

Abstractions from Aristotle's Polis and Plato's Republic for Education, Self-Actualization and Sustainability in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *The paper adumbrated on prevalent circumstances surrounding the delivery of the type of education that may not correspond to sustainability in Nigeria. This is against the backdrop of a plethora of negative imperatives in the motive, mode and usages for educational certificates instead of knowledge and merit. Abstracting from the philosophical postulations embedded in Aristotle's Polis and Plato's Republic as its theoretical foundation, the paper argued that education for self-actualization, if not skewed to align with the goal needs of the larger society cannot confer sustainability in the long run. Mainly descriptive in approach, the paper inferred that apart from the fact of poor funding and outmoded curriculum contents of Nigerian educational programme, which result in the churning out of graduates adjudged to be largely unemployable, a great number of education seekers still hold unto the misconception that an educational certificate, no matter how acquired and what nature it is, provides, not just jobs, but white collar jobs, whereas this had long been supplanted by pragmatism, smartness, innovation and creativity. The paper therefore recommended, among others, improved funding, the re-appraisal of educational curriculum, improvement in schools' infrastructure, training of teachers etc.; community involvement in platforms for counselling, support and skill acquisition centres for alternative development; and the acquisition of skill sets in computer/ICT related programmes, arts and crafts, as complements to educational certificates that are expected to train the head and equip the hands at the same time.*

KEYWORD: education, self-actualization, society, sustainability, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

"If we prize education only for the sake of how it will avail just our personal sufficiency without factoring its bearing on the society, then we are more than a million miles from our goal satisfaction, for as observed by Aristotle, man can only achieve his greatest potentials in a city state, that is, the larger community (Atakpa, 2022)".

As men are different, so also are their social psychological needs and corresponding capacities to meet those needs. And since, in the words of Rodney (2009), education grows out of the environment, the learning process is directly related to the pattern of work and needs in the society at any given time. A time could be recalled when, at the introduction of formal education during the early days of colonialism in Nigeria, what was needed was the ability to

read and write (mere literacy), thus the primary school certificate was good enough for those who served as clerks and messengers, to achieve some relatively high level of social and economic self-actualization, even those of their families and the community at large.

It is likely that some older folks may recall with nostalgia, the panoramic ambience of the Whitehorse bicycle riding Headmaster as a sort of king and the princely referenced teachers of the early Nigerian days. That was when secondary school/teacher training institute certificates were the choicest magic watermarked printed papers. In fact, there were times in the 70's when secondary school 'leavers' (Class 5, Grades 1 & 2) were employed as auxiliary teachers in secondary schools. During this period also, private capitalist firms, government bureaucratic institutions and government owned companies were flourishing and readily available for the employment of these category of certificate holders. Thus the attainment of these levels of education conferred some high level of self-actualization.

The referenced period also coincided with the emergence of technical, college and university education. Because university graduates readily found employment in top management positions in the civil service, big corporations and multi-national companies, the quest for university degrees became the rave of the moment such that communities got involved in designing various models of scholarships for their sons and daughters, especially for studies outside the shores of Nigeria. Inspiration was also drawn from the experience of foremost anti-colonial activists who, on return from foreign trainings, led the liberation movements and also became the first set of indigenous operators of government apparatuses. That is perhaps one of the allures of certificates for political office as a business venture, one of the worst maladies of our time. Nevertheless, one of the beauties of those schemes was that overseas scholarship benefitting graduates inadvertently owed some level of reciprocation to their communities, in replicating scholarship schemes and involving in other personalised corporate social services for the benefit of their communities. That was when socialist/communist philosophies were the overriding tenets of existence as against barefaced individualism.

Statement of the Problem

As society advanced with the primacy of science and technology, and the demands of an ever expanding civil service, the educational aspirations of people also variegated with multi-disciplinary expansion in university certificates. One misconception that accompanied these aspirations is the notion that education is to provide, not just jobs, but white collar jobs for young people. More succinctly, in our society, the expectation has been heightened that a young man or woman should finish school and join the civil service, or a big corporation. This craze unfortunately led to many selfish, corrupt approaches to the acquisition of paper certificates instead of knowledge and merit. The various schemes where parents/guardians/relatives, educational operators and students conspire in various criminal devices to abet, perpetuate and nearly institutionalise examination malpractices that grant distinction certificates to candidates of Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE), West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE) and even University and Tertiary Institutions' Matriculation Examination (UTME), who can barely read and write, are cases in point.

