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JUSTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHILD-CENTRED EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The task of justification has been and is still a major philosophical activity. It has been regarded as a proper concern of a philosopher to explain, criticize and justify concepts and/or actions. Justification is generally an ethical issue because justifying a concept entails arguing for the positive aspects of the concept or action that is justified. In any case, therefore, only worthwhile activities are justifiable. Education is justifiable because it involves worthwhile activities (Bartel, 2005). The worthwhile of a thing or an activity is an ethical matter because the society must have ascribed a positive value to what it labels education by which it is viewed as something worthwhile. This paper was dedicated to the justification and assessment for the implementation of child-centred education in Nigeria. While justifying the key concept it provided the philosophical justification, child-centred education was traced to Jean Jacques Rousseau whose Philosophy of education was not concerned with particular techniques of imparting information and concepts, but rather with developing the learner's character and moral sense, so that he may learn to practice self-mastery and remain virtuous even in the unnatural and imperfect society in which he will have to lives. Psychologically, the paper justified the concept of child-centred education as the interaction between the individual and their environment in constructing meaningful knowledge, while on the other hand social constructivism was attributed to the work of Vygotsky, and it emphasized the importance of student learning through interaction with the teacher and other students. Educationally, justified that the word 'child' has merely served to refer to the individual who receives attention in education and who happens, generally, to be a child. "Child –centred" was interpreted to mean at least that the individual who is receiving education should be regarded as an end in his own right as far as education is concerned. The notion of child-centred education also implied that the child should be treated as a child and not as miniature adult. The paper also assessed the type of curriculum and method teaching to be employed in child-centred education. It finally recommends that since basic education level is under the control of UBEC, the body should organise seminar for all teachers, including those in private schools, to equip them with knowledge and skills needed for successful implementation of child-centred education. Such training should be handled by experts.

KEYWORDS: JUSTIFICATION, ASSESSMENT, IMPLEMENTATION, CHILD-CENTRED

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Introduction:

The child-centred education is an approach to teaching and learning that has been so popular in the 20th and 21st centuries. The main idea of this education is to involve the learners during the learning process as opposed to having the teacher dominating the whole learning process with learners playing a passive role as if the teacher is fountain of knowledge and learners are empty vessels that need to be filled in with information. Barbara (2007) defined child-centred as a "learning process whereby learners work individually or in small groups to explore, investigate, and solve authentic problems and become actively engaged in seeking knowledge and information rather than being passive recipients." In traditional learning mode, the teacher basically controls the instructional process. The content is delivered to the entire class, and the teacher tends to emphasize factual knowledge, and the focus of learning is on the content, that is how material has been delivered, and how much have students learnt. This shows that the traditional rote memorization learning mode tends to be passive and learners play little part in the learning process. In view of traditional teaching and learning approach are concerned with the teacher as the controller of the learning environment, and plays the role of instructor and decision maker with regards to curriculum content, specific outcomes and teaching methods (Donald,2008) But in child-centred approach, learners play an active part in the learning process. They become autonomous learners who are actively engaged in constructing meaning within the context of their knowledge, experiences and social environments, learners become successful in constructing knowledge through solving problems that are realistic, and they usually excel when they work collaboratively with others. All these mean that the child centred approach is learner centred as opposed to teacher domination. To justify the concept of child- centred education in relation to Universal Basic Education, it has become very imperative to provide the Philosophical, Psychological and Educational justification of the concept under study.

Philosophical Justification of Child- Centered Education

Child-centered education can be justified by the philosophical assertions of philosopher like Jean Jacque Rousseau, who explored the breadth and depth of the child-centred approach to teaching and learning at all levels of education. The detail of the exploration of child-centred philosopher can be used to justify the concept from philosophical perspectives.

One of the noblest works in education is to make a reasoning man for education is expected to train a young child by making him reason. If children understood how to reason they would not need to be taught. This shows that Rousseau right from the beginning believed that meaningful education should make the learner to reason and to be creative, otherwise if education fails to achieve this it ceases to be relevant to the learners.

