



Consilience and Conviviality-Scholarship in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract: Consilience as bethought in this paper is delimited to the agreement, co-operation and overlap of academic disciplines where approaches to a subject matter of different academic subjects especially science and the humanities come to the fore. Conviviality as a tool on the other hand frowns against a single version of good life in a world peopled by infinite possibilities but rather encourages competitive and complementary processes of social cultivation through practice, performance and experience. These two concepts are aptly considered for the purpose of promoting diversity and inclusion, scholarships, communion, cutting-edge research, collaboration, creativity and innovation, which seem to have been an eroded phenomenon in the last few decades. The methodology adopted in this paper is contextual analysis with sourced information from journals, textbooks and literature. This paper proposes that both consilience and conviviality can become underlying guides for revival of scholarship, multi-disciplinary, trans-disciplinarity, and integrative eclecticism in Nigerian universities, most especially within the context of teaching, learning and research.

Keywords: Consilience, Conviviality scholarship, Integrative eclecticism, Nigerian universities, Teaching and learning, Unity of knowledge

1. INTRODUCTION

The birth of academic disciplines has been described as aged as history of human evolution considering the structure and transfer of knowledge in ancient civilizations. Yadav & Lakshmi (1995) posit that the development of disciplines is a necessary aspect of social evolution in which disciplines evolved as a result of continuous human efforts toward understanding their environment in an increasingly penetrating and comprehensive manner, and thus, reacting to it. Hence, social experience or interaction among various human minds and the environments have contributed to the birth of academic disciplines or specializations cutting across all cultural and experiential barriers.

In antiquity or pre-literate societies, the customs and knowledge of ancient civilizations became more complex that many skills were said to have been learned from an experienced person on the job. With the passage of time, different skills and activities became more specialized due to generation of new knowledge and discoveries by the skilled and experienced persons in these fields. The organized body of knowledge of a particular field was termed as discipline. As communities grew larger, there was more opportunity for some members to specialize in

one skill, activity or another. For instance, animal husbandry, agriculture, and fishing gave room for agricultural studies. Also, education was achieved through oral form, observation and imitation. The young learned informally from their parents, extended family and grandparents, and at later stages, they received instruction of a more structured and formal nature, imparted by people not necessarily related, in the context of initiation, religion or ritual. Thus, continuous production of new knowledge led to its preservation and transfer from one generation to another (Krishnan, 2009).

While some instruction of a utilitarian and religious nature are understood to have existed within a family or tribal community, some of the earliest formal efforts to institutionalize different forms of knowledge can be linked to the Pythagoras' Museum in the 500 BC with the cultivation of mathematics, music, acoustics and geometry. The Sophists established the oratorical tradition though they were itinerant teachers, and Socrates, who advanced his questioning method of provoking discovery. In 392 BC, Isocrates established a rhetorical school in Athens to train students in politics; and in 387 BC, Plato established an Academy in Athens, which led to standard studies in Pythagorean number theory, advanced geometry and speculations on science. Aristotle also founded Lyceum in



335 BC in Athens before the emergence of earliest European universities in Salerno, Bologna, Paris, and Oxford in 1000s-1100s (Russell, 1960). While Salerno focused on medicine, Bologna focused on law, and in Paris, the cathedral school became the supreme center for study of dialectics and theology. By 1300, there were few universities of about twenty in number, and in contemporary age, there are about 30,000 universities in the world (Russell, 1960).

University education emerged in Nigeria, in 1948, and this can be regarded as the establishment of the first university, University College Ibadan (UCI), which was an affiliate of the University of London – now known as the University of Ibadan. The implementation of the Ashby Report of 1959 also led to the establishment of University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1960, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) in 1962, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1962 and University of Lagos, in 1962. Presently, there are one hundred and seventy universities, with 43 federal universities, 48 state universities, and 79 private universities in Nigeria (Otonko, 2012; Baruwa, Aluko & Obajowo, 2021).

