

## AN EVALUATION OF JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU'S THEORY OF EDUCATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA'S SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

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### Abstract

One of the fundamental challenges for contemporary human society is that despite the high level of education, human character still remains very questionable. Education has not really reformed or changed the mind set of man. Rousseau's theory of education reflects on moral reform. Rousseau's theory of education advocates that the child ought to be educationally sound and that the child should engage in a pedagogical training with a good moral psychological balance devoid of self-interest. Rousseau's theory of education aims at the need for the public good of all in the society. This paper analyses Rousseau's theory of education in line with the Nigerian educational system. This paper adopts the hermeneutical methodology and analytical framework in unravelling the great significance and potentials of education on contemporary era. The objective of this paper is to advocate that man's moral probity and education remains the key in the society. Education remains the vantage point for the promotion of individual well-being. Education helps in ensuring social order and in restoring the harmonious living condition of a people. Findings, however, show that education plays a critical role in the self-transformation of the individual; that education has a global implication; that education helps in shaping human physical and mental well-being; that education serves as the solid bedrock for problem solving mechanism; and that education is light and good democratic framework gives room for social and educational security. This paper concludes that the clarification of education has to do with the progressive, pragmatic, protective, moral and socio-psychological functions of the individual. Educational programme of any country is aimed at ensuring national development, the liberation of the human mind and to make the child a more rational, moral and responsible citizen.

**Keywords:** The Child, Education, Emile, Man, Society.

### 1.1 Introduction

Education is fundamental to every human development and it could serve as a springboard for national development. Rousseau's *Emile* (1762) was in response to suggestions made by Plato with regard to education of men and women. Philosophy plays a critical role in education. Philosophy and education are correlated. According to Torill Strand (2022, 1), there is a decoupling between philosophy and education. For Subrata Mukherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy (2011, 82-83), education enabled the individual soul to develop fullness of experience, both theoretical and practical. It trained the human mind in moral and aesthetic judgement. It developed the physical body to be healthy and athletic. For Kenneth Iheanacho and Emmanuel Iheanacho (2012, 115), education, at the risk of sounding simplistic, can be described as a project of acquiring technical and humanistic values. And is a progressive endeavour, much like building a house, whereby incremental values have to be adopted, fitted and advanced for the best performance of the human person as a rational participant in the society. Accordingly, Joan Ferrante (2003, 538) argues that education is referred to those experiences that train, discipline and develop the mental and physical potentials of the maturing person. For Wesley Osemwegie (2013, 80-81), in all education is geared towards the shaping and moulding of the individual's character, behaviour and attitude so as to become relevant in the society, which he/she is a citizen. For John Burr and Milton Goldinger (2008, 521), education presupposes the training of the

human mind and the mind is a nonphysical thing, it is a place where thinking, sensing and feeling takes place. Education aims at human emancipation. For John Hoffman and Paul Graham (2009, 596) emancipation is the capacity of people to act freely and thus govern their own lives. For Omotoso Adetutu (2010, 13) education signifies that there was one developmental process common to all humans. For Jaakko Hintikka (2007, 458) education is all about the entire strategies of knowledge-seeking. Education envisages a form of society that is not easily contaminated by corruption and lack of self-discipline. For Henry Ekiyor (2007, 25), corruption is deeply rooted in human intention. However, Rousseau's notion of education aims at the need for the public good of all. Education itself has what Jeremy Wisniewski (2007, 91-92) calls a practicality function.

Broadly speaking, education has great significance on contemporary times. Education has an all-round progressive and positive implication for man. Education is aimed at the transformation of human character. For Omotoso Adetutu (2010, 20), education should draw out the individual's natural goodness. According to Mads Qvortrup (2003, 34-35), Rousseau's natural man existed prior to the establishment of society. Education is aimed at developing the right of the child from infancy to adulthood. Education reveals a kind of progressive impulse and protective kind of educational training for the child. For Omotoso Adetutu (2010, 13-14) Rousseau's theory of education envisages a mental/psychological balance and a harmonious living of the child with others.

Moreover, this paper is divided into five sections. Section one anchors on the introductory remarks. Section two focuses on Rousseau's educational thought. Section three reflects on Rousseau's theory of education in line with Nigeria's social challenges. Section four discusses the implications of Rousseau's educational thought to the Nigeria's educational challenges. Section five focuses on the concluding considerations.

