

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE IN TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

For many centuries theories have been found to be useful in the education sector and this may not be far from the fact that to better understand issues in education, theories are of immense importance. This paper set out to analyze issues as they relate to bridging the gap between theory and practice of education in Nigeria. The aim of any educational theory is to analyze and interpret issues in education for the progress of teaching and learning. The paper further stressed the need for teachers to be carried along in decision making process that has direct bearing on teaching and learning. It goes on to say that educational theories provide stakeholders in education with the necessary knowledge they need for laying an excellent educational foundation. The paper also posited that educational theories offer experts tips and information necessary for laying a sound foundation of education. Insight into and knowledge of educational theories the argument provided by the paper can help teachers and curriculum planners to evaluate the quality and relevance of educational theories and apply them appropriately to establish a flawless scheme of education.

Introduction

Education today has become a game for all participants; lawyers, business men and women, politicians, counselors, administrators and other people with background and experience which have not the slightest connection with the arts of teaching and learning, except for the fact that they were probably once students. The result is that the educational institutions seem more of recycling machines where every year they turn out a large number of the same types of graduates instead of striving to be development centres. The education industry is quite a rich and dynamic enterprise. The field of education has a pool of ideas and a very vast knowledge

base with their background in different psychological and epistemological traditions to be used according to set goals and objectives. These range from ideas that are completely abstract in nature like idealism to ones that are right down to earth like pragmatism and existentialism. Educational theories are an aggregate of theories on how to learn, what to learn and how to teach what to teach as well. Over the years one of the most frequently asked questions is that, how can theories learnt be well employed in the teaching and learning process? How can these theories help in the attainment of teaching and learning objectives?

The success of what is to be learnt and how to teach can be attributed to the kind of educational theories that is in use. Kluwer (n.d) opines that theories, particularly (the learning theories) can serve as a guide for planning a better educational system. In spite of the significance of theory to planning and development of the education sector, a gap appears to exist between theory and practice of education in Nigeria. What we claim to be doing in the classroom and what is actually happening in the classroom are not the same. There appears to be an existence of a lacuna between theory and practice. This paper is therefore set out to bring to limelight those gaps that exist between theory and practice and the need to close them for the betterment of our education system in Nigeria.

Educational Theories

Long before now, theories have been found to be useful in the educational arena and this may not be unconnected to the fact that to better understand issues in education, theories are of immense importance. The aim of any educational theory is to analyze and interpret issues in education for the progress of teaching and learning. That is to say that the essence of educational theory is to better understand the many problems of teaching and learning and also find solution to it. Theories are central to the teaching and learning process because it can impact positively on educational progress. According to education.com (2017), educational theories provide stakeholders in education with the necessary knowledge they need for laying an excellent educational foundation. This simply means that critical and creative ideas can be developed from reading theories developed by scholars such as John Dewey's pragmatic theory of education and Rousseau's child centred educational theory.

Educational theories offer experts tips and information necessary for laying a sound foundation of education. Insight into and knowledge of educational theories helps teachers and curriculum planners to evaluate the quality and relevance of educational theories and apply them appropriately to establish a flawless scheme or system of education. Understanding Educational theories can help a society to provide a smooth learning atmosphere for the education of all and sundry. Richard (2012) says that, theories are an important aspect of the teaching and learning process because it arms the teacher with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet

the learning needs of the learners. The understanding of the society can also provide us with the knowledge necessary for reform and improvement in the society since education as argued by Durkheim (1951) is the image and reflection of the society. Knowledge about the various learning theories can help the teacher to be acquainted with the various learning theories that are useful in the teaching and learning process. Learning theories can help stakeholders in education particularly the teachers to be aware of all other processes which humans learn to enable them encourage such activities that facilitate learning.

The knowledge of educational theories particularly the learning theories can aid the teachers to guide their students based on the diverse learning styles that subsist (Forrest, 2012). This means that being exposed to divergent educational theories guide teachers on which method of education to use and at what level and time during classroom instructions. Devoid of educational theories, it may be difficult to understand the rationale for education. How then can these gaps be bridged?

Teacher Education in Nigeria

Like other nations of the world, teacher education is very central to all facets of development in Nigeria. However, it is important to note that despite its significance to all round national development there appears to be a gap between the theory and practice of teacher education in Nigeria. Supporting this claim, Ogunyinka (2015) says that teaching is a very significant and strategic profession for national development.

What then is teacher education? Teacher education can be described as that kind of education that is given to teachers in preparation for the task ahead. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2019) describes teacher education as a formal training given to both pre-service and in-service teachers so as to equip them with the necessary knowledge, attitude, values and skills needed to teach at all levels of education. The history of teacher education in Nigeria is as old as the history of education itself in the country. According to Osokoya (2010), the first teacher training institution in Nigeria was founded in 1859 by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Abeokuta in the present day Ogun State and it was later moved to Lagos in 1867. The major aim of the teacher training institute then was to produce masters who graduate to classroom teachers in the end.

To what extent is teacher education relevant? The fact that teacher education is relevant to national development cannot be overstated. This is because no nation can rise above the quality of its teachers. For any development to thrive in any nation teachers must be up and doing. Hence, it will not be out of place to say that without good and quality education for the teachers, there can be no development.

Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice of Teacher Education in Nigeria

The success of any educational theory/reform is largely dependent on teachers since they are the ones that are saddled with the responsibility of putting into practice those theories/reforms (Gercama, 2014). It is sad to note that despite the significance of teachers in education, they are not always carried along in decision making. This is unfortunate because teachers are responsible for implementing any meaningful reform or theory in education. To this end thus, teachers should be carried along in implementing any theory of education since by so doing the gap between theory and practice can be reduced.

Over the years, massive changes have taken place in educational practices across the globe as a result of globalization. In the past as affirmed by Monash (2016), teachers only tell students things they should know whether it makes sense to them or not; whether they understand them or not. Similarly, students prior to the times of Rousseau and Dewey were subjected to rote learning and were passive in the learning process. The teacher in addition was said to be a knowledgeable person, someone who knows all that was knowable, simply put, teachers were idealistic in approach (Mr know all). However, with the emergence of Dewey and Rousseau, education was said to be perceived from a different perspective. Henceforth, understanding the various educational theories can help teachers to close the gap that exists between theory and practice in Nigerian Education.

Correspondingly, it is worth mentioning for instance that the banking method of education cannot flourish in the contemporary human race owing to advancement in education and shift in the employment market. Consequently, hands-on methods of teaching as encouraged by Dewey should be used in the classroom as it gives the learner the autonomy and control over what is to be learnt. To this end therefore, stakeholders in education should do well by making sure that educational theories that are documented are being put to use as specified. For example, although the National Policy on Education (2009) advocates for equal educational opportunities among its citizens, this appears to be on paper as rightly observed by Onwuameze (2013) that there is a wide gender and regional gap in education. This is irritating because it is counterproductive.

Bridging the gap between theory and practice of teacher education in Nigeria will similarly mean that all the resources needed for the implementation of an educational scheme or theory is provided for the smooth implementation of the system. For example, to implement education for self reliance, a variety of activities or skills geared towards self-reliance should be provided so that the students or learners will come in contact with reality. Ozumba (2013) adds that to bridge the gap between theory and practice in education, practical education should be encouraged.

Conclusion

The paper concluded that to bridge the gap between theory and practice in education, an enabling environment for teaching and learning must be provided. The resources and logistics required for better implementation of educational theories or ideas should be provided. Teachers should be also be engaged in the process of making decision and not only implementation as doing this can help in bridging the gap between theory and practice.

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