

# John Dewey's Idea of Education: Its Relevance to Contemporary Nigerian Educational Value

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is a critical evaluation of John Dewey's concept of education visa viz its relevance to contemporary Nigerian educational value. To undertake this task, the paper seeks a more holistic approach to offer a comprehensive overview of the importance of John Dewey's idea of education. Specifically, the paper examines the importance of John Dewey's Philosophy of Education in the present-day Nigerian educational system. Within this framework, the researchers were posed with three major considerations. Firstly, the paper unravels the idea of education in light of John Dewey's model. Secondly, the paper executes a succinct evaluation of the present Nigerian educational values. Thirdly, is the application of Dewey's theory of education to serve as a panacea for the Nigerian educational system. The paper notes that Dewey introduced his pedagogical approach into the educational space that altered the traditional teaching and educational value prevalent in his time. Dewey insists that active teaching-interactive learning, step-by-step reading as well as writing for critical thinking are germane to modern-day education. Comparatively, today, these approaches as recommended by Dewey, appear to have not been holistically adopted within the framework of today's Nigerian educational system. Nigeria has only partially implanted Dewey's new theory. Hence, a call for a holistic adoption of his theory in Nigeria. This paper finally recommends Dewey's theory of education for Nigerian present educational woe. Dewey, no gainsaying, ushers in plausible revolutionary changes into the present-day educational philosophy.

**Keywords:** John Dewey, Education, Contemporary, Nigeria, Value

## INTRODUCTION

This paper critically examines John Dewey's theory of education and its relevance to the present-day Nigerian educational value. To usher us into the task at hand, it is pertinent we commence by noting that the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a period when philosophical exploration allows for mixed philosophical investigations. An era when the focus of philosophy was no longer concentrated on a single aspect of philosophical problem and curiosity but a consideration of all the different philosophical issues. John Dewey a renowned American thinker and educator within this period gifted humanity with his array of intellectual contributions to the development of philosophy and in particular education. Dewey, whose desire was to rewrite a new rule for the practice of education, decided to develop his pedagogical framework (method) different from what was obtainable in his era. Strengthening this view, Mayhew and Edvard opines inter alia; "At the beginning of the XX century the American philosopher and educator John Dewey introduced to the world his educational theory that sparked a movement of international dimension." (Mayhew & Edvard 1936: xv-xvi)

Furthermore, let us avail ourselves of a brief definition and clarification of the concept of education. This clarification will help us to appreciate the values of education as well as how these values can be applied in the discourse of Nigerian educational philosophy. Speaking from the point of etymological underpinning, education simply means to 'lead' or 'bring out'. However, today, the term 'education' has received

variegated definitions. To some, it is systematic training and instruction geared towards the development of the ability, character, and mental powers of the individual. To others, according to Azenabor, “education is a conscious molding of man by man, in which he acquires knowledge needed to cope with the inherent problems of life, according to his age, ability, and aptitude, in his environment, to live a good and useful life in the society.” Also, to Peters’, “Education is a systematic attempt to develop the character, physical and mental powers of an individual through a careful dissemination of knowledge.” It is Kneller offered definition of education when he defined education as “the process by which any society through schools, colleges, universities, and other institutions deliberately transmits its cultural heritage, that is, its accumulated knowledge, value, skills, from one generation to another...” (Azenebor,1997:2) It is noteworthy to say that this paper adopts here, Kneller’s definition of education because it is all-inclusive and comprehensible. Kneller’s definition accommodates formal, informal, and non-formal educational classifications. Again, particularly, his definition emphasizes the essence of education to the human community. Given Kneller’s broader definition, therefore, ideally, the analysis of this paper should have included formal, informal and non-formal education. However, the thrust of this paper is limited to the problems and issues confronting the Nigerian formal educational System. Bluntly speaking, only a few scholars knew that Dewey wrote his works on education when democracy was flourishing. His careful studies of the traditional curriculum of education concerning the tenets of democratic principles in his time exposed him to the consideration for a newer pedagogical approach to education. Dewey discovered that the old traditional approaches to educational careers were no longer in consonant with the basic principles of democracy which many countries envisaged and have adopted. During this time, democracy was already an acceptable way of life in America. Therefore, Dewey advocates and calls for a new paradigm in the framing of educational curricula. To further lay this foundation in a more summarized but comprehensive manner we will avail ourselves with Mohammed’s clarification as he succinctly submits that:

Dewey criticized authoritarian organizations and, as a result, conventional teaching techniques in schools, due to his deep democratic conviction in civic society and education. Dewey believed in progressive education and campaigned for changes in pedagogical elements of teaching and school curriculum; most significantly, he taught that the child was at the center of all academia, and his educational philosophy and reforms were primarily focused on the child. (2014:1)

As seen from the above passages, John Dewey’s interest and curiosity for the development of a new method and theory in the educational curriculum was greatly due to his disaffection with the old educational curriculum which was following the trending traditional educational system that was practiced, which was in line with the authoritarian system of government that prevailed before his time. Dewey went on to develop an educational theory that favors his experience with democracy, humanism, and pragmatism which gradually gained dominance in America and in most countries of the world. His goal was to formulate a pedagogical system of education that will give a sense of belonging to both the pupils and the teachers, that is, a practice of educational values where there will be a cordial relationship between the teacher and the student.