With the emergence of universities in the world, and in Nigeria, this paper aims to introduce consilience and conviviality scholarship as means to achieving viable educational institutions most especially in areas of teaching, learning and research in Nigeria. This article also anticipates a teaching-learning process anchored on dialogue among (and between) students and professionals in higher education. The thrust lies in guarding against faculties and departments identifying their pros and cons as attacks on one another, but rather in identifying differences on the basis of bringing about improved outcomes to the global society. In this regard, this paper shall firstly consider the evolution of knowledge or emergence of academic disciplines. It also aims to clarify issues surrounding the discourse of consilience and conviviality scholarship. And lastly, it seeks to establish a bridged gap between the humanities and the sciences in Nigerian universities for the purpose of teaching, learning and research.

2. PHILOSOPHY, KNOWLEDGE AND SPECIALIZATION

As established earlier, while present advanced colleges and universities can be traced back to many centuries, the idea of having a designated place for learning can be traced to a millennium ago. Disciplines inadvertently have been existing for a while and humans have been learning from one another. Though education in ancient time has been described as religion and military-based, unlike in recent epoch where disciplinary-focused curriculum exists (Idakwo & Baruwa, 2021).

Philosophy (as known to be any body of knowledge) was the term used for many forms of inquiry that exist today, be it politics, religion, classics, natural sciences,

education, mathematics, cosmology, geometry, history, ethics and such like, as it was difficult to differentiate between philosophical writings and scientific writings in Plato's and Aristotle's writings. Philosophy came into being through man's desire for knowledge – many referenced scientific discoveries today were invented and discovered by 'Greek Philosopher Scientists' such as Thales (who discovered the Eclipse of 585 BC), Anaximander (who discovered the evolution of mankind), and Anaximenes (who discovered the cause of rainbow). However, the growth and development of modern research universities led academic philosophy and other disciplines to professionalization and specialization. Unarguably, one can describe philosophy as the mother-penguin of all disciplines (Bamisaiye, 1989), and argue that philosophy and science were not initially separated but rather existed as one body of knowledge (Russell, 1960).

A claim from classical study also revealed that philosophy was traditionally divided into three principal parts. Natural philosophy, moral philosophy (ethics) and metaphysical philosophy – logic (Baruwa, 2020a). In the contemporary age, natural philosophy has split into various natural sciences such as astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology and cosmology; moral philosophy includes the social sciences, and metaphysical philosophy has given birth to logic and mathematics.

By history, the 18th century witnessed the first philosophical birth of the sciences. Science started as natural philosophy and became natural science. Natural science later split into Biology, Chemistry, Physics, etc. through the efforts of Pythagoras, Lucretius, Democritus and Epicurus. In the 19th century, philosophy gave birth to the social sciences by virtue of Malthus, Karl Marx, Ricardo, Auguste Comte etc. Though the primary agitation of these social scientists was for a single discipline before the emergence of compartmentalization. Today in the social sciences, we have disciplines such as Economics, Political Science, Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, amongst others. The 20th century recorded the contributions of philosophers to the fields of law, journalism, politics, religion, sciences, business and various arts, and entertainment activities. With no doubt, the widespread comprehensive nature of philosophy today reflects the highest academic degree in any discipline – PhD (stands for doctor philosophiae in Latin, i.e. Doctor of Philosophy).

All disciplines that exist today started with the quest to know or the quest of knowledge, and it all started with philosophy. The quest of knowledge has led to the development of the modern disciplinary systems and this can be summarized in two phases. While the basis of knowledge formed into specializations has brought about various consultations of like-minded scholars, the resultant effect shows that scholars specialize in their field of interest, stick to their spots like leopards and quills like porcupines. Despite their quest for distinction through science and reason, the *homo academicus* are as much



creatures of habit as the *homo ignoramus*. As a result of this specialization-gap, this paper calls for consilience and conviviality scholarship among Nigerian universities and colleges.

