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Abstract

This paper seek to assess the role of rationalism as a foundation of knowledge exploring its limitation and implication for Nigerian education. The paper argues that over reliance on rationalists' principles on education neglects contextual, cultural and social dimension of knowledge acquisition hindering inclusive education. This is because scholars from different angles claimed that there are different sources of acquiring knowledge in school system. Rationalism even though is a cognitive theory of knowledge argued that true knowledge is attainable through the mental faculty of reason. The focus of this article centered on what might be the position of rationalism as a foundation of knowledge in Nigerian education. Rationalists are of the view that regards reason as the principal source and test of knowledge and hold that reality has an inherently logical structure, also asserted that a class of truth knowledge exist with the intellect can be grasp directly. The five pillars on Nigerian education carried some elements of rationalistic principles. For instance, free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian society, united strong and self-reliance nation among other are very strong concepts that cannot be implemented through technologies. This paper concludes with good recommendation suggesting that, the federal government should incorporating critical thinking exercise into curricula activities with specialize teachers for their implementation, the federal government should provide teachers with rationalist-based training, this will help to foster the ideals of our educational aims and objectives. Nigerian

government should re-visit her efforts on education and organize another curriculum conference similar to that of 1969 emphasizes on logical and systematic knowledge

Introduction

When philosophers argue about the foundations of human knowledge in general, our attention is drawn to various sources of knowledge. Philosophers over the years are continuing debating on which of the sources of knowledge is more reliable or certainty. At this point, over some decades, the argument about foundations of knowledge, is between rationalists and empiricists even though they have all agree that there are objects which exist in it as reality. It is therefore, part of these intellectual arguments concerning sources of knowledge that some claims are certainty to some extent they can be basic foundation of knowledge. In fact, understanding of these components will help to clarify our basic questions about the knowledge claim. It is based on these arguments that Ayer stated that the concept of certainty itself has different connotation between rationalism and empiricism¹. For rationalists, Ayer says that true knowledge is synonym for necessary or 'a priori'. Rationalists further argue that no empirical source is attainable, what is meant by this statement is that empiricists views are not necessary in the way a priori statements are, they can all be denied without contradiction. Hence rationalists take a priori statements as their ideals and from these levels they are able to build solid foundations of knowledge at all levels of education. From the foregoing statements has direct links with Rene Descartes dictum which he presented all his argument in support of rational source of knowledge. Descartes believed that there are innate ideas in humans which make a priori possible². Such process of knowledge may be said to be distinct, clear and indubitable and are not based on any experience for proof. With this, it helps to explain the strength of the inductive method in the process of recognition, which Plato and Descartes were in agreement to promote idealistic school of thought above others. Plato further stated that acquiring knowledge through principle of rationalism enable human beings to recognize the essence of things, which some serve as basic foundations of knowledge.

The concept of rationalism

The concept of rationalism is derived from the Latin word 'Ratio' meaning reason. From the above derivative sense, rationalism and reason are closely related, sequel to this view, is that rationalism recognizes supremacy of reason as the best human faculty, fundamental-based of its norms and its insufficiency as an organ for thought and action. Benne described rationalism as life of reason³. This implies that reason is linked with ideas of intelligence, sensible or even reasonable. For instance, to say that a man is rational is just one way of saying he is either of these things. But the other aspect of rationalism lies not in reason alone but in its methods that is the norms of logic and sciences.

Rationalism is an epistemological component in knowledge which its megaphones include Rene Descartes and Spinoza, stated that, in addition to what we know by experience, there are certain innate ideas or innate principles which are known independently of sense experience and which do not only organizes or regulate the later but are also priori to it. Therefore, with this view, rationalists are of the view that regards reason as the principal source and test of knowledge. Rationalists further hold that reality has an inherently logical

structure, they also assert that a class of true knowledge exist that the intellect can grasp directly⁴. There are certain rational principles especially in logic and mathematics and even in ethics as well as metaphysics that are so fundamental, denial of these statements is to fall in confusion.

Rationalism was first expressed in platonic doctrine of forms or ideals which are not known by the sense, but reason alone. Plato explained how human senses may show things to be more or less equal, though equality itself is not seen or felt but known independently of sense⁵. Additionally, rationalists view of innate ideas or innate principles are epistemological equivalent of Platonic philosophy that may be re-called from knowledge that the soul in question possessed prior to its union with the present body. Plato further account of rationalism as follow;

1. Whereas sensory experience is superficial and deceptive, the soul or reason nevertheless is to know, and how infallibly, the immutable and the essential forms that exist separated from the phenomenal world
2. The sense do not reveal the true structure of the world but reason reveal it
3. A universal science that is extremely true is possible⁶

In view of these fundamental principles of rationalists, Nigerian educational blueprint are far-reaching in their implementation in academic activities as they are controversial. Intuitively, the subsequent continental rationalists such as Rene Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz sought to lay down an all-time foundation of knowledge upon Plato's tenets and particularly in the area of mathematics fabric.

