

## A REVISIT OF JEAN JACQUE ROUSSEAU'S CONTRIBUTION ON EDUCATION

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### **Abstract**

This paper sought to revisit Rousseau's contribution on education. Jean Jacque Rousseau is a Swiss philosopher. He was a great and a social thinker of the 18<sup>th</sup> century of all his works, his contribution on education was centered on one of his books titled Emile. Emile is regarded as a learner. On his social contract, he understands that man was originally innocent but the society corrupts him. For that, Emile should be separated from the society; until he is fully grown to be taken back to society so that he shouldn't be corrupt. He described the way that suites a learner to have a standard of education. This was done by his illustration on the stages of a child. Education of a learner should be highly observed based on their level e.g. infancy level which is 0-2 years shouldn't be taught anything. Rousseau as a naturalist declares that natural education relies upon inclinations rather than habits. He says that a learner should not be punished rather be left with nature to do that. He further stated that a child should be taught what interest him. This papers adopt expository and analytic methods in order to record the Rousseau's contribution on education of a boy from infancy to adulthood. In this study of Rousseau, the set principle of Emile's education has been a paradigm for a new type of society. It was certain radical in its day, at least because it raised the status of childhood, and particularly valued the early stages of child development. Rousseau's theories are based on what is known as 'child-centered' approach education. As this article will be discussing some of Rousseau's contribution on education and the child development; with a view of recognizing the relevance they have to the present day early years' practice; certain critique / evaluation on his works will be ascertain.

### **Introduction**

Rousseau, the son of a watch-maker, was born in Geneva on June 28, 1712 cited in Vincent<sup>1</sup>. His mother died in childbirth and his father reportedly showed little interest in him. The young Rousseau was left in Geneva when his father was exiled to Lyons. History has it that, Rousseau left Geneva up in Turi. After long years of wondering from place to place, he was taken into the private care of Madame de Warens; while with the woman he took some study and later became a secretary to the French Ambassador in Venice. His parents were Protestants, but Rousseau got converted to Catholicism under the influence of Madame de Warens and subsequently became

her lover. Rousseau is reported to have written his first independent work when he was nearly forty years old but became famous for a short while on its publication. He was tagged a leading French philosopher of the Enlightenment, who was responsible for inaugurating the Romantic Movement in Continental philosophy. His *Confessions* provide the details of his life.

Prior to his publication, Rousseau became a friend to Diderot on his arrival in Paris, during which time he contributed to Diderot's *Encyclopedia* in the area of music. He equally developed an intimate relationship with Theresa Le Vasseur in 1743, with whom he subsequently fathered his five children. In spite his success in life as a writer, Rousseau fell out with almost everyone who knew him, including the Catholics and Madame de Warens, his mistress, he equally fell out with the Protestants and the Government of France after publishing the social contract. Due to his weird attitude Rousseau ended his days alone in poverty and despair, after quarrelling with his old time friend Hume in England, and with Diderot and Voltaire; he finally expired in Paris, most probably committing suicide.

His works include *A Discourse on the Arts and Science*, *Le Du Village*, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, *Political economy*, *The Social Contract*, *Emile*, etc.

### **Society and Social contract**

Rousseau regards the society as the corruptor of man and that education is the instrument used by the society to perpetuate inequalities. According to him, the society deprived man of his freedom and made him conform to the social order. To Rousseau, cited in Muhammad <sup>2</sup> " man is born free and everywhere in chains" such that his original nature which was good had to be corrupted by the society.

In his social contract, Rousseau depicted men in their state of innocence voluntarily coming together to enter into an agreement to forego part of the personal freedom, right and privileges and to confer these on an authority, a government, which he called the general will. This government had the powers and obligations to protect and mutual rights and obligations were the reasons for the existence of any good government. The social contract makes a society an artificial product and therefore devilish. To realize Rousseau's ideal political organization an Emile based education is necessary for the citizens of a country.