It is also imperative to state that child-centred education is traced to Jean Jacques Rousseau whose Philosophy of education is not concerned with particular techniques of imparting information and concepts, but rather with developing the learner's character and moral sense, so that he may learn to practice self-mastery and remain virtuous even in the unnatural and imperfect society in which he will have to live. Rousseau sees education as a tool that is used to acquire survival skills and competencies through reasoning and creativity. This is illustrated when a hypothetical boy Emile is to be raised in the country side, which Rousseau believes is a more natural and healthier environment than the city, under the guardianship of a tutor who will guide him through various learning experiences arranged by the tutor. The tutor will make sure that no harm results to Emile through his learning experiences.

Like modern behaviourist Psychologists Rousseau believed that the child learns through consequences rather than through physical punishment. The purpose of education of the child according to Rousseau should be to equip the child to cope with his own problems, enjoy his interest, and not to prepare the child for some distant adulthood. Jean Jacques Rousseau in his book Emile Rousseau recommended a type of education that was unknown at the time, an education that was natural, child-centred, and experience based. This is in line with the provision of National Policy on Education that teaching shall be participatory, exploratory, experimental and child-centred (NPE,2009:14).

This philosophy is also in line with behaviourism perspective which contends that the behaviour of children is shaped by consequences, because children continue with the behaviour that results in positive consequences, but tend to stop or discontinue the behaviour that result in negative consequences as the case is in Thorndike's cage and Skinner's box. In the same token basic education learners need to be actively involved during the lesson in order to enable them to achieve and enjoy the results of their own effort. Once this happens these learners will be motivated and continue working hard on their own and in groups so that they continue reaping positive results of their own hard work and initiative.

Psychological Justification of Child-Centred Education

As previously discussed, the idea of Rousseau really focused on the Child-centred approach to education. Philosophers are good in coming up with ideologies and lines of thought. They cannot direct or prescribe behaviour. In light of this though the philosophical ideology discussed above are all relevant to the teaching and learning of Basic education, it is imperative to use them collaboratively with psychological perspectives and theories. This means that a balanced investigation of the child-centred approach to teaching and learning should also examine Psychologists' views about the child centred approach. Psychologists' perspectives are very important when it comes to the practical implementation of the child centred approach, because psychologists prescribe and as well suggest what ought to be done in order to successfully justify the child centred approach to teaching and learning (Jadalla, 2000:56). From the 20th up to the 21st century wholesale psychological developments influenced the development of the child-centred approach to teaching and learning[i]. Worth mentioning were the development of constructivism ideology.

Pedagogically, the learner or child centred approaches to teaching have emerged from changing understanding of the nature of learning, and in particular from the body of learning theory known as constructivism. In the broadest terms, (Duffy,1998) opined that constructivist learning is based on an understanding that learners construct knowledge for them-selves The child is not a blank slate, but brings past experiences and cultural factors to a situation. In light of this the constructivist teacher provides tools such as problem solving and inquiry-based learning activities which learners formulate and test their ideas, draw conclusions, inferences, pool and convey their knowledge in a collaborative learning environment. The constructivism transforms the learner from a passive recipient of information in class to an active participant in class during the learning process. Always guided by the teacher, students construct their knowledge actively rather than mechanically, ingesting knowledge from the teacher or the text book. Constructivist theories encompass a disparate array of Philosophical, Psychological, and epistemological orientations. Cognitive constructivism is based on Piaget's model which emphasises the interaction between the individual and their environment in constructing meaningful knowledge, while on the other hand social constructivism is attributed to the work of Vygotsky, and it emphasises the importance of student learning through interaction with the teacher and other students. The principal implication of constructivist understanding for the way in which knowledge is

produced is that students are the key initiators and architects of their own learning and knowledge making, rather than passive vessels who receive the transmission of knowledge from expert teachers. This approach ultimately holds students responsible for their own learning.

Constructivists identify Child-centred education as encompassing five changes in practice, according to (Weimer, 2002)

i. Shifting the balance of classroom power from teachers to students.
ii. Designing content as a means to building knowledge rather than a knowledge end in its-self.
iii. Positioning the teacher as the facilitator and contributor, rather than director and source of knowledge.
iv. Shifting responsibility for learning from teacher to learner.
v. Promoting learning through effective assessment.

The points highlighted above mean that moving towards a child-centred approach entails changing the learning environment and responsibilities of teachers and learners, changing the communication of the learning content, as well as changing the assessment to learning.

