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MAJOR TRENDS IN POST 1789 FRENCH EDUCATION: KEY LESSONS FOR A REVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA.

BY

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ABSTRACT

The usefulness of historical studies in national systems of education is dependent on the merits of the hindsight and insight that those systems provide for the betterment and furtherance of education in some other places, particularly those places that are yet to find their right footing in education. Although French and Nigerian educational systems are varied in a number of ways, mostly because of the colonial relationship of both countries, this paper however observes that there were notable events and developments in French educational history that remain too fundamental for the benefit of education in Nigeria. This paper scanned through those significant events and developments that trended in French education; with the view to establishing the necessary ideas, attitude and lessons that would benefit education reforms in Nigeria. In writing this paper, we discovered that the leadership character needed for a rapid and revolutionary development of education in Nigeria should be akin to that which facilitated and dictated the pace of educational development in France, following the events that were immediate to 1789 and continued after the 1789 revolution. The paper firmly emphasized that the radical nationalistic leadership that shaped and spurred French education during this period is urgently needed for the repositioning of the Nigerian education system.

Keywords: Trends, Revolutionary, Development, Education, Lessons.

Introduction

In every country, the trends and systems of education are the expressions of the national ideals or values and this is very much true of France in a very marked degree. The French national ideal laden with her self-esteemed culture, high spirit of nationalism and strong philosophy on existentialism have in no small measure dictated the trends and dimensions of its education, across space and time. According to Pounds (1968; p137), "French schools have developed out of the ideas found in French culture and also out of the political system, which is centralization of authority within a national system".

There were major trends and tendencies of France's educational scenery beginning with some historic events directly before and after 14th July 1789, that is, the French Revolution

cum the Napoleonic era and the educational dynamics that emerged with it. The trends of education in the Republics, though with emphasis on the Third Republic's bearing and input on education were also remarkable. Again, the Second World War left immense challenge for France with the impact of the Vichy regime on French education. Efforts at identifying the consequent educational reforms in the Post-War years are germane for this discourse, much as such efforts eventually redirected the country's education in the 21stcentury.

It is well known that the trajectory of Nigerian educational system is largely modelled after the British, considering the long colonial and post colonial relationship between both countries. Nevertheless, in a world of many options and alternatives, no nation is expected to remain tied to the apron string of its political masters, more especially in a globalizing world where experiences from every nook and cranny matter a great deal. After all, part of the benefits of comparative education is to borrow the functional and requisite ingredients of other systems of education for the improvement of another system (Ebong, Olawolu and Quadri,2013).

The trends in Nigeria educational system have indicated some chequered results. However, scholars have argued that the system is currently in dire need of revival, if not a revolution. To that end, the lessons from the experiences of other nations with a tested and tried educational system, different from what the British bequeathed to Nigeria, would be of immense help in the search for the desirable turnaround in the country's education. This approach to addressing the gaps in Nigeria's education is not only imperative; it is also for the survival and sustainability of the country's educational system. In the light of this, the discourse herein adopted the lessons inherent in some major historical events in the French education between the periods under review as prerequisites for the speedy revamping of the Nigerian educational system.

Education, following the Revolution and the Napoleonic Era

The period of the French Revolution (1789-1799) was noted for its instability, but despite the activities of the State politics and internal conflicts of the period, the leaders of the Revolution were very much concerned with education. As such, the French Revolution and Napoleon, as a phenomenon and as a personality, in their turn had a tremendous memorable aftermath on the development of French education. Expectedly, one of the changes of this time in France had to do with religion in relation to education. The chaotic opening years of the Revolutionary period were barraged with ambitious schemes for universal education vis-à-vis the French Declaration of the Rights of Man in the year of the Revolution. For one, the Revolution declared equality for education as the corner stone of the State. Educational system, administered by the church for the few, received a wide clampdown. As a rejection of the old order, including the role played by the church, while the Revolutionaries were destroying the statues of Notre Dame, they were also committed to removing any vestiges of the influence of the church on French educational system. The

Revolutionary constitution of 1791 guaranteed universal public education, of which the lower grades would be free.

