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EDITORIAL

Journal of Science Education and Research (JSER) is a peer-reviewed published Bimonthly. It aimed at advancing knowledge and professionalism in all aspects of educational research, including but not limited to innovations in science education, educational technology, guidance and counselling psychology, childhood studies and early years, curriculum studies, evaluation, vocational training, planning, policy, pedagogy, human kinetics, health education and so on. JSER publish different types of research outputs including monographs, field articles, brief notes, comments on published articles and book reviews.

We are grateful to the contributors and hope that our readers will enjoy reading these contributions.

Prof. Patrick C. Igbojinwaekwu

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**FREEWILL AND DETERMINISM: IMPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING IN
NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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Abstract

This paper examines how freewill can be engaged in Nigerian secondary schools to enhance learning among the students. This study is qualitative in nature and philosophical in orientation. It adopted the analytical, the speculative and the prescriptive methods to deal with issues and problems such as freewill, choice, determinism, indeterminism and compatibilism, among others. The paper depended on library sources for its data collection. The paper examines freewill as the power to do or not to do, and determinism as having all events caused by past natural occurrence(s) or possible consequence. It discusses indeterminism as the philosophical idea that supplants determinism. The paper analyses compatibilism as the compromise between 'freewill' and 'determinism'. This study found out that proper deployment of freewill in Nigerian secondary schools could facilitate learning among the students, and build sense of responsibility in them. The paper reveals that there could be cases of derailment, aberration or abuse among the students if exposed to absolute freedom. The paper concludes that controlled freedom of choice is what the students need, although still within the confines of their interests, abilities, dispositions and outlook.

Keywords: Compatibilism, determinism, freewill, indeterminism, intellectual opportunities.

Introduction

Philosophy and education seem to overlap, or involve each other. At times, philosophy is what is needed to deal with certain issues in education. Among such issues are freewill and determinism, which are sub-branches of philosophy. From the submission of Aboluwodi, in Akinnawonu (2006), freewill is subsumed in metaphysics and its implications for learning can be felt generally. The relevance of freewill could be perceived as ranging from moral to social and intellectual development of the students. However, it seems as if freewill, despite its relevance, has not been fully engaged in Nigerian secondary schools. This must have put not only the students but also the entire education system and the country at large at disadvantages in some ways. As such, this paper advocates the deployment of freewill in Nigerian secondary schools.

Freewill

The term *will* may be interpreted as desire, wish or cravings. Will, according to Kelly (1946), is used by scholars to signify the controlling and sovereign faculty in man, the intellectual tendency to desire, seek and enjoy that which is considered good by the intellect. For Klemm (2018), a common explanation of *freewill* is that a person can decide or choose among multiple alternatives without being forced by physical laws, luck, fate, or divine will. Where *will* is viewed as *freepower*, according to James, (as cited in Hewett, 2006), freewill may be defended as the capacity of self-determination. Aboluwodi (2023) conceptualises freewill as being able to make choice. Acts of the will, as further explained by James, are usually carried out under the influence of motive.

It appears as if freewill implies that nothing triggers an action. That is, the actor acted on his own volition, and could have behaved otherwise under the same circumstances. Aristotle in Tuarez (2020), contends that we have the power to do or not to do, and much of what we do is voluntary, and has its origin in us. From the foregoing, it could be inferred that ‘choice’, ‘choice making’ or ‘freedom of choice’ emanates from ‘the will’. To this end, Covey, as cited in Gurteen (2020), argues that we may have limited choices, but we can always choose. In furtherance, Covey, as cited in Gurteen (2020), contends that “our thoughts, emotions, moods, words, actions, values and principles of life are all matters of choice, whether we act or are acted upon”. That is, our personality in life is all a matter of choice.