3. CONSILIENCE AND CONVIVIALITY SCHOLARSHIP

Millennia ago, the human mind set out to discover the cosmos it had one day awoke to. After a long and meandering journey, it has finally returned and in a final act of cognition faced its own nature. The subject of consilience has been the point of emphasis by various scientists, arguing that, everything in the world is organized in terms of a small number of fundamental natural laws that comprise the principles underlying every branch of learning (Wilson, 1989; Watts, 1991; Powell, 2007; Glattfelder, 2019). The concept of consilience in this paper emerges as a diversion from what Wilson established in his book titled 'Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge'. Consilience as bethought in this paper is delimited to the agreement, co-operation and overlap of academic disciplines where approaches to a subject matter of different academic subjects especially science and the humanities are of interest. Conviviality-scholarship on the other hand can be seen as a tool that frowns against a single version of good life in a world peopled by infinite possibilities but rather encourages competitive and complementary processes of social cultivation through practice, performance and experience.

By etymology, the word, 'Concilience' goes back to the 19th century when it was adopted by philosophers of science to mean the connection of different disciplines through shared basic laws. That is, the concept circumscribes the unison of knowledge at a fundamental level. Also, the word, consilience was originally coined as the phrase 'consilience of inductions' by William Whewell to mean jumping together of knowledge (Whewell, 1840). The word comes from Latin *com-* 'together' and *-siliens* 'jumping' (as in resilience). Conviviality on the other hand originally means 'the art and practice of living together' (Whewell, 1840). It encompasses living together in solidarity, in sharing resources and in the joint struggle for human dignity, creativity and sustainable community life. Illich (1974) described it as the individual freedom realized in personal interdependence, which focuses on the cooperative aspects of the interactions among humans.

For Wilson (1998), consilience has its proper usage in his conception and further described it as unification of knowledge. The word consilience is preferred over coherence because its rarity has preserved its precision, whereas coherence has several possible meanings, only one of which is consilience. For emphasis, the overall origin of knowledge starts with philosophy, where in classics, there were divisions into natural, moral and metaphysical philosophy, and knowledge was believed to be one, not until recent times where emanation of disciplines began, and further led to compartmentalization of heights and sundry.

Consilience as bethought here could be represented as convergence of thoughts, ideas and evidence or concordance of all mentioned. In other words, consilience seeks ideas, thoughts and bases from all disciplines for the posterity of all. Today, there is more emphasis on the sciences than that of humanities, even in scholarships and references, which seems contrary from how it all began. Though the unification of all disciplines under one umbrella might be tagged difficult especially in an era where scholars are seeking extension and opportunities in their solitary confinement, and where sciences are refuting the claim of being an offspring of the mother-penguin, philosophy. To achieve this unification of knowledge, this study proposes conviviality scholarship with an understanding of seeing all as one, not in name but through the implementation of combination of methodologies, teachings, instruments, solely for the appraisal and advancement of knowledge.

Conviviality in this regard does not only embolden us to accept our own incompleteness, it also drives us to be open-minded and open-ended in our claims and articulations of identities, being and belonging. It drives us to be much interested in our encounter and exploration in the world especially with one another. This could include how humanities and sciences complement each other for the interest of productive possibilities. Conviviality as argued should never be seen as a ploy to becoming complete but rather pushes or encourages humans to be efficacious in their relationships and sociality (Nyamnjoh, 2015). For conviviality to thrive among sciences, humanities and education, there is a need for accommodation and conversation (Nyamnjoh, 2017). Accommodation brings all disciplines together with the purpose of reaching out in research and seeing to an agreement. Conversation remains privileged over conversion, and ritual influences are more amenable to the logic of conviviality than the coercive violence of one discipline or field positioning to be a ruler over others.

The essence is fostered by the dynamics of mutual need and the prospects of mutual gain. For instance, using a rose as a case study, a physicist may observe it consists of a specific set of particles and the forces that act between them; a chemist on the other hand can explain its basic compounds. A biologist might describe the ecosystem required for a rose to grow, and an economist can identify its exchange value. An artist may depict its beauty, and a lover ought to appreciate its romantic significance. Thus, each of these perspectives teaches us something about a rose, but none of those explains all there is to know. So, to expand our appreciation of the world, we need to accept the incomplete nature of knowledge, question our own perspective, and adopt alternative points of view. As argued by Nyamnjoh (2019), frictions, challenges and arguments may occur, conviviality believes a resolution of frictions which when turned into meaningful relationships may actually facilitate mutual interests and mutual trust.



