

African Thinkers And Self-Reliance: Remedy To Ameliorate Unemployment In Africa

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Abstract: In African states, there is high tempo of following the residual paths of Western thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle and John Locke, in the quest to formulate sound thoughts and policies. While nothing is inherently wrong with appropriating ideas from non-African cultural backgrounds, what is awkward is that Africans are so engrossed in this vogue that our own models, whatever their worth, are rarely considered. This paper therefore critically appraises the ideas of Dr. Taiwo Solarin and Julius Nyerere on education for self-reliance as panacea to ameliorating the mounting quotient of unemployment in Africa. The paper notes that although African education is rooted in self-reliance as stated in the National Policy on education, commitment however is only at the level of policy articulation. Using historical and philosophical analytical methodology, the paper examines African Political Thought and self-reliance and posits that the present educational policy stifles the graduates' initiative to apply their theoretical knowledge pragmatically. The paper explores the philosophers' views on education which reflects African cultural experiences based on resourcefulness, self-realization, self-sufficiency and self-reliance through emphasis on vocational and technical education. The paper asserts that Africa is blessed with great thinkers and in our march to economic greatness, the paper concludes by advocating for the integration of their perspicuity into the National Policy on education in other to tackle unemployment in Nigeria.

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Introduction: Theoretical Conceptualisation and Clarifications

African Political Thought refers to the original ideas, values and blueprints for a better Africa that inform African political systems and institutions from the ancient period to the present. African political thought also refers to political theories and ideologies developed by various African scholars and statesmen, as enunciated in their speeches, autobiographies, writings and policy statements, the main focus here being on the idea, not on individuals. In other words, African political thought provides practical solutions to political, economic, social and cultural problems of African states. African political thought thus sought to dispel the denigrating myths and stereotypes linked to black people by acknowledging their culture, history and achievements, as well as reclaiming their contributions to the world and restoring their rightful place within the global community.

There is no precise definition of unemployment. In Britain for instance, the Department of Employment accepts as unemployed any school-leaver who is not in paid employment but who is available for work and is capable of working, (Olajide: 1981). The Census Bureau of the United States of America accepts Lloyd G. Reynold's definition of unemployment as "the difference between the amount of labour offered at present wage levels and working conditions and the amount of labour hired at those level". Underemployment on the other hand, is

measured by the number of hours worked. Those who work for less than 40 hours a week for involuntary reasons in Nigeria are considered underemployed, (Englana: 2001). According to Smith (1997) in Akewushola et al (2007), unemployment is a stock concept. This is because the number and identities of people in the labour category are always changing and thus affect the level of those in the market. Unemployment has also been categorized as one of the serious impediments to social progress; apart from representing a colossal waste of a country's manpower resources, it generates welfare loss in terms of lower output thereby leading to lower income and well-being, (Olajide: 1981). Unemployment is a very serious issue in Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, (Englana: 2001). The need to avert the negative effects of unemployment has made the tackling of unemployment problems to feature very prominently in the development objectives of many developing countries. Incidentally, most of these countries' economies are also characterized by less pragmatic education. Thus, it seems obvious to many policy makers that there must be a straight forward connection between education and employment/unemployment.

Tai Solarin, famous in Nigeria as both a social critic and an educator was born in 1922, educated in a Nigerian missionary school, served in Britain's Royal Air Force during World War II, and finished a bachelor's degree in history and geography at the

University of Manchester, Great Britain, in 1952. Tai returned to Western Nigeria to become Principal of Molusi College from 1952 to 1955. Because Molusi's governing board forced him to open each school day with hymns and prayers, and march his students to church every Sunday, he protested and eventually quit. He wasted no time as he started his own school in 1956, calling it the Mayflower School, followed by the Mayflower Junior School in 1959, both located in Ikenne, south-western Nigeria, where Tai lived for the remainder of his life. He was one of the most prominent educationists in the history of Nigeria, and was at the vanguard of criticism of not only the social, political and economic policies of the nation, but also of the structure and practices of its education system.

On the other hand, Julius Kambarage Nyerere was a Tanzanian politician who served as the leader of Tanzania, and previously Tanganyika, from 1960 until his retirement in 1985. Born in Tanganyika on 13 April 1922 and died on 14 October 1999, Nyerere received his higher education at Makerere University in Kampala and the University of Edinburgh. After he returned to Tanganyika, he worked as a teacher. His oratory skills and integrity helped Tanganyika to independence and became the new country's first Prime Minister. The country became a republic in 1962, with Nyerere as the country's first president. In 1975, the Tanzanian government of Nyerere issued the 'ujamaa program' to send the Sonjo in northern Tanzania from compact sites with less water to flatter lands with more fertility and water; new villages were created to reap crops and raise livestock easily. This "villagization" (coined by W. M. Adams) encouraged the Sonjo to use modern irrigation techniques such as the unlined canals and man-made springs. Given the diversion of water from the Kisangiro and Lelestutta Rivers by dams, river water can flow by canals into the irrigation systems to alleviate the hardships of smallholder farmers and livestock owners. Farming practices towards tea and cloves increased for subsistence farmers. By 1974 ujaama programs and the IDA (International Development Association) worked hand and hand; while villagisation organized new villages to farm, the IDA financed projects to educate farmers to grow alternate crops and granted loans to farmers with added credit to small farmers. Nyerere's government did much to foster social development in Tanzania during its time in office.