Given the intersecting submissions of scholars above, there are questions that may bother the mind- Does freedom mean autonomy in totality? Could it mean that everything man does, or how he does, is always a matter of his choice? Does man’s freedom to choose (freedom of choice) put him at total liberty to choose in all cases? On this note, Fisher (1992) raises the question “Do I really have freewill?”. The obvious truth is that, at some points, we choose. Interestingly, Eysenck (1994) declares that people who believe in freewill know that there are internal and external factors, but hold the notion that those factors would not stop people from choosing their own behaviour. That is, one acts according to one’s own rules, as opposed to being controlled by external influence.

Although Covey, as cited in Gurteen (2020), asserts that “we all have the freedom to choose if we choose to”, it must be noted that our freedom to choose is often limited/controlled by circumstances or possible consequences. This could be justified

by Frankl's (2020) opinion that the last of human freedoms is the ability to choose one's attitude in a given set of circumstances. That man has freewill does not imply that all his acts are free. Rather, it could mean that he has the power to make a choice he considers good out of various options, or to abstain, based on intellectual motives. Motives connote personal interests or desires, and may not leave out bearing of responsibility for the choice made.

Freewill in classroom situation

Students' freewill situation is a condition that permits their free choice-making as agents in the classroom. In this case, they are neither coerced nor restrained. Thus, as free agents, the students have the opportunity and the ability to make something happen without the influence of the environment. However, students' supposed freewill in school or the classroom does not by any means connote absolute freedom. This explains why Kelly (1946) reasons that the practical meaning of freewill includes power to reform, develop, alter unfavourable tendencies and take on new/better habits. Therefore, going by Kelly's submission here, the freedom of choice the students are expected to enjoy in school is limited to the desires that must have been awakened in them in the school. The students do not have to be totally independent of all interests in their choice and performance of duties in school or the classroom. Besides, if students are exposed to freedom in totality, freedom could be abused. In fact, morality, in particular, could be swept under the carpet, or reduced to arbitrary personal preference. The claim here could be substantiated by Augustine's assertion, as cited in Carlisle, (2012) and Willows (2014), that creaturely misuse of freedom is possible, and could generate evil.

Russell, as cited in Fisher (1992), Fisher (1992) and Sen (1987) make this explicit. In Fisher's (1992) opinion, "freewill is never properly the freedom to attack or demean fundamental values, persons or communities" (n.p). In the same spirit, Sen (1987) avers that "the idea that freedom of choice is quite central to leading a good life is not a new one" (p. 4). Relatedly, Russell, (as cited in Fisher, 1992), contends that morality is one of the responsibilities of freedom. In agreement, Sen (1987) holds the notion that freedom could turn negative if not properly handled. It could be too dicey to expose students to 'naked/raw freedom'. This implies that to avoid possible abuse of freedom by the students, instructions are still necessary to guide them in all they do. The teachers are still needed, although as instructors and partners in investigation, with the students. It must be noted, however, that if students must be guided, controlled or restrained in their choice-making for whatever reason, it means that *determinism* is not far-fetched. Does it follow that freewill and determinism interplay somehow, somewhere?

How about determinism?

Determinism may be conceived as a theory premised upon the idea that all events are determined by previously existing causes, or possible consequence. It may be explained as the philosophy that all events (past, present or future), all choices/decisions and natural occurrences, as well as the way they take place, have causes, are determined, and, therefore, could not have been otherwise. Kelly (1946) describes determinism as the theory that denies freewill. For the determinist, every act of man or choice made by man is strictly a function of antecedent occurrence. It seems as if determinism is usually understood to contradict freewill because it holds that human beings could not have acted otherwise than they do. Riley (2015) asserts that philosophical determinism is the belief that everything in the universe, including all human choices and actions, has

a cause(s). Hewett (2006) conceives determinism as the closed view of the universe and of our world which holds all events to simply be the effects of other prior effects. As could be inferred, the determinist believes that there is nothing in the universe that is not caused by antecedent condition(s). He believes that previous or preceding occurrences determine events in all circumstances.

