy adult." It should aim at making such child the best possible adult, since the best good person desire is always happiness. Aristotle also considered human nature, habit and reason as an inestimable value to be improved and cultivated by education (Adeyinka 2014: 157). For him, the helpful or viable way to do this is simply by consistent repetition of this action through the exercises of good choices that promote common goodness and harmony. More so, the high point of Aristotle's philosophy of education is a proposal that education should definitely and ultimately seek to create a sound mind in a sound body. This means that the three main sublime powers of the human person which include the intellectual, moral, and physical faculties must be integrally formed by education (Isanbor & Uzomah, p. 224). As a matter of fact, relating also to the implications of this principle of causality; the art and act of teaching is the causation of the student's learning. Hence, no person can learn for another person and the role of the teacher is to help the learner to actualize his potential.

Aristotelian Philosophy of Education and the Nigerian Child

For Aristotle, the human person could learn to use his or her reason to arrive at virtue, happiness and political harmony only through the process of education. This means that education is the only tool for all-in-all of the human person as a subject of lived experience, just like Nigerian education declares education as the instrument "par excellence" for attaining the national objectives and goals. This Aristotle's notion of the human person, using his reasoning and reasonability, is based on his claim that the human person is rational animal, for that, he or she has capacity of the rationality and no other specie has (Hospers 1970: 57). Aristotle also gave the fundamental implications of education to an individual from the infant stage. Thus for him, to develop the child so that he or she may become the best adult of its type; to promote the reasoning ability of the person since that is the best and highest element in the human person, to inculcate in

all wisdom for practical living, good moral conduct and concern for the social welfare of his fellow citizen; and most importantly, to foster in the individuals who were capable of it, the ability for intellectual and theoretical engagement (Akinpelu, p. 224).

To Aristotle, the learner is just passive receiver of knowledge with obedience while the teacher is the creative agent who molds the child's life in accordance with the ideal pattern and the ideal virtues of the human person. It is important to note that despite the teacher being the main agent of education, the student must also play his part in the sense that the learners are to learn effectively and are expected to be hardworking and self-disciplined. However, Aristotle's aim of education is to help the child to realize his or her potentials that will make him or her full and happy adult. It is like that in Nigerian education too, only that Aristotle did not tell us what type of growth and happiness a child would attain through education (Iyamu & Isanbor 2024^a). Aristotle was also said to have considered nature, habit and reason to be the three equally important forces to be cultivated in education. Also, producing good and virtuous citizens for the polis??? is one of the most important missions of education. This assertion fails to tell us the yardstick for the virtue and goodness unlike the Nigerian education that clearly mention the attributes (Sulaiman 2001: 78). Thus, we can deduce that the aim or implication of Aristotle's philosophy of education on the Nigerian child is basically on practical and physical development as well as morality. Hence, Aristotle's philosophy of education is relevant to Nigerian children in several ways:

- i. Virtue thics:** Nigerian children could benefit from the development of virtues like honesty, integrity, and respect for others, which are important in Nigerian society.
- ii. Practical Wisdom:** Education should equip Nigerian children with skills and knowledge that are useful in their daily lives and future careers. This could include problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making skills.
- iii. Civic Education:** Aristotle emphasized the importance of education for civic participation, which is relevant to Nigerian children in developing their sense of civic responsibility and participation in their communities and society.
- iv. Virtuous Citizens:** By developing virtues and ethical principles, Nigerian children will be better equipped to contribute positively to society and make ethical decisions in their personal and professional. **Active Citizenship:** Nigerian children can be taught to be active participants in society, rather than passive recipients of education. This can be achieved through education on civic responsibilities,

democratic processes, and social issues that affect their community and society.

- vi. Social Justice:** Nigerian children can be educated on the importance of social justice, including issues of equality, human rights, and social responsibility. This education can instill in them a sense of social justice that can contribute to a more just and equitable society.
- vii. Cultural Awareness:** Education can also promote cultural awareness and appreciation for Nigeria's rich cultural heritage. This can help Nigerian children to contribute to the preservation and celebration of Nigerian culture.

Evaluation

We have been able to review that of the Aristotelian conception of education which is based on his writings and politics. First of all, there should be a sort of agreement here without any form of bias or prejudice, that even though Aristotle had a basis of Athenian education in mind, but we can also say that his philosophical thoughts are of universal importance and not limited to a particular time or place. From the onset, we can see that Aristotle in some way agreed with Plato on the division of Greek philosophy into stages corresponding with the level and years of schooling. But on the other hand, he does not support Plato's theory of the concept of communism in education. Aristotle condemned the idea of communism as being too ideal to be practiced because for him, it would be reasonable to expect the state to incorporate both parents and children, to mold them to think and act in a way or manner prescribed by the state (Uzomah & Isanbor 2019: 222).

