



## Applicability of Pragmatism in the Implementation of the 9-3-4 System of Education in Nigeria

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**Abstract.** The study closely examined the historical purview of the concept of pragmatism, discussed the central ideas inherent in this school of thought, x-rayed the evolution of the present system of education in Nigeria, and presented in a nutshell the relevance of pragmatism in this system. Finally, the study suggested further measures for the appropriate applicability of this school of thought towards the improvement of the overall educational system and societal advancement.

### 1. Introduction

Philosophy has long been acclaimed as the mother of all subjects. This is as a result of its divergent nature, cutting across all facets of human endeavor and other disciplines. Even in education, philosophical principles and theories are used in solving problems. Thus, education and philosophy are closely inter-related. Dominant philosophies invariably influence educational policy, practice and theory. In view of this, the Nigeria government fashioned out what she calls the “Philosophy of Nigerian education” as enunciated in the National policy on education with so many versions now. In this document, (2008 Edition) it stated unequivocally that a Nigeria’s Philosophy of education is the following set of beliefs:

- Education is an instrument for national development and change
- Education is vital for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria
- Education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society
- Education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society.

This philosophy is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the basic, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system.

The worrisome and unanswered questions that gave impetus to the choice of this work is? Can all these lofty ideas be achieved without the application of the appropriate philosophical school or schools of thought? Can pragmatism as one of the schools of thought be applied the Nigeria educational system especially 9-3-4 system? Or put in another way; is pragmatism relevant to the 9-3-4 system of education in Nigeria?

Pragmatism as a philosophical school of thought is characterized by its functionality, practicability and scientific methodology. In a situation whereby any educational system finds solace in this school of thought, it becomes very necessary to borrow a leaf from its wealth of postulations. That is what this study sets out to do.

The study shall closely examine the historical purview of the concept, the central ideas inherent in the school of thought, the evolution of the present educational system in Nigeria popularly referred to as the 9-3-4 system, and the relevance of pragmatism to the system. The article ends with a summary and a conclusion.

### 2. What is Pragmatism?

It has become a tradition amongst educationalists the world over as well as philosophers to have the meaning of particular concepts explained in order to avoid ambiguity. Consequently, it is pertinent to explain the concept “pragmatism”, but before doing that, a brief excursion into how the word evolved is presented.

Evidently, it has been asserted that modern pragmatism emanated in America. According to Gail (1950:105), pragmatism has generally been recognized as the first indigenous movement of philosophical thought to develop in the United States. The emergence of this movement was as a result of the kind of wind that was blowing over Europe and needed a change. Through the bad effect of slave trade and concomitant wave of industrial revolution, change became imminent, if not pertinent. In Moore's (1961:265) words:

*The emergence of such philosophical movement represents the development of the cultural self-consciousness of a society... it is true that within a brief period a number of movements arose that were explicitly committed to the development of an American national (life) style...*

It was in line with the foregoing that pragmatism emerged to change the life style of the American. This new wave change started through the industrial Revolution. Okafor (2004) avers that:

*The scientific revolution changed the economic and political world and set perceptible tremors through the foundations of human attitudes and human values. It opened new vistas and extended the possibilities of human action and human achievement. It brought to question attitudes, value, conceptions, rooted in tradition. The old philosophies had to be reconciled in the light of these new variables in human existence and any new Philosophies cannot but be influenced by the same factors. PRAGMATISM is such a new philosophy.*

From here, pragmatism came to stand out as a distinctive school of thought.

The word Pragmatism is etymologically coined from the Greek root "Pragme" which, when literarily translated, means "work or action". Even the founding fathers are in agreement with this explication. Hence, James (1907:43) wrote that the term is derived from the same Greek word "Tipayi (Pragme)" meaning "action" from which our words "practice" and "Practical" came from. The implication of this is that, pragmatism is concerned with the practical aspect of human life and every action of man is to be interpreted in terms of its practicability. In the light of this, Gove and Webster (2004:1781) describes it as:

*American movement in philosophy founded by Peirce and James and marked by the doctrines that the meaning of conceptions is to be sought in their practical bearings, that the function of thought is as a guide to action, and that the truth is prominently to be tested by the practical consequences of belief.*

Thus, because of its actions and practical consequences, pragmatism is otherwise referred to as

"functionalism" "instrumentalism" "experimentalism" "Conventionalism" etc. Suffice here to say that the concept was first used by Peirce in a philosophy lecture hall, but it was not until 1902 that the actual word "Pragmatism" was used. What is the cardinal point, emphasis or tenets of the concept?