Inescapably, the cheating senior secondary certificate holder is also the 'sorter' (briber for marks) in the university, who impresses on parents/guardians and society at large that no one

passes examinations in tertiary institutions except through financial inducements/sex for marks, whereas it is not so in many instances. Most unfortunately, a large number of these 'sorters' eventually manipulate their way through the university and earn bachelor degrees that grant them job opportunities including significant political/administrative positions where policies are made and implemented for the society. All these gravely undermine the value of education in Nigeria, thus societal considerations gradually gave way to negatively skewed individual self-actualization ventures.

As communal considerations gave way to individualism, the crooked African mindlessness that takes every vice to the extreme, tended to defer everything that bordered on the positive virtue that once defined our essence, to the cravings of self-allurement and the perpetuation of self-interest as the sole end of life (education being one of its drivers). It is as if life and self-actualization is only a one-way-traffic viz. education - educational certificates (no matter its quality and how it is got) – position - power - money (money not earned but stolen); all in the 'me and my family trajectory'. That is how society degenerated to a point where those with first class degrees search for jobs for up to a decade while third class graduates are working in oil companies; that is why vacancies are advertised only as a way of officialising the employment of family members who never attend interviews while those who perform well at interviews wait in eternity; that is how graduates with religious studies, chemistry and physics degrees are working in banks while those with cognate skills are roaming the streets for employment. These vices may confer personal, temporal, short-run self-actualization imperatives on the purveyors and beneficiaries but certainly not good enough to enable us achieve sustainability as a society.

The selfish ends of education portend only one of the myriad problems that make the attainment of self-actualization and sustainable development difficult. There are several factors that hinder the ability of Nigerian to either acquire any significant level of formal education at all, or make it such that whatever level of education acquired is not functional enough to confer satisfaction, whether at the individual or societal level. Whichever way, the debilitating factors are nearly numberless. They are either external (systemic flaws) or internal (personal inadequacies).

At the systemic level, Nigeria though counted among the 12 key strategic influencer nations by reason of its projected population, territorial size and length of ocean and sea coastline (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019), is reckoned as unlikely to exert global leadership in 2050 due to its forecast failure to achieve full literacy – a basic metric of a functional educational system, itself a sine qua non for sustainable development. Sadly, Nigeria wins the inglorious medal of occupying the second worst position in illiteracy, after India, and this partly poses grave obstacles to employment and employability, aggravating an already distressed socio-economic system, dovetailing in poverty and further engendering a breeding ground for crime and violence (see Caro, 2021). What is more demonstrative of this gloomy posture than the fact that though the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommends that developing nations devote at least 15-20 per cent of their budget to public education, Nigeria's allocation to this very important sustainable development driver-sector, over the years, has been ridiculously low – 7.9 % in 2016, 6.1 % in 2017, 7.1% in 2018, 8.4% (the highest under President Muhammadu Buhari's regime) in 2019, 6.5% in 2020, 5.7% in 2021 and 5.4% (the lowest) in 2022 (Taiwo, 2022). Besides, records have shown that the

federal government has never released the total sum budgeted for education each consecutive year, rather, Sahara Reporters (2020) hints that the deficit between appropriated funds and amount released have often widened. To make matters worse, even the paltry budgetary funds released for the development of education are never fully utilized, as much of it is usually corruptly diverted to the private pockets of operators of the sector (see Okoroma, 2006).

Also the Nigerian educational programme has been criticised for being mainly theoretical and academic. This is partly due to the craze for acquisition of certificates instead of knowledge (see Madumere-Obike, 2006). A vast majority of graduates churned from our institutions are simply unemployable due to a number of factors ranging from the none inclusion of practical entrepreneurial training in schools' curricula, to the fact that the contents of our educational trainings are not in synch with the current skill sets needed in our society, thus, expectations of families through education of their children have failed. The mind set of our young ones, and parents, are still fixated on a past that has long been supplanted by pragmatism, smartness, innovation and creativity.