A submission in *The Information Philosopher* (2020) reiterates that the determinist believes that all events, human decisions and actions inevitably have their origin in antecedent states of affairs. Muller and Briegel (2018) conceive determinism as the metaphysical claim about the universe that “there is only one possibility for the future to turn out” (p. 3). For McLeod (2019), the determinist holds the view that all behaviour has a cause and, thus, could be predicted. He would maintain that every event is usually determined by natural law and that nothing can happen but traceable to an unbroken chain of causes that take their source in the past.

As affirmed by Leibniz in Begby (2005), the root of determinism is the idea that “everything can, in principle, be explained, or that everything that is, has a sufficient reason for being and being as it is, and not otherwise”. The submissions on determinism here so far imply that events occur, and occur the way they do, for explainable reasons. That is, our actions are conditioned by factors beyond our control Hankinson (1999). Therefore, it is not reasonable if we are held responsible for our actions. Thorndike (1910) notes that, in determinism, man is not regarded as a ‘free agent’, but as a mere machine that is automatically adjusted to its environment and therefore should not be blamed for his unworthy acts, or praised for his good behaviour. In other words, whatever happens at any point in time emanates from necessity.

Determinism should not be confused with *inevitability* or *fatalism (fate)*. Determinism is simply a function of universal, natural laws, but inevitability suggests event/occurrence that cannot be avoided. At its own end, fatalism is believed to involve the influence of mystical forces or wills of the gods. It may be of interest to note that although 'determinism' threatens 'freewill', *indeterminism* seems to be a more appropriate philosophic concept as the opposite of determinism. This observation may be affirmed by Sobel's, as cited in Bishop (2005), claim that a theory is deterministic if its laws as a whole are deterministic, but as indeterministic if all its laws as a whole are not deterministic. Then, what is indeterminism?

Indeterminism

It appears as if the most nearly opposite philosophical concept to *determinism* is *indeterminism*. Jeremy (2020) points out that taking indeterminism as simply the negation of determinism has nearly become a universal practice. Augustine, as cited in Carlisle (2012) and Willows (2014), describes indeterminism as the philosophical idea that some events in the universe have no deterministic cause(s), and thus, occur by chance, or randomly. Muller and Briegel (2018) interpret indeterminism as the metaphysical claim that there are many possible ways for the future to turn out. If determinism, as explained by Strumia (2002), is understood as the philosophical idea that the natural laws, together with the appropriate antecedent conditions, uniquely determine time evolution of the universe or subsystem in its totality, *indeterminism*, from Muller and Briegel's (2018) point of view, is its contrasting theory.

The argument here is that, sometimes, certain choices and actions are not caused by anything. They might even have nothing to do with the human agents making the choices or performing the acts. They just happen, or better put, purely by chance. This

is the idea of indeterminism. To the indeterminist, the notion or assumption that all events in the universe are naturally determined is uncalled-for. By implication, indeterminism is a theory or doctrine that supplants determinism. According to Christian (2011, p. 24), “determinism implies that (at any time) only one future consequence of events is *physically possible*”. In contrast, indeterminism is the belief that (at any time) many future consequences of events are physically possible. Therefore, indeterminism may be preferred over freewill as the opposite of determinism.

Compatibilism

Whether *freewill* and *determinism* interplay or not could have generated much controversy among scholars. This is because, from the foregoing, it seems as if some scholars believe that human beings have freewill, while others are of the view that all human actions and choices are caused by antecedent events or occurrence. However, many modern philosophers have claimed that human actions or choices can be a function of antecedent occurrence and of freewill at the same time. For instance, John Locke, as cited in Olayinka (2016), contends that every action of man contains the qualities of both freewill and determinism. This is compatibilism.