### **Nature and Natural education.**

He understands education to come from three sources: "from nature, from men, or from things" (EM: 11). These three sources must "coincide and lead to a common goal" if the individual is to become well-educated (EM: 11), yet not all of the sources educate man in the same manner. Education from nature acts independently of man's actions. Emile in Archer <sup>3</sup> Education from things depends on man only in a limited extent. Only education from man is entirely in his control. "Since the three educators must be mixed together for a perfect result" (EM: 12), Rousseau contends that nature, which man cannot control, must determine the course of the other two in cultivating children. Thus, he justifies naturalism as a guide to education. What does education with an eye to nature entail? Rousseau declares that natural education relies upon inclinations rather than habits. He first argues that habits are ineffective, citing the example of a plant being forced to grow a certain way. When let free, the plant continues in its habituated posture; however, as soon as the plant has any new growth, it strains towards its natural

inclination. Rousseau claims that human inclinations act in the same manner: “So long as there is no change in conditions and inclinations due to habits, however unnatural, remain unchanged, but immediately the restraint is removed the habit vanishes and nature reasserts itself” (EM: 12). Later in *Emile*, Rousseau emphasizes that “the only habit which a child should...form is that of forming none”. With this statement Rousseau seems to contradict himself. Whereas in the example with the plant, Rousseau stresses that habits become ineffective with time, he notes that children should not develop habits due to the constraints these practices could cause. Hence, it seems that some habits could remain with the child through adulthood.

Rousseau in his theory of education counsels us to live according to **nature** and to follow the order of the nature in education. For him, nature has several connotations. Nature in one way can be regarded as equivalent to endowment, the inherited disposition and capacities of the individual. Before our innate tendencies are warped by our prejudices, they are what Rousseau terms nature. Nature in this sense is beyond our control.

The second meaning of the term ‘nature’ in *Emile* is a negative one, a consequence of Rousseau’s disposition of the anti-social attitude. Society, for Rousseau is not a natural product, but an artificial one, the outcome of a contract. And for Rousseau what is natural is good and what is conventional or artificial is evil. Nature and society thus become opposed to each other; nature is accordingly defined negatively in the society.

The third meaning of nature, according to Rousseau in Muhammad <sup>4</sup> is a positive one which states that nature or the universe is governed by a divine providence. To live according to nature is to live in accordance with the rational principle of the universe, to live according to reason. He who obeys his conscious is following nature.

Following his definitions of nature, a number of educational imperatives were drawn by Rousseau. He stated that the first meaning of nature equalizes it with natural endowment should not be taken to imply that education should lead to a non-interventionist policy or hands off procedure. This is because even though education is an artificial creation of the society and as such may be devilish, yet education is very necessary in the life of every individual. In fact, without education, human beings would be worst than a monster. But despite man’s unavoidable need for education, natural education in this context should be geared towards ensuring that man does not allow himself to be carried away by the passions and prejudices of life. Rather man’s education should be guided by reasoning all the time.

As regards the second meaning of nature, natural education should not be taken to mean no education at all. Rather, according to Rousseau in Muhammad <sup>5</sup>, natural education should signify non-social education. This is otherwise called preventive education or preparation against the social conditions which the child must unavoidably live with and play his part. Rousseau does not aim at producing an unsocial creature. He hopes to establish in *Emile* an ethical constancy before his inevitable entrance into society. The ultimate aim is nevertheless to reconcile the conflicts; the learner is ill-educated and will never be at peace with himself. But if the natural and social training agrees, the learner is well educated and he lives at peace with himself. The third meaning of nature makes it imperative that a child should be educated to live in accordance with the rational principle of the universe.

However, the concept of “natural education” is not meant to imply that everything the child encounters is coming about entirely naturally. O’Hagan <sup>6</sup> notes, “During the period of negative education, the child is to be surrounded by an environment of artificial necessity, encountering obstacles which appear to be the inevitable outcome of his own behaviour, rather than willed by others.” Thus, natural education in this context means educating a child in accordance with reasoning ability and conscience.

### **Child-centered education**

In his theory of education, Rousseau cautioned that Emile (the learner) should remain in complete ignorance of those ideas which are each stage of human life has its own peculiarities which must be organized and appreciated. According to Rousseau in Rusk <sup>7</sup>

There is a time for every kind of teaching and we ought to recognize it, and each has its own dangers to be avoided. Every stage, every station in life, has a perfection of its own. Childhood has its own ways of seeing, thinking and feeling (Rusk, 1976, P.178).

