

A Review of 'An Introduction to Philosophy of Education' by J. A. Akinpelu

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I. INTRODUCTION

The late Professor Emeritus Jones Adelayo Akinpelu (1936-2010) was an enthusiastic Philosopher of Education who earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Classics from the University of Ibadan in 1961, Master of Arts Degree in 1963 from the University of London and Doctor of Philosophy Degree in 1970 from Columbia University (Aboraside, 2010). It is further indicated by Aboraside (2010) that Akinpelu spent his entire life as "University Teacher"; at the University of Ibadan between 1963 and 1967 and between 1972 and 1992. He also lectured at the University of Ife, 1967-1972. He had unique curiosity towards "Philosophy of Education and as a result he had a significant breakthrough as one of the leading Philosophers of Education in Africa. At the University of Ibadan, he served as Head of Department of Adult Education, Director of Extra-Mural Studies, Dean, Faculty of Education, Pioneer Coordinator General Studies, Professor and Pioneer Provost, College of Education. Professor Akinpelu was also the Foundation Professor/ Director, Center for Continuing Education, University of Botswana, Gaborone, 1994-1999. He was an astute member of the American based Philosophy of Education Society. In 2013 the late professor was posthumously honored for having been the best student of Bachelor of Education by the University of Ibadan (University of Ibadan, 2013). In 1981, Macmillan Publishers (London) published his "An introduction to Philosophy of Education. The book was reprinted in 1984. Its second edition appeared in 1987 followed by another reprint in 1988. An introduction to Philosophy of education is one the few books by Professional Philosophers of Education in Africa that is worth the attention of both instructors and students of Education. Akinpelu was among the first generation of African Professional Philosophers of education. In this book, he attempts to point out the problem of authors of Philosophy of Education books after the great R. S. Peters; an analytic Philosopher who treated education majorly from conceptual analysis point of view. He laments in the preface that Authors that came after R.S Peters tended to veer off from the traditional conception of Philosophy of Education in favour of conceptual analysis while ignoring prescriptive aspects. Akinpelu also laments that the tendency of Philosophers of education being archaic and dealing with old themes in education is undesirable. Lastly, being an African and

writing within an African context he observes that any genuine Philosophy of Education literature in Africa should not be full of foreign values, references and instances, as it is the case with most of the philosophy of education texts used in African Universities. Traditional approach to Philosophy of Education is the most effective way of Philosophizing about Education in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries Africa. It is from this point that this book employs eclecticism to provide a conjunctive approach that is both contemporaneous and Contextual to Africa in general and Nigeria in Particular. There is credible evidence as shall be seen later that Akinpelu partially and significantly achieves his goal by using various philosophical approaches including the Conceptual Analysis approach and Prescriptive Methods.

II. OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

In two hundred and fifty pages Akinpelu covers four significant themes namely: An Introductory Exposition of Philosophy and Philosophy of Education (21 pages), a history of Educational thinking before and during the twentieth century (108 pages) in which he dedicates the second chapter to pre-twentieth century thinkers and the third chapter to twentieth-century thinkers. The third theme is Schools of Philosophy of Education which forms the fourth chapter of thirty-six pages. The final theme is on Analysis where Akinpelu intensely breaks down the concept of education and related concepts in chapter 5 (30 pages) and Educational issues in Chapter six (39 pages). In his exposition of Philosophy of education, Akinpelu like many authors of Philosophy of education books begins by explaining what philosophy is by clarifying the distinction between philosophy in general sense as a Worldview derived from assumptions, beliefs, attitudes and prejudices....partly acquired partly inherited (p.2) and Technical Philosophy as a committed thinking process characterized by Logical, consistent and systematic thinking (p.2-3). He builds up from General philosophy to elucidate common sense Philosophy of Education which he considers as a reactive and attitudinal response to educational issues and Technical sense of Philosophy of Education as the application of Philosophical methods and principles/theories on education. He finalises this section by expounding the connection between branches of technical philosophy (Metaphysics, Axiology and logic) and

education. Lastly, he indicates that Philosophy is relevant to teacher education by appealing to critical thinking, proper argumentation, Policymaking and pedagogical efficiency.