Austin (2014) conceives compatibilism as the compromise between freewill and determinism. Ogletree and Oberle (2008) contend that “freewill, properly characterised, can be compatible with determinism” (p. 1). In a similar spirit, Ross (2007) describes compatibilism as the theory that human actions or choices can be both caused and free. Hume, (as cited in Ross, 2007, para. 4), notes that even “if we try to prove our absolute liberty by doing something ‘unpredictable’ then we are still acting from a straightforward motive...”. In furtherance, Ross points out that to compatibilists

like Hobbes, Hume and Dennett, liberty implies being free to act as we will, which does not mean that our actions do not come from somewhere. On the same ground, Covey (2020) affirms that our freedom to choose lies in the space between what happens and our response. Does it mean that one can believe in both freewill and determinism, and still maintain logical consistency? Perhaps yes.

Some compatibilists hold the view that the truth of determinism would not threaten or undermine our freedom to do otherwise (Berofsky, Campbell and Vihvelin, (2019). Berofsky, Campbell and Vihvelin further explain that some compatibilists conceive one's freewill simply as one's ability to do what one wants. Therefore, that the human agent acts under a deterministic circumstance does not follow that the agent lacks freewill or ability to do otherwise. Green (2016) explains that compatibilists think our free actions or choices are driven by the necessity or compulsion for good behaviour. Hilary (2015), too, submits that "classically, compatibilists (such as Hobbes and Hume) have defined freewill as the unhindered ability to do what we want, whilst conceding that it remains the case that we are determined to want that that we want" (p. 2). That is, we might have the will to make a particular choice, but that choice could have been necessitated.

Besides, as contended by Klemm (2018), choices are often made within limits. For instance, if only three options are made available for someone to choose from, he is restricted within the three, regardless of whether he is actually interested in any of them or not. On this ground, one may want to argue that freewill and determinism are two philosophical concepts that cannot be disentangled in totality. In this spirit, Bagley (1922) argues that the determinist abuses his assumptions by undermining the influence of experience, a deterministic factor, on freewill. Experience, as such, could be

categorised under determinism, but it drives freewill. Given the foregoing, one may not be surprised at Ogletree's (2013) observation that the nature or position of *choice* as to whether it is *determined* or *free* has been a matter of concern among scholars from various disciplines. This is compatibilism, the compromise, interplay or intersection between freewill and determinism.

Students' freedom of choice in Nigerian secondary schools

Many countries of the World employ education as an instrument for achieving certain goals at one time or the other. Therefore, countries do formulate policies on education. This explains why Bowman (1936) argues that society educates a man for its purpose and its purpose alone. For instance, it is clearly spelt out in Nigeria's National Policy on Education, 2014 edition, that "education in Nigeria is an instrument 'par excellence' for effecting national development" (p. 1). In the interest of development, countries set their unique educational goals, pattern their school systems in certain ways, and design their curricula with peculiar learning content at each level accordingly. These educational goals are otherwise called "educational aims" (Dewey, 1916) or "aims of education" (Whitehead, 1966). Possible variations in what to be achieved by countries, using education as an instrument, have informed Giesinger's (2010) assertion that education is, to a large extent, heteronomous.

The grim pursuit of the educational goals in Nigeria seems to have hampered secondary school students' freedom of choice in learning. Government decides what to be taught in Nigerian secondary schools, and much of the content of the curricula is strictly designed and enforced based on the country's set goals, even at the expense of the students' respective interests, abilities, ambitions and will. Certain subjects are made compulsory for all students, regardless of whether some of these students are actually

interested in such subjects or not, or whether such subjects are relevant to the students' pursuit in life or not. Instead of being guided within the confines of their interests, the students are forced to offer these compulsory subjects. It appears as if this is done in Nigerian secondary schools as a way by government to achieve certain national goals. The logical consequence of this is that the students' freedom of choice is practically undermined and hampered.