Today, in most countries, many scholars, within their respective democratic institutions, have called for the adoption of Dewey’s theory of education as a panacea for educational curriculum. Nevertheless, Nigeria as a democratic country is yet to embrace practically this endorsement. The policymakers could have done so, by creating a level playing ground and a sense of democratic freedom for students to freely choose courses of study of their choice. In addition, children and students are still being coerced either by their parents, teachers, and generally by the present undemocratic policies inherent in our educational policy formulations. Nigerian students, no doubt, are being compelled to either undertake some compulsory courses or conditionally made to accept to study courses or disciplines which are not of their interests and choice. It is unfortunate to still see that our students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are being forced to pursue a career, course, or program in areas in which they never had an interest. Such a scenario is incompatible with democratic

values. Consequently, in this paper, an attempt is deliberately made at exposing Dewey's theory of education and how his method can be recommended for adoption within the Nigerian educational space.

## JOHN DEWEY'S PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

It is pertinent to state without equivocation that John Dewey was a thoroughgoing philosopher. To make this assertion, however, it is imperative to note that Dewey's philosophical exploration did not arise from a vacuum. In other words, there are some scholars who in one way, directly or indirectly influenced his philosophical thoughts and backgrounds. This implies that most of what is said to be Dewey's ideas and contributions to philosophy and human knowledge, generally, today, are ideas lifted from other thinkers whom he both directly or indirectly admired and learned from. However, Dewey studied different courses at the University, but his major course of interest was Philosophy which he studied to the Doctorate Degree level. Notably, Dewey was also influenced by other philosophers' ideas and thoughts particularly, Plato, Hegel, and Kant. Going further, in his early days at school, Dewey was influenced by his own Professor – George S. Maurice. Specifically, Dewey's acceptance of idealism or idealistic philosophy has a direct impartation on him by Maurice but has a traced background to Hegel's idealism. Subsequently, we are told that Dewey was later influenced by Charles Darwin, who influenced him in the area of naturalistic philosophy. Thereafter, towards the end of his academic journeys, Dewey's also made popular his most famous philosophy- pragmatism of which he was influenced by William James. In short, Dewey made enormous contributions to philosophy, especially in the areas of metaphysics, epistemology, logic, axiology, and educational philosophy

In his time, particularly, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he made enormous contributions to the growth and development of philosophical exploration. Like other philosophers, while his ideas in philosophy are applauded, nevertheless, there are some criticisms leveled against him. It is this interpretation that some writers conceived and had about him that led Mohammed to air as follows; "Though Dewey is criticized for reducing reason to mere instrumental value and undermining the importance of inclinations and motivation in the analysis of knowledge, his thoughts reflect the effects of a modern industrialized colonial society." (Mohammed 2014:1-2) Mohammed adds more:

Dewey was heavily influenced by Marx's ideas of social struggle and class warfare. According to Marx's theory of conflict, society is stratified and stacked with distinct strata, and there is rivalry among these layers. Marx emphasizes the need of focusing social analysis on class structure and connections. Dewey and Habermas both criticize positivism, technocracy, autocratic dominance, and other cultural and social circumstances that stifle democracy's potential. Dewey was influenced by Habermas's ideas, which are based on Kant's ideas and stress the importance of education in making the world a more humane, just, and equitable society. (2)

As seen above quote, Dewey's philosophical thought did not rise from a vacuum, as his was influenced by some philosophers who shaped his ideas in philosophy. Notably amongst these scholars as expressed above by Mohammed were Karl Marx and Habermas. Studies also reveal that thinkers like Immanuel Kant and other Idealists also indirectly influenced Dewey's philosophical view. Also, adding to the discussion Gutek tells us that; "John Dewey was a pragmatist, progressivist, educator, philosopher, and social reformer. He felt strongly that people have a responsibility to make the world a better place to live in through education and social reform." Gutek (2014) From the views of Schirra, Dewey believed that education was "a crucial ingredient in social and moral development." Schirra (2012:174) Another scholar, Morgan states that; "Dewey's beliefs and philosophy about education and learning have impacted countless educators over the years and are woven throughout many learning theories such as progressive education, constructivism, learner-centered theory, and experiential knowledge, all of which differ from what Dewey describes as a traditional classroom setting." (Morgan 2017:91-) Similarly, Gurminder Kaur asserts that Dewey was the

legendary educationist who is remembered in the classroom every day, and everywhere due to his innovative ideas for the field of education. He continues that Dewey's pragmatism and laboratory schools are examples of his greatest contribution. He identifies Dewey to be the most important single force in the progressive educational movement. As regards Dewey's contribution to philosophical advancement:

Building on various reforms he had been initiated and formed a new philosophy of learning and logic of thinking. The main aspects of John's philosophy are: Truth is that which works, which fulfills our purposes. There are no fixed values. All values change with time and space. Human life is a series of experiments and purposeful actions. Everything is provisional. Nothing is ultimate. Knowledge is a means and never ends in itself. Knowledge and thinking are associated with actions. Action is superior to thought but at the same time, thought and action are complimentary. (Kaur, 2019:42)

We can see from the above passage that Dewey's knowledge and thinking are meaningful when applied to practical actions. In his philosophy, Dewey also argues that human action is superior to our thought. He contends more that thoughts without their corresponding action is not worthy but mere sophistry. Hence, Dewey can be said to be a pragmatic thinker. Kaur explains further that Dewey's philosophy is essentially derived from his analysis of the scientific method. Kaur asserts more that for Dewey, for a philosophy to be significant and intelligent it must be scientific and follow in its inquiries the method of science. He further adumbrates the under words:

Dewey takes modern science as an example of what knowledge is and the method of modern science as the standard of the method of knowing. For John, there is no absolute knowledge other than the knowledge gained by the methods of natural science. Knowledge must have past experimental tests before it can be considered knowledge are sufficient proof of the statement. Dewey does not see any difference between knowledge and experience. According to him, knowledge is only a result of our various types of experiences. He does not believe in any truth. He does not accept the permanence of reality forever. (2019:42)

Further inquiry into Dewey's ideas of philosophy as shown by Kaur in his view above, it can be understood that for Dewey, there is no absolute knowledge, that is, objectivity in knowledge is difficult if not impossible. It is still a position of Dewey that human knowledge is properly gained through past epistemic warrants. If this is true as Dewey claim, it then implies that his idea of philosophical knowledge appears to be borrowed from Locke and other members of the British Empiricists.

## DEWEY'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Dewey's educational philosophy shows his conviction that education is the bedrock of human development. For him, no society or child can experience the desired development in a better and improved manner without being equipped with a correct and sound education. Dewey made it a point of necessity to assert his idea of education as being drawn from the spirit of democracy that was dominant in his time. In the opening chapter of his on *Democracy and Education*, Dewey made his intention known by situating the central thrust for which his book was conceived. David Hansen had similarly conceptualized the idea behind Dewey's development of his book; *Democracy and Education*. Sharing his thought, Hansen writes; "Dewey signals his purposes in his brief preface to *Democracy and Education*. The preface consists of the following paragraph and a subsequent one in which he acknowledges his debt to several generations of students as well as to several critics." (Hansen 2006:1) In his *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1985) opines that the book; "...embody an endeavor to detect and state the ideas implied in a democratic society and to apply these ideas to the problems of the enterprise of education." Here as seen from the above quote, Dewey reiterates his intends to intellectually look at the present state of governance in his days and to see how the doctrine of democracy which was already flourished in his country can be applied in addressing the

challenges confronting education. Dewey was seen to be concerned about the education architecture that prevailed in his time, which was responsible for the fundamental problems and challenges facing education was the lack of autonomy for the students to make their choices. He was worried that there was no cordial relationship or interaction between the students and their teachers. Dewey went on to explain in his book that “The discussion includes an indication of the constructive aims and methods of public education as seen from this point of view, and a critical estimate of the theories of knowing and moral development which were formulated in earlier social conditions, but which still operate, in societies nominally democratic, to hamper the adequate realization of the democratic ideal.” (1985:1)

It can be understood from Dewey’s remarks above that his educational philosophy is the nexus between a democracy with the development of the experimental method in the sciences, evolutionary ideas in the biological sciences, and industrial reorganization. He was also concerned about how he can point out the changes in subject matter and method of education which are already contained and indicated by these developments. Declaring the importance and how relevant education is to contemporary development, Dewey avers:

Education is a necessity of life, social process of continuing change and reconstruction of the individual experience; being interpreted within the concept of development, education is a process of living and not a preparation for future living. School is an embryonic form of community life and an instrument for social change and progress. That means that the school life grows out of all the aspects of the social life and that the child’s experience develops in transaction with the community he lives in. (1915:65)

In the same passage, Dewey goes on to maintain that; “Activity is the fundamental characteristic of the child’s nature, which is expressed through his instincts, experience, interests, and individuality. They represent a huge educational potential and starting point of the process of learning, but are not an end in itself: they need to be controlled and guided toward realization of predetermined goals.” (1915:65) Similarly, in the words of Tanner; “In the last years of the 19th century, Dewey observed that ‘the accumulation of knowledge has become so great that the educational system is disintegrating through the wedges of studies continually introduced.’” (Tanner, 1994:163) In further analysis of his concept of developmental curriculum, Dewey directly responded to this conviction when he openly contends that; “All studies arise from aspects of the one earth and the one life lived upon it. We do not have a series of stratified earth, one of which is mathematical, another physical, another historical, and so on... Relate the school to life, and all studies are of necessity correlated.” (1915:80-81) Morgan still explains that; “In contrast to traditional classrooms, Dewey thought that schools and classrooms should be representative of real-life situations, allowing children to participate in learning activities interchangeably and flexibly in a variety of social settings.” (2017:91) It is further revealed by Morgan that Dewey was of the idea that abruptly introducing too much academic content, out of context with children’s social lives, bordered on unethical teaching behavior. Morgan further offers a detailed analysis of Dewey’s idea as he corroborated Flinders and Thornton’s thoughts. Morgan writes inter alia:

This notion would be a point of conflict in education today, as it is vastly different from what is happening in classrooms with the strong emphasis on implementing the Common Core standards. The strong focus on increasing academic achievement through the use of Common Core standards in today’s classrooms makes finding evidence of John Dewey’s philosophies in classrooms less common than it used to be. (2017:91-92)

Again, it is imperative to say that Dewey’s educational philosophy advocates for an interdisciplinary curriculum. It focuses on integrating different disciplines and provides for students’ freedom as they explore their interests and create their own routes for learning and application. Also, Dewey’s theory of education recognizes the importance of student-teacher interactions. He was aware that interaction is one of the social channels through which teachers are engaged with the students. Dewey believes that during learning, not only is the student that is taught but both the student and the teacher learn new things every day. Thus, for

him, teachers are members of the learning community, and they play an important role in selecting experiences and directing them appropriately. To buttress further, Dewey was primarily concerned about how a child can be groomed to actualize his or her full potential and self-development without coercion by the guardians. He maintains that every child is unique and that uniqueness must be respected and accorded to every child. Dewey was also displeased with a system of educational curriculum, content, and concepts; where these are forcefully pushed on the child at school. Once such practice is enshrined, the child's voice becomes drowned out. It is against these evil policies as highlighted earlier that Dewey made an open call for the liberty of the child both within the school and outside the school. Mohammed posits more:

That is why Dewey saw a child as the most vulnerable member of society, one who is immediately influenced by the actions and attitudes of academics—those who impose regulations on him and exert control over him. Dewey was particularly concerned with the rights of the child as a person, including his ability to make decisions, study and educate himself, and participate in a democratic learning process. (2014:4)

Furthermore, in his essays on democracy and education, Dewey expresses his belief in education as a tool for social change. He sees education and democracy as twin factors. He is of the view that education as an institution, no doubt, aids society in the actualization of its desired democratic goals. He argues that through education, issues of economic injustices are addressed, and the desired need to achieve political goals that would lead to societal growth, advancement, and development is made possible. As a result, education is the conclusion of Dewey's political views. Dewey, therefore, calls for the creation of a community in which common goods, such as knowledge and social intelligence, are fairly shared among all strata of the individuals within the State.

In his *Democracy and Education*, Dewey, also clearly emphasizes that the kind of teaching approach the teacher or a school adopted, most often leads to the teaching purpose. According to him, this is because teaching and learning are both pedagogical. Hence, the subject matter should be well-planned in a well-organized curriculum. Separately, in his *How We Think*, Dewey argues that; “the subject matter alone is not a guarantee of learning and growth; rather, the teacher should prepare and relate the subject matter to the students, considering their needs, wants, interests, and cognitive development.” As earlier stated, Dewey was fundamentally worried by the discrepancy placed between a child's experiences and the lack of sense of a child's liberty to freely think and choose courses of their choice. Democracy is opposed to coercion, and as it is practiced in democracy, Dewey also advocates for an educational system that will allow and promote the liberty of the students; a system of education that create channels for teacher-student interactions. For Dewey, the traditional practice of education, where students are not allowed to freely make their choices, no doubt, stifles a child's natural knowledge and skills. In such a situation, the child is only pushed to conform to the laid down norms as established in their curriculum.