## 1.2 Rousseau's Educational Thought

Rousseau's theory of education aims at ensuring gender equality between men and women. Rousseau's interpretation of gender equality seems to be logically inconsistent because he prioritizes the education of the male child over the female child. According to Martin Cohen (2008, 147), Rousseau confines the education of the fair sex to domestic science and recommends training from an early age in habits of docility and subservience. Geraint Parry (2000, 256-257) in consonance with Rousseau asserts that the liberating and the disciplinary objectives of the child's project are equally essential. Rousseau presents this protective education as liberation from the constructions of conventional child care. For Rousseau (1979, 4-5), the *Emile* is a truly great book, one that lays out for the first time and with the greatest clarity and vitality the modern way of posing the problems of educational psychology between the teacher and the child.

In his *Emile*, published in (1762), Rousseau suggests that learning before undertaking action is key to the psychological development of the child. Rousseau (1979, 94) argues that one must know well the particular genius of the child in order to know what moral diet suits him. Rousseau invariably argues that the masterpiece of a good education is to make a reasonable man. Rousseau (1979, 89) asserts that before the age of reason, one cannot have any idea of moral beings or of social relations. Rousseau (1979, 80-81) further heightened his theoretical position by arguing that: Man's felicity on earth is, hence, only a negative condition; the smallest number of ills he can suffer ought to constitute its measure. Humanity has its place in the order of things; and childhood has its in the order of human life.

Furthermore, education is aimed at addressing man's physical ills and socio-psychological imbalance, personal emotions and mental state. For Rousseau (1979, 82), men's physical ills are themselves destroyed or destroy them. Time or death is man's remedy.

Everything is only foully and contradiction in human institutions. For Geraint Parry (2000, 251), *Emile's* education is intended to be highly disciplined, but the discipline is to come from nature and not society itself. Human beings must go back to nature and obey the rhythm of nature itself. As rightly observed by George Kelly (2000, 10), for Rousseau, the human clock, the clock of peoples, the universal clock all run down, we service them for better or for worse. The main thing is to obey the clock of nature and to discard our modern European timepieces. Rousseau's critique of education is to address and sustain social norms, moral reforms and to achieve economic progress by an improvement in human civilization and educational standards. According to Obi Oguejiofor (2000, 15), Rousseau's pessimism about the corrupting influence of human civilization as such resulted in his opting for a new beginning that would produce human beings who are to live within the human society, but who are to be trained outside that society. For Leo Damrosch (2007, 336-337) growing up in society, no one can possibly live as a natural man, and the tutor's role is to create artificial situations in which Emile will develop properly without realizing it.

In line with the above theoretical subscription, Leo Damrosch (2007, 335-336) further asserts that to encourage Emile to think for himself the tutor presents him with a series of covertly orchestrated challenges. The child needs to grasp ethical principles through concrete experiences, something very different from memorizing verbal formulas. Rousseau's pedagogical timeline is deeply rooted in positive and progressive education. According to Leo Damrosch (2007, 335), writers on education normally referred to children as rational beings. Accordingly, Rousseau put emotions first, suggesting that the age of nature lasted until the age of twelve and that the age of reason did not begin until then Emile lives in the modern world and must eventually become a member of society.

Put differently, Rousseau's interpretation is aimed at addressing human nature. George Ritzer and Jeffrey Stepnisky (2014, 49) in concurrence with Leo Damrosch (2007) assert that our concept of human nature dictates how society can be sustained and how society can be changed for the overall purpose of the common good of all. According to Subrata Murkherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy (2011, 156), the human nature is wicked, selfish, egoistic, fundamentally weak, ungrateful, exhibitionist, anti-social, artificial, anxious to avoid danger and excessively desirous of gain. According to John Scott (2023, 16-17), Rousseau's conception of human nature and the self constitutes a pivotal point in the history of philosophy. Agastya International Foundation (2022, 2-3) in consonance with Scott (2023) asserts that Rousseau's philosophy depends on his notion of human nature and general will. Rousseau's theory of education reveals the practice of philosophy as a means of the development of the self. Accordingly, Neil Wilcock (2022, 2) asserts that, the practice of philosophy is seen as a means to the development of the human person and as a political and educational method of philosophy that aims to discover and answer the problem of cooperative association. For Martin Cohen (2008, 148) Rousseau offers a view of social evolution in which the human animal is being moulded by its environment, deriving its attitudes and values from its surroundings and vision. According to Geraint Parry, (2000, 252-253), the temptation of such a vision is that a child can quite rapidly acquire the skills that society considers it needs. Teaching becomes a technique of transmitting ideas, and the success of both the tutor and the child can be assessed by tests of achievement. For Adegbite Ibrahim (2020, 144), teaching is both vital and strategic profession in the course of national development. According to Leo Damrosch (2007, 332) the child is effectively isolated from his family as soon as he enters the tutor's care. According to Geraint Parry (2000, 253) Rousseau outrightly condemned positive education as externally imposed on the child and as designed to reinforce social conventions. It ignored the manner in which the child developed and instead sought to force it to mature prematurely.

