



Implications of Freire's Pedagogy for Almajiri Education System in Nigeria

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This paper will review the implication of the banking education model to the Almajirai Education system in Nigeria. Paulo Freire used the term banking method of education in his highly influential book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to describe and critique the traditional education system. The relevance of this concept to the Almajirai education system in Nigeria will be reviewed, and the paper will be concluded with some brief reflections on establishing the appropriate learning environment for authentic education.

Education is how society provides its members with certain knowledge, attitudes and skills through formal systematic training. The relationships in society are mostly determined by the educational system and the educational system is determined by the economic, social and cultural relations in human society (UNESCO, 2015). An imperfect society cannot hope to provide a just educational system.

Paulo Freire's book, "pedagogy of the oppressed" is a stimulating exposition of the phenomenon of oppression in our education systems. He beamed a broad light on the essence and process of education in our societies. The book is a product of Paulo Freire's experience working with the poor in Brazil and Chile.

Paulo Freire was born into a middle-class family in Recife in Brazil in 1921. He experienced poverty during the depression of the 1930s. It is believed that this was a formative experience that led him to believe in the idea of fighting oppression. In 1943 he enrolled in Recife University, Majoring in Law, but also teaching Portuguese part-time in a local school. When he finally finished his degree, rather than go into a law career, he instead became a welfare official in the department of education and culture in the state of Pernambuco (Roberts, 2005).

He was exposed during this time to areas where there were very many poor people. This got him thinking about how to help people in abject poverty, which eventually led to the development of a dialogic process within literacy. He became aware of the economic, social and political domination resulting from paternalism, a method people in authority use to restrict the freedom and responsibilities of subordinates. A practice which according to Freire creates an emotional bond of control and dependence between the oppressed and the oppressors (Gorder, 2008). Freire developed and promoted a philosophy of education that centres on critical consciousness that seeks to expand the capacity for critical thinking by the oppressed of themselves and promotes people's ability to take actions to change their social realities (Blackburn, 2000).

In the early 1960s, Freire worked for the cultural extension programme of the University of Recife, where he continued to work with the poor in terms of literacy and helping them to gain more local power by guiding them to become literates. However, when the Brazilian government was taken over by a military coup in 1964, the programme was terminated. Freire was imprisoned and later went into exile in Bolivia, then Chile. In Chile, he wrote what would become his seminal book, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (Roberts, 2005).

According to Paulo Freire (2001b), the teacher is knowledgeable and an active participant in the traditional education system. The teacher's existence is necessitated by the ignorant student, which means the student is bound to the teacher's narration, which contextualizes and frames the way the student thinks. The description of reality to the teacher is static and not dynamic as the teacher teaches what they were taught, which discourages creativity. The Teacher does not draw from the student's existential experience nor discuss meaning, and the student merely memorizes information without contextualization (Freire, 2001b). The student is the object of the instructor's narration (Freire, 2001b). The student has to accept his or her own ignorance, the teacher has knowledge that the student does not have, which does not only demonstrate the teacher's proficiency but the student's ignorance. The student is receptive to the teacher's static knowledge and fails to recognize the ability to educate the teacher under this paradigm. The student becomes passive and the higher the level of passivity the more the student will learn (Freire, 2001b).

Paulo Freire (2001b) referred to this transfer of static knowledge to the receptacle student as the act of depositing in what he referred to as the "banking concept of education". What is banked is content knowledge that comes from the teacher as a gift to a passive student. Passivity limits student's creativity and the ability to think critically. Education under this system embodies a system of adapting students to their roles as dominated, passive recipients. The teacher becomes the oppressor, and the student becomes the oppressed since students are better if they don't challenge authority (Freire, 2001b). This system, in essence, serves the interest of the oppressor as there is no creativity in the system. When there is creativity, then you have theoretical, logical and rational grounds to challenge the system. According to Freire (2001b) the banking concept is the indoctrination of the oppressed into the worldview of the oppressor, turning the students into objects that are malleable and that liberation cannot be attained through the banking concept of education because it leads to dehumanization which reinforces oppression.

The shortcomings of this kind of educational system led Freire (2001b) to propose a liberating method which he called the problem-posing model of education. This is a democratic relationship between teachers and students, allowing the teachers and students to teach and learn from each other. This method allows the teacher and students to engage in dialogue and critical reflection of topics or issues. In this dialogic exchange between teachers and students, they both learn, reflect, and participate in creating meaning (Freire, 2001b). Knowledge is shared and both the instructor and students are co-creators and investigators.

The problem-posing model is liberating and beneficial because education becomes the practice of freedom instead of domination and students are able to attain an ability to perceive their purpose, existence and role in the world. When teachers implement problem-posing models in the classroom, they approach students as fellow dialoguers, creating hope, love, humility, and

trust. Authentic education is not carried on by A for B or by A about B but rather by A with B (Freire, 2001b). In the problem-posing model, students are taught facts and learn along with the teacher on how to think. This method makes students critical thinkers and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality (Ekanem, 2014). It is important to note that Paulo Freire's educational theory has been criticized by conservatives who are opposed to revolutionary projects of emancipation, who have condemned him as demagogic. In contrast, feminists have criticized him for failing to consider the radical differences between forms of oppression and their complex and contradictory instantiation in subjects (McLaren and Noah, 2020).

So far, this paper has focused on Freire's pedagogy. The following section will discuss the Almajirai education system and the relevance of Freire's ideology.