Educational Justification of Child-Centered Education

Apart from philosophical and psychological justification of child-centred education one of the compelling aspects of justifying Child-centred education is educational sector. In making this justification, emphasis will be placed on the positive accomplishments or consequences of child-centred education as against its counterpart – essentialist education. The advent of child-centred education owes much to the lack of respect accorded children in the traditional school system where the children were viewed as empty vessels that need to be filled up with essential skills by the teacher. It was on the basis of this consideration that the teacher needed to be a strict disciplinarian in order to mould the character of the children into a desirable shape. With total disregard to individual differences, children were crammed into one classroom and instructed in block. Right to freedom was disregarded; they were victims of cruelty and needless oppression. (Peters 1996) The educational practice was viewed with great concern by child-centred educational reformers thus they were quick at querying the sterile and lifeless activities of the learners and echoed loud calls for a change.

From Rousseau onwards (progressivists) made a moral protest against the lack of respect shown to children. It was this that gave birth to child – centered education which reversed the entire trend of educational practice. In consequence, instead of relegating the child to the background in the teaching/learning process, the child was placed at the centre. Through the efforts of the progressivists, therefore, the needs and interests of the learners dictate the direction that learning will take. The central focus of child-centred education is "the learner's own interest (Adewole, 1989:45).In basing educational activities on the needs and interests of the children, people with teacher-centred inclination might wish to object to this practice on the ground that it will be risky to allow children learn whatever interests them because of the essentialist claim that children are naturally bad and their interest will be in bad things. The progressivists view of the nature of children is at variance with this. Accordingly, the progressivists contention is that children are naturally good and will always do good things when they are given an enabling environment. Through child-centred education therefore, the needs and interest of the children were taken into consideration in the teaching/learning process.

The word 'child' has merely served to refer to the individual who receives attention in education and who happens, generally, to be a child. "Child –centred" has been interpreted to

mean at least that the individual who is receiving education should be regarded as an end in his own right as far as education is concerned. The notion of child-centred education also implies that the child should be treated as a child and not as miniature adult. It is Rousseau who is generally credited with being the first to recognize that children were not simply small adults and that their mental capacities, attitudes, feelings and ways of looking at things were not simply relatively undeveloped but, in many ways, quite distinct from those adults.

Assessment for the Implementation of Child-Centred Education in Nigeria

Nigerian education is in complete harmony with child-centred education as the National Policy of Education legislates that "educational activities shall be centred on the child". Also, for the adequate development of the child's physical, social, emotional and moral abilities, the National Policy of Education has pledged "to inculcate the right type of values and attitudes\ for the social, cultural, economic and scientific progress of the learner". To say that education should be centred on the child alone implies a total neglect of both the teacher and content. Havard (2019) reminds us that establishing a rapport in teaching involves three elements namely "the teacher, the content of the teaching and the learner". Again, at the early stage of the child's development, he is said to be egocentric. If learning activities are to be tailored round this behavioral trait, the fear is that the child will grow into an irrational and prejudiced adult. This makes to infer that "child-centredness resulted in an extreme solution instead of a rational and balanced conclusion reached after carefully weighing the evidence for and against. In Nigeria, education can hardly be said to be child centred because of persistent teacher domination in the teaching/learning process as shall be seen as the work in this part progresses.

Child -Centred Curriculum

Child-Centered Curriculum means children take command of their own learning. Teachers are there to provide support and facilitate the child's learning but children determine the direction of their own learning following their natural curiosities, interests and passions. Nigerian education is carefully arranged to cater for "differences in talents. This is done through the diversification of the curriculum in order to accommodate the different abilities and aptitudes of the learners. The narrowness of the colonially inherited curriculum did not go down well with some Nigerian learners. (Okafor) clearly stated that "the principal reason for the drop-outs was the dissatisfaction of the child with what the school could offer" With the diversification of the curriculum, Nigerian learners have ample opportunities to choose from the array of disciplines, those which match their interests and abilities. With this practice, the individual difference of the learners is taken care of.