In employing historical and philosophical analytical methodology to appraise African Political Thought and self-reliance, it is germane to conceptualise education which is the accepted foundation for societal growth and development. However, the term education is quite elusive and very difficult to pin down to a single definition because numerous authorities in different fields have described

education as it appeals to them. As problematic as the definition of education is, in his *Philosophical Foundations of Reform in Higher Education*, Babarinde (2007:4) simply puts it as the sum total of what is left after we might have forgotten all we learnt in schools. Quoting Peter (1967) Babarinde asserts that:

"It is a process of being initiated into knowledge and understanding which in turn regulates the recipients' attitudes, emotions, want and actions. The recipient has to be more than just 'knowledgeable', the knowledge has to alter his view of the world, that is, the interpersonal world, the world of social, economic and political institutions. While these knowledge and understanding have to be worthwhile, the process of acquisition must also be ethically defensible. And these processes include all organizational modes in which these processes are promoted. They include the formal, non-formal, informal and casual modes"

Education is an indispensable factor in the all-round development of any nation. The genesis of Nigerian education called Traditional Education was progressive in nature, because of its emphasis on functionalism. Enoch (1996) stated that "traditional African education is not admired for the mere fact of its being indigenous to Africa, rather a mere permanent, justification thought". Fafunwa has given the seven cardinal goals of traditional African education as follows: the development of the child's latent physical skills; the development of character; respect for elders and peers; intellectual training (including the poetic and prophetic aspects; vocational training (including agricultural education, trade and crafts, and the professions); the acquisition of specific vocational training to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour; the development of communal spirit; and promotion of cultural heritage. The success or failure of an education system is usually measured in terms of the extent to which the system has satisfied the needs and aspiration of the people - that is, the extent to which it has attained its main objectives. Upon the imposition of western style of education, Africans viewed education as a central body of essential knowledge that must be transmitted to all who came to school. In imparting knowledge to the learner therefore, a teacher could use lecture or play way, while the learner was expected to learn what the teacher taught by memorization and reproduction of the same on the examination day.

Over the years, self-reliance has been advanced by many African state men and scholars as a viable alternative strategy to dependent development in developing countries. As a matter of fact, self-reliance is one of the bases of effective community development in the traditional pre-colonial African

society. This concept of self-reliance is in fact located centrally within the discourse of African pre-colonial community development and largely connected to related concepts like self-help, mutual-help, indigenous participation and rural development.

Julius Nyerere and Dr. Tai Solarin: Education for Self-reliance as Panacea to Unemployment

Dr. Tai Solarin admired traditional communal African societies, which he attributed to the absence of sloth in them. According to him, “every individual had something productive to do for the good of all”. His belief was that the traditional African communalistic societies discouraged their members from substituting work with prayer. To him, even though they prayed, they were more on their heads than on their knees (Solarin 1959: 37). This may therefore account for Solarin’s espousal of secular humanism, which places a high premium on the human being. Solarin observed that among Nigerians, the absence of the spirit of self-reliance and resourcefulness has given way to indolence, parasitism and the attraction of anything foreign.

It can be easily said that Plato (philosophical principles), Socrates (oratorical principles) and Aristotle (the father of scientific enquiry) discovered the main principles of education thus, making education a weapon of liberation from ignorance, poverty and diseases. Other notable giants in the history of ideas that have subsequently shaped education generally and higher education in particular include Martin Luther of the Age of Reformation, 1483 – 1546, Jacques Rousseau, 1712 – 1778, Fredrich Froebel 1782 – 1852, Herbert Spencer 1820 – 1903 and many others. Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the former and founding president of the united republic of Tanzania, is known not only as one of the world’s most respected statesmen and an articulate spokesman of African liberation and African dignity but also as an educator and an original and creative educational thinker. Apart from his involvement in politics, Nyerere was an articulate theorist of education whose views deserve explication. Nyerere’s views on education can be located within the nationalistic ideological view of education in Africa. Characteristic of this position is the view that education has to reflect and sustain national priorities, aims and aspirations. In addition, it has to translate the national ideology into curriculum (Njoroge and Bennaars, 1986). Nyerere first articulated this idea in 1967. Later, he reflected upon this view and modified it into education for liberation. Anyanwu’s position was not different from the stand of Tanzanian president, Julius Nyerere when he asserts that self-help enables the local people to exploit to their advantage resources, which would otherwise lie dormant and thereby perpetuate the ignorance and

poverty of their community, by making use of the under-utilised labour. The emphasis is on democratising with reliance on what people can do for themselves. In line with the above view, Nyerere’s publications articulate education for independent Tanzania and by extension, for Africa.