In the prevailing circumstance, and given that there is no alternative to functional education for sustainable development, the following questions beg for more than a passing reflection: what type of education is necessary for self-actualization in the manner canvassed herein? Have we attained self-actualization correlative to the level of education we have acquired? What is the missing link between our educational certificates and self-actualization? Adumbrations on these questions and perspective answers to them constitute the objectives of this paper.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This article adapts perspectives from Aristotle's and Aristotle's political thought on the ideal polis to provide explications on the relationship between self-actualization and the actualization goals of society as may be powered by functional education. Aristotle's political thought on the ideal polis (society) was concerned with the subject matter of happiness (self-actualization in this context) and how to secure it in a circumstance where though expected that everyone can live a flourishing life, yet when examined, it seemed that only a rather small minority of human beings within the society actually flourish. He sought to establish how government can articulate its actions to ensure citizens' happiness as the ultimate goal for both the political art and for the political animals who are objects and subjects of that art.

Aristotle therefore argued that the polis is the end (the crown) of earlier forms of association. Other levels of association such as the household (family) and village, are for the sake of mere life, while the polis (the larger society) is for the sake of living well (self-actualization). In his words, 'living well or happiness is the end of human life, hence the polis is the final form of human association and the one that aims to accomplish the living well of its members'. Aside this, the polis is also known to possess the capacity that could help accomplish the crucial good of self-sufficiency (Turner, 2020). The relevance of this theory to this paper lies in the fact that the self-actualization thesis here canvassed transcends the self-centred happiness of single individuals, isolated households or families, but inculcates the actualization needs of the larger society as that which should constitute the ultimate goal of every human in seeking self-actualization.

Plato, on the other hand, proposed an ideal state where citizens are divided into three classes: The Rulers, the Guardians and the Artisans. The Rulers are the leaders of government who direct and pilot the affairs of the state, the Guardians represent the soldiers and security agents who protect the state from external aggression and internal strife, while the Artisans stand for businessmen who provide for the material needs of members of the state (Essien, 2011). These classes are expectedly built up and maintained by a mixture of controlled breeding, education and selection (Griffith, 1997). The main attraction of Plato's ideal state is the type of education prescribed for each class of citizens in the state.

Although Plato placed premium on education for all classes by prescribing that even women should undergo the same education, physical and military training as men, and serve the state wherever their level of education proves suitable, his emphasis was more on the kind of education necessary for one to qualify as a ruler who must be a philosopher. Rulers were to undergo a long and rigorous educational programme until they are thirty-five years old before taking up official assignment.

Plato envisaged a situation where class distinction was to be hereditary, that is, where the children of the different classes inherit the positions of their forebears after undergoing prescribed education. However, he made an exceptional prescription by insisting that a child from the ruling class who is found unfit or incapable of fulfilling the role of a Ruler should be relegated to the lower class of the Artisans (Omogbe, 2013). By so doing, Plato believed that justice (sustainable development) in the state was possible through the efficient, proper and harmonious fulfilment of roles assigned to each class, without interfering in the roles of others. Although Plato's Republic has been variously dismissed as utopian, inherent in his prescription is the idea of merit as the basis for occupation of positions, not just of the political class (Rulers) but also of the others classes, especially positions of official nature. Thus, merit is considered sacrosanct for today's administrative systems in the scientific selection of bureaucratic personnel, emphasis on division of labour, the training process to ensure best practices, the idea of specialization on a given task, reward/awards for performing staff, promotion and even punitive measures for erring staff and all other operations that constitute the order to turn out work (see Atakpa, 2015). Griffith (1997) believes that Plato's picture of an ordered and stable society ruled by the wise influences a lot of Western culture.

