

Original Article

PLATO AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study focused on Plato's contribution to the development of education. Plato (C.427-347 BC) was a famous Greek Philosopher and a pupil to Socrates - one of the wisest men of Greece that ever lived. Plato, the Athenian was one of the most, intelligent pupils of Socrates. Plato contributed to Education through his development of the school of thought known as idealism. He developed and explained his idea of an ideal state through his book the "Republic." It explained also his theory of education which stressed the need for mass education of all citizens. Education for him should stress individual differences and as such promote them. He founded a famous school known as 'Academy in Athens'. The Academy was the prototype, of what we call a university today. He also stressed the need for an all-round education - physical, moral, intellectual and social. He was the first to divide education into the formal levels which we now commonly use and to assign to them appropriate ages and curricular contents. Plato also wrote lots of books that are in use today. Among his books are Republic, Symposium, Crito Euthyphron, Laws, Hippias Meno, Statesman, Apology, Protagoras and Laches.

Keyword: Education development, Educational theory, and principles.

Introduction

Plato (C.427-347 BC) was a famous Greek Philosopher and a pupil to Socrates - one of the wisest men of Greece that ever lived. Plato, the Athenian was one of the most, intelligent pupils of Socrates (Egbo, 2017). He continued the work of his master teaching philosophy and emphasizing his masters view that 'an unexamined life is not worth living' and that 'knowledge is virtue'. Plato was renowned for his philosophical thoughts and ideas on metaphysics, politics, ethics, epistemology and education. Two of his most popular classics were the

Republic and the Laws. In these he set forth his great ideas on political philosophy and social conduct of life. He put an end to peripathetic philosophizing, where itinerant teachers went under the trees of peripathos to teach and philosophize. Rather, Plato founded a school called the Academy with a detailed curriculum of studies (Chukwu, 2009). Students came from far and near to learn in Plato's Academic. The Academy became the first formal school as institution with a programme of studies and a plan for administration. In the time of Socrates and Plato, democracy was like a double-edged sickle in the

hands of a sick-mind, ready to do destruction to anyone at the slightest mistake or provocation. That was how Socrates met his untimely death. It is most probable that unbridled democracy is as worse as distempered autocracy. Only a well-educated alternative will redeem the situation that is already so bad. Informed by the awkward consequences of unplanned and uneducated democracy, Plato planned out the nature of an ideal State governed democratically but with a new orientation. He was aware that his Academy was not making enough impact since it was a school mainly for mature adults. He was also perplexed by the reckless, planless and unintelligent manner with which people make contributions at the peoples' Assembly (The Agora) for the passing of legislation, and making of decisions. More worrisome was that the situation was likely to go on since the conduct of education of the young ones, the future leaders, was a haphazard affair. Yet, education has been identified as a means to attaining the status of an Athenian Ideal man. In Athens, an Ideal man must be versatile in ability and achievements, self-reliant and reliable, physically and mentally sound (Aguba, 2006). Following these developments, Plato theorized that organization and planning of the educational system was more worthy an endeavor than the jumbling together of all the multi-variant educational Interests and resources to produce the expected ideal man.

Planning in education, Plato thought, must precede administration at any level, so that the goal of educational process may maximally be achieved with minimal waste of resources. These theories were then condensed for posterity in Plato's classics the Republic and the law. It is here that we find the first well-articulated model of educational plan and political ideology for Athens.

The principles initiated by Plato now guide the educational systems of the modern society. He was the first to divide education into the formal levels

which we now commonly use and to assign to them appropriate ages and curricula contents.

Plato's educational plan is based on a variety of sources namely:

1. His political theory was that there ought to be a principle of division of labour in the state for individual fulfillment and social-economic survival of the state. Everyone should be assigned specific but interdependent roles for socio-economic survival of the society.
2. His educational theory of professionalization was that people should be trained in the talents they exhibit the best competence. Professionalization will increase competence and facilitate role performance and increase each professional's input to development.
3. His educational theory was that when all citizens are educated they will be in a better position, to fulfill their roles adequately in society. This he believed will ultimately facilitate state development through general enlightenment.
4. His political theory was that since education is a powerful instrument for state planning and development, education should be state planned, controlled and provided. The state indicates, identifies values and needs and how these can be inculcated or satisfied. And everyone will have educational opportunity for self and national development.

The education plan of Plato according to Iwuchukwu (1991) specified four main stages and contents of formal school system as follows:

1. Nursery and Kindergarten stage for children of 3 to 6 years of age.
2. Elementary education stage for ages 7 to 10 years.
3. The secondary stage for ages 11 to 17 years. This is a stage of preparation for higher education.
4. The higher education stage. This starts from the age of 25 to 35 years and meant only for the highly intelligent,

The curriculum for the first stage was mainly guided plays and games. For 'he elementary stage basic literacy, elementary study of the gods, Greek mythology on moral and spiritual development were recommended. The Secondary Stage was planned to be a rigorous exposure to mathematics, literature and music. At this Stage the pupil can be guided to identify his area of interest He should be enabled by this stage to develop competence in thinking things through and decide for himself whether he could hold offices in government or develop to eventually ascend the throne as a philosopher king. Those who wish and can qualify as philosophers will enter the fourth stage of education so that at the age of 35 they had known a lot about politics, philosophy, economics and enough of the liberal studies that develop the mind and the intellect. The philosopher becomes the aristocrat fit to rule because his rulership is held by one whose training makes him sound in mind and body.

Besides the plan of educational system in stages, Plato infused the idea of orderliness in learning environment. Also, he stressed the importance of appropriateness and worthwhileness of educational curriculum. Then, because of the potency of education as an instrument for rapid development of the State, he advocated the secularism of education. This implies that the state should enjoy a monopoly in the provision, control and organization of education rather than allow education to remain, as it were, a private enterprise of anyone who cared. The eventual and now enduring consequence of Plato's educational and political ideology is nativity of educational planning.

According to Eze (2019) the contributions of Plato towards the development of education are summed up as follows:

1. Plato contributed to Education through his development of the school of thought known as

idealism. He developed and explained his idea of an ideal state through his book the "Republic."

2. It explained also his theory of education which stressed the need for mass education of all citizens. Education for him should stress individual differences and as such promote them.

3. He founded a famous school known as 'Academy in Athens'. The Academy was the prototype, of what we call a university today.

4. He also stressed the need for an all-round education - physical, moral, intellectual and social.

5. He was the first to divide education into the formal levels which we now commonly use and to assign to them appropriate ages and curricular contents.

6. Plato also wrote lots of books that are in use today. Among his books are Republic, Symposium, Crito Euthyphron, Laws, Hippias Meno, Statesman, Apology, Protagoras and Laches.

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