### 3. Historical Purview

To some scholars, pragmatism is of the eighteenth century. This may not be quite true because some traces of pragmatism could be found in the postulations of the ancient or classical philosophers. This assertion can be substantiated by what Sharma and Hyland (1991:51) according to whom philosophers "such as Heraclitus, Parmenides and Democritus introduced empirical considerations into man's speculation about the world". These were not the only philosophers among the ancient Greeks that had pragmatic inclinations. Protagoras, for instance, in discussing knowledge, talked of sense perception which revolves around man and ended up in his popular axiom: "Man is the measured of all things" (Dictum of Humo Measua).

In the sixteenth century, an aspect of this school of thought was re-echoed by Francis Bacon in his introduction of inductive logic to scientific method. Even in the early nineteenth century, this mode of thought, apart from those regarded as the founding fathers, was in the discussions of some philosophers. For example, Auguste Comte, who pioneered positivistic thinking, traced "the development of human thought from its theological and metaphysical stages to its positive stage characterised by the systematic methodology of modern science" (Obot, 2015). Pragmatism is thus as old as the ancient Greek philosophers, only that it was given special attention by the following who are today regarded as its founding fathers:

**Charles Sander Peirce (1839-1914):** This is an American philosopher who lived between 1839-1914. During his life time, he wrote many philosophical articles which were used for publications after his death. One of these articles deal with pragmatism and was captioned "How to make our idea clear". In this work, he opined that our beliefs are really rules for actions.

**William James (1842-1910):** He and his father were Americans of Irish origin. He studied Art, Chemistry, Anatomy and Psychology. He was religious like his father, a great teacher, and noted for his establishment of the first laboratory in America. Though a Christian, perhaps because of his association with Peirce, he became more interested in

philosophy and eventually became closely associated with two doctrines, namely, radical empiricism and pragmatism. He published many books among which are: "Pragmatism and four Essays from the meaning of truth" (1909).

**John Dewey (1859-1952):** was born in Burlington, Vermont in 1859. He attended the university of Vermont and graduated in 1879 and John Hopkins University for post-graduate programme. While in the latter, he came in contact with Peirce and became captivated by Peirce's work on pragmatism though initially he was interested in Hegelian philosophy. His first philosophical work was titled the metaphysical assumption of materialism. Having looked at events as the unfold in America and attendant implications to education and the social life of Americans, he published the book titled "democracy and education" in 1916. John Dewey firmly believed that education should make its product functional member of the society.

#### 4. Tenets

One of the commonest criticisms levied against philosophers is their emphasis on the meaning of meanings-what a word stands for. Bacon was aware of this and asserted that no one can claim to be the master of any word. Same is also applicable to the concept of pragmatism. It was in view of this that the foremost founder started with the concept of "How to make our ideas clear". Invariably, the point he is trying to clarify is that the meaning of any term culminates in our ideas of the ways we would act and the sensory experiences we would expect from one object to which we apply the term. This is to say that if an individual conjures a term, translates the term into his sensory experience, what is translated is what will make practical sense to such an individual. For example, if "I" act toward "Y" in manner "T", then, "I" would expect sensory experience "A". As an illustration, if object "Y" is an object to which "I" would apply the term "Man", then, the pragmatic definition of the term "Man" would be made up of a statement such as: if "I" touch object "Y" then "I" will have the sensory experience of limbs, etc. In view of this, the first tenet of pragmatism is that every term or issue must have a practical consequence. Conforming to this, Gove and Webster (1991:1781) thus define Pragmatism as an "emphasis" in Philosophical thought on the application of ideas or the practical bearings of conceptions and beliefs. "The new age encyclopedia (1977:584) defines it as the doctrine that the meaning of an idea consists of the sum of all its practical consequences". This is why one of the proponents, Dewey (1925:44) wrote that "all realities influence

our practice, and that influence is their meaning to us". In essence, pragmatism is of the opinion that reality should be viewed in terms of its experiential and verifiable dimensions.