Rousseau further situated childhood in the context of mankind by saying ‘‘ mankind has its place in the sequence of human life; the man must be treated as a man and the child as a child. Give each his place’’ (Rusk, 1976 P. 179). It was because Rousseau was the first to give the child his rightful place that the Emile was characterized as the charter of youthful deliverance which ushered into the educational scene, a new turn.

The new turn marked the beginning of what is called today child-centered education, which calls for the recognition of the fact that childhood is good and innocent. As such the child should be allowed to enjoy this period and should also be allowed to learn from his experiences and whatever is it that interests him. The child-centered education advocates for the development of the child’s ability to cope with his own problems and needs and not preparation for some long distant Adulthood. This principle continues to echo among educationist till today.

### **Stages of Education**

Rousseau divided the education of the child into four stages: infancy, early childhood and adolescence.

**The infancy (0-2 years)** is the stage when the child develops through free activity and the use of his senses. The child should be allowed to freely exercise his body, limbs, senses and strength. But his mind should be kept idle and all attempts at formal education should be discouraged. Speech development starts here.

**Early childhood (2-12 years)** is characterized by necessity and training of the senses. At this stage too, there is no need for formal education but preparatory education. Rousseau believed that education should not begin too early because the first and most important part of education which unfortunately is forgotten by most people is that of preparing a child to receive education. The preparatory education should consist of preserving the heart from vice and the spirit of error. In other words, preparatory for the child’s inevitable entry into the perverted society, it consists not in teaching virtue or truth but preventive evil from becoming near the child (negative or preventive education). The positive education, however, comprises physical and sensory training.

The child's first teachers are his feet, hands and eyes. He should be more concerned with things rather than words; these are concrete objects. In another way, the child should be allowed to learn by "trial and error" and also to profit from his actions and mistakes that are not too costly.

It is important to state why preparatory education is prolonged up to 12 years. This because Rousseau felt that "the art of teaching at this stage: is to lose time and save it. Give nature to work before you take over her business, lest you interfere with her dealings. You assert that you know the value of time and are afraid to waste it. You fail to perceive that it is a greater waste of time to use it till than to do nothing, and that a child ill-taught is further from virtue than a child who has learnt nothing at all (Rusk, 1976, P.188).

**12-15 years** otherwise called **later childhood or boyhood stage**, the lost ground must be recovered. The Education now is speeded up, while the ability to reason rapidly develops. At this stage, education must be limited only to what is useful because this is the utility period when the child often asks: what is the use of this? What is the use of that? Science teaching should be practical and discovery. Let him know nothing because you told him, but let him know something because he has learnt and discovered it himself. His curriculum should include geography, work, gardening or husbandry in general and carpentry. The book recommended by Rousseau as cited in Abraham, U.A., <sup>8</sup> (2016) is *Robinson Crusoe* in which the child will learn self-reliance.

**The fourth stage** in learning which the adolescent period is (**15-25 years**) is particularly sensitive. Rousseau described it as the crown and coping-stone of education. Rousseau was the first great educator to pay a special attention to adolescent stage. He regards it as our period of second birth, the period of second birth being the period we were born into existence. The adolescent education should involve studying himself in relation to fellow men and not in relation to things. Because of the period, he should be made to learn how to control the new passions that are surging within him.

Furthermore, let the adolescent know that man is by nature good when he was born, but the society perverted him. Let the adolescent Emile see that all men wear almost the same mask, but let him know further that some faces are fairer than the mask that cancel them. Let him judge his neighbor by himself such that he should only do to his neighbor what he will accept from his neighbor. At this stage, he could look for a partner for a wife, an ideal wife to suite his education. Learning about solid norms is based on interaction and relationship with the subjects. At this stage (Emile) an isolated child could be integrated into the society and can even travel abroad. The adolescent curriculum should include History, Biography, Mathematics, Science, Religious and Moral instructions.

### **Women education**

In recognition of the need for marriage in a man's life, Rousseau included the education of Sophie, Emile's wife in his philosophy of education. He contended that because men are different from women, their education should not be the same. As far as Rousseau is concerned, women are created to give way to man, and to suffer injustice. A woman's empire is an empire of gentleness, mildness and complaisance, her orders are caresses and her threats are tears.

