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## **Educating the Self for Economic Viability in A Dependent Economy: How Do We Change the Narrative?**

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### **Abstract**

Educating the self for economic viability in a dependent economy: How do we change the narrative is aimed at how education would assist in the reconstruction of the learner's mind to lead a meaningful and realistic life. It was observed that the learner seems to see schooling as a scam and schooling cannot guarantee its products any future. The absolute dependence on a single economy, the craze for certification and materialism among young adults and belief that borrowing to fund capital project points to a fact that only the self can resolve these plethora of challenges. For the self to bring about a turnaround in the economy, this narrative must change. So that the nation's dependence on education as an instrument par excellence must gravitate from intention to actuality. These authors employ the existential-phenomenological approach in conceptualizing the self, education and the educated man, reconstructing the self for economic viability, and other issues. This is to the extent that we come to understand the need to invest in human capital development. Because, it is man that drives the economy, not the availability of sufficient funds and funding of capital projects.

**Keywords:** Education, Educated Man, Viable Economy, Existential Self

### **Introduction**

Educating the self for economic viability in a dependent economy: how do we change the narrative was aimed at how education would assist in the reconstruction of the learner's mind to lead a meaningful and realistic life, particularly attaining the good life by looking inward. It

was observed that the learner seems to see schooling as a scam and schooling cannot guarantee its products any future.<sup>1</sup> The absolute dependence on a mono-economy and belief that borrowing to fund capital projects points to a fact only the self can resolve. For the self to bring about a turnaround in the economy, this narrative must change. So that the nation's dependence on education as an instrument par excellence must gravitate from intention to actuality. These authors employ the existential-phenomenological approach in conceptualizing the self, education and the educated man, reconstructing the self for economic viability, and other issues. The importance of this paper is that the COVID-19 pandemic opened the mind to the socio-economic realities of the time. This is to the extent that we come to understand the need to invest in human capital development. Because, it is man that drives the economy, not the availability of sufficient funds and funding of capital projects.

### **Education and the Educated Man**

Education goes beyond passive or active learning. An education which employs strategies that promotes positive change in the life of the individual learner, with the aim of changing something about how the learner learns and lives is fundamental to the self as an individual and a person. It is about getting the learner to develop passion as a being and be interested in the happenings around them. Education presupposes what the leader, the custodian of the value system of society, wants to achieve with education. The essence of education is to remove the veil of ignorance in order for men to appreciate the human sense of reasoning. Hence, education can be understood as knowledge becoming conscious of itself. Education equips the mind to lead a course of reasoning for the betterment of the individual and community. It is a continuous process toward understanding human achievements in the areas of music, arts, architecture, literature, philosophy, religion, political organization, trade and commerce, human relationships, feelings, science and technology as well as other ideas and values, implicit and explicit.<sup>2</sup>

The social implication of this view is that the process of educating is to attain the good life. In bringing about the good life, the products of the education system ought to be a transformed beings who could look beyond immediate gratification and see one another as “not better than,” but as a starting point for understanding the very nature of man.<sup>3</sup> However, it is understood that a country's cultural values influence its education system, teacher education, administration and control, and methods of transmitting knowledge.<sup>4</sup> The call on education implies that a satisfactory process of change must begin with the self. This is because faith in education is comparatively adjudged as a veritable instrument for progressive change or maintaining the

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<sup>1</sup>Olabisi Deji-Folutile, *Schooling in Nigeria a Scam*. Retrieved from <http://www.premiumtimesng.com> 23/09/2021.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Oakesshott, “Learning and teaching.” In R. S. Peters (Ed). *The Concept of Education*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Julie I. Kalusi and Paul J. Iretefoju, Educating the Self for Political Stability in Nigeria, *Nigerian Journal of Educational Philosophy*, (2019), 30(2), pp. 25-32.

<sup>4</sup> B.O. Ukeje, “The role of education in a changing society.” In B.O. Ukeje (Ed). *Foundations of Education*. (Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1979), p. 113.

status quo.<sup>5</sup> As a result of this importance, the Nigerian State sees education as an investment for wealth creation, building a dependable workforce for the economy, and good citizenship.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, this intention was politicised and education, which ought to be an investment and social service, becomes something with little or no attention.

Education is a tool for social engineering or reconstruction. For education to ensure a change in the narrative, it must bring about freedom, creativity, rationality, responsibility, and self-reliance. But, the present education system which was intended to be utilitarian in nature and structure turns out to be bookish, academic, and general.<sup>7,8</sup> The African worldview, which sees the learner as not being capable of thinking, doubting and doing things independently, does not seem to help matters.<sup>9</sup> This traditional African belief system in Nigeria seems to influence the action and conduct of the Nigerian learner negatively. Hence, he cannot be trusted to be the Governor of a State or President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Education ought to go beyond general and technical education, in order for the self to realize the authentic self – the bedrock for changing the narrative. Basically, the educated man is to be the ideal man in society. This is because there seems to be really no distinction between the educated and the ideal man. Each society seems to have different ways of realizing this ideal or an educated man. This variance does not change the nature of the educated man. This brings us to how the Western culture perceived the educated as more of a cognitive being. To them, the educated man is one who combines expertise in some specialized body of knowledge which can translate into how its products conduct themselves in every facet of society. From this perspective, four main conditions upon which the concept of an educated man can be based were identified. They are: (1) the body of knowledge and understanding of associated principles condition – the educated man is expected to possess skills, some body of knowledge with understanding; (2) transformation condition: his knowledge and understanding must be broad-based so that in addition to his specialized knowledge, his outlook ought to be transformed by what he knows; (3) commitment condition: he should be aware of the prevailing standards in his field, so that he is not only able to find evidence for assumption but also knows what count for evidence and where it should be found; and (4) cognitive perspective condition; the educated man must have an in-depth knowledge of what he possesses to specialize in. Otherwise, his knowledge would lack a cognitive perspective.<sup>10</sup> The African worldview of the educated man was rooted in the traditional African culture to mean that:

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<sup>5</sup> Olatunji O. Oyeshile, *Reconciling the Self with the Other: An Existential Perspective on the Management of Ethnic*

*Conflicts in Africa* (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2011), pp. 15 – 17.

<sup>6</sup> Federal Republic of Nigeria, *National Policy on Education*. 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. (Abuja: NERDC, 2014), pp. iv and v.

<sup>7</sup> Federal Republic of Nigeria, *The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (Lagos: Federal Government Press, 1999), p. A885.

<sup>8</sup> V.F Chukwuebuku, *Education as a Tool of Social Reconstruction*, (2011). Retrieved from [http://www.nigeriavillaquare.com/guestarticle/education on the 14/10/2018](http://www.nigeriavillaquare.com/guestarticle/education%20on%20the%2014/10/2018).

<sup>9</sup> O. Okoroh, "How critical can the African learner be?" In A. Adewole and O. Ayodele-Bamisaieye (Eds). *Philosophising*

*About African Education*. Lagos: PEAN in association with Macmillan Nigeria Publishers, 2000), 121.

<sup>10</sup> Richard S. Peters, *Ethics and Education* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), p. 45.

...man is one who shows evidence of a well-integrated personality...he is economically efficient, socially and politically competent, morally acceptable, intellectually and culturally sophisticated. He is one who is able to handle successfully, the problems of living in his immediate and extended family; who is well-versed in the folklores and genealogies of his ancestors, who has some skills to handle some minor health problems and where to obtain advice and help in major ones; who stands well with the ancestral spirits of his ancestors and knows how to observe their worship; who has the ability to discharge his social and political duties; who is wise and shrewd in judgement; who expresses himself not in too many words but rather in proverbs and analogies, leaving his hearers to unravel his thoughts; who is self-controlled under provocation, dignified sorrow and restrained in success; and finally and most importantly, who is of excellent character.<sup>11</sup>

The above descriptions of the educated man portray him as one, who possesses political, cultural, economic, rational, mental, historical, moral, social natures and abilities. To ascertain who an educated man is, is to examine the concept of education and the activities that qualify as education.<sup>12</sup> Following from this, the educated man ought not to possess only individualistic characteristics but also the spirit of corporate existence. That is, education ought to be a process of initiating and integrating man into society in order to manifest social grace and inter-relationship, which tends to justify Aristotle's view that man as a social and political animal finds satisfaction not only in his own world, but in the company of other men – the whole essence of forming societies.

### Concept of the Self

The knowledge of the self is a very complex one. The self has been defined from different areas of study. The sociologist sees the self as an individual person and as the object of his own reflective consciousness. The philosophy of the self describes the essential qualities that constitute a person's uniqueness or essential being. From cultural point of view, the self is constantly evolving due to the complexities of societies. The self is dependent on the social relationships in a given culture, that is, it is society that determines what the self is. Hence the self cannot be conceptualized outside other beings or selves. So, the search for a possible way of improving human welfare and well-being encourages men to evolve differing strategies on how to tackle and ensure authentic economic order.<sup>13</sup>

For meaningful and realistic economic order and development, man must always be at the centre of human activities. Without man, no development or viable economy can be successful. Hence there is much emphasis on the 'I' or 'self' or the 'will' of man. Collectivism, particularly in its Western context, does not give consideration to the individual, but to the aggregate or common will of the people as an economic standard.<sup>14,15</sup> Unfortunately, advocates of

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<sup>11</sup> Jones A. Akinpelu, *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education* (London: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1981), 26.

<sup>12</sup> Jones A. Akinpelu, *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*

<sup>13</sup> Julie I. Kalusi and Paul J. Iretefoju, *Educating the Self for Political Stability in Nigeria*,

<sup>14</sup> Jim I. Unah, *Essays on Applied Phenomenology* (Lagos: Foresight Press Ltd, 2002), 28.

<sup>15</sup> Olatunji O. Oyeshile, *Reconciling the Self with the Other*, 17.

collectivism became power-drunk and their activities were centred on how to be in control of the seat of power, take control of available economic resources, and to be in charge of the means of production.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the welfare of the generality of the people became meaningless to them (the leaders and men of God).

As a reaction against the system of collectivism and politics of his time, Nietzsche reacted against the unjust, moral and religious disposition of the time, by emphasizing the need to save the individual from the overwhelming influence of society in order to promote the vital element in man – the will to power. Although, we cannot perfectly say that the system of collectivism in African communalism was successful in Africa, yet considerable attention was given to common welfare in traditional African thought. Technically put, the individual is not only a being-in-itself but also a being-in-the-world with others.<sup>17,18</sup>

As a result of human disposition, we seem to see ourselves more as being-in-itself. And it takes the grace of God for the self to give consideration to another self. Even the idea of morality, as a guide to human conduct and action, seems not to prevent the self from thinking less of himself. However, when it comes to commerce and food the self tends to forget differences because these are critical to his survival and existence. The self here implies the human person or any form that can be attributed to the self.<sup>19</sup>

In reconciling the self with other selves in order to realize the authentic self, the self must not think of itself as “better than”, or “worse than”, or engages itself in communal clashes, bitterness and hatred, selfishness and greed. The self, in his own right, promotes tolerance, peaceful co-existence, cordial relationship and mutual understanding, particularly in multicultural setting. Interpersonal and human relationships are central to political stability; they are some of the heart-rending existential conundrums, which are perceived as critical to meaningful human existence.<sup>20</sup>

Interpersonal relation implies being-in-the-world with other fellow beings who share common human qualities, like the human body, as ground for social connections and interactions. Through the “human body man is able to insert himself in the world and through it he is able to achieve both intimacy and distance, and whose immediacy is the agency for his locating objects, persons, events and feelings, as here and as mine.”<sup>21,22</sup> He further says that the human body is the resplendent and baffling variety of human involvements, which include among others: work, love and hate, disease and sickness, and death. It is through this human body the sociality of man achieves its primordial expression, and the social world is made up of predecessors and successors.<sup>23</sup> Through which, each of us is also destined to either be a

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<sup>16</sup> Jim N. Omatseye, *Educational Philosophy and the African School* (Benin City: Mindex Publishers, 2004), 28.

<sup>17</sup> M. Natanson, “The nature of the social man.” In H. Y. Jung (Ed). *Existential phenomenology and political theory: a*

*reader* (pp. 191 – 200). (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1972), p. 214.

<sup>18</sup> Olatunji O. Oyeshile, *Reconciling the Self with the Other*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Olatunji O. Oyeshile, *Reconciling the Self with the Other*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Jim I. Unah, *Essays on Applied Phenomenology*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> M. Natanson, *The nature of the social man*, 214.

<sup>22</sup> M. Natanson, *The nature of the social man*, 214.

<sup>23</sup> M. Natanson, *The nature of the social man*, 214.

predecessor or successor as long as a social world goes on.<sup>24</sup> Realizing that it is man that creates the social world, existential philosophy of education gives the learner the opportunity not only to realize himself as a being-the-world but a being-living-with-others.<sup>25</sup>

### **Education and the Nigerian Economy**

A country's economy becomes more productive as the proportion of educated (used in terms of schooling) workers increases since educated workers can more efficiently carry out tasks that require literacy and critical thinking. It is assumed that the higher their education and accomplishment, the better employment options they get. Education is an investment in human capital, similar to an investment in better equipment. Education raises people's productivity and creativity and promotes entrepreneurship and technological advances. Also, it plays a very crucial role in securing economic and social progress and improving income distribution. Education helps countries grow economically since it is about getting knowledge and being able to apply it wisely to our lives and, at the same time; improving other person's lives. Education aids the economy in the following ways: (a) providing prosperous and happy lives, (b) creating more employment opportunities (c) securing a higher income (d) improving the economy.<sup>26</sup>

### **Existential Phenomenological Approach**

Existential phenomenological approach seeks to develop an in-depth, embodied understanding of human existence. It challenges approaches which view human beings in a reductionistic way. The methodology is a source of insight into the richness and diversity of human psychological experience.<sup>27</sup> Existential phenomenology is humanistic in that it challenges the modern tendency to interpret the human condition through a set of narrow technological lenses. It engages with and appreciates the wisdom accumulated by the rich traditions of reflection on the human condition. It deepens our understanding of the experiences and perspectives of others through its focus upon the meanings that we make in our lives and the choices that are reflected in our understandings and actions. It nourishes openness to understanding the lives and needs of others by helping men to identify and set aside their theoretical, ideological prejudgments, superstitions, and bias as learners approach their studies as researchers. Finally, the existential-phenomenological approach is ethical in recognizing that the fundamental characteristic of being human is to be responsible to others.<sup>28</sup> Existential phenomenology is a philosophical tradition developed by thinkers such as Buber, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, de Beauvoir, Sartre, Marcel, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas.

### **Challenges against the Existential Self and Economy**

One of the major challenges against the self and the economy is the gap between schooling and society. The Curriculum seems to be irrelevant to the reality on ground. This could be the

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<sup>24</sup> M. Natanson, The nature of the social man, 214.

<sup>25</sup> M. Natanson, The nature of the social man, 214.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.ideas.repec.org>pra>mpara>

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Reynolds and Jack Reynolds, Existentialism, Phenomenology and Philosophical Method. Retrieved from

<http://www.researchgate.net/publication/306259225>, 14/04/2021

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Reynolds and Jack Reynolds, Existentialism, Phenomenology and Philosophical Method.

reason why pharmacists after graduation became food vendors and architects are fashion designers. After graduation, the products of the school system deliberately depend on government and significant others for their daily needs. This has made some youths to see schooling as scam in Nigeria, as something that cannot improve the quality of the learner in the future. How do we change this narrative to make schooling meaningful and realistic to learners and the economy?

In addition, the absolute dependence on certification without merit has reduced the emphasis on dignity in labour which is replaced by social vices as a medium of survival in the community. Education, therefore, ought to promote personal development and the ability to develop the will to power so that the learner can live a life based on his level of consciousness (awareness and experience).<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, the traditional African experience of reality, knowledge and value sees life as an interwoven web where everyone is neatly tied together as a whole, even though consciousness is individualistic.<sup>30</sup>

Another challenge is the belief that the African learner is a being not capable of thinking, doubting and doing things independently. The school system seems to complicate this issue by exposing them to too much of bookwork, at the expense of helping the learner to cultivate thinking capacity, certain values, survival skills as well as discovering untapped potentials buried inside of them. Education must not necessarily view the teacher as a model, but also as a guide and facilitator of knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

### **Reconstructing the Self as an Indispensable Actor for Economic Development**

What education needs to do at all levels is for the learner to realize that it is what men make out of existence that makes life meaningful and worth dying for. It will be better to employ our freedom for something beneficial rather than wasting it on frivolous things that undermine human and environmental integrity and dignity. And one of those things is self-reliance where the self thinks of himself as an actor rather than a spectator on the field of football. It is also engaging itself in economic fraud, communal clashes, bitterness and hatred, selfishness and greed. Self-reliance and the positive aspect of interpersonal relations are critical to economic viability. They provide room for creativity, interdependence, taking responsibility for one's actions, tolerance, freedom and rationality. An interpersonal relationship is central to existentialism because they are some of the heartrending existential conundrums which are perceived as critical to meaningful human existence.<sup>32</sup> Through the "human body man is able to insert himself in the world and through it he is able to achieve both intimacy and distance, and whose immediacy is the

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<sup>29</sup> M. Natanson, *The nature of the social man*, 214.

<sup>30</sup> Jim I. Unah, "Ontological-Epistemological Background to Authentic African Socio-Economic and Political Institutions."

In A.F Uduigwomen (ed). *Footmarks on African Philosophy* (pp. 107 – 123). (Lagos: Obaroh & Ogbinaka Publishers Ltd, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> M. Natanson, *The nature of the social man*, 214.

<sup>32</sup> O. Okoroh, *How critical can the African learner be?* 121.



agency for his locating objects, persons, events and feelings, as here and as mine.”<sup>33,34</sup> He further says that the human body is the resplendent and baffling variety of human involvements which include among others: work, love and hate, disease and sickness, and death. Also, it is through this human body the sociality of man achieves its primordial expression, and the social world is made up of predecessors and successors.<sup>35,36</sup> Realizing that it is man that creates the social world, existential philosophy of education gives the learner the opportunity not only to realize himself as being-in-the-world but being-living-with-others.<sup>37</sup> Even though man takes a lot of things for granted, the common sense principle seems to guide how we conduct the self in the mundane world. It therefore behooves the learner, including other fellow human beings, to recognize others as ends just as others would recognize the learner as an end.<sup>38</sup> When this is done it is possible that man can transfer such ability to the environment, by making such thought and act part of our given sociality. We can achieve this, if the human mind recognizes the physical body as medium of connections and ground of human interactions, rather than class, ethnicity, race and self.<sup>39,40</sup>