Unfortunately, the principle of merit for either political or administrative positions in Nigeria tends to be observed mostly in the reverse. Otherwise how do we explain the fact that all that is required for one to occupy the highest political office in the land, the Presidency (a position requisite of the wisdom of the philosopher) is the attainment of an educational achievement as low as 'School Certificate level or its equivalent' (see Section 131 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). The story of Nigeria is that of widespread incongruence between capacity and position; merit and promotion; where who you are, whom you know and where you come from matters much more than merit and excellence. It therefore places a moral burden on how to convince the young ones that there is value in functional education so that they themselves would aspire to earn it? The beneficiaries of these distortions may feel 'self-actualised' but the society is at a loss. And where society loses, sustainability is undermined and the future cannot be guaranteed.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis of the variables under consideration viz. education, self-actualization, sustainability - correlated with the vistas of both Aristotle/Plato's ideal society and their inherent provisions for self-actualization and societal well-being. Inferences from all the variables were therefore used to draw conclusions on the educational realities and needs of the Nigerian polity.

Sustainability and Sustainable Development

A number of definitions have trailed the notion of sustainability and whichever way it is, the concept of sustainability has become a core phenomenon in global discourse and usability, denoting the concerns for what the effects of actions taken in the present, have for the future. These concerns are so important as to be incorporated into a world governance principle, driven on the platform of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a central theme for post-2015 development paradigm; its main focus involving how general development priorities and needs can be skewed to correspond with the broader agenda of the world and the impacts of such agenda on the well-being of the generality of the people and society at large. As noted by Ramutsindela & Micker (2018), sustainable development goals, from their inception at the Rio+20 United Nations Conference in 2012, are underpinned by the moral principles that are captured in the phrase, 'no one should be left behind' and epitomises a common global vision 'of progress towards a safe, just and sustainable space for all human beings to thrive on the planet' (Osborn et al., 2015).

Although the major concern of scholars as encapsulated in the sustainable development goals mantra is with global capitalist economy and how to reconcile environmental protection with economic growth, one of the driving forces behind the quest for sustainability is found in the theme of Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR which canvasses the inclusion of social responsibility in any type of human activity, be it business, politics, justice etc., where the concept is used interchangeably with such terms as social responsibility, corporate responsibility and governance (see Crowder et al., 2018). The core concern of sustainability therefore is that in whatever business anyone or an organisation is involved in, the concern of such a business should go beyond the profitability and retunes to the owner of the business (stakeholder), and must involve the interest of other stakeholders as a matter of necessity. Sustainability therefore implies development in a sustainable manner, and has also established convenient synonym with 'sustainable development' in the development literature.

In the context of this paper, sustainability and sustainable development is relevant when considering education as an important resource which pursuit, usage and value must be understood as not conferring the real self-actualization needs of the individual as a sole stakeholder until such needs are sustainably aligned with the overall needs of the society as canvassed by Aristotle's thesis of man fulfilling his greatest potentials in the city state, that is, the society.

Education and Self-Actualization – the Synergy

Most academic materials on the subject matter of self-actualization consider its emergence to interrogations into whatever it is that motivates humans. This is in reference to the ancient

belief that humans are hedonistic – that we seek pleasure and try to avoid pain, deprivation and loss (Gortner, et al 2007) and Abraham Maslow is credited as the foremost theorist who undertook the most fundamental postulations in this area. According to Baridam (2021), Maslow's needs theory indicates that individuals have certain needs that influence their behaviours and that only unsatisfied needs can inspire or influence behaviour, while satisfied needs are not expected to motivate actions towards their satisfaction anymore.

Maslow listed 5 human needs according to their level of importance and ranked them in a hierarchy thus: physiological needs – safety and security needs – social affiliate needs, esteem and self-recognition needs – (and finally) self-actualization needs. By this arrangement, physiological needs, that is need for food, water and shelter are the lowest needs (at the bottom of the hierarchy), while self-actualization needs – desire to become more and more what one is; to become everything one is capable of becoming; and to realise fully, the potentialities of talents and capabilities, is the highest of man's needs (Baridam, 2021). This requires that the self-concept or self-perception of self is transformed into reality through action (Gortner, et al 2007). This action is what should be exercised through steps, programmes, activities and processes to acquire quality education which, should in turn, constitute the ability to solve problems or create products which are valued within a cultural setting.