In the second and the third chapters (covering the historical theme) he covers pre-twentieth century educational thinkers in chapter two where he discusses the educational ideas and theories of Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates, Quintilian, Comenius, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel and Johannes Friedrich Herbart. He notes that Plato was the first of the thinkers to systematise education according to age, content and ability, based on his tripartite psychology of stratification of the human mind into the appetitive level (also known as the Acquisitive), the Pneumatic (Spiritual level) and Rational level (which is the highest level). He infers that Platonian Education aimed at determining the mental ability of each child and in so doing, to place them in their correct social class. Those with Mental abilities that cannot transcend Appetite level would later become Artisans (*Hoi Polloi*) while those whose mental power transcendent appetitive level but stick at Pneumatic level would become soldiers; while those whose mental ability reached the rational peak would become Philosopher Kings (Rulers). Akinpelu notes that in the Platonian view, Artisans needed the virtue of moderation, soldiers the virtue of courage while philosophers need the wisdom to rule.

He also discusses Aristotle and observes that he (Aristotle) emphasizes the theory of natural development which holds that every child's mind is flexible and has the potency to grow and to be moulded through intellectual and practical activities and habituation into a happy human adult. Akinpelu indicates that Isocrates, Quintilian and Comenius were great teachers whose concern was the Delivery of Content. He notes that Isocrates and Quintilian were both lawyers by profession and as such their teaching methods were based on effective use of words for jurisprudential purposes. As such oration, rhetoric's and proper reasoning by the teacher and learner were both means and ends of education. Further, the book notes that Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel, immersed themselves too much on the child at the expense of the teacher, a problem that was resolved by Johannes' Freidrich Herbat's postulate on the five steps of instruction that should be used by a teacher, *id est*: Preparation, Presentation, Association, Systematization and Application.

In the third Chapter Akinpelu transitions into Twentieth century Philosophers of Education and their Educational ideas. Alfred North Whitehead's educational *organism*, Blyden's culturalism, Henry Carr's concern with quality education and Julius Nyerere's cultural relevance of education are some of the philosophers mentioned by Akinpelu. In general, he notes that the twentieth-century philosophers were mostly concerned with Contextualization of education and regard for education as a process. In chapter four Akinpelu discusses what he calls the 'four important schools of thought' in education, namely idealism, realism, pragmatism and existentialism. He digs into the Philosophical nexus of each

school while clarifying their recommendations about curriculum, the teaching processes and learner-teacher relations. Most importantly he observes that no single school of philosophy is sufficient for a teacher and recommends that a teacher can choose the best elements from each school and use them to come up with their philosophies of education. Finally, in Chapters five and six Akinpelu introduces Analytic Philosophy with the primary aim of clarifying ideas and concepts such as Education, teaching and learning. This analysis culminates in the dissection of three issues in Nigerian Education *viz*; Equal educational opportunity, Quality debate in Education and Integrated educational system.

III. CRITIQUE

This review uses Universal Intellectual Standards as propounded by (Paul & Elder, 2012) to critique Akinpelu's "An Introduction to Philosophy of Education". These are; Clarity, Logic, Depth, Breadth, Accuracy, Precision, Significance, Relevance, Fairness and Completeness:

Clarity and Logic criteria: It is clear from the preface that Akinpelu intends to produce literature that is both traditional in its philosophical treatment of education and contextual to Africa. He attempts this by appealing to the contributions of African Philosophers of Education like E. W. Blyden, B. Horton, J. Johnson, H. Carr and J. Nyerere (pp.88-124) and by using Nigerian illustrations to analyse educational issues. There are however some instances where he misses out on clarity; For instance, in his attempt to locate the philosophical backgrounds of each of the philosophical schools of Education (Chapter 4) he fails to clarify what he means by "Philosophical backgrounds' of these 'schools of philosophy of Education'. Readers in Philosophy of Education tend to have difficulty in understanding concepts such as: Branches of technical philosophy, Schools of Philosophy, Systems of Philosophy, Educational Philosophies and Philosophical Paradigms. We can, however, conclude that by mentioning Philosophical background, Akinpelu is referring to Metaphysical, epistemological, axiological and logical foundations of the 'Schools of philosophy' and not of 'schools of philosophy of Education'. Realism, Idealism, pragmatism and existentialism are schools of Philosophy founded on branches of philosophy like metaphysics, logic, axiology and epistemology. As such the most appropriate title for chapter four would have been 'The Implications of Schools of Philosophy on Education'. In regards to logic, the book progresses from concise definitions through to history and ending up in an analytical attempt to solve some of the issues in education in Chapter six. There is indeed a coherent connection between Chapter six with Akinpelu's premise that Philosophy of education is both the process (of reflection) and the product (of tentative solutions of educational issues) (p. 8.)