Dewey, no gainsaying, made enormous contributions to the body of knowledge, especially in the area of philosophy of education. And this has attracted many commentaries to his project. Today, many commentators have made inedible remarks on Dewey's educational theory. His idea and theory have continued to receive mixed feelings and interpretations from a plethora of scholars and researchers. Commenting on the root source and originality of the development of Dewey's theory of education, McDermott (2011) avers that; “Dewey developed his educational philosophy from both philosophical and psychological viewpoints.” (McDermott, 2011:88) Also, Cunningham (1993) reveals that; “He (Dewey) believed that one of the most essential goals of education is to strengthen Pupils' imaginations.” Cunningham, on his part, asserts that; “The teacher's duty is to help pupils, particularly teenagers on the cusp of maturity, to make choices among attractive options, which is crucially essential in the development of character.” (Cunningham 1993: 43)

In this contemporary time, forcing children to pursue a pre-determined course of study, no doubt is

incompatible with democratic values. Thus, Dewey, in his *Democracy and Education* frowns against such practices. It is this understanding that led a plethora of Dewey's interpreters and analysts to have stressed and maintained that Dewey's educational theory and its connections to experience democracy, humanism, and pragmatism have had a significant impact on the current educational system across the world. Unfortunately, despite Dewey's plausible contribution in the area of education within a democratic nation, which, many nations today have adopted, Nigeria is yet to incorporate fully his new model into its educational policy, curriculum, syllabus, and program. This gap and lacunae leave much to be desired, hence, the need to continue with more exposition and discussions of Nigerian educational values and systems. An attempt is further made here to see how the present-day Nigerian State has failed and battered educational conditions that can be redressed using Dewey's educational reform as a panacea.

## **NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL VALUE: PERSPECTIVE FROM DEWEY'S EDUCATIONAL REFORM**

In this section, conscious efforts are made at evaluating the Nigerian educational value system *visa viz* Dewey's main three cardinal contributions to the study of educational philosophy. These, on one hand, specifically, an attempt is made at trying to expose a few Nigerian current educational policies with the hope of seeing how these policies affect the living condition and development of people. On the other hand, the three chosen but important aspects of Dewey's theory of education discussed here include his idea of Educational Curriculum, Learning, and Teaching Methods as well as the Teacher's Role in Education. The exercise of this section, therefore, focuses on how these three pillars of Dewey's contribution to education are to be discussed alongside their applicability to the present Nigerian educational system.

On the nature, scope, issues, and challenges of the Nigerian educational value system, Azenabor affirms that the nature of the issues and problems in the Nigerian educational system is conceptual, historical, methodological, moral, as well as financial. He contends that if any educational policy, exhibits credence and vitality, then it must function and draw inspiration from a dynamic philosophy. Azenabor also posits that it is only through a detailed knowledge of philosophy that one can mitigate the greater challenges of education. Consequently, with the essential philosophical tools, it will be possible to render an indigenous educational philosophy for Nigeria. (1997:1) As it concerns the Nigerian experience, Azenabor asserts:

Our enthusiasm for education seems to be paralleled by our ignorance of what education is. Education for what? For whom? And how? Is there no relationship between society and the type of education it imbibes? These questions border on educational value and goal. It is in an attempt to proffer answers to these questions, examine and evaluate the principles and the validity of thought that underline issues in the Nigerian educational system that this paper is being written. (1997:1)

Azenabor expresses more that periodic and constant examination of the identified issues, problems, and prospects in the educational system of any country is necessary, as any desirable development centers upon the educational system. Azenabor describes further the current situation with the Nigerian education system and writes *inter alia*; "Nigeria is witnessing today a proliferation of institutions of learning. We find federal and state governments setting up Colleges and Universities of Technologies all over the country." (Azenabor 1997:5) He also reported that as at 1999 there were about 36 Universities, some numbers of Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, the thousands of primary and secondary schools, Ordinary and Advanced Teachers' Colleges and Allied institutions. However, the Nigerian University Commission records of 2019 show that there are about 170 universities alone, including public and private owned. (NUSSD, 2019) Adumbrating further Azenabor contends:

On a casual observation, one would even think that Nigeria is developing educationally. But the expansion in the educational provision has not been marched with equal educational development. Hence, the Nigerian

educational system in the past three decades, has been described as that of proliferation and growth without development. Most of the institutions are not well equipped; whether with adequate manpower or infrastructure. Hence, we have frequent teacher strikes and student rampages. (Azenabor, 1997:6)