The word 'Almajiri' is derived from the Arabic word 'Almuhajirun', which means migrants. It refers to a traditional method in Northern Nigeria where young males from the age of five to early twenties, mainly from rural poor homes are sent out by their parents or guardians to other villages or towns to attend traditional Quranic boarding schools that are not under the purview of state regulation (Hoechner, 2011). They undertake Quranic lessons as opposed to western education and generally do not speak English. It is an educational system that is primarily Islamic. Due to lack of financial support and poverty, Almajirai in rural areas normally farms under the guidance of their teacher, while those in urban areas usually beg for food or money in the streets as a means of survival. According to the United Nations Children's Fund, there are over nine million Almajiri in the streets of the northern states of Nigeria (Nwanze, 2019).

The children are handed over to teachers (Malams) who are not paid a salary but rely on community contribution and contributions of students and are not formally certified but are themselves products of the Almajiri system. The children are made to learn in a sorry state of learning and live in poor health and malnutrition conditions. The children are thought to memorize and recite the Quran in Arabic without understanding the meaning of the words and are continuously flogged by the teacher to instil fear in the minds of the Almajirai (Yusha'u et al., 2013).

The teacher in this system is viewed as having controlling power over socially distributed religious knowledge and determines the meanings, norms and values that the education system preserve and disseminates. No formal qualification is required from a Malam to establish and manage a Qur'anic school apart from the experience of having attended one himself (Baba, 2010). Once established, the school exists in its own right since the system affords Malam a considerable level of autonomy in its management and operations. The implication of this power manifest in the selection of content and prescribed text for the school curricula.

X-raying the Almajiri education system, it falls guilty of oppression as illustrated in the banking model of education. This monologue that is inflicted upon the students is an essential asymmetry, and one-sidedness in the teacher taught relationship where the teacher doles out knowledge to the student who is to be appropriately grateful for this beneficence. Freire questions this paradigm and suggests a relationship of mutual give-and-take between the teacher and the student, which, like in most other world education systems, is nonexistent in the Almajiri system.

The teacher needs to understand that teaching is not to transfer knowledge, but to create opportunities for knowledge production. If the teacher is seen or sees himself as the subject in relation to the students as subjects in the classroom, the passive students will, in turn, be unable to add value to the teacher and the process. Teaching is valid when there is an emergence of something learned that allows the teacher to recreate and upgrade what has been taught (Freire, 2001). Teaching is when the teacher is being formed or reformed as he teaches and the students develop themselves or themselves in the process. A teacher should be open to new ideas, questions and curiosity of students as well as their inhibitions.

It is also necessary for teachers to be aware of their role as educators in possession of content and correct thinking. Therefore, it becomes imperative for the teacher to be a critical thinker at the expense of mechanical memorization or repetition of phrases and ideas. Intellectuals who memorize fail to make concrete connections between their reading and the world. Such teachers rarely teach anything of value and are disconnected from reality (Freire, 2001). The teacher who critically thinks transmits to the students the reality of the world and the tools to think and create new discoveries.

It is obvious that research is important just as teaching is important to research, it is imperative for teachers to continue to search and research. Teachers should question and submit themselves to questions so that in so doing they can educate and educate themselves. Teachers must research to know what they do not yet know and state what they discover (Ekanem, 2014). The teacher should respect the students' knowledge and this can be achieved through the utilization of the student's life experience, which is the establishment of unity between knowledge considered basic to the school curriculum and knowledge that is a product of individual experiences of the students. The teacher should respect student's curiosity in all ramifications since lack of it can smother the natural curiosity and freedom of the student. It is through openness and respect for the student's curiosity that the possibility of true dialogue ensues.

Education is like water to dry lips. Without education, we can't empower ourselves. Proper education is knowing the information and having the wisdom to understand how to use it. Education is there to empower the people, if the people aren't educated, then they aren't empowered to grow the state. A state grows because of its people who support it, and every true state is eager to educate its people because they know a community can't grow if it does not have a good quality education.

There is no contesting the vital role that teachers play in the educative process in the world. They are the most influential and powerful forces for equity, access and quality in education and key to sustainable global development (UNESCO, 2020). There is no substitute at the moment for teachers as major stakeholders in the educational system. Therefore, it is a fact that the foundation of quality and relevant education across all levels depends on the quality of teacher education. (Ekanem, 2014) While business styles, technology and even politics have adapted to an ever-changing progressive culture, the Almajiri education system has remained comparatively the same. The Almajirai system still involves the teacher dumping information on students in a language they don't understand. If the educational system has not kept up or blended with the changing times and reality, then one can question its relevance in preparing students for the world today and the future.

It is imperative for the role of the Almajiri education system to be redefined to meet the needs and demands of today. Considering that the teacher is the most important factor in student success, it would be appropriate to focus on skills that can help the teacher create a positive classroom environment and make learning relevant and engaging to boost student success. This includes organization, planning and managing the learning environment and the development of relevant applicable lessons that relate to the lives of the students to find the information meaningful and eventually take responsibility for their own learning. The teacher will also need to build crucial interpersonal skills, such as building authentic relationships with students, parents, and the community. The teacher has to appreciate the importance of making education relevant to the lives of the students. The students need to understand the world they live in and realize how to survive and succeed in it. This is done through authentic relationships and teaching to connect to the real world (Johnson and McElroy, 2012).

In conclusion, effective teaching should be flexible, fluid and adaptive to present times. Almajiri system of education lacks this flexibility, thereby limiting its relevance in preparing students for the world today. The Almajiri system should be reformed to produce teachers who can bring about students' critical and reflective spirit through democratic settings informed by dialogue. The teacher requires organization, management and planning skills. The art of teaching is making authentic connections with students as well as connecting the curriculum to the real world.

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