Granted the intricacies of popular conceptions of reality, and in view of the frontier reality, nothing short of convivial scholarship would do justice to the legitimate quest for activation of cutting-edge research, teaching and learning, innovation, creativity, knowledge production in Nigerian universities. Convivial scholarship therefore is not interested in imposing what it means to be human, just as it frowns against a single version of the good life in a world peopled by infinite possibilities but rather encourages a competitive and complementary processes of social cultivation through practice, performance and experience (Nyamnjoh, 2015).

4. METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in this paper is contextual analysis with sourced information from journals, textbooks and literature. The aim of adopting this methodology is to engage the readers with the hope of having a clearer view of what existed and what exists. Keywords such as collaboration, conviviality, Nigerian universities, quality education and consilience guided the search for the resources used in this paper. The modes of analysis are thematic, qualitative and philosophical in nature.

5. BRIDGING THE KNOWLEDGE-GAP IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

Before entering the examination room of unification of knowledge, it would be worthwhile to consider the meeting point where dialogue among various disciplines exists; a place whose building and logic are precisely those of justifying the presence of different branches of knowledge – a university is such a place in this context.

It has been a general phenomenon from the inception of universities that various departments should have a certain intellectual communion. Since the middle ages and the renaissance up to the appearance of universities in the contemporary age according to the model conceived by Wilhelm von Humboldt for the University of Berlin in 1810, an interdisciplinary approach and a tendency towards the unity of knowledge remain the most distinctive attributes of universities (Tanzella-Nitti, 2002). For this reason, Tanzella-Nitti (2002) has shared how various authors like Rigobello et al., 1977; Tanzella-Nitti, 1998; J. G. Fichte (*Ideen für der innere Organisation der Universität Erlangen*, 1806; W. Von Humboldt (*Theorie der Bildung des Menschen*, 1793; *Antrag auf der Errichtung der Universität Berlin*, 1809; J.H. Newman (*The Idea of a University*, 1852; Jaspers (*Die Idee der Universität*, 1923 and 1946; Ortega y Gasset (*La misión de la universidad*, 1930 and Guardini (*Die Verantwortung der Universität*, 1954 have stressed in one way or another the ‘contextual’ character of university studies, their belonging to a common picture and to a unitary intention. While there are variations and differences in the models suggested to build up such unity of knowledge, they all agree that the university campus must be seen as a place where people do not meet by chance but rather a place defined more by an

intellectual architecture – by a logistic, urban or functional plan.

Jaspers (1971, p. 11) submitted that:

Propelled as it is by our primary thirst for knowledge, this search is guided by our vision of the oneness of reality. We strive to know particular data, not in and for themselves, but as the only way of getting at that oneness. Without reference to the whole of being, science loses its meaning. With it, on the other hand, even the most specialized branches of science are meaningful and alive. [...] Thus, what determines the actual direction of any inquiry is our ability to perpetuate, yet continuously to interrelate two elements of thought. One is our will to know the infinite variety and multitude of reality which forever eludes us. The other is our actual experience of the unity underlying this plurality.

Similar reflections by Newman (1852) revealed that:

In saying that Law or Medicine is not the end of a university course, I do not mean to imply that the University does not teach Law or Medicine. What indeed can it teach at all, if it does not teach something particular? It teaches all knowledge by teaching all branches of knowledge, and in no other way. I do but say that there will be this distinction as regards a Professor of Law, or of Medicine, or of Geology, or of Political Economy, in a University and out of it, that out of a University he is in danger of being absorbed and narrowed by his pursuit, and of giving Lectures which are the Lectures of nothing more than a lawyer, physician, geologist, or political economist; whereas in a University he will just know where he and his science stand, he has come to it, as it were, from a height, he has taken a survey of all knowledge, he is kept from extravagance by the very rivalry of other studies, he has gained from them a special illumination and openness of mind and freedom and self-possession, and he treats his own in consequence with a philosophy and a resource, which belong not to the study itself, but to his liberal education.

