REDEFINING OUR FORMAL EDUCATION

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Abstract: In this article we argue that our formal education has failed, to a certain extent, to create good quality graduates, namely, those who are not only competent and independent, but also good in terms of such character traits as "grit, self-control, zest, social intelligence, gratitude, optimism, and curiosity" (Tough, 2012: 76). Such a failure has been caused by some educational practices which are not pedagogically sound like: institutional manipulations leading to our students' highly consumeristic behaviours;nondialogical education; teacher-centered approach; misunderstanding of teaching and learning; and, centralised education.To prevent such a failure, we suggest that our formal educational system be redefined so that it will be capable of creating good quality education that, in turn, can help our students be more competent, independent, and excellent in terms of the character traits mentioned. It can be done by applying such methods as Ivan Illich's learning webs, Paulo Freire's dialogical education, and student-centered education in which teaching is seen as a means of faciliating students' learning based on their potentials, interests, and learning needs. In this sense, it is important that school curricula be also designed by each educational institution and that each individual instituion has its own independent management system and networking system to make it more successful in achieving its educational goals.

Keywords: *teaching, learning, teachers, students, potentials, interest, and learning needs.*

INTRODUCTION

Our formal education or school teaching and learninghad its root in Greek formal education many centuries before Christ. Greek formal education was so famous that it had once become the center of the intellectual world that many people from different nations studied there. On this great quality of ancient Greek education,Cubberly (1948: 20) says, "After Athens had become the center of world thought, many foeigners took up their residence in the city because of the impotance of its intellectual life. Foreigners, though, they remained up to 509 B.C." Since then, it hasdeveloped into the Western world and, through the Western world in general, Christianity in particular, it has found its way to the entire world and has formed our human civilization as it is nowadays. In other words, the present globally great civilization has been the major product of our formal educational system whose root started to grow in Greece many centuries before the birth of Christ.

Based on its excellent history in creating such a great civilization as we have had today, many people may conclude that our present educational system is great and, therefore, it has to be maintained at all cost until the end of time. The question is whether the conclusion as such is right. In this article, we argue that such a conclusion is wrong and we, therefore, strongly suggest that it has to be changed. Before we put forward our arguments, however, we would like to describe, first, what is wrong with our present system of education and, secondly, what we should do to make it better in the future, that is, a world which is not only pretty crowded (the present population is around, 7,8 billion people)[1] but also very competitive.

Throughout the world nowadays, unemployment rate is very high in such countries as Senegal (48%), Djibouti (40%), Kiribati (38.2%), Yemen (35%), Namibia (34%), Kosovo (28.6%), Palestine (28.45%), Lesotho (28.1%), Gabon (28%), Eswatini (28%), Mayote-France (25.4%), Mozambique (24.5%), Dominica (23%), Nauru (23%), Armenia (20.6%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (20.5%), Botswana (20%).[2]It must be even much worse during this Covid-19 pandemy[3]. In Indonesia, we have 5% of unemployment rate with around 6.9 million unemployed people,[4] a number which is more than the total population of Singapore (around 5,8 million people).

[1]When this article is being written, the World Population Clock shows that there are 7,777,386,155 people on earth; there are 148,258 "births today"; and, 62,39 "deaths today"(https://www.worldometers.info/world-population.(Downloaded on April 13, 2020 around 09:00 Middle Indonesian Time Zone).

[2]en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Countries_by_Unemployment_Rate (Downloaded on April 13, 2020).

[3]When this article is being written, most countries in the world have suffered from Covid-19. This is why many businesses have been closed; most people have to stay at home and work from home to prevent the spread of the deadly virus.

[4]Indonesia-investments.com/finance/macroeconomics-indicators/unemployment/item255 (Downloaded on April 13, 2020).

It is believed that those who are unemployed are those who have been educated in our schools. In this sense, they should have not been unemployed because by joining certain level of school education they should have got certain kinds of skills to make them employed. Yet, the fact is that after such a long period of schooling time and after spending a lof of energy, time, and money, they are unemployed. In addition to contributing to high level of unemployment, our schools seem to have produced a lot of graduates who fail to do their best in their lives: they end up, for example, becoming corruptors, criminals, and environmetal destroyers through such activities as deforestrations and littering. This is why the question what is wrong with our schooling system is crucial to be answered.