Depth and Breadth: The book exhibits an appreciable level of intellectual depth evidenced by profound elucidation and explanation of various concepts. However, in regards to

breadth Akinpelu can be faulted for wallowing into the spirit eclectics without material expanse. For instance, in his exposition of Speculative aspects of Philosophy of Education (pp.9-19), he omits Logic for reasons that we can only speculate. Secondly, his treatment of Metaphysics, Epistemology and Axiology exclude actual Principles and methods which should have reflected the definition of Philosophy of Education as the application of Principles, theories and methods of philosophy on education (pp.7-8). In chapter four, he leaves out Analytic Philosophy and other relevant schools of Philosophy. Could it be because of his 'dislike' for Logic and R.S. Peters conceptual analysis? These omissions defeat to some extent, his goal of Eclecticism which he had earlier on intended to convey as indicated in his preface (p.ix). One would also have expected Education philosophies like Perennialism, Progressivism, Humanism and even African Philosophies.

Accuracy and Precision: There are several cases of glaring inaccuracies in the book; for instance in p.154 paragraph 4 the author errs when he claims that "Existentialists disclaim any interest in Metaphysics". This is not accurate because it depends on which strand of existentialism one is speaking about, and secondly, existentialism is derived from the ontological principle of Existence, and its twin correlates of Essence. Essence and existence are fundamental principles of being that squarely fall under the domain of Ontology (Mattei, 1995). *Ipso facto*, Existentialism has no problem with metaphysics; it has a problem with the order of occurrence between Essence and existence (Jacquette, 2002). This could be illustrated by Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of human being as *L'etre pour soi* (*being for itself*) in which he tries to elucidate that ontological tangent of man is in his freedom". Quoting Greene (1969), Akinpelu observes that "existentialists regard man as an "open possibility" which is a variation of the metaphysical principle of potency (Jacquette, 2002).

Significance and Relevance: Significance implies the focus on essential issues measures the Significance of a book while Relevance is the connection between the ideas in the book and the matter at hand which is usually portrayed in the purpose of the book. Akinpelu sticks to the traditional threefold approach to philosophy namely Eclectics, Context and Prescriptivism.

Fairness and Completeness: In as much as Akinpelu is against the imperialism of conceptual analysis and Western *pontification*, his 'distaste' is a rational one and not an emotional one. This acts as a premise for intellectual fairness as evidenced by his use of Conceptual analysis in Chapters 5 and 6. Furthermore, he does not lock out Western thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, John Dewey, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Froebel among others. He has several illustrations of Africa as well as indicated earlier in this review. However one would have expected at least a drop of one or two eastern philosophers like Confucius and Buddha to make the work more complete and eclectic.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the question of verdict is: Has Akinpelu achieved his objective of using eclectic and didactic methods to provide a conjunctive approach to the philosophy of Education that is both contemporaneous and Contextual to Africa in General and Nigeria in Particular? Despite some of the weaknesses in the book we can infer based on the numerous sources of information used by Akinpelu, both primary and secondary, due to his appeal to several points of view that he uses, his explicit assessment of the assumptions of the 'New Philosophy' to the resolution of decontextualization of philosophy in Africa and its direct implication of Africanization of philosophy of Education, we can authoritatively infer that Akinpelus's work achieves its goal by a significant margin.

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