Descartes and his co-rationalists put efforts on proffering a true foundation of knowledge were, however fraught with problems. Descartes says it is notable that his chain of epistemological deduction crumbled in the circulatory on his arguments. He described the absoluteness and finality of intuition by appeal to the highest Supreme Being (God) as the final truth of what is known clearly and directly⁶

Apart from the above, rationalism was approached differently by various scholars who attempted to support epistemological dictum with various explanation. For instance, in the psychology of perception, rationalism is opposed to transaction-lists, a point of view in psychology according to which human perceptual skills are achievement, accomplished through actions performed in response to an active environment⁷. In this view, the experimentalists would like to chained it that, it is made that perception is conditioned by probability of judgments formed on the bases of earlier situations.

From the Psychological view explained above, is a correlative to these sweeping claims that the rationalists defends a nativism which holds that certain perceptual and conceptual capacities are 'innate'. Even though these nature capacities may at times be dormant until the appropriate conditions for their emergence arises⁸. This meant that in whatever action or experiences by the organism as stated, such action or experiences are reducible to the innate principles for their meaning.

Additionally, psychological thought can only be relevant when all their actions are connected with the innate principles, if not so their results no matter their relevancy cannot serve as a foundation of knowledge. This is because in the field of education where epistemological components are mostly used, rationalists holds that at least some human knowledge is gained through a priori or rational, insight as destined from experience, which always provides a confused or merely tentative approach to knowledge.

In the debate between empiricism and rationalism, empiricists holds the simpler and more sweeping position which they claim that all knowledge of fact stem from perception⁹. Rationalists on the other side of the argument would like to state that knowledge arise through direct apprehension by the sense experience intellect¹⁰. What the intellectual faculty apprehends are objects that transcend, namely universal and their relations. a universal is an abstraction, a characteristics that may reappear in various instances. For instance, in our assumptions that all triangles or all human beings have something in common respectively. Though this cannot be seen or felt, but rationalists pointed out that human can plainly think about themselves and about their relations. Therefore, this kind of knowledge, it is the most important and certain that is only achieved through innate principles. Such a priori knowledge is both necessary and universal.

Rationalism and education

According to rationalists, only with reason a child can reach the real truth.¹⁰. Base on this understanding of the concept of rationalism, rationalists stresses the principle of relationship as the basic source of knowledge. Therefore, the development of science by human must begin with relationship. People cannot acquire truth knowledge without relationship, relationship in itself is thinking which according to advocate of rationalism argue that its theory is the basis of all research and investigation in all academic process. This is because its principles are good as they interpreted as sensual experiences as a source, in contrast to empiricism approach. Rationalist principles move from major premises and end in a skeptic conclusion.

In more sense, from the above analysis, the role of rationalism as a source of knowledge is that of interpretation, concretization and consistency determine the relationship between people ideas. This is because rationalists further argue that reason is the most important way to obtain knowledge because after obtaining information through the senses, reason then process this information to produce knowledge.

On education, rationalistic principles are the most important ways to shape our education system, where knowledge, values and skills are transferred from one generation to another. however, education process is more than just exchanges of data, but it involve deep understanding of how people learn, what is considered important in learning and how learner exist in the educational system.

From the above, below are the basic roles of rationalism in education

1. Critical thinking. Rationalism emphasized on critical thinking, essential problem-solving method and decision making

2. Rationalism emphasizes scientific inquiry that promote the study of science and technology, driving innovative and technological advancement
3. Rationalism stresses the important curriculum reform, design, emphasizing on logical and systematic knowledge
4. Intellectual freedom, rationalism emphasizing in education encourages intellectual freedom allowing learners to question and explores ideas

Argument against Rationalism as a source of Knowledge

Rationalism has long been the rival of empiricism, a doctrine that all knowledge come from, and must be tested by sense experience. The empiricists strongly are against any source of knowledge that is acquired by reason alone, such knowledge acquired cannot be certain. Empiricists goes further to argue that in explaining the existence of the natural lives of things, rationalism has no any significant right to explain rather depends on what senses would provide.

Intuitively, on the foregoing argument on basic cognitive mechanism of empiricism, they have denied the role of rationalists' distinction between being empirical and a priori background. All knowledge according to empiricists' claims arises through, and it is reducible to sense perception. And there is no knowledge that arises through reason alone, and to think of basing the process of knowing only on reason meaning that some strategic aspects of the physical world will not be known

However, above, both empiricists and intuitivism stated that their interest is not to completely deny the existence of reason or that reason has no any role, rather, it is that reason that has some special access to foundations of knowledge over many decades. All empiricists acknowledge that human being possessing reason, therefore reason is the instrument that allows manipulating.

It is based on these reasons that Macann rightly say that empiricism begin with the distinction between sense data and ideas⁹. Sense data represent the basic information that the senses present to the mind through our perceptual experience that is sight, sound and taste. For instance, suppose that one see a green glass cup, this sense experience is reducible to the visual act of the sense data, that is, the information that the visual act contains. In this example, the sense data/ information that the visual act provides are those that tries to explain property of greenness and a greenness property known as a cup. At this point, there is no conscious recognition that one sees a green cup, all there are pure sense data that the senses present to the mind if not the mind itself is at lost. The mind itself at this point, processes and represents each sense datum with ideas. With this, the mind can function when sense experience create or present objects to it.