Child-centered curriculum involves educators making decisions about the most relevant content to include in the curriculum based on the needs, interests and capabilities of the learners. Developmental psychologists such as Erik Erikson and Jean Piaget, have done extensive work in describing the cognitive changes that children go through throughout their lifetime. Knowledge of these changes is important in guiding decisions about curricula content, material and activities. Piaget proposed that each child moves progressively through each of four stages of cognitive development as they mature physically. These are the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational periods. At the early childhood level, a child is in the sensorimotor and preoperational stages which lasts between ages zero (0) to two (2) years old and two (2) to seven (7) years respectively. Children first "learn about their surroundings by using their senses and motor skills (Slavin, 2000). These stage-based characteristics that Piaget has identified are important starting

points for curriculum design as educators need to have a clear understanding of the characteristics of learners before any decision can be made about what curricula content to deliver to them.

Additionally, the designers of curricula material need to ensure that such programs and the material that go along with them are innovative. Educators in the field should work collaboratively in deciding on the most appropriate material to include in the curriculum. Moreover, when it comes to actual classroom implementation the curriculum should be used as a guide and not as an absolute. This means that teachers should be flexible in implementing aspects of the curriculum based on the unique needs of their particular set of learners. Furthermore, curricula should be continuously improved to reflect new knowledge about how children at the early childhood level learn. For each group of students, the curriculum should be adopted to better serve their needs and challenges. Consideration must be given to the particular ethnic, cultural, and language characteristics of the children concerned and seek to meet them where they are. This means that, rather than trying to force children into a pre-made mold, educators must ensure that the children are the basis used in constructing the mold.

Teaching Methods in Child-Centred Education

Early educational movements that led the way to child- centered education include Dewey's progressive, Montessori education. Child-centered approaches include but are not limited to problem- based learning, project-based learning and inquiry- based learning. Therefore, child -centered instruction can take many different forms. Child-centered practices do not look the same from school to school, classroom to classroom or day to day A child -centered method of teaching views the learner as active agents. The students exhibit their own knowledge, past experiences, education and ideas and this impacts how they take on board new information and learn. It differs significantly from a traditional method of instruction as it presents the students as "blank slates" and teachers as experts who must impart all relevant information whereas the child-centred method creates a dynamic classroom where students participate actively where while the teacher take a more passive role. It boils down to group work, one-on-one tutoring between student and teacher and students' presentations (Caroline, 2019). It was further reiterated that for students to learn a skill, students must be directly involved and that teachers cannot just say a thing in the classroom and expect students to leave the classroom able to do it.

In the traditional method of teaching, most class time is spent with the instructor teaching and the students watching and listening. Learner- centered teaching methods shift the focus of activity from the teacher to the learner. The following are learner centered methods of teaching (Bas and Bayhan, 2019).

1. Project
2. Dramatic
3. Play-way
4. Field-trip

Project method is derived from the educational ideas of one of the great educators, John Dewey. Dewey argued that education should not prepare a child for the future that is

unknown, but rather that it should fit him rightly into the society. Dewey emphasized individual and group projects. This is because in project, we interact with the object of knowledge. Stressing the significance of project: We know an object when we know how it is made and we can only know that when we ourselves have a share in making it. In the project method) an individual is given the opportunity to try out things that perplex him (Maina nd).

In project method of teaching, children work towards the same directed goal therefore their aims are similar, that is to overcome any difficulties in order to achieve the desired end. Children learn to plan and cooperate better with one another when working together as a team under the guidance of the teacher the when working individually and different tasks. this teaches them the sense of collective responsibility. The learners come more into contact with real life situations. The method is child-centred approach. It can be criticized that the method is not the type a teacher could use frequently in Nigeria where examinations feature prominently in our educational system because the learners are likely to fail in the neglected subjects during examinations.

On the project method, the manner in which it is implemented in the Nigerian educational system leaves much to be desired. On the side of the teacher who guides the project, he is supposed to be emotionally calm and dedicated to his guiding role. This will be accomplished through a teacher who is satisfied with his work but the constant industrial actions by Nigerian teachers in recent times clearly testify their dissatisfaction with their job. With this development in sight, some teachers are often engaged in doing other things in order to make ends meet. Consequently, they hardly find time to supervise and assess the progress of learner's projects.