Another tenet within the orbit of pragmatism is that the environment and man works in harmonious rapport to constitute reality. The translation of these realities into concrete phenomenon is referred to as society which in turn is progressive. The society as it were is dynamic and subject to change. This stand finds anchor in Heraclitus' apothegm that "we cannot step on running water twice". Equating this with the society, it means the society is ever in the state of flux or progress. It is in this light that Egbeke (1991:65) writes that

The pragmatist believes that we must always be prepared to alter the way we do things. The ends and means of human endeavor must be flexible and open to continual revision. They must be pursued rationally and scientifically.

A further tenet of pragmatism is in the area of truth. According to Peirce, truth is the opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate. What he seems to be saying here is that truth is what is accepted so far as the investigation continues. For James (1907), in Lacy (1979:168) truth is agreement with reality, but this means that it is what works or satisfies us.

Last but not the least is that "Pragmatism" holds that the ends and areas of education should be flexible and should be open to constant revision (Egbeke, 2016). Nigeria can be said to have borrowed a leaf from 6-5-2 to 6-3-3-4, and from 6-3-3-4 to 9-3-4 systems. Thus, pragmatism opposes any pre-determined aims and objectives in the school curriculum.

Although this section may never be exhaustively treated as the tents are variously interpreted, a final point within the limitation of this work is that pragmatism emphasizes a scientific method in solving life's problems hence its relatively to our current educational system cum policy. This even formed the bedrock of Dewey theorization, as far as this topic is concerned. Ayer (1968:125) thus opines that To a marked degree, pragmatism provided Dewey with a philosophical rationale for the consistent adoption of scientific inquiry as the single methodology to be used in solving all problematic situations. This is why for an ardent pragmatist, every problem of life should be interpreted in terms of its workability based on its practical application.

### 5. The 9-3-4 System of Education in Nigeria

The educational system in Nigeria has witnessed so many changes. Before Nigeria became a sovereign nation, her educational system was a reflection of the British System that is, 6 years of primary education and 5 years of secondary and 2 years of higher level/A levels.

After independence, agitation from Nigerian elites forced a change. The 1969 curriculum conference is very prominent in this regard. This conference gave birth to an indigenous blue print on education that metamorphosed into the National Policy on Education which today has witnessed so many editions and versions. For record purpose, the first edition was in 1982. An important aspect of this document is the fashioning of an Educational that is akin to Nigeria situation, and a change from purely rote learning to a more practical and technologically oriented curriculum as reflective of the 6-3-3-4 system of education. This system was also as a result of the quest for the provision of education to all Nigerian children of school going age and was tagged “Universal Primary Education”.

In 2006, in order to meet the requirement of Millennium Development Goals (MGDS) a new basic education policy emerged, the six years of primary education and three years of Junior Secondary Education as a basic education, three years of senior secondary education and at least 4 years of Tertiary education replaced the 6-3-3-4 system of education and the 9-3-4 system was given birth to. The beneficiary of this system of education is expected to have a mandatory 9 years of basic education upto junior secondary school 3,3 years of senior secondary school, and another minimum of 4 years in the tertiary school. The essence of the first 9 years is to minimize the rate of children dropping out after Primary school education and to provide them with enough skills for early professional career development (Osokoya, 2011).

Just like the 6-3-3-4 system that emphasis academic and pre-vocational curriculum, the 9-3-4 system does the same. And since the emanation of this system was a response to global demand, it has also both core and elective courses or subjects. The core subjects are Basic Science and Technological oriented, pre-vocational and then electives. With this excursion into the evolution of the 9-3-4 system of education, it becomes imperative to examine closely whether there is any correlation between pragmatism and 9-3-4 system of education in Nigeria.

### 6. Relevance of Pragmatism to the 9-3-4 System

To the pragmatist, education is a necessity of life and can help to broaden man’s horizon and dispose him to face problems he may encounter. This is why an educational system should be such that can help in the transmission of cultural values from generation to generation. Denga (1986:234) stresses this point saying.

Dewey therefore feels that’s education should not be seen as a mere acquisition of academic subject-matter but as a part of life. The individual needs society as a necessary part of his learning experiences and we must not treat the subject matter as if it is separate from life itself.

In the same vein, the National Policy on education (2012:8) Section 1 sub-section 5, article 4 demands that the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical as equipment for individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society shall be inculcated in the child. In tandem with this, Nigeria educational system must be open to innovation and improvement in line with global best practice.