The whole education of women ought to be related to men; to please men and to be useful to men; to make them loved and honored by men; to render their lives agreeable and sweet to men; to train him in childhood; to tend him in manhood; to counsel and console him in life. These are the duties which ought to be taught to women in their education right from their childhood, according to Rousseau. On husband and wife, Rousseau states that they were designed to live together but not to live in the same manner. They ought to act in concert, common good by different ways; a sort of recognition for the individual difference between a husband and a wife.

### **The relevance of Rousseau's Education in today's society**

Rousseau understands of the early years' child development as being a profound time in our lives is still relevant today. Claydonor<sup>9</sup> writes that 'it is a reminder for us, but perhaps a revelation in Rousseau's day, that the first years of life are of tremendous importance and characterized by an astonishingly complex developmental pattern (p.59). His appreciation of how much a child learns through finding things out for themselves, and the role of observation and thoughtful interaction with the child is facilitating this kind of learning are central to our current understanding of good practice in the early years. Comparing these concepts with this quote from Ann Gillespie Edward in Juliet<sup>10</sup>, in making their day, written in 2002: 'children learn through exploration and conversation with interested others and they need to know that adults are listening to what they are saying. Real conversation with children is a skilled art. It works best when adults can abandon their intentions' (p.32).

### **Rousseau's contribution on education: it's applicability in the classroom teaching**

Given Rousseau's depiction of the society as devilish, character training during classroom teaching should be guided by the general principle of preventing the child from identifying with the vices of the society while enhancing his practice of the desirable traits of the society.

As Rousseau having introduced the idea of social contract, as a part of the leadership training at the classroom and school level, teachers should make a class monitors and school prefects realize that leadership is a trust bestowed on them by the entire school. And the best way to hold the trust is to use the leadership to promote the well-being and social welfare of the followers and not to further their personal (selfish) interests. School leaders and indeed the entire student's body should be made to cultivate that culture and carry it over to their normal life after school.

Rousseau's position on child's nature, teachers should study their pupils carefully using all available opportunities so as to discover their natural inclinations in terms of their abilities and inabilities so as to counsel and guide them appropriately. In other words, guidance and counseling should not be done in vacuum. Rather it should be done on the basis of sound psychological principle.

Having the view on Rousseau principle of child- centeredness. Classroom teachers should avoid the extreme position of teaching curriculum content at the expenses of children's interest. Therefore, teachers' language and fluency should be dictated by the level of education of the children. In other words, classroom teachers should always use communication techniques and strategies that are within the level of understanding of the learners. That is why the language used in teaching primary six should not be the same with the language used in teach primary one;

the vocabulary and the grammar should be different. This will be in line with Rousseau's contention that children should be treated and not as adult.

Rousseau's position on the application of equipment while teaching some courses especially science courses, has advanced self-learning discoveries in the laboratories and outside the laboratories.

Classroom teachers especially at the primary one stage always watch out for the under prepared children that may be brought by parents during new session enrolment. In partial recognition of Rousseau's advocacy for preparatory education, some parents emulated not to be in hurry to send their children to school except they are certified to be mentally and physically ready for the rigors and routine of formal schooling.

In ascribing to the moral training of a child in Rousseau's view, teachers pay special attention to the adolescent children, with special reference to their moral and social training. The character training opportunities of honesty, tolerance, dedication to duty and mutual respect which are offered by various subjects and they capitalized upon and used adequately to develop the adolescents morally and socially. Examples can be drawn from the larger society as second hand information on the dangers of misusing their new passions and adolescent qualities.

### **Evaluation/ Conclusion**

Having critically observed Rousseau's contribution towards education, it is worthy to note that Rousseau theory also brings about the ideas of executions, primary and nursery schools, kindergarten in today's Nigeria education. Although, many of his theories are still considered controversial today.

Rousseau's assertion that a child is naturally good and would naturally develop good lines by not interfering by the adult world was not empirically verified. This can hardly be the case because certain natural phenomena carry with them bad or undesirable-effects. Aggression for instance, is a natural tendency in man but can its naturalness confer desirability on it for any reason? What occurrences like draught, flood, earth-quake and diseases?