The above picture is a justification for Hocking's (1923) claim that a major peril or defect of modern education is that the child's will is not exposed, or adequately exposed, to objects that could bring about the best responses of his whole will. This contravenes the educational idea of Plato, (as cited in Arogundade, 2001), that "what the child learns should be determined by his outlook and interest" (p. 24). Undoubtedly, these students enjoy some measure of freedom, but not freedom of choice when it comes to learning. Carter (2004) reveals that an agent can enjoy freedom without enjoying freedom of choice. Arguably, this seems to be anaphorical to the Nigerian secondary school students.

Imperative of freewill in Nigerian secondary schools

The deployment of freewill in the classroom involves allowing the students to make choices regarding the subjects to be taken. Here, the students are guided and taught within the confines of their interests. Learning activities are hardly imposed on them. Learning content is designed based on the students' abilities, interests, desires and outlook. According to Plato in Aboluwodi (2008), argues that individuals are born with different moral and intellectual capacities, and deserve special training to become good rulers of their community. Plato further advocates educational undertakings that correspond with the students' strengths at different stages in school. Proper deployment

of freewill in Nigerian secondary schools could promote democratic classroom situations in the schools. The interest of every child is adequately represented. This could help the students to consummate their desires and achieve their goals in life. The correct application of freewill in Nigerian secondary schools could help to shape students into what they become. This is self-actualisation. This explains why Maslow and Rogers as cited in McLeod (2019), reason that freedom is possible and necessary if we are to become fully functional human beings.

Challenges seem to be inevitable in life. In their academic journey, the students face challenges. However, an average human being would prefer facing challenges on issues of interest rather than on issues that have been superimposed. Therefore, these students' ability to withstand challenges on issues of academic interest could make them to grow into strong and experienced adults. They are, also, likely to develop the problem-solving skill, which may help them in later years. The argument here is that, as we learn from our mistakes in life, the experience these students must have gathered in school may serve as a problem-solving template for them in the life beyond the classroom. Relatedly, experience, at times, could serve as a virtue. Their myriad of experiences as they handle their academic affairs with liberty is likely to guide them in handling life issues in general.

Responsibility usually accompanies choice making. In this regard, allowing students to make choices for themselves in the class is likely to be a way of building sense of responsibility in them. By implication, they will be holding their destiny in their own hands, although under the guidance and supervision of their 'experienced' teacher. Besides, as the students struggle to manage their personal affairs, they invariably learn and develop managerial skills naturally in the course of their studies. Later in life, they

may become sound managers and organisers. Therefore, they would not take any step or venture into any act/activity that can bring them regrets later in life.

Confidence is another quality that a freewill classroom situation could build in the students. The emphasis here is that the possibility of feeling inferior in whatever situation they find themselves may be reduced to the minimum. Similar to this is the possibility that such students sail through the bedevilment of “do it for them syndrome”. That is, they must have learnt how to handle issues of life by themselves. They may not have to depend on anyone, an organisation, or even government for means of livelihood after their schooling. As a result, Nigeria may, directly or indirectly, be raising an army of self-reliant young adults that would make the country a better place to dwell in.

Conclusion

Loose/uncontrolled freedom can be abused easily by anyone, male, female, young or old. Therefore, it may not be wise enough to expose the Nigerian secondary school students to such. For instance, it may not be a surprise to find these students on the corridor of derailment or aberration if allowed absolute freedom of choice in school. There could also be cases of abuse and unhealthy conformity among them because of their inexperience at that stage. Besides, many of them might be driven by emotion rather than by reason in their choice-making. As such, there is the possibility that some of them ignorantly take detrimental steps. Based on Haggerty’s (1935) view that denying students freewill in school is synonymous to denying them intellectual opportunities, one may want to posit that engaging freewill in Nigerian secondary schools is a way of enhancing the students’ intellectual opportunities. It must be noted, however, that freedom of choice among these students needs to be controlled to

forestall possible abuse of freedom to choose. They need to be guided, although within the confines of their interests, as they exercise their freedom of choice.

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