Secondly, pragmatism emphasizes science education and adds that one of the ways of acquiring true knowledge is through scientific method. On this, Okafor (2004:8) explains that the pragmatists’ approach to human knowledge is different. Pragmatism holds that man attains knowledge through the scientific method. This as it were, is borne out of the fact that pragmatism believes in the practical aspect of whatever man is doing, hence its christening as functionalism, instrumentalism or experimentalism. The 9-3-4 system in the same view stresses the need for education to be functional and makes the learner a functional member of the society. This is implied in Section 1, Sub-section 7, Article 6 of the NPE(2014:8) which says that “efforts will be made to relate education to the overall community needs”.

Pragmatism as a school of thought recognizes the individuality of every learner and says that education should be learner (child) centered. An individual is a unique being, so special attention should be given to every child. The role of the teacher should be that of an adviser. The National Policy on Education (2008:8) recognizes this and states unequivocally in Section 1, Sub-section 7, Article 4 that “educational activity will be centered on the learner for maximum

self-development and fulfillment". Idam(1997:109) thus posits that:

In the new policy on education, emphasis is now placed on training Nigerian youths and adults to acquire skills, knowledge and attitude necessary for gainful employment, which will enable them contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation.

How can this be done? An attempt to answer this question, makes pragmatic principles to implicitly become very pertinent. Pragmatism holds that man by nature is capable of understanding and being responsible for what he does. The purpose of education can only be fulfilled if our educational system promotes this and the school provides a conducive environment for learner to develop his reasoning abilities. This is why the National Policy on Education (2004:8), Section 1, Sub-section 7, Articles (2) and (9), stipulates that; "life-long education will be the basis for the nation's educational policies;... the education system will be structured to develop the practice of self-learning".

Judging from the foregoing, the relevance of Pragmatism to the 9-3-4 system of education is enormous.

### 7. Defects of Pragmatism

Having examined some of the relevance of Pragmatism, it is worthwhile to mention that it is not without some defects. Some of the inherent defects include the following:

The exaltation of practice over theory, action or functionality over contemplation, and experimental inquiry over speculations, is realistically untenable. It is not in all situations that these may be applicable because ideas are the bedrock of any action, so we cannot say that an idea which is the basis of action is not important. This is why Okafor (2004:77) says that experimental reality is only a fraction or not the whole of reality.

Another weakness of pragmatism is on the bases of workability. If anything that works is applaudable, vices like cheating in an examination, rigging of election etc. should be encouraged.

Furthermore, pragmatism in denying the metaphysical and supernatural dimensions of reality makes man's life to be too mechanic. Instances abound that most of the problems that confront us in our day-to-day activities are anchored in the spiritual.

The Pragmatist over-emphasised change. It is not everything in life that is subject to change. Eternal

truths for instance are not in the state of flux. (Ategwu, 2004).

The principle of education being child-centered is not the best because experience has shown that what the child may desire is not always in his best interest.

Pragmatism as a school of thought in philosophy over-emphasized psychomotor domain to the detriment of others like affective and cognitive which renders the learner's educational quality incomplete because after graduation, the graduate should be found worthy in character and learning.

### 8. Summary/Conclusion

Any development of a nation, whether politically, socially, economically, etc., depends on the type of education her citizens are given. For any good educational system to achieve the above goals or objectives it must evolve from a good philosophical foundation.

In realization of this fact, the Nigerian Government brought a different policy on education whose aim is to make every product of the system a functional citizen. Judging with unalloyed serenity, the philosophical school of thought best suited for the workability of the system is pragmatism.

Pragmatism from its conceptions implies "work" or "action" which tantamount to its being referred to as functionalism, instrumentalism or experimentalism. Broadly speaking, as a philosophical school of thought, it has the following tenets (Nwabusi, 1986):

- Change is real (the society is progressive)
- Man by nature is essentially a biological and social being
- Values are relative, thus, nothing is ultimate, and finally, knowledge or education is a means to other ends.

Consequent upon the above, the 9-3-4 system can work efficaciously with the help of Pragmatic principles, which directly apply to the 9-3-4 system in the following ways:

- Education is a necessity of life as such it should be given all the needed attentions
- Scientific methods should be employed in the teaching and learning process.
- The center of every educative process should be the child, and finally man is a
- Thinking being and if oriented properly, he can contribute to the development of the society.

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