Nevertheless, Leo Damrosch (2007, 335) posits that education is a form of “*equine dressage*”. The child was being expected to reason and verbalise its impressions before it was ready to grow and mature. What Rousseau is simply saying is that the form of education society gives to the child is too abrupt and not gradual. For Leo Damrosch (2007, 334-335), Rousseau advocates that the process of learning by the child should be continuous and gradual for the purpose of memorization by the child. For Leo Damrosch (2007, 335), most of what usually passes for education is counterproductive and education shouldn’t make the child worse but a good citizen.

Rousseau’s essential requirement was that education must be sensitive to the development of the child and education should be deeply rooted in the child’s life rather than constantly thinking about the future adult and its suitability to society, especially as it is currently conducted. For Obi Oguejiofor (2000, 16), education is an all-embracing phenomenon and it has a psycho-practical utility. In addition to the foregoing, Geraint Parry (2000, 254-255) asserts that the child must be allowed the time and room to develop at its own pace. Rousseau (1979, 94-95) argues that education makes oneself respectable.

In the light of the above, education brings about human progress and it serves as a solid bedrock for national development and the normative context of social order. Bertrand Russell’s notion of education re-echoes Rousseau’s pedagogical timeline. For Bertrand Russell (1977, 151) if a man’s life is to be satisfactory, whether from his own point of view or that of the world at large, it requires two kinds of harmony; an internal harmony of intelligence, emotion and will, and an external harmony with the wills of others. Rousseau’s interpretation of education presupposes the maintenance of social order. According to Mads Qvortrup (2003, 70), in his pursuit of his own happiness man forgets his responsibilities for maintaining social order. Rousseau’s theory of education raises the question of democratic citizenship and the common good of all in the society. For Mads Qvortrup (2003, 69), the citizen must...sacrifice himself for the sake of the common good and society can only be maintained if man is willing and able to trade in his limitless “negative” freedom for the benefit of the whole of the democratic community. According to Mads Qvortrup (2003, 46) nature is innocent and good.

Furthermore, Rousseau’s theory of education has two major strands. These strands include political science and education. According to Ethan Putterman (1999, 19-20), two disciplines in particular have benefitted from the contributions of Rousseau; political science and education. According to Morne Diederick (2022, 4-5) Rousseau’s influence in various fields of science is clearly visible. One field of science in which Rousseau is particularly indispensable is in education. A key concept with Rousseau’s ideas on education is his concept of natural inclination. Rousseau’s educational programme indicates socio-psychological development of the child and he advocates gradual and comprehensive development of the child through rational inquiry. For Leo Damrosch, (2007, 331), Rousseau proposed that the teacher would work by subtle indirect manner to encourage a child to develop according to his own natural bent. According to Maduabuchi Dukor (2004, 194) education presupposes the rational inquiry that is precisely and legitimately an inquiry into the moral and ethical capacity of man in building an ideal society.

Rousseau advocates a form of education that is predicated on progressivism and the protection of the child. Rousseau’s educational programme teaches the child to be a responsible citizen in order to meet up his democratic, social, economic and material needs. He posits that the child’s educational training ought to be devoid of self-interest and to galvanise for the collective interests of society. Rousseau admonishes that the strength the child receives from his educational training and programme should be aimed at making him a rational administrator of his socio-political and economic environment. Rousseau admonishes that education should strengthen the