What is Wrong in Our Present Formal Education

The present system of our formal education has been fiercely criticised because, to a certain extent, it has created some problems – instead of solutions to theproblems –that we have face as human beings, particularly in the last few decades. One of the major critics was Illich whose book entitled *Deschooling City* (1976) reflects his opposition to the present system of our globally formal education. Birchall *(*1979: 236*)* describes Illich's opposition to our present school systems as follows:

> Conventional wisdom has taken it for granted that the school plays an important educative role in society. It is the institutional means whereby the unitiated are slowly but surely introduced to the great tradition of enlightenment. In his influential book, *Deschooling City,* Ivan Illich states that this is not so. He proposes the 'radical thesis' that the institution of schooling is, by itsvery nature, opposed to education. Instead of introducing individuals to the 'great tradition of enlightenment', it introduces them, through a series of institutional deceptions, to the debilitating 'tradition' of consumerism ... For Illich, then, it is ... 'the insitutionalization of values' that 'leads inevitably to physical pollution, social polarization and psychological impotence: three dimensions in a process of global degradation and modernized misery.

In other words, what Ivan Illich argues is that it is our schools that create in our students, in schools and beyond, a culture called "consumerism" without critical and creative thinking (enlightenment) that, in turn, creates "physical pollution, social polarization and psychological impotence: three dimensions in a process of global degradation and modernized misery."

In addition to Ivan Illich, another major critic to our schools isFreire who states that our schools fail to create critical and creative individuals because those schools teach their students using the method that he calls "antidialogical"and/or "banking system" (1973). Describing this concept of antidialogical banking system of education, Crittenden (1979: 163) says:

> The 'banking" concept of education is one in which the teacher 'deposits' in students pre-determined information, presented in narrative form. Students are filled with information in the way that one might fill a bucket with water. Their role is to receive, file, and store the deposits through mechanical memorization. This education, Freire, argues, serves the ideology of oppression, reflecting the oppressive society as a whole. It is an exercise of domination even when it takes the form of benign paternalism. Teacher and student stand in opposition as Master and Slave (cf. Hegel). Students are forced into a passive role and their spirit of critical inquiry is suppressed. They are treated as objects (cf. Sartre), automatons, moulded to fit the world created by their oppressors. There is no place for dialogue between teacher and student, no recognition that they educate each other. The system rejects communication in favour of communiques from on high. There is no attention to the students' socio-cultural reality.

So, Paulo Freire argues that in educating their students, our schools have such problems as lacking of critical education because education is done without critical dialogs; our students are supposed to memorize things that their teachers want them to memorize; instead of becoming subjects of teaching and learning, students become objects of teaching and learning itself; and instead of persuing their own aims of education, the students are forced to persue their teachers' aims, i.e. the aims of the oppressors who employ the teachers.

To a certain extent, what Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire say is supported by Rogers (1983). He believes that our students learn in schools without any freedom, namely, they study things that they may (totally) dislike. School learning for them is, therefore, without any freedom to learn things that they really like to learn. In that kind of learning, Neville (1989) argues, students end up learning things that they are not interested in, have no potentials on, and possess no relevance to their future (i.e. learning needs). This is made worse by the fact that many teachers/schools see success as something which is related to a student's cognitivism. This view, of course, creates a major problem in our schooling system

because it is different from what we see in our reality. Our life reality shows that many people also succeed although they are cognitively weak. In other words, they also succeed although they simply rely on their psychomotoric skills and on their good characters. Even if they are not strong both cognitively and psychomotorically, they can still be successful in their lives if they have great characters like being good, honest, and responsible (Casson, 1953; Coelho, 2003; Tough, 2012).

In more or less the same arguments as stated above, Tans (2011/2014) and Tans et al. (2019) add thatour schools in genral, in Indonesia in particular, have the following problems. First, they have wrong focuses. They are, in general,heavily teacher-centered and not student-centered at all. Including in this problem istheir school curricula which are strongly centralised; they are not decentralised; Their aim is to achieve state aim, not individual aim.

Second, they have some pedagogical problems, that is, their education is based more on cognitivism and behaviorism than on humanism, constructivism, and connectivism. Third, their management system is not really school-based. Staff recruitment for state schools, for example, is so centralised that a school has no power to recruit its permanent staff or to automatically dismiss his/her when he/she fails to obey school roles and/or principles. Fourth, learning by doing (practices) is not common in our schools. Memorising seems to be more important than understanding and critical/creative thinking. Fifth, they have poor networking system. School stakeholders, for example, still rely on prospective employees' formal education certificates than on their real competences in doing things they have to. It is made worse by governmental policies seeing formal education certificates as major reqirements to be employed.