We also recognized that Aristotelian philosophy of education also posed to argue that the type of unity which his master, Plato's communism aimed at was too extreme because it was one of unity more appropriate to the individual soul than to the state and that if it was successful, far from being beneficial to the state, it would be harmful as it will have the effect of molding everybody in a single pattern (Adetula 2016: 30). This conception of development points to the fact that with the results or outcomes of this theory on education as well as in politics, life would be in parallel comparison to the reduction of complicated piece of music as to a single beat. With such conviction, we recognized that educational activities remain a craft in the sense that determined the main appropriate dispositions in pursuing life's goals and objectives, and that which we think is possible is the "kind of making" as well as the "kind of doing." It is commonplace to say that in doing, we try to make things happen, and owing that education is an attempt to find the kind of unity of doing and

making that enables individuals to grow, ethically and socially and even politically as propounded by Aristotle.

Hence, Aristotelian philosophy of education takes care of almost every aspect expected to be touched though, in contrast with Nigerian education in some areas. However, the moral conduct, self-awareness and self-realization Aristotle talks about can be cultivated of course in his theory of education and conformity is highly possible in the learners since they are taught authoritatively by disciplinarian teacher. Not only that the society is divided along professional and skilled lines, and for that, there are types of education for free citizens and slaves in order to accommodate everyone; but the irony is that going by the fixed stages, state control, teacher centeredness and legislature's censor of curriculum almost turn even the free children to slaves as freedom, autonomy and individuality are absent in the system.

Furthermore, the education and social training of children in Nigeria faces various challenges and opportunities for improvement. This work exposes the challenges of education for the development of the Nigerian child:

- i. **Access to Quality Education:** Many children in Nigeria, especially in rural areas, lack access to quality education due to inadequate infrastructure, underfunded schools, and a shortage of qualified teachers. This can be seen in most government schools where in a whole school there are just 2 or 3 teachers and the ruffled nature of most government schools.
- ii. **Curriculum Limitations:** The curriculum often focuses on theory over practical skills, leaving children unprepared for the modern workforce and global challenges. This continues even when they get to tertiary institution and so the child ends up theoretically brilliant in his/her profession but practically dull.
- iii. **Socialization and Cultural Preservation:** The emphasis on Western-style education can lead to the erosion of traditional Nigerian culture and values. Traditional cultures, languages, and values are been expunged from school curriculum and a Western method of education been adopted will bring about the loss of our traditional heritage and cultural identity.
- v. **Discipline and Corporal Punishment:** Physical punishment and strict discipline can be prevalent, potentially leading to emotional trauma and negative long-term effects, and this is owing to the values the human persons have placed on themselves as a measure of instilling the needed qualities of social order and justice in their society.

v. **Gender Bias and Inequality:** Gender-based discrimination and stereotypes can limit opportunities and potential for girls and women. With this conception of development the postmodern feminists critique grand narratives and challenge essentialists' views of gender. By emphasizing the diversity of experiences and identities, feminism contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the values of the human person as a subject of lived experience, and such interests belonging to both genders in the society.

Conclusion

Having looked at the Aristotelian philosophy of education though not exhaustive, it may be deduced that Aristotle in his philosophy of education laid emphasis on the need for one to be educated person in the sense that education is a source of one's happiness as seen in his work, when he said that an educated person is a virtuous person because for him education is a means of cultivating virtue and this virtue which is required from every individual leads to happiness through education.

Recommendations

Despite the challenges above, there are ways in which the training of Nigerian child can be improved by putting into practice the following factors of creative and innovative opportunities:

- i. **Incorporating Practical Skills and Vocational Training:** Integrating hands-on learning and vocational training can prepare children for the modern workforce and entrepreneurship. This is because in a developing country such as Nigeria, there is the need to reinforce the work force and provide the child with the opportunity of having a better future, providing employment opportunities which will aid them in taking care of their selves in the future.
- ii. **Cultural Preservation and Integration:** Incorporating Nigerian culture, history, and language into the curriculum can help preserve heritage and promote national identity. This is very important because the removal of history from school curriculum has stolen the knowledge of the past history which includes the mistakes of the past from our present generation which will make the future generations prone to making the same mistakes.
- iii. **Emphasis on Critical Thinking and Creativity:** To maximize the creative and innovative mentalities and abilities, the enabling environment that encourage the exercises of critical thinking, logical reasoning and problem-solving skills for the child,

and this will help the child to adapt to a rapidly changing world and then make his or her positive impacts.

- iv. **Positive Discipline and Emotional Intelligence:** Allowing the Nigerian child to exercise his or her creative and innovative skills and abilities in freedom and trust brings out the level of happiness such individual seeks to sustain in the society he or she belongs. This is adopting alternative discipline methods and teaching emotional intelligence which can promote healthy emotional development.
- v. **Gender Equality and Inclusivity:** This is one the collective interests in the promotion of gender equality, and then challenging gender and sexual stereotypes on the choices of courses of study and trades, and providing equal opportunities can empower girls and women to reach their full potentials.
- vi. **Investment in Infrastructure and Teacher Training:** This is about the intensive funding of education by the governments through implementing policies for the upgrading of schools in meeting the standard of the world-best practices, providing resources, and training teachers which can improve the quality of education.
- vii. **Community Involvement and Support:** This is by engaging parents, communities, and local organizations can enhance the educational contents for proper and adequate socialization of children. By acknowledging these challenges and opportunities, Nigeria can work towards providing a more comprehensive, inclusive, and effective education system that prepares children for success in an ever-changing world.

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