Solarin provided a very comprehensive philosophy, which is sensitive to both the school and the wider society. He believed that the gateway to societal transformation is the transformation of the school system itself. Solarin had an optimistic view of the individual and of the society. In his view, both can become anything depending on how they choose, and on whether or not they accept responsibility for their choices. There is also a clear pragmatic thrust in Solarin’s philosophy, that is, a system of thought which stresses the human being’s use of intelligence to overcome problems that confront him/her in his/her interactions with the environment (Enoch 1996: 165). He opined that, we are what we choose to become, and can only become what we want to be, not through prayer, but through hard work, persistence and courage”. The implication of this is that the inculcation of self-reliance through problem-solving skills ought to be central to education. Solarin identified what to him are the problems confronting the education system in Nigeria. Pertinent among these are parasitism and indolence, emphasis on paper qualifications and enslavement of the mind. Accordingly, he opined that education should aim to inculcate in individuals the habit of work, and to equip them with the necessary skills that will enable them to contribute their quota to the growth of the society rather than remain huge parasites. Education should therefore be more of the development of problem-solving skills with which to confront the various challenges of life, rather than the acquisition of information that will never be put to productive use. He was of the view that “it is impossible for a country to change, if the education of that country is not undergoing a change; a change no matter how infinitesimal is only possible with the education of the people” (Solarin 1992: 20)

Solarin avers further that, the colonial education bequeathed to Africans did not awaken their critical consciousness. Rather than free an individual’s mental powers, this education promotes fear of almost everything - parents, teachers, day-light, darkness, thinking and speaking (Mamora 1992: 20). Solarin primarily attributes this mental enslavement to the veil of religion, which allegedly preaches fatalism and renders the individual irrelevant even to himself/herself. Consequently, for Solarin, the goal of education should be the building of a new community by producing individuals who can stand on their feet, men and women who are mentally free and

independent (Solarin 1963: 5). Solarin's educational ideas made him to establish the Mayflower School, founded in January 31, 1956 in Ikenne, Ogun State. Mayflower preaches a very strong educational philosophy grounded in self-reliance, self-sacrifice, public service and physical toughness. The school's sound academic reputation has produced a long record of achievements, including the first female engineer in sub-Saharan Africa.

Tai Solarin, in his trademark khaki shorts, shirt and cap, was very critical of Nigeria's gross unemployment, as well as the prevalent preoccupation with fleeting pleasures rather than a collective commitment to enduring virtues. For Dr. Solarin, commitment to high ideals and the value of hard work, honesty and sincerity count much more than mere celebrations. This charismatic visionary ensured that Mayflower School imparted academics with vocational skills. If his message of self-reliance had been embraced, many of our unemployed graduates would have been in self-employment; for the Nigerian curriculum would have combined the best of academics with the best in entrepreneurial training. If that had been the case, the current overdependence on white-collar jobs would not have been our lot. The main essence of highlighting these philosophers' ideas is to showcase that a nation can radically turn around its own socio-economic and political clout if it decides to, in other to liberate the African nations from much dependency on other countries of the west and Asia for their domestic needs and in reducing unemployment level, which has resulted in the present social-economic and political crises today in Africa. When Tai Solarin wrote about his own moral and philosophical ideals, his true humanism was well revealed. He asserts that "anything that man wants to do must be done by man himself. Anywhere he wants to go, he must, himself, aggressively propel himself in that direction." He further teaches that prayer is useless, and that it is better to teach people how to solve their problems, and to give them the power and freedom to act. According to Solarin, "I want to be seen teaching the poor how to live creatively by making use of his hands and feet and not giving alms to the poor".

In the light of this, we face daunting odds for the most part in Africa. For our young people, it is not a levelled-playing field. Children attending schools in the industrialised countries are learning to use information and communications equipments simultaneously with learning to write, often at age five or six. An African child is lucky if he or she sees a computer somewhere, and I think it is fair to say that most schools in our country do not have a working computer laboratory. On the strength of this, there is the need for a new focus on overhauling our education

system in other not to survive alone but to compete favourably with other states in the world in terms of development, self-sufficiency, productivity and self-reliance. Other countries have managed to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. Asia and South American states are good examples showing exactly what is possible. Africa is blessed with abundant natural resources and few environmental challenges. We are, however, squandering the most precious natural resource we have – our human resources – mostly through lack of pragmatic quality education which has more often than not resulted into productive youths either travelling abroad in search of denigrating jobs or engage in fraud due to lack of white collar job which our educational institutions groom them for.

Conclusion

Educational expansion as we now know, does not necessarily make people of countries more prosperous, instead it may and does leave the former without jobs and the latter with increasingly burdensome claims on public funds; a view coherently corroborated in African states right from the colonial era to the present dispensation; with the rise of formal education on one hand and a general neglect of economic and local realities on the other resulting in the dearth of viable manpower. This consequently accounts for the wide economic gap between developing and developed countries which is traceable to their level of technological development and the extent to which vocational and technological education is encouraged and pursued. It is in this regard that this paper proposes the integration and rigorous implementation of Julius Nyerere and Dr. Tai Solarin's perspicuity into Africa's National Policies.

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