To become a teacher in primary and secondary schools, for example, one has to have bachelor degree (strata one degree), to become an undergradtae lecturer masters degree, and to become lecturers at masters and Ph.D. levels Ph.D. degrees. In other words, those who are in fact capable of teaching at those levels of education will not be allowed to teach if they have no formal education certificates relevant to the job they are interested in. This is to say that great inventors like Thomas A. Edision will not be allowed to teach electricity course even at primary or secondary school level, let alone at university level, because he had no relevant education degree (i.e. he dropped of a primary school).

Based on those problems, it is, therefore, necessary that our formal education be redifined. What is meant by teaching and learning in schools should be modified to make sure that our schools will create good products (in terms of outputs and outcomes) that would improve not only our students' future but also the future of their nations, social and physical, and by implication the future of the whole world. How it is redifined is discussed below.

REDEFINING OUR FORMAL EDUCATION

Redefining our formal education, we think, is not supposed to be a difficult task because we have already known its problems. Illich (1973), for example, asserts that to overcome such problems as "the insitutionalization of values" that "leads inevitably to physical pollution, social polarization and psychological impotence", namely, "three dimensions in a process of global degradation and modernized misery," it is important that our schools apply what he calls "convivial" learning institutions as social agents. In such a context, learning is obligatory, but its aim is to facilitate students in their learning based on their "self-determination", not on "other determination (in Birchall, 1979).

All in all, this will lead to what Illich (1973) calls"learning webs". By this term, he means, among other things, the teaching and learning in schools that should involve anyone who has the competence needed by schools to improve their students' power to empower themselves. This is to say that the primary aim of teaching and learning is to actualize students' potentials in such a way that they can then be independent and possess great character traits after their school learning years. Thus, for Illich, *learning webs* become *new formal educational institutions* to channel the following three aims of a good educational system: "to provide all that want to learn with access to resources at any time in their lives; make it possible for all who want to share knowledge etc. to find those who want to learn it from them; and, to create opportunities for those who want to present an issue to the public to make their arguments known" (in *What are Learning Webs.*https://freeuniversity.wordpress.com downloaded on 19 April, 2020).

In this sense, dialogical education that sees students as the true subjects of our educational efforts as proposed by Freire (1972) is necessary. It is through diloagues we will be able to find out our students' potentials, interests, and learning needs as well to treat them well as human beings who can think critically and creatively for their own great future development. By knowing their potentials, interests, and learning needs, teachers can then be more effective in teaching them, that is, to facilitate their learning (Neville, 1989: 13).

Teaching may not, therefore, be seen asa means to transfer knowledge, skills and values. It has to be seen as a means of facilitating students' learning as proposed by, among others, Rogers (1983), Neville (1989) and Tans et al. (2019). Thus, activities of teachers' teaching and students' learning should be seen as those based not on "other-determination" but on students' "self-determination" as proposed by Illich (1973) in *Deschooling Scoiety*, by Rogers(1983) in *Freedom to Learn,* and by Neville (1989) in *Educating Psyche.*

In addition to the ideas stated by Illich (1973), Freire (1976), Rogers (1983), and Neville (1989), and Tans (2011/2014), Tans et al. (2019) argue that redefining our schools should then focus on the following few things. First, our educational system

should be decentralized. Including in this is school curriculum that should be based on students' real potentials, interests, and learning needs. In other words, it has to be made more focussed by having a school curriculum that is student-centered, and not teacher-centered.

Second, teaching and learning in schools be based more on such educational paradigms as humanism, constructivism, and connectivism than on cognitivism and behaviorism.   When it is based on humanism, it is hoped that our schools will teach our students based on what we mean by being human beings. That is, human beingswho arespiritually goodcan sruvive in their livesalthough they are not that smart or skillful. Judging one's success just through one's cognitive aspect as suggested by cognitivism paradigm of education is, therefore, misleading and may not be practised in our schools.

This is also the case for constructivism.   It is important that our students be encouraged to actively construct their own understanding of their own world because it will help them find and solve their problems in their lives. This is far better than just asking them to memorize things that they many not need in their lives, although they can memorize a lot. In other words, it is better for our students to connect what they learn in schools with their life experiences that they face after their formal schooling than simply to memorize things that are meangingless to them in schools and beyond. Such a connection can be created through such activities as sincere dialogues between teachers and their students (cf. Freire, 1972/1976). By having such dialogues, what students learn from what their teachers' teachings and/or from their own learning activitiescan then be meaningful (cf. Rogers op.cit., p.20).