Later in 1793, the National Convention established the Committee of Public Instruction and charged it with the responsibility of reordering education in France. Consequently, the leaders of the Revolution used education to re-establish the long standing French nationalism. They realized the need to keep the patriotic impulses alive through public education. They recognized the desirability of establishing a State system of education through which the citizens might be informed of their advantage in the new system of government. They also showed clearly that, in the education of children, the Revolutionary government had an effective agency of social control and guarantee of stability (Wild, 1961).

In 1795, the National Convention intensified move towards consolidating the development of public education. It decreed that free primary schools be established in each commune and that secondary "central schools" be located on the basis of one in each department, with five in Paris. Advanced technical schools were to replace all other forms of higher education, thus setting the pace for France's niche in technical education. By far, the most successful practical outcome of the decree was that relating to the "central schools" avidly patronized by the French middle class, which survived until the next phase of educational reorganization that was undertaken by Napoleon when he seized power in 1799. Thus, Fraser (1968:p1) stresses that 'it was the Revolution which proclaimed officially, for the first time in France, the right to education as an essential right of all individual and the nation's "duty to instruct all its citizens".

When Napoleon took power, he demonstrated sufficiently that education was on the list of his priorities, although some authors like Fraser (1968) notes that his interest in education was political. To adumbrate Roe (1969:p152), "it was with the coming of Napoleon that national system of education essentially passed from theory to reality". Although Napoleon had little interest in elementary education, secondary education was extremely important to him because he saw it as the base education for future leaders of the nation. As such, he established government secondary schools (Lycées) to train officers and officials for the imperial army and administration. These survived till the recent times as academic schools, which prepared students for entry into the professions or universities, after the baccalaureate (The Encyclopaedia Americana; 2002).

Again, Napoleon's education was designed to provide for increased education for the middle class so that they will be successful and hence, non-revolutionary. In addition, there was emphasis on patriotism in the schools, an emphasis that was to increase during the years of his empire and beyond. Hence, Osokoya (2002) asserts that it was Napoleon who actually revolutionalized education in France.

When Napoleon became emperor in 1804, during the days of First Republic, he became interested in centralized control of the country's educational system. He further made education a State monopoly and established the imperial university. This monopoly lasted till 1850, when a law was passed, allowing private schools to be reopened. Napoleon indeed left the stamp of his powerful personality on French education. The educational system he evolved was more uniformed and centralized. It survived to the present day, although the framework has lost its rigidity and its contents have been somewhat altered by subsequent reforms, additions and transformation. Essentially then, education under the Revolutionaries and Napoleon provided the firm bedrock on which the French education was rebuilt in the years following. To that extent, it will not be out of place to imply that the foundation of modern education of France was laid by the revolutionary government of Napoleon I. "The Napoleonic regime gave education in France its lasting form and character, having delivered it from the hands of the self-centered royalty." (Nwadiani, 1997: p110).

French education under the Republics after Napoleon

After the downfall of Napoleon, it might have been expected that his system of education would have been abolished or greatly modified. The curriculum he left was mutilated by the Revolution that swept him out. The imperial university, of course disappeared, but the centralized control of education continued for as much as the republics that emerged needed it.

One other feature in the French educational history after Napoleon was the further and deep-rooted struggle for the freedom of education from clerical influence, leading to the innovations in secondary schools for modern and scientific branches of learning. Under the Republics that followed, the establishment of primary education became not just secular, but compulsory and expanded (King, 1979).

The Second Republic passed the controversial Falloux law of 1850 with the legal incorporation of the principles of "Liberty of Education" which had the effect of expanding the role of the church in schooling and making it a partner with the State in the provision of education. Indeed, in the Third Republic, the demand for State monopoly in schooling or severe restriction on "Liberty of Education" became a major political issue.