Adding to the above submissions, John Paul II (1988, p. 3), who also served as a university professor for more than 20 years contended that:

Now, it is precisely characteristic of the university, which is by *antonomasia universitas studiorum* as distinct from other centers of study and research, to cultivate a universal knowledge in the sense that in it every branch of knowledge must be cultivated in a spirit of universality, that is, with the awareness that each one, although diverse, is so linked to all the others that it is not possible to teach it outside the context, at least intentional, of all the others. To withdraw into oneself is to condemn oneself, sooner or later, to sterility and to risk exchanging the norm of total truth for a keener method of analyzing and grasping a particular section of reality. The university, therefore, must become a place for meeting and spiritual comparison in humility and courage, where people



who love to learn can learn to respect, consult, and communicate with one another, in an interweaving of open and contemporary knowledge with the goal of leading the student towards the unity of the knowable, that is, towards the truth which is sought and safeguarded beyond any manipulation.

Drawing from the epistemological realms of the afore-highlighted scholars, it is expedient to conceive that a discipline remains a component among many, or remains one within the logic of a campus. This paper proposes a milieu where scholars will not only be limited to their academic spots but rather embrace seeking interdisciplinary approach and unity of knowledge. In the view of adopting consilience and conviviality scholarship, this article opines that truth and meaning find their place in the 'whole', and not in 'part'.

Universities must have at the center of their reflection the fundamental questions about truth and good; about the meaning of life, about the place of human being in the universe and about personal and social responsibility which are associated with any knowledge. The exclusion of these questions from the university on one hand could bring about interrupting its ages-long tradition, thus enervating its nature and mission. On the other hand, its inclusion can serve as a framework for the promotion of diversity, scholarships, dialogue, cutting-edge research, collaboration, creativity and innovation, amongst others. Hence, scholars and researchers must find their way to seek an integrative eclectic approach in reflecting and adopting measurements, frameworks, strategies, methodologies, data and theories. If employed, this could lead to advancement of humanity and development of universities, societies and nation globally. It could also help in understanding the challenges facing Nigerian educational system and help reduce the recurring incidence of policy somersaults in the fashioning and implementation of policies in the country.

6. CONCLUSION

Consilience (as convergence of thoughts, ideas and evidence or concordance of such) and conviviality scholarship (as an enablement for disciplines to accept their own incompleteness, and drive to be open-minded and open-ended in claims and articulations of identities, being and belonging) can possibly delimit the arguments and traditions existing among various academic disciplines, specifically that of scientific and humanistic knowledge, likewise that of empirical knowledge and philosophical wisdom.

Scholars in various fields must come together as disciplines void of forms of hatred to promote the uniqueness of universality. In the book, *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe (2006) pointed out that 'a man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we

gather together in the moonlit village ground, it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so'. There is a crossroad and a choice therein; lingering over the choice to make is no option as humans must choose the obvious long-forgotten road – the road to communion and unity of knowledge. Socrates in this regard stated that, 'I do not think I know what I do not know', and in his later time during his trial for life, posited that 'real wisdom is the property of the gods' (Baruwa, 2020b).

In addition, raising awareness and observing the functionality of trends, interdisciplinary approach and unity of knowledge in Nigerian universities take an integrative eclectic and collaborative effort. Teaching and learning in Nigerian universities are fundamentals that must be taken into cognizance by those involved in it. An effort to disregard such in the possibility of promoting conviviality-scholarship and consilience could lead to dissonance and nothingness. It is crucial to demonstrate that both teaching and learning are Siamese twins which could be described as humanistic in nature and process. To attain the potentialities of learning through teaching, there is a dire need to recognize both the recipients and catalysts as teachers and learners, or both as sharers of knowledge. In the pursuit of identifying the differences and similarities for the promotion of all, learning becomes achievable.

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