It however seemed to counter the Christian dogma of original sin resulting from Adam and Eve, a sin which according to the dogma all men inherited from conception. This is because the child's nature at birth is neither originally evil nor originally good as being potentials, but capable of becoming either good or evil on the bases of environmental influences. Though there are some genetics or traits that can be inherited, but such things can also be modified by the environment.

Again, Rousseau's naturalism rejects both the use of society for training and the use of habits. On the one hand, no commands are to be given to the child; on the other, he is to be taught nothing. Consequently, no moral authority, no material discipline in the child's upbringing. However, he describes an early childhood designed to minimize the obstacles of civilization and bring man as near to nature as possible. Instead of educated men being guided by societal reputation. Rousseau desires for a child to have no other guide than his own inclinations by the time he is partially grown. Formal moral education does not begin until the child reaches

adolescence, and even then he only gradually approaches moral notions involving the distinction of good and evil. This means that by this time the child should be able to know what is good and what is bad. At the same time what should be useful for the society.

Moreover, in negative and preventive education, the child's first teachers are his feet, hands and eyes. He should be more concerned with things rather than words; these are concrete objects. In another way, the child should be allowed to learn by "trial and error" and also to profit from his actions and mistakes that are not too costly. How can we know exactly what the child is doing or about learning to do is not costly? When do we know he is coming to learn so that he can be guided? If a child is learning to jump across a well or burning fire, but when he does, it becomes costly, such actions are not in the interest of the adult world, though it's learning by experiment.

Henceforth, Rousseau's ideas are unrealistic in today's understanding. First, we cannot be assured that a weak child is, as a rule, wicked, or that a strong child is good. We may accept Rousseau's program of physical education at the early stage. In fact, the idea of Kindergarten or Nursery education points to Rousseau's educational theories for early stage. His negative education, for the second stage, is not acceptable in our time. Many people may think it is a waste of pupils' time. This is in relation to civilized world; we have seen pupils who, through rich environment and assistance, rise very fast, academically to the age of eighteen years. Rousseau does not consider the idea of early development or maturity (precocity) in children. His conception of education for women is not proper. Women are human beings and all human beings have individuality. After all, women have done beyond the stage of playing subordinate roles to men. There are women leaders almost all spheres of human endeavor.

More to this, Rousseau's position that the child should not be punished by the teacher but be left to be punished by nature is contestable. How now for instance can nature punish a child for stealing? Nigerian children for instance and indeed other children by are by nature stubborn. Where punishment is not imposed on them by the teacher whenever they go wrong, the minimum condition of order required of learning to take place can hardly be attained.

In addition, Rousseau's bit to make Emile enjoy natural life to the fullest, he was isolated from the society which to Rousseau is corrupt. This practice is self-contradictory (paradoxically) unnatural because children are naturally playful and would naturally like to play to each other. How then could Rousseau sentence Emile to solitary confinement?

Henceforth, Rousseau recommended that for natural development and proper education, children should be brought up by their parents. Contrary to his recommendation, the four children that his maid bore for him did not grow up with either of them but in a foundling hospital. Worst still, Rousseau did not grow up with his parents. This amounts to doing what I say and not what I do. For one to urge others to do good, he should be seen to be doing good himself. That is living by example.

Therefore, to Rousseau, books should be de-emphasized in the educative process. In his thinking, there should be no books because the child who reads ceases to think." I hate books; they only teach us to talk about things we know nothing about" says Rousseau in Rusk<sup>11</sup>. A good defense for his position but Rousseau has to be reminded that his rise to fame owed much books. Apart



from writing books as already discussed, his self-education project was undertaken and accomplished through books.

Proceeding in Rousseau's learning that it should arise from the learner's need and interests; how does the teacher identify the needs and interests of the learners so as to base their education, what becomes of the fate of the teacher? What if their interest is not worthwhile?

Emile alone was attached to a tutor. This brings to the fore, Rousseau's concept of a learner to a teacher. This individualized method of teaching can hardly be feasible in many countries particularly the developing and less developed worlds where mass education is the general practice. Suffice it to say that even in the developed world, a case only be made for small classroom sizes as against the individualized method.

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