Dramatic method is the method of teaching derived from the words "to dramatize" or "to act". This method is used by the children in schools to convert facts or skills to be learnt into drama in order to make learning of such facts or skills more interesting and more real. In this way children in school dramatize short stories under the guide of the teacher in order to facilitate learning and with full attainment of behavioral objectives. It has been observed that Africans, in general, are born actors (Deborah, et al., 2007). If this observation is true then the wise teacher could make use of this natural tendency to teach by allowing the pupils occasionally to act and dramatize some situations that the pupils are familiar with.

This method can be encouraged as a way of learning, and there are many lessons or topics in Social Studies, Literature, Sciences which children can dramatize in order to make such topics clearer to the pupils. The method is practical and child-centred this is because it makes easy and learning permanent this is in agreement with the popular Chinese proverb that says:

I hear, I forget,
I see, I remember,
I do, I understand

From the proverb, the method develops children's power of imagination and may even shape the pupil's character since some of the pupils would want imitate the lives of their ideal character, where learning becomes joyful and purposeful activity with greater attention concentrated on the dramatization taking place. It is easier to sustain the children attention for longer time through this method.

On the play-way method, the spontaneous expression of (a child's) thought and feeling an expression which his inner life requires. In play, the child exercises "harmoniously all his physical, emotional and intellectual qualities. Play combines attention with relaxation, purpose

with independence and rule with freedom. Play is for the child as ethical as devotion to his work is for the adult. The progressive flavour of Nigerian Education in respect of teaching methods is documented by the National Policy of Education in these words; "teaching shall be practical, exploratory and experimental." Again, the government is to ensure that the method of teaching at the nursery school "level shall be through play". It is on the basis of these policy pronouncements that the implementation of the already discussed methods is assessed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Child-centred education on curricula issues follow suit. To them, the child has to be actively involved in deciding curricula activities. The child's curriculum is to be drawn up in consultation with him. In his protracted argument on the state control of the curriculum, Curriculum decisions are largely a moral matter dealing with considerations of the 'good life" and the "good society", a matter in which there are no experts. In such an area of decision, most tax payers, local employers, pupils, parents, mature students and so on, have an obvious interest and indeed a right to be involved

It is on the basis of this inference that the 1969 National conference in Lagos which gave birth to the National Policy on Education was attended by "both literates and illiterates, professional and non-professional bodies, males and females, workers and students"[74]. Progressive education therefore offers a Smorgasbord Curriculum in the belief that the "child will select that which answers his felt needs. With the commendable effort of basing the curriculum on the needs of the learners, the problem of learner's population surfaces. How can the felt needs of the children in our overcrowded classrooms be identified for the curriculum to be based on them. Since the needs of the learners vary from one child to the other, it means that every child is to have his curriculum. An impossibility is sensed in this direction. Again, if the curriculum is to be based on the needs of the learners, the fear is that because of the tenderness of the learner's age, it may become difficult for their needs to be in consonance with educationally valuable activities. The child-centred curriculum ushered in an education, which gave children the knowledge that they needed and developed in them the power. to handle themselves in the modern world. This was done by providing an array of elective courses. Activities were also introduced to cater for the diverse interests and abilities of the learners. In all, the disciplines listed in the child-centred curriculum are meant to involve the learner in exploring and discovering knowledge on his own with the assistance of the teachers.

Recommendations

1. Since Basic education level is under the control of UBEC, the body should organise seminar for all pre-primary school caregivers/teachers, including those in private schools, to equip them with knowledge and skills needed for successful implementation of Child-centred education. Such training should be handled by experts.
2. Apart from this, government should see to it that more professionally qualified teachers with certificates are employed to guide children's learning and development in primary schools. This should also be made mandatory for privately owned schools.
3. In addition, the commission should organise a forum where all stakeholders in basic education would be enlightened about their roles towards the implementation of Child-centred education. Educational sectors would need to employ a more practical approach to disseminating the child-centred curriculum. One way by which this can be done is to upload the curriculum on the website.

4. Finally, Government and Educational non- governmental organizations should organise training, workshop for teachers on how to interpret and implement the child- centred educational approach.
5. To ensure effective implementation of any educational enterprise, supervision must be given adequate attention. it is important to supervise in order to gather information from children, teachers, parents, communities, and general environment. Supervision of child-centred education can be used to correct errors, modify practices where necessary and motivate as well as encourage all involved in its implementation.

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