The Third Republic brought about a complete renovation of the French schools to the extent that education became a national enterprise. In 1882, the Third Republic had made education compulsory up to 13 years and by the laws of 1886 abolished religious teachings in State schools just to consolidate on national education. Authorities of the Third Republic felt they were to be upholders of the Revolutionary tradition. Again as Fraser (1968:p1) asserts, it is the Third Republic that appropriates the honour of introducing popular primary education that is "free, secular and obligatory" in France. But as Osokoya (2002) observes, this did not indicate that the State had monopoly of schooling because

besides the schools set up by the State, there existed private schools set up and maintained by the private persons, associations, religious bodies (especially the Catholics), trade unions, etc

The Fourth Republic (1940-1946) inherited the strains in the educational institutions of the Third Republic, but the period was another time for a major political quandary for France, occasioned by the World War II, especially with regards to the occupation of France by the Vichy government. During the occupation of France by the Vichy rule, which lasted from 1940-1944, propaganda became evident in French education as it was used to train young people with the idea of new Vichy education. The period became even more challenging for France because the government had to employ effort to guide against communist fermentation in schools, so the need to uphold the unification of French education became of utmost consequence (Roe; 1964).

From the foregoing, it is clearly observable that the long standing culture of patriotism and nationalism in French education were under serious threats at that time as the Vichy regime almost compromised all of that (Kandel, 1941). Thus, according to Mallinson (1980), during the dark days of Vichy occupation much thought was given to the whole question of radical reforms as the basis for stamping out the decadent system hoisted on France by the Vichy regime.

Education in Post-War Years

The Post-War years became series of time for the re-focusing and repositioning of French education for a technological age and the determination for this found profound evidence in the reforms extensively initiated and executed by Charles De Gaulle, the indefatigable and charismatic architect of the 5th Republic. As the aftermath of the Second World War, the educational system had to be designed to meet new demands. Concerns about modernization and democratization was linked with demands for realistic educational system combining aspirations for social justice, more attention to individual needs, and more modern method in curricular reform appropriate to a modern State like France in a revived Western Europe. It was for this yearning for a turnaround that the 1947 "Longevin-Wallon" (An Educational Reform Commission/Project under Paul Langevin and Henri Walton set up in 1944)Reforms plans were devised and later adopted by De Gaulle when he promulgated in January 1959 an order-in-council and decrees reforming the educational system. The reform plans gave prominence to educational planning, centred interest on school building, laid emphasis on democratization of French education, and harped on the need for educational response to further technological phase etc.

A breakdown of the reform plans shows that the first plan (1947-1953) talked about how to use education for economic recovery. The second plan (1954-1957) had direct interest in school building. The third plan (1958-1961) and the fourth (1962-1965) gave much

preference to educational planning. In the fifth plan (1966-1970) emphasis was placed on making good some evident shortcoming in French education and on the need for democratization. The sixth plan focused on active consolidation of secondary school reforms and wary readjustment in higher education while the seventh plan (1977-1981) committed itself to implementation of radical reforms which became law in 1975 (the Haby reforms). These reform plans were popular and indeed recorded some degrees of success for French education over these years. The Langevin-Wallon plans were so radical and all-embracing that they remained a point of reference for all subsequent proposals. The reform plans particularly as implemented by the visionary and firmly presidential rule of De Gaulle left many other French leaders acutely conscious of education's critical role for national planning and development in France(King, 1979)

Finally, by the twilight of the 20thcentury, France, through a policy statement, has convincingly demonstrated in the chronicles of modern education that she is one nation on planet earth that places immeasurable value on its educational system. This assertion is traceable to Vigouroux-Frey and Convey (1994: p66) who noted that most recent measures affecting the whole of the French education system is enshrined in the Loi d'Orientation .sur I'Education (Orientation law of education) of July1989 (Act No 89-486) whose preamble states that: "Education is the first priority of the nation". This singular national statement and commitment, in the opinion of this paper simply, goes to buttress the notion that National education in France has doubtlessly gained 'commanding heights'. The French revolutionary theory that, "all men were created equal" and, "the French revolutionary belief in the infinite perfectibility of mankind through education", (Boyd and King; 1983: p463) have very well informed the trends of the country's education. Again, as Peterson (1971: p133) notes, "Leaders of Education in France have been conscious of the historical superiority of French culture and efforts to preserve it. It is constantly recurring in the official pronouncements of French policy which in turn runs through all French thought on education".