Today it is a sad reality in Nigeria, particularly, within her educational system as there is moral decadence on the increase just as it were when Azenabor observe the same in his 1999 conference paper. It has been observed that both the teachers and the students are found wanting. Immorality is today synonymous with the present Nigerian educational value. Dewey also saw similar problems in his days and frowned against them. Unfortunately, these problems are still visible in the Nigerian educational structure. Azenabor agrees with the researchers on the above viewpoint. Azenabor contends more that the existence of moral laxity and decadence resorting to leakages of examination questions, cheating in the examination hall, forgery of certificates, and other malpractices, like sexual harassment, etc. have been cited.” Again, it has been identified that another reason for educational woes in Nigeria lies in the problem of teaching methodology. It is quite unfortunate in the Nigerian education system, for knowledge to be transferred and impacted on the students; the latter is imparted through lectures, seminars, and hand-outs methodology. This methodology, according to Azenabor (1997:7); “has been referred to as the ‘banking system of education.’ Azenabor express more that the ‘banking system of education as put forward by Paulo Freire exposed that there is no participatory relationship between the teacher and the students. Students are assumed to be empty containers in which knowledge could be deposited.” In such a scenario, usually, the result is that instead of communicating with the students, the teacher only issues communiqué, which the student patiently receives, memorizes, and reproduces. All these points to the argument that the teaching method in our contemporary Nigerian educational institutions merely treats students as objects rather than subjects.

It is still regrettable to note that the present Nigerian educational system is directly opposed to Dewey’s idea, theory, and method of education. Dewey emphasizes the need for educators being sensitive to students’ needs and individual diversity. Teachers, according to Dewey, should recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning. Hence, to appreciate Dewey more in concrete terms, let us take further discussions into his new idea of education, thematically. That is, to unravel some of the themes in his new educational model.

## **DEWEY ON CURRICULUM, LEARNING AND TEACHING METHODS AND TEACHER’S ROLE**

Among other important themes in Dewey’s theory of education, the concept of “curriculum” remarkably is one of the major aspects of Dewey’s analyses and contributions to education. In short, the theme of ‘curriculum’ in Dewey’s educational philosophy is a pivotal aspect in the discussion and analysis of Dewey’s idea of education. No wonder, Leshkovska and Spaseva (2016:59) remark that; “Curriculum represents a central issue in Dewey’s school and a key concept in his educational theory. If the starting point is the child who creates his experience in the transaction with the surrounding environment, it is understandable why Dewey’s concept of curriculum is different from the traditional one, which is perceived as a set of systematized information that is carefully packed in subjects and is independent from the child’s experience.” Leshkovska and Spaseva (2016:59) continue to buttress that; “Hence, traditional school is separated from the real life and becomes “place for listening”; the knowledge becomes formal, static, and dead, while the child is treated as immature, superficial being with egoistic, impulsive and confused behaviour.” These ebullient scholars; Leshkovska and Spaseva (2016) further adumbrated this:

Despite the fact that Dewey criticized traditional separation of the curriculum from the child’s experiential learning, he didn’t reject the idea of systematized knowledge. The education should follow the path that leads from the child’s individual experience towards the cumulative experience of human kind. In this way, the child and the school curriculum build together the unity of the educational process. Dewey pays great



attention to the relationship between the child and the curriculum, trying to overcome the separation between the two fundamental factors in the educational process, between “an immature, undeveloped being and certain social aims, meanings, values incarnate in the matured experience of the adult” (2016:59)

In Kaur’s (2019) words; “Dewey’s curriculum is not a mere scheme of studies, not a list of subjects. It is an entire range of activities and experiences. For him, subjects are only summaries and recapitulations of human activities. He does not recommend any readymade curriculum. He rather wants the curriculum to grow out of the student’s impulses, interests, and experiences.” Kaur’s (2019:44) This can further be summarized that, unlike most modern-day school curriculum that merely appears on the pages of paper as guidance for classroom teachings, Dewey’s idea of curriculum, on the contrary, is elaborate, philosophical, more empirical, and scientifically inclined.

Another significant contribution of Dewey in Philosophy of Education lies in his analysis of the idea of ‘methods’ as part of the criteria for learning ability, and progress. Dewey affirms that the idea of ‘method’ in education is always understood and discussed concerning the subject matter. He, however, argues that method was and is never something outside of the material that needs to be studied. To this end, Dewey opines that the method is the effective direction of subject matter to desired results. Also, Dewey defends his idea of method by insisting that; “The only method that has meaning is the method of the mind that achieves and assimilates.” (Dewey 1966:127) Describing further, Gardner remarks that; “One could value basic skills and yet seek to inculcate them through transformative methods- for example by having children learn to write by keeping their own journals or learn to compute by supervising their own little shopping centers.” (Gardner, 1991:120) It can be seen that Dewey’s idea of method differs from that of the traditional concept of method. While the traditional concept of method had emphasized on teaching methods that are designed and provided in school curricula, Dewey, on the contrary, places priority on methods of learning and experiencing.