rational and cognitive faculty of the child. Education is not just to make the child a rational citizen or economic man, but to make him humane, prudent, just, patient, moral and compassionate to others. Rousseau's theory of education is a social experiment that is aimed at restoring harmonious living condition in the society. Man requires a healing or therapy through the power of education which returns him to himself. As Rousseau (1979, 3-4) rightly puts it, the *Emile* is one of those rare total or synoptic books, a book with which one can live and which becomes deeper as one becomes deeper; a book comparable to Plato's Republic. Synoptic books mean that Rousseau's book on education is encyclopaedic and worthy of emulation because it is one of those books that helps in the proper psychological development and mental balance of the child. It is pedagogical because it helps in the formation of the human character from childhood to adulthood. Rousseau (1996, 356) asserts that human life arises out of curiosity; and people were anxious to make the acquaintance of the singular man, who sought no one's society, and whose only anxiety was to live free and happy after his own fashion. Accordingly, Iain Mackenzie (2009, 110-111), believes that education gives society the right impetus for individual freedom. Education requires that the democratic state must ensure the improvement of the people. Accordingly, Iain Mackenzie (2009, 107) further asserts that the aim of all good government is the improvement of the people. For Obi Oguejiofor (2004, xxiii), Rousseau's theory of education addresses the causes of man's being good or bad, happy or miserable, with such pairs of opposites as sincere/insincere, authentic/inauthentic, inner-directed/other-directed and real self/alienated self. Anthony Echekwube (2004, 461) in consonance with Obi Oguejiofor (2004) argues the possibility of charting a practical philosophy is only possible through the power of education in Nigeria. The central thesis of this paper is that Rousseau's pedagogical timeline presupposes that education does not only contribute to the psychological development of the child but it helps the child in all spheres of life and it contributes to national development.

### 1.3 Nigeria's Social Challenges

Nigeria as a country is bedevilled by socio-political, economic and educational challenges. Some of Nigeria's social challenges include get-rich-quick-syndrome, internet fraud, brain drain syndrome, poor educational institution, poor road network, gender inequality, abject poverty, physical insecurity, educational insecurity, social insecurity, moral insecurity, hunger and increase in the numbers of out of school children. Many Nigerian youths have been given the wrong orientation that education is a waste of time due to the prevailing socio-economic challenges and political unfreedom in Nigeria.

Moreover, insecurity remains one of Nigeria's social challenges and this has drastically affected every sectors of the Nigerian society such as the educational sector. Many Nigerian children have been kidnapped from their places of learning in some educational institutions in Nigeria. For Gbari Sylvester and Anselm Odo (2021, 209), schools and educational institution have been destroyed by insurgencies, thousands of children are out of school. Teachers and pupils were killed, properties worth of billions destroyed. School teachers and their families, community members and others have been forced to live in Internally Displaced Camps (IDPs) against their wishes causing disease, poverty, hunger and other related crimes in the IDP camps.

In addition, due to this bad image within the international community, many hardworking and honest Nigerian citizens are seen as suspected internet fraudsters. The Nigerian government ought to see this as a duty to reverse this unfortunate trend by engaging the Nigerian youths in meaningful employment through massive industrialization and people-oriented socio-economic and political programmes. Employment remains one of the indices of good democratic government. Any country that cannot provide employment opportunities for its citizens, such a country is prone to socio-political insecurity and this will give room for social vices such as armed robbery, crimes, indolence, gangsterism and political thuggery or political insecurity.

According to Gbari Sylvester and Anselm Odo (2021, 208-209), political insecurity will give room for thuggery, violence, kidnapping and lost of lives and property because of insecurity and lack of truth.

Nonetheless, the right to education, employment and political participation ought to be the topmost priority of the Nigerian government. Many Nigerian youths are faced with the nightmare to school in some parts of the country due to the problem of social insecurity. Based on this theoretical subscription, Gbari Sylvester and Anselm Odo (2021, 208) argued that the lives of Nigerians are at stake everywhere. Robberies, kidnapping, immorality, stealing, drug addiction, alcoholism, sexual harassment, all these social problems have severe social insecurity in Nigeria, thus, lives and properties are lost as a result of these crimes. However, the problem of abject poverty and hunger remain some of Nigeria's social challenges. Many Nigerians are currently passing through harrowing experiences of hunger and abject poverty. There is hunger in the land. According to Ejike Cyril (2021, 9), alleviation of poverty and improvements in human well being are of central importance in the development of human potential and the realization of goal of life which necessitate the formation of a civil state.

#### **1.4 The Implications of Rousseau's Educational Thought to Nigeria's Educational Challenges**

The contemporary Nigerian society has a lot to learn from Rousseau's educational programme. Rousseau's theoretical insight and educational thought reminds Nigerians that the rational man must be objective in his politico-existential, economic relations and socio-psychological existence with others. Rousseau's educational programme aims at addressing man as a self-transformative being. However, education reminds man of what Finn Hansen (2009, 208) calls self-transformative moments and existential relations with others. Rousseau's *Emile* is a social experiment that tends to address the social imbalances of society. Rousseau opines that the critical importance of education is that it ought to be a place-based pedagogy and it makes Nigerians as better citizens. Rousseau's theory of education helps in inculcating a sense of political obligation and moral responsibility in the individuals. For William Edelglass (2009, 74), education connotes place-based pedagogies and the questions of place and dwelling are central concerns of ethics and political philosophy. On the other hand, Mads Qvortrup, (2003, xvi) asserts that political philosophy should be a continuing dialogue with the classics. According to Judith Shklar (1970, 5), Rousseau was regarded as a pedagogue. Rousseau's pedagogical influence on the contemporary world is apt, timely, immense and imperative.

