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# Philosophy of Education and Its Implications for Environmental Education in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Environmental education is designed to help people become environmental knowledgeable, equip them with skills and attitudes that can be used collectively or severally to address environmental challenges. Unfortunately, there is no operational environmental education curriculum in schools in Nigeria. As a result of this, learners lack adequate information about environmental challenges, and habits that are environmentally friendly. Thus, this paper examined the implications of philosophy of education on environmental education in Nigeria. It frowned at the infusion strategy of environmental education curriculum because it does not create room for elaborate discussions of environmental issues. It was recommended among others that a well articulated curriculum for environmental education be designed and implemented at all levels of education.

**Keywords:** Environment, Environmental Education, Philosophy of Education, Curriculum

## Introduction

One unique characteristic of the earth is the presence of biological species and conditions that contribute towards the sustenance of a conducive environment necessary for human habitation and that of plants and lower animals. The environment has become grossly degraded and unconducive for human existence because of man's economic activities, which have impacted negatively on the environment. This has gone on unchecked in Nigeria in the form of gas flaring, oil spill, dredging, bush burning and indiscriminate disposal of human and industrial waste. These activities have resulted in environmental problems such as air pollution as recently witnessed by the appearance of black soot in parts of Rivers State, water and land pollution, flood, global warming and famine. The state of the environment as contained in United States Environmental Report in Muhammed, Abdullahi, Bello and Abdullahi,<sup>1</sup> cannot be separated from man's well-being and his economy. It therefore submits that people need knowledge and sensitivity to tackle environmental challenges. This is in line with the concept of environmental education which is indispensable for the conservation and preservation of the environment for future generation.

To ensure the protection and preservation of the environment, Agbor<sup>2</sup> asserted that the inclusion of environmental issues, consequences and solutions in the curriculum becomes imperative. This is because the school is a veritable tool for creating awareness of the need to protect the environment and possible ways of preserving it. It is in this light that this paper seeks to examine the impact that philosophy of education can make on environmental education in

Nigeria. In other words, what are the roles that philosophy of education can play in environmental education?

### **Conceptual Clarification**

For a better understanding of the topic of discourse, the key concepts that underlie this paper will be analyzed especially in the context that they are used. The concepts are environmental education and philosophy of education.

### **The concept of Environmental Education**

The term environment is a broad and comprehensive one that refers to all that surrounds man.<sup>3</sup> This includes the biological surroundings man lives in and interacts with, and the physical, the economic and socio-cultural aspects of the environment that affects man.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the environment can be defined differently depending on the type of environment being considered. For purposes of this paper, environment will be discussed from the biological and physical points of view, especially because of the interaction and interrelationship that exist between them.

The environment, according to Benny in Muhammed et al,<sup>5</sup> is made up of biological and physical factors that surround us. This includes the plants, animals and microorganisms around us and conditions such as soil, water salinity, temperature and humidity. Over the years, man's activities on the environment have brought about alterations in the balance between the biological and physical surroundings thereby resulting in a state of environmental decline or degradation or challenge. Hence, Olujimi, Adewumi and Odunwole,<sup>6</sup> described environmental problems as negative changes in the physical and biological characteristics which have resultant negative effects on human and living conditions. The need to mitigate the effects of environmental degradation and preserve the environment for future generations led to the introduction of environmental education.

Environmental education according to United States Environments Protection Agency in Agbor,<sup>7</sup> is designed to equip individuals with the ability to analyze environmental problems and take necessary steps to improve the environment. When people have fuller knowledge of environmental problems and have the skills required to address them, they will be able to make rational decisions. This is because people are made to understand the effects of their actions on the environment.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, people became willing to take action for the environment in order to preserve it for the future generations because of the environmental education they have acquired. It is therefore safe to align with the submission of Muhammed *et al*,<sup>9</sup> that creation of environmental consciousness and the teaching of behaviours that are environmentally appropriate are the main thrust of environmental education. This is because it enables people to think and reason in order to live successfully and sustain human existence.

### **The Concept of Philosophy of Education**

Philosophy of education is very pivotal to the education process because it directs the course of education process and determines the methods and techniques employed in the process. In defining the concept of philosophy of education, Reid in Abiogu,<sup>10</sup> posited that it entails the application of tools used in resolving educational problems or questions. It addresses such questions as; what do we intend to achieve through education, what approach do we adopt to

achieve what we purport? It performs this role by recommending or prescribing activities and practice that are desirable for effective education process.<sup>11</sup>

The importance of philosophy of education can never be overstressed because it also sits as the clearing house of the education process. It does this by applying the analytic tool in education.<sup>12</sup> By so doing, concepts such as education, environment, environmental education etc., are dissected and analyzed in order to minimize contradictions and ambiguities that are bound to arise either as a result of the meaning or application of such concepts.