The third aspect of Dewey’s analysis of the philosophy of education revolves around his idea of the role of the teacher. According to Leshkovska and Miovska (2016); “The role of the teacher in Dewey’s educational theory is defined within the framework of its understandings of experience and development. The value of the systematized and defined experience of the adult mind, as Dewey points out in his book *The Child and the Curriculum*’, is in interpreting the child’s life as it immediately shows itself, and in passing on to guide or direction.” (2016:63) The teacher should learn how to psychologically interpret the personality of each of their student, and strive to be their guidance always. In fact, for Dewey, these two considerations are crucial tasks of the teacher, which must be given priority by the teacher while engaging with the students. In advancing further, Leshkovska and Miovska continue:

Teacher primarily needs to know and understand the characteristics of the childhood, but also the nature of each child as individual. To interpret the child’s nature, according to Dewey, means to consider his strengths and weaknesses within the process of development and in connection with the dynamic character of the child’s experience. Hence, it is the wrong approach of the teachers in “the old” school, which consider the child as an immature being that needs to get rid of this negative trait as soon as possible, in order to move towards the mature adult. (2016:63-64)

According to Spaseva, (2005:76-80) education, for Dewey; “is neither ‘putting in’ as Herbart believes, nor ‘drawing out’ as Froebel defines it. It should be a conscious and intentional activity, which gives direction to the child’s activities.” Agreeing with Dewey, Philips (2010) insists that; “Teachers seeking to utilize multiple intelligences theory in their classrooms must determine their students’ strengths, weaknesses, and their combination of intelligences to provide meaningful learning experiences for them. The challenge is to figure out what these combinations are and how to best engage them.” (Philips, 2010)

In summary of Dewey’s ideas on education, and the relevance of his method and theory of to a global

contemporary educational advancement, Nigeria, inclusive. Morgan (2017) had this to say; “Finding evidence of John Dewey’s theories and beliefs in action in 21<sup>st</sup>-century classrooms is certainly becoming more and more infrequent, however, it is possible, as shown by the various teaching models presented here.” Morgan submits more that:

In some schools and classrooms throughout the United States and in other countries around the world, John Dewey’s theories are still quite present. These schools and classrooms are still placing an emphasis on the importance and relevance of building community, building strong relationships, developing higher-level thinking skills for real-life application, and following student interests when planning for instruction. (Morgan, 2017:100)

This typically describes the relevance of Dewey’s new educational philosophy to contemporary Nigeria. As of today, Nigerian education encourages the liberty of students in choosing their preferred course of studies. Parents and teachers nowadays no longer have much influence on their wards in their choices of course of studies. The students are now gradually gaining their independence in terms of being at liberty to freely think and pursue their dream careers. In Nigeria, it is sad and pathetic that Dewey’s theory seems to have been neglected and not so much given the expected serious consideration in its educational curriculum and policy formulations. This sad scenario, though noted with displeasure, however, is not peculiar to the Nigerian educational system, as most other countries have been identified for not taking full advantage of the complete implementation of Dewey’s proposed model.

Unfortunately, the present situation with Nigerian education leaves much to be desired. Its practical experiences do not conform to the recommendation given by Dewey. Several factors have been identified as responsible for the current backwardness in the Nigerian educational system. Thus, narrating this scenario, Nwafor, (2014) bitterly describes the situation with Nigerian education thus; “Notwithstanding the palatable and juicy objective of the National Education Policy, it is pitiable that the Nigerian educational system is yet to create national consciousness and patriotism among students and even among lecturers (teachers) at all levels because citizenship education exists more on paper, and not in practice.” As I speak, there is no dispute over the reality of how the current Nigerian education is a mockery of Western education and global curriculum. Sadly, moral decadence in the education sector is alarming and this calls for sober reflection. Some scholars have expressed displeasure over the rate at which moral decadence has taken over the educational sector in Nigeria. Commenting on this, Ignatius and Umotong (2022:11) unanimously declare thus; “But it becomes a more perturbing and tragic issue when it is found in the educational sector. As sad as this is already, the prevalent corruption in Nigeria political and economic terrain has managed to crawl into the educational sector of the country.” It is for this reason that Adah (2009) lamentably decries as follows:

The entire Nigerian educational system is bedeviled by a myriad of problems and the situation is getting worse by the day. These problems include: poor funding, shortage of quality staff; dearth of infrastructure, inadequate classrooms and offices, inadequate laboratories for teaching and research; shortage of journals; indiscipline among staff and students; inconsistent and ill-conceived policies; corruption in high and low places; cultism; irregular payment of salaries; examination malpractices as well as politics in the appointments of heads of many tertiary institutions (cited in Nwafor, 2014, p. 95).