Key Lessons for Nigeria

Nigeria has been in want of the type of Napoleonic revolution in education. From independence to till now, it was mostly the leadership of Obafemi Awolowo in the defunct Western Region that reflected the sense of emergency and urgency for education in Nigeria. Bank-Olemoh (2021) notes that it was only in Chief Awolowo's free education reform that Nigerians found "the most courageous, bold, innovative and revolutionary reforms in the education". Sixty-six years after the monumental reforms of Awolowo in 1955, no government in any part of Nigeria has exactly replicated what he did. To say therefore that Nigeria is desperately in need of a revolutionary reform in education is merely reiterating the obvious. Education in Nigeria must be considered and treated as an emergency with a momentum that should move in the spirit of a national revolution. In addition, education for economic recovery was one of the outstanding hallmarks of Charles De Gaulle's administration, unlike in Nigeria where repeated attempts by several

regimes at engaging education for National Development Plans have met with limited success. The need to pragmatically actualize the nexus between education and national development is an urgent task that Nigerian leaders must take up.

The current security crises, orchestrated by the protracted activities of insurgents, gunmen and other social miscreants, have not only brought the Nigerian nation under siege but have heavily impacted negatively on education. This can be compared to the siege that French education suffered under the Vichy regime, when the ideals of the country's education were almost completely threatened. A situation in Nigeria where a section of fundamentalists have branded modern education as evil is akin to creating a recipe for a regime of underdevelopment in education. Schools have been shutdown in some places, students are terrorised and kidnapped, the number of out-of-school children is on the rise and other sundry untold experiences have been hoisted on the Nigeria school system (Nyewusira and Worgu, 2020). What insecurity and fundamentalism have done to Nigerian education is nothing short of pushing it into a "Dark Age" experience, *à la* the Vichy occurrence. What France did to overcome the devastating impact of the Vichy regime is therefore a food for thought for the government and people of Nigeria, if education must survive that acts of militancy against it in Nigeria.

Conclusion/Recommendation

This paper, in its excursion through the periods of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Era, and in the transitions of the first three Republics through the Post-World War 11 regimes, observes that the centralized nature of the French government has maintained itself in the country's educational landscape. Each new government, however much it differed with or might have criticize the old, wished to retain the centralized power it took over in order to effectively enforce whatever educational reform it had proposed. The major reforms or changes in education over the years, under our survey, were continuously suited to the traditions, tempers and historical legacies of the French leaders.

There were challenges and breakthroughs in the development of French education, of course, according to the vagaries of political power and expediency; nonetheless, the challenges in particular mostly enabled most of the country's rulers to make robust and far reaching reforms which reflected in the trajectory of the country's education since 1789. As such, the challenges that manifested in the trends of French education were multiple and sometimes cataclysmic yet they were met with the strong characteristic French response that never gives up on national engagements, more especially on the business of education that has turned out to be the country's foremost priority. These are the lessons that Nigeria must learn and utilize for radical changes to happen in education.

Nigeria is still in search of the right type of leadership, particularly the leadership that would prioritize education in the way and manner French leaders did. With the return of

democracy, it is yet to be seen which leadership, at all levels that has demonstrated the type of French vigour for the advancement of public education. Hence, the French experience does not only serve as an impetus, but a clarion call on the part of leadership in Nigeria to find the political will to prioritize education. Prioritization of education is the first and most critical step towards attaining educational revolution for the country.

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