Again, as observed by Abiogu,<sup>13</sup> philosophy of education serves as a basis for the development of man and the society at large by applying the tools of critical reflective thinking to problems in the education process. As a result, man is able to act and do things because he has valid reasons for his actions

### **Nexus between Philosophy of Education and Environmental Education**

The central subject in the two concepts - environmental education and philosophy of education - is man who is the ultimate beneficiary of the education process. While environmental education aims at making man to be able to take rational decisions about the environment in order to preserve it for future generations, philosophy of education sees to the development of man by prescribing what the aims of education are,<sup>14</sup> the curriculum to be adopted, the instructional methods and materials to be employed. In other words, philosophy of education plays the role of the umpire that decides what should be and what should not be in the education process.<sup>15</sup>

The curriculum content of any educational system is premised on its philosophy of education. It is on this ground that Ogwara, Kuria, Nyamwaka and Nyakan<sup>16</sup> stated that philosophy has great influence on curriculum decisions. That is to say that the philosophy of education of any nation should be seen in its curriculum. Therefore, the success or failure of environmental education to a large extent depends on the operational curriculum which in turn is dependent on the philosophy of education embraced and practiced by the country.

### **Environmental Education Curriculum**

Curriculum occupies a place of pride in the education process since it stipulates those things learners are expected to know and how they are achieved, thereby playing major role in the implementation of educational policies and programmes. Curriculum contents according to Ehindero,<sup>17</sup> are deliberately planned learning experiences both in formal and informal settings. Therefore, environmental education curriculum is planned and organized in such a way that it explores the environmental challenges of the learner's environment and the remedial measures to be employed in the event of environmental degradation.

The realization of the aims and objectives of environmental education depends to a large extent on the teacher, who is saddled with the responsibility to interpret and implement the curriculum. This is because the quality of the teacher is a reflection of the quality of knowledge he imparts. But the questions are: Does the teacher training programme incorporate environmental education curriculum? What is the curriculum strategy for primary and secondary schools?

According to Erhabor,<sup>18</sup> environmental education is taught as distinct programme in some teacher training schools while other schools adopt the infusion strategy mainly because of lack of manpower. But as Agbor<sup>19</sup> pointed out, teachers should have elementary knowledge of environmental education so as to be able to teach lessons in environmental concepts in secondary and primary schools. Therefore, she emphasized the incorporation of environmental education in teacher education programmes in Nigeria. For Jekenyinfa and Olawepo in Erhabor,<sup>20</sup> infusion strategy of environmental education into the curriculum, rather than making it stand as a distinct subject, appears to be the best strategy for awareness of environmental education. Unfortunately, Anijah-Obi, Eneji and Ubom<sup>21</sup> observed that efforts to create environmental education curriculum is yet to yield fruit. People are not environmentally knowledgeable because the curriculum is not operational in schools. This is evident in the unhealthy attitude of people towards the environment and environmental issues.

### **The Role of Philosophy Education in Environmental Education**

In order to increase the level of environmental knowledge, philosophy of education has a crucial role to play. Firstly, people should know the reasons for certain environmental practices.<sup>22</sup> This way, they are able to understand and accept environmental practices that are healthy and acceptable. They therefore will be able to distinguish reason from evidence of things. In effect, deliberate effort should be made to ensure that the learners become critical minded and are able to question the status quo in environmental practices and seek solutions to environmental problems.

Again, much of the discussions on environmental education emphasize the ability to know rather than ability to do.<sup>23</sup> Knowledge of environmental challenges is not enough, because necessary actions should be taken to mitigate, cushion and prevent environmental degradation. Therefore, lessons on environmental education should not be restricted to the classroom alone, but should have practical components especially in places directly impacted by unhealthy environmental practices. This will afford the learners the opportunity of having first hand knowledge of the causes and possible solutions to such environmental problems. This is pertinent because it will prepare them to respond effectively to environmental problems in order to achieve sustainability. This can be achieved if environmental education is tailored to be pragmatic in nature in order to solve precipitating problems in the environment.

Furthermore, looking at the plethora of environmental challenges in our society and their attendant effect on the present and future generations, the need for a functional environmental education programme and curriculum is imperative. Philosophy of education will provide for the foundation for curriculum development by serving as an anchor that coordinates and integrates inputs from other disciplines of education.<sup>24</sup> This would go a long way in ensuring that the curriculum developed is holistic.

### **Conclusion**

The importance of environmental education in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized especially, in the light of the plethora of environmental issues that face us as a people. Environmental education will go a long way in ensuring sustainability, preserving the environment for future generation and engender development. This will be achieved when people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes that will enable them solve or take appropriate steps to improve the

environment. Unfortunately, there is no clearly spelt out curriculum for environmental education which in most cases is infused into other subjects. This practice, does not create enough room for extensive and elaborate discussions of environmental problems.

### **Recommendations**

To encourage the implementation of environmental education in our education system, it is pertinent to recommend the following:

1. That environmental education be taught as distinct subject at all levels with separate syllabus and examination instead of infusing it into other subjects.
2. That effort be intensified towards adoption of a functional environmental education curriculum from the basic education to tertiary institutions as general studies courses.
3. That the curriculum be planned in such a way that environmental education draws illustrations and examples from the environment of instruction which the learners can relate with and appreciate. This will give them first hand information and afford them the opportunity to acquire skills for remedying or preventing environmental degradation.

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