Ignatius and Umotong (2022) continue; “The hallmark of the problem of education in Nigeria is corruption and bad governance. The Nigerian society is generally enveloped by insecurity and near absence of freedom and democracy.” These ebullient scholars go on to ask; “Yes, how can a system be called democratic when it does not yield to the needs of the populist? How can a system be democratic when its citizens cannot exercise their constitutional rights, namely, freedom of speech, constructively criticize the government without being witch-hunt or their criticisms tagged “hate speech” (Umotong 2022:11)

Theobald (2009:36) captures the above thought thus; “Although Dewey’s work seems to have fallen out of favor, at least as far as a current educational policy is concerned, his work remains fundamental in many

departments of education.” Theobald (2009:65) however argues that; “John Dewey’s philosophies and work in the field of education have been very influential to educators over the years.” Schiro (2013) also toes the same line of thought by insisting that His (Dewey)’s philosophy that children, not content, should be the focus of the educational process, has left a lasting impression on educators who share his beliefs and philosophies about education and how children learn most effectively.” Indeed, no doubt, Dewey’s theory of education is plausible and one of the most recommended theories of education in the modern period. Unfortunately, Nigeria as a country is yet to thoroughly adopt Dewey’s theory of education. It is, therefore, the argument and submission of this paper that if Nigeria is truly desirous to have a better and improved educational standard, it must practically adopt and implement Dewey’s paradigm idea which has become the bedrock for contemporary democratic nations, globally.

## CONCLUSION

The hallmark of this paper has been a study of Dewey’s educational philosophy cum the Nigerian educational system. In other words, the focus of this study was to see how Dewey’s theory of education can be applied in solving the present Nigerian educational degeneration and retrogression. While this has been the central thrust of this essay, however, to come closer home from all that has been analyzed and studied about Dewey above, it can be inferred, laconically that Dewey, no gainsaying has a vast knowledge in many areas of human endeavors. These include philosophy, education, politics, humanism, logic, axiology, aesthetics, metaphysics, science, sociology, and psychology. Though, in spite of Dewey’s numerous works and achievements which cut across diverse interests and areas of study, the focus of this article has been on Dewey’s educational philosophy and Nigerian contemporary educational values. In pursuant of this goal, the researchers, however, encountered some challenges and limitations, particularly; it was a herculean task and effort to summarize John Dewey’s most important writings and thoughts. Nevertheless, it is our submissions that Dewey ushers in great revolutionary changes in modern-day educational philosophy, methodology, and values. Dewey should be appreciated for closing the long traditional gap and dichotomy which existed between the teacher and the student. He called for equality, mutuality, and a democratic approach within the educational community. In acceptance of the above affirmative assertion, Mohammed (2014) also tells us that; “Fundamentally, Dewey’s philosophical creed places the child at the center of education, focusing on the development of a child who is a useful part of society; a society that believes in fairness and freedom, and implements democratic traits and principles.” (Mohammed 2014:4) In conclusion, even though we admit that in philosophy, there is no ideas/theory that is absolute and completely devoid of criticism. Nevertheless, we have a model presented by a selfless educational pedagogical juggernaut whose primary aim is to see that the teacher-student relationship is built on trust, confidence, and most especially moral dispositions. In other words, Dewey who was mostly interested in the ‘ought-ness’ and not ‘is-nesses’ of the way education should operate. No wonder his proposed method lays parallel to the traditional method of teaching which he meets. His dedication and commitment to the welfare of the child motivated him to research deeply, cutting-cross legendary scholars before him on the subject matter. Dewey refined ideological position we see is consistent in his works such as; *My Pedagogical Creed (1897)*, *The Child and the Curriculum (1902)*, *Principles of Education (1909)*, *Democracy and Education (1916)*, *Nationalizing Education (1916)* etc., all are pointers to the fact that Dewey was not just any writer on the subject of education, but a true ambassador of knowledge. (Hickman and Alexander, 1998) It is therefore expedient for the researchers to recommend to the Nigerian State the complete adoption of Dewey’s model for its curriculum development. In addition, educational policies should be designed following Dewey’s innovative and novel theory of education, as this is germane and remains one of the most accepted theories in contemporary education.

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