Third, to support such changes, school management should be modified by, for example, giving our state schools more power to manage their own affairs like recruitments of their academic and administrative staffs, having their own administrative and financial accountable amanagement, establishing their own income generating venues, and deciding whether their students pass or fail for certain reasons related not only to students' academic performances but also to their psychomotoric performances and characters like discipline and social relationship.

Fourth, learning by doing (i.e. practicing things they are learning) be made more common in our schools. In that sense, students should be given more opporunities to practise what they learn so that they have a fair degree of mastery of what they learn in schools. This will help them be more independent after finishing their schooling years. This is important because in the present system of our fromal education, learning by doing is pretty rare.   What is often practised is memorising that seems to be more important than understanding and critical/creative thinking.

Fifth, schools be given more chances to create their own networking system. By having through which they can introduce what they do in schools in creating

sound, quality, outputs and outcomes to their stakeholders. It is also to make sure that their stakeholders can also change their behavior in, for example, recruiting their new staffs. What has been going on so far is that education stakeholders still base their new staff recruments more on their certificates than on their real competences. This is though a global phenomenon. In such a context, a person whose English is perfect, whose pedagogical competence is great, whose social and individual competence is excellent, for example, cannot be employed as an English teacher if he/she has no educational degree/sertificate. In other words, people wo have relevant educational degrees will be employed as teachers in that sense, although they are not professional and competent.

To create a good quality of education, it is important, therefore, that such ideas be practised in our schools worldwide. If we fail to practice them, we are afraid that our educational institutions will become our major problems instead of becoming solutions to such problems.

CONCLUSIONS

It is acknowledged that our education has contributed a lot in making our word a better place in most aspects of our life. In other words, we understand that our present civilization has been a great product of our education through its long history. Yet, we also see that our formal education is not that perfect that it has also created some problems in our today's civilization.

We argue there that such problems have been created because, among other things, our schools, in general, fail to create outputs that really make our world better. Instead of having educational graduates who are the champions of our environments, we have had our gradutes who have polluted our environments, polarized our societies, and become psycologically passive.

It is also believed that such worldwide problems have also been created by our wrong method of educating our students. Instead of using such methods like dialogical education and student-centered learning, we teach them without sincere dialogues in order to achieve our own goals instead of theirs. It has been more of a teacher-centered paradigm of educationthan a truly student-centered one.

Such paragdigm, we understand, has made us busy creating curricula that our students, in general, do not really need because their learning needs are different from what we have in our curriculla or from what we teach them to learn to. They do not also need what we teach because they generally have no relevant potentials to understand the subjects we have written in our curriculums and, therefore, they are not interested in.

It has also been made worse by our focus of teaching which is not clear, our management system which is centralised, our networking system which is out of date, and our educational paradigms which are mostly irrelevant to our students' leaning needs. We have asked our students, for example, to learn many things that may not necessarily be connected to what they need.   In

addition, such problems have also been created by the fact that we still view teaching as a means of transfering what we know and believe in when it is not supposed to be like that anymore in today's world where students should learn things they want to in order to win in their future.

To overcome those problems, it is, therefore, crucial that we redefine our formal educational system by doing such things as: 1) making our schools more capable in helping our students prevent environmental disaster, social chaos, and inactivity; 2) implementing dialogical education in our schools; 3) applying student-centered learning and building up constructivism, humanism, and connectivism paradigms of educatio ; 4) seeing teaching as a means of learning; 5) creating school-based curricula relevant to students' potentials, interests, and leanring needs; 6) building up strong networking systems with their educational stakehloders; and, 7) having proper management system.

We strongly believe that if we do these in our schools, our schools can then be more beneficial to out civilization development. On the other hand, if they are not practised, we are afraid that our educational system will not be able to answer our life problems which we are now facing. In other words, those problems will still be there and we are not that good at overcoming them. So, the only way to make them disapear is by redefining our schooling system, a thing that we believe we can do because we have already known how to handle it. All we have to do now is, therefore, to have some courage to redefine our schools anew and to start treating them accordingly right away so that our schools can then be more effective in developing our civilization, including in overcoming its problems like Covid-19 and other kinds of deseases that we are facing right now throughout the world.

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