It thus becomes obvious that a functional educational system is that singular most important vehicle to activate human potentials and guide him/her to the fulfilment of self-actualization. In this sense, education for self-actualization connotes Marie Montessori's proposal that the most effective education can only be secured when the prime driver is to help the recipient to discover himself/herself and then release his/her full potentials to function with the knowledge gained (Johnson, 2017). It is based on learning which, though intended to develop personal intuition, perception, intentions, knowledge and skills, also inculcates plans for future generations (Selvi, 2009). This later target 'plan for the future' is in tandem with sustainable development principles which factors-in the interest of not just the individual and society at present, but also those of generations unborn.

Education for self-Actualization and Sustainability/Recommendations

Aside what the Nigerian government should do with regard to a re-appraisal of educational policies in terms of funding and curriculum development, improvement in schools' infrastructure, employment of better qualified teachers and their training, provision of modern teaching aids, IT labs, rich libraries, in-school health care facilities, and school feeding, government should progressively de-emphasize, or balance, the gramma type school system and give prime attention to education that trains the head and equip the hands at the same time.

Communities should rise to the occasion by engaging in advocacy platforms, in setting up of education foundations where counselling, talent hunt, support and provision of skill acquisition ventures for young ones are vigorously pursued as complimentary programmes to government actions in this regard. The privileged individuals in the society should partner with such advocacy as well as network with credible high net worth individuals, foundations, NGOs and multilateral agencies and persuade them to assist in this direction.

At the family level, parents, care givers and guardians should engage their children during weekends and holidays in relevant skills acquisition and talents development activities ranging from computer programming, coding and other IT related endeavours, as well as craft, arts, music, film making, footballing, fashion, baking etc. Indeed, excellence in some of these areas are raking in returns that surpass certain professional endeavours. Families should therefore guide rather than discourage the young ones if they develop interest in these areas.

Also, parents/guardians should repent from the culture of forcing their wards to study courses of their fancies but for which the children may not possess adequate capacity and drive to pursue. The force option has led to a lot of frustration on the part of numerous students who often struggle with low marks or graduate with very poor classes of certificates, some of them even dropping-out, sometimes without the knowledge of parents. Rather, they should realise that society has advanced to a level where some of those vocations that were undermined in the past are becoming money spinning platforms for those who pursue them with passion and vigour. Therefore, parents/guardians should play the role of advisors and guide for carrier choices, with a mind on the personal inclination, interest, talent and passion of the child, and not their fancies which are sometime misplaced.

Most importantly, society should be re-orientated to never encourage or abet students in examination malpractice of any kind. Families should endeavour to verify their children's claims of victimization or harassments when reported. Also counsel should be sought from operators of the system whenever issues are raised. It is better to get to the roots of those problems and solve them pragmatically than to yield to the temptations of crime which always undermines the future of students. Where the crime of examination malpractice is detected, culprits should be dealt with in accordance with the prescriptions of the law, to serve as deterrence.

Society should realise that not everyone possesses to aptitude for higher educational studies. Those who are identified as weak in academics should be encouraged to learn trades that appeal to their talents rather than allow them resort to less honourable ventures or remain as unredeemed labour market variables in yearly unemployment data permutations. It is further recommended that in society's quest for tertiary education, emphasis should be on professional qualifications with high IT knowledge. Graduates of basic sciences, management, humanities, etc. can also acquire professional qualifications and additional post graduate diplomas to enhance employability. The young ones must learn to move away from their zones of comfort. Big fishes are not caught in shallow waters. Labour, like every other commodity, goes to where it is scarce and well rewarded. One prime objective of education is to confer independence on the recipient, to think creatively, and to be useful to one's self and society.

Concluding Remarks

From the above thesis, it can be seen that self-actualization being the highest ranking need of man is far beyond mere human cravings for material needs which dovetail in avarice, greed, corruption and desire to acquire more and more, identified herein as one of the stumbling blocks of Nigeria's development strides. Rather, the self-actualization ends of every man should be driven to rhyme with the actualization concerns of the larger society. This is where Aristotle's polis is germane since, to him, 'the polis is the final form of human association and the one that

aims to accomplish the living well of its members' (Turner, 2020). Thus, the Nigerian educational system should be remodelled to align with the self-actualization needs of the society and not only the selfish needs of individuals which may not include the general needs of the society.

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