Moreover, education could bring about socio-psychological freedom. In Nigeria, education has not been able to address certain socio-economic and political challenges due to the problem of human nature and the evils of corruption. Education is aimed at shaping Nigerians but many Nigerian leaders have failed the country due to their egocentric calculation. What this simply means is that education supposed to serve as a platform for selflessness and responsible leadership rather than being avenue for stealing or looting national treasury at the expense of the Nigerian masses. Political leadership through functional education demands that public interest ought to take precedence over private interest. For Subrata Murkherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy (2011, 82), Plato was confident that young minds could be shaped, if directed properly.

Rousseau's pedagogical teachings advocate the need for a moral rebirth in Nigeria. As Omotoso Adetutu (2010, 19-20) rightly observed, the educational principles developed by Rousseau in general are still alive and well in the twenty-first century. This discourse is indicative of what Mads Qvortrup (2003, xv) calls the underlying (tacit) assumption that Rousseau has something to say to us even today, more than two hundred years after his death. For Mads Qvortrup, (2003, 34), Rousseau is no exception, inspiring writers from Marxists, through liberals

to conservatives. Today, Nigeria as a country is faced with a myriad of socio-economic problems and politico-existential challenges such as structural violence, thuggery, political assassination, election rigging, lack of electoral reforms, tribal sentiment, social injustices, ritual killings, kidnapping, rape, gender inequality, bribery and corruption and incessant strikes in educational institution. Nigeria as a country is characterized by ineffective leadership; and this ineffective leadership has led to lack of proper government interventions on education; and this has resulted in poor educational funding, dilapidated infrastructures in Nigerian educational institution, poor teachers' remuneration, poor motivation of teaching facilities and the problem of abject poverty has drastically affected the increase in the numbers of pupils' enrolment in Nigerian educational institution from the level of the primary, secondary and university. Rousseau's theory of education permeates all levels of Nigerian society.

Furthermore, the Nigerian government has a role to play in funding education in line with UNESCO's recommendation of 26% of national budget on country's education. Rousseau's educational programme is trans-gender. It is aimed at the educational training of both male and female children all over the world. For David-Mary Odunsi (2010, 245), at creation, man and woman were given to each other in mutual friendship and equality; gender inequality is an unfortunate aberration, in the initial setting of providence, predicated upon historical and cultural contingencies which now have been raised to the level of convention. Accordingly, John Stuart Mill argues that women should be given equal opportunities in terms of employment, voting rights and access to educational opportunities. For Cyril Udebunu (2009, 55), the "woman question" has remained one of the world's most troubled issues. It has not ceased to surface at each historical moment and this is precisely because it has not been given adequate response. Omotoso Adetutu (2010, 17-19) in consonance with Cyril Udebunu (2009) asserts that, Rousseau maintained that women were the makers of men; their education should be different from men. Accordingly, Omotoso Adetutu (2010, 18-19) asserts that with regards to Rousseau's theoretical position, he flirts with the position that women have a more practical reasoning power than men.

Nonetheless, philosophers such as Piaget, Quintillian, Froebel, Pestalozzi, Locke, Rousseau, Hume, Plato, Wollstonecraft and Mill advocate the complete education of both male and female children in order to guarantee a well-ordered and robust civil society. Rousseau's thought is all about gender studies. According to Omotoso Adetutu (2010, 11-12) Jean Jacques Rousseau avers that *Sophies* (women) are cleverer than *Emiles* (men) in matters of practical reason. Rousseau's educational thought reflects on the need for functional education. According to J. Abiodun (2017) cited by Adegbite Ibrahim (2020, 145), a functional education is aimed at problem solving skills and it produces a positive output in any learner.

### 1.5 Conclusion

So far, this paper examines Rousseau's theory of education and its implications for Nigeria's social and educational challenges; and concludes that Rousseau's political, moral and educational writings are aimed at addressing the all-round psychological development of the child right from infancy to adulthood. Education has progressive, positive, protective, pragmatic, cognitive and psycho-motive functions. Education is a social experiment that is aimed at restoring harmonious living condition among the people in society.

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