In summary, the empiricists would like to stick to sense data as it represent the basic materials that the mind uses to construct an idea that comprises all our knowing. No matter what the ideas are, it is possible to trace the sources of such ideas to sense experience.

Notable empiricists philosophers such as John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume all appeal to explain the process through which sense data becomes the foundation of knowledge¹⁰.

Implications of rationalism In Nigerian Education

Our main focus here is to illustrate that one's general assumption about the foundation of knowledge will have many consequences in different philosophical approaches with reference to Nigeria education practices. No matter the loosening of sense rationalism as rightly argued, still it served as foundation of knowledge. In educational system, as it is stated that one cannot claim monopoly of knowledge implies that one source of knowing cannot guarantee the true test of knowledge. Philosophers in various schools of thoughts disagree with each other on the bases of being certainty. Here the criticism comes from both side which one cannot do without the other. This is because the concept of philosophy itself is a rational activity. On the educational note the researcher examined how rational and empiricism would be useful in educational theory and practice.

In the present 21st century, contemporary education places more emphasis on science and technology as well as self-development. These aspirations are believed to be attainable through the study of school subjects since these subjects represent various aspects of knowledge. School subjects and all activities involve are largely taken place formally through teaching and learning in both classrooms and outside classroom setting. It appears that since Nigerian education place great emphasis on self-reliance and technological development as desired outcomes of her education, Nigerian present day education focuses on both rational and empirical foundation of knowledge.

Therefore, in present era of science and technology, scientifically it is good for man development in the 21st century. The empirical knowledge which all her proponents advocated cannot be under score, but such knowledge would necessarily entails element of rationality, since man need to be rational in order to function meaningfully in the world he find himself. Other aspects of human development such as self-development and technological development among others forms of development are achievable through the application of lesson experience to daily and techno-logical living. This is said to be achieved through a philosophical principles of teaching and learning which teachers instructed learners to think analytically upon information acquired and have to derive general knowledge from the particular knowledge within the classroom through inductive or deductive reasoning.

In general understanding, the article dwelt much on rational dimension to emphasize the place of reason on knowledge acquisition as bases for educational development. The use of senses and reason in teaching will therefore be the constant feature of principles of teaching in school system. This would reflect on the statement of lesson objectives as well as in the methods and evaluation of teaching process. This will also be based on the philosophical assumptions that teaching and learning particularly within the classroom situation entails sharing of perception between the teacher and the learner. The sharing of perception still has both empirical and rational contents.

Admittedly, the country even though has advocated for the application of digitalism in education, has taken a giant effort in providing a succinctly prescribed and subsequently reviewed the National Policy on Education which entails some of the rudiments of a sound education which is basically theoretical in nature. It is nevertheless recommend that section (1) dealing with the philosophy of Nigerian education should be clarified to remove the ambiguities and vagueness of terms such as 'a free and democratic nation, just and egalitarian and a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens, if and only if implementation is to be meaningful, because a sound education cannot be built using opaque and blurred terms. When such terms are clarified the concepts involved would receive sequentially adequate methods giving rise to contemplation, critical thought, experimentation, inquisitiveness all of which are the bedrock of a education at all levels.

Therefore, any teaching process in schools that facilitates effective sharing of perception would necessarily be philosophically approach to genuine knowledge, since philosophy itself is a rational activity that involves the use of senses and reason to our doubts

Benefits of rationalism in education

1. Rationalism help to improve critical thinking and also enhances learners analytical skills
2. Rationalism enhances problem-solving and foster innovative in ideas and practice
3. Rationalism helps to promotes learners autonomy in thought
4. Rationalism help to prepared learners to face global challenges and also equip them with logical reasoning.

Challenges facing rationalism in Nigerian education

1. Cultural and social barriers. Traditional and cultural values may conflicts with the principles of rationalistic views at the point of implementation of academic programs in schools
2. Limited resources. Inadequate infrastructural facilities and instructional tools hindered effective implementation of policies and programs in most Nigerian schools
3. Lack of teacher training. Nigerian teachers especially basic school teachers need continuous training to effectively integrate rationalists principles into real practice

Conclusion

Rationalist principles plays vital role in Nigerian education fostering critical thinking, intellectual freedom and scientific inquiry. Addressing all the problems facing the implementation of academic activities in Nigerian schools can enhances rational impact and also preparing school leaners for global challenges.

The way forward

1. Nigerian education should incorporate critical thinking into curricula activities with functional educational facilities for effective delivery in schools
2. Nigerian education should provide teachers with rationalist-based training. This will help to foster the ideals of educational aims and objectives

3. The federal government need to improve on provision of infrastructure to schools, this will help to address issues of congestion in lecture theatres, library and in science and technology laboratory.

End Notes.

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