As part of changing the narrative, vocational and technical education (VTE) can make the learner look beyond general education, not necessarily because the field of study is recognized by nations as the discipline for the future, but it is a discipline that cultivates self-confidence, independence, and autonomy in the learner and the capacity to live an authentic lifestyle. Reliance on VTE is with the belief that the discipline has contributed so much to global economy. Its philosophy and goals must act as a guide so that they can be achievable.<sup>41</sup> Achieving its philosophy and goals would give the discipline a place of recognition among other disciplines. Our attitude towards VTE and its practitioners must improve for the better. This is because, whatever a man does in terms of career or occupation is to make him attain the good life – happiness and contributions to the welfare and wellbeing of others, growth and development of the economy. In addition, VTE must possess the capacity to proffer possible solutions to technological activities, which may constitute such context for curriculum designs as a content area in textbooks and meaningful research as an attempt to position itself as an academic discipline that may lead to the emulation of such effort of educating other fields of learning. As the sub-sector of the education system widely recognized to be the bedrock of sustainable technology development programmes in entrepreneurship, occupational professionalism, self-reliance, poverty alleviation and wealth creation. This would in turn help them to improve their living conditions and social status. It would then be that when the youths and adults acquire

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<sup>33</sup> M. Natanson, *The nature of the social man*, 214.

<sup>34</sup> M. Natanson, *The nature of the social man*, 214.

<sup>35</sup> Julie I. Kalusi and Paul J. Iretefoju, *Educating the Self for Political Stability in Nigeria*,

<sup>36</sup> M. Natanson, *The nature of the social man*, 214.

<sup>37</sup> M. Natanson, *The nature of the social man*, 214.

<sup>38</sup> O. Okoroh, *How critical can the African learner be?* 121.

<sup>39</sup> Julie I. Kalusi and Paul J. Iretefoju, *Educating the Self for Political Stability in Nigeria*,

<sup>40</sup> M. Natanson, *The nature of the social man*, 214.

<sup>41</sup> Jim I. Unah, *Ontological-Epistemological Background to Authentic African Socio-Economic and Political Institutions*.

entrepreneurial and employable skills, they would be gainfully engaged in paid employment or become self-employed as artisans, skilled craftsmen, technologists, technocrats and so on, helping to diversify the economy.

### **Conclusion**

It was our resolve that the existential self would be able to change the narrative, if and only if, education looks beyond certification and make the learner look inward as a necessary condition for economic viability in the face of single economy. The search for a viable economic order begins with the self. Hence educating the self involves self-reliance, a sense of belonging, social integration and interdependence, creativity, and critical thinking as conditions for building the authentic self and capacity for participation in the economy. The socio-economic configuration of man reveals that they are selfish, greedy and self-centred by nature and in a society where inequality is a natural process and the appropriation of available natural resources seems to follow this natural propensity. Since the self is made to see this as a natural thing, it will be impossible to use this same kind of education to erase this way of thinking and doing things from the learner's perspective. Such education is bookish; it makes the learner conceive education as a process of acquiring a certificate, which guarantees its recipients only a meal ticket. This situation makes it difficult for the learner to look beyond the experiences acquired in the process of learning. Therefore, to realize the authentic self through education for viable and sustaining economic order, the self must engage in a self-overcoming process by reconstructing its perception, expectations and aspirations based on its level of awareness and experience, in order to change the stereotyping narrative.

### **Recommendations**

It was recommended among other things that the existential self should look beyond their natural tendencies and not see them as limitations. This is because the self is not only a determined self, but a free being with the capacity of becoming whatever they choose in the face of these natural tendencies. The Nigerian youth is a forward-looking and enterprising learner with great potential to revive the economy. The education system should encourage independent-thinking beings through project work, group discussion and other democratic teaching approaches. In addition, the learner's attitude, beliefs and stereotypes towards certain disciplines and other humans should change. This is because we all possess a spark (rationality) of the Ultimate Reality. Being a manifestation of this reality suggests that the capacity we possess, basically, is to contribute to human welfare and wellbeing, not to see people, disciplines and occupations as "less than" or "less important." The task of education would also be to encourage broadmindedness